

Open Letter to our Democratic Governors:

On behalf of the 4.8 million members of AFT and NEA, we urge you to protect families and public education in your state by saying no to the Trump private school voucher scheme. Public education is a core value of our communities and the foundation of a thriving democracy. Every child deserves access to a high-quality education in well-supported public schools. It is the core of our country's civic values and ideals: all young people should have opportunities to learn, grow, and thrive. Vouchers betray the promise that, no matter their place, race, or ability, a local public school ought to help every student reach their full potential.

Endorsing this voucher program would disregard both the Democratic National Committee platform and the wishes of voters, who have said “no” to vouchers by wide margins every time the issue has appeared on state ballots. Part of the Project 2025 agenda, the program is a Trojan Horse carrying near-universal K-12 private school vouchers into every state that participates—even states that have rejected vouchers at the ballot box. Any state that opts in invites the kind of disinvestment and chaos that are hurting kids and schools in states like Arizona and Florida. Any governor who ties themselves to the program should know this is an abandonment of the core value that every student has the right to a free, quality, well-funded public education.

Pro-voucher interests are asking governors to welcome that Trojan Horse, falsely claiming that public schools will enjoy meaningful benefits from the program, or that states can shape their participation to limit harm. Neither claim stands up to scrutiny. The program is designed to fund private school tuition, expenses, and other fee-based services that public schools must, by law, provide for free. And the Treasury Department just confirmed* that its regulations will NOT permit states to impose requirements consistent with state education policy and priorities, such as targeting support only to public school students, low-income families, or certain uses like tutoring or after-school programs. To the extent public school students manage to salvage a few crumbs from the scheme, the program's potential \$50 billion annual price tag will all but ensure further cuts to federal programs like Title I and the IDEA—cuts also proposed as part of Project 2025—that will force states to either fill the gap or let students with disabilities and students from low-income families fall through the cracks.

A “yes” to this program is a “yes” to siphoning public dollars to private schools that are neither transparent, accountable, nor open to all families. It is a “yes” to robbing public funds intended for marginalized communities to subsidize families who are already in

private schools—a brazen wealth transfer that shamefully rejects the widely shared value of opportunity for all. It is a “yes” to the well-documented harms of school voucher programs including poor educational outcomes, deepening racial and economic segregation in education, and rampant waste and fraud. For these reasons and more, “no” is the right choice.

The “free money” the program’s proponents promise is a mirage. Vouchers will shrink public school enrollment, reducing per pupil state revenue while fixed costs remain; destabilize school districts, especially in rural areas; pressure state budgets to backfill funding losses; and impose costly administrative burdens—while the program’s promised benefits for public schools are diffuse, indirect, and unlikely to materialize in any meaningful way. Free money? To private schools, yes, which will raise tuition in response to voucher funding as they have done under state voucher programs. To public schools, no: they will face uncertain state and federal revenue, threatening key programs and school personnel needed to adequately support our students. No matter how some may try to sell this program, the bottom line is it is harmful for students and public education. At a time when we face serious budget challenges, states simply can’t afford to fund two different education systems—one private and one public—on the taxpayers’ dime.

The underlying strength of America rests on the provision of education to all as a public good. We shouldn’t gamble our future on promises made by an administration relentlessly dedicated to undermining that public good. Rejecting the Trump administration’s voucher program helps to preserve and protect the future of public education for our students, families, and communities.

This is a moment to lead and send a powerful statement to all students and families by refusing to participate. Be a visible firewall against the further encroachment of privatization in our communities across America. Vouchers have failed time and time again to live up to the promises of their proponents. Vouchers are a self-serving scheme driven by a handful of billionaires hellbent on taking down the promise of public education for the rest of us and the broad-based prosperity it provides. Lead the effort instead to fully invest in the public schools that welcome all students and where nearly 90% of America’s K-12 students learn their ABCs, periodic table of elements, and the life skills that will equip them to become tomorrow’s artists, scientists, innovators, and educators.

* <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/Preview-of-Forthcoming-Guidance.pdf>



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