

Vouchers Violate Religious Freedom

Private school vouchers violate the fundamental principle of religious freedom because they pay for religious education with taxpayer funds. They also threaten the autonomy of religious schools by opening them up to government audits, control, and interference.

Private school vouchers predominantly fund religious schools. Congregations and other religious organizations often see religious education as an extension of their ministry and therefore, subsidize these schools, making them appear more affordable than other private, nonreligious schools. With vouchers capped at a certain dollar amount, less expensive religious schools are particularly appealing. In some cases, however, tuition at private religious schools may increase at a corresponding rate to the amount of the voucher resulting in a windfall to the religious community and minimal if any savings to the taxpayer.

Because these schools are unable or unwilling to separate the religious components of the education they offer from their academic programs, it is impossible to prevent a publicly funded voucher from paying for their religious activities and education. This conflicts with one of the most dearly held principles of religious freedom—the government should not compel any citizen to furnish funds in support of a religion with which he or she disagrees, or even a religion with which he or she does agree. Parents certainly may choose a religious education for their children, but they may not insist that the taxpayers pay for it.

Furthermore, in accepting public funds, religious schools run the risk of being mired in political debates, battles over regulation and accountability, and disruptive inquiries into their school standards in admission, curriculum, and hiring practices. This kind of taxpayer accountability that must accompany public funds would not be beneficial for either religious institutions or the government.



The **National Coalition for Public Education** comprises more than 50 education, civic, civil rights, and religious organizations devoted to the support of public schools. Founded in 1978, NCPE opposes the funnelling of public money to private and religious schools through such mechanisms as tuition tax credits and vouchers.