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VOUCHER FUNDED SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

FLORIDA PTA POSITION

While continuing to oppose vouchers in all forms, that Florida PTA urges the Legislature to impose strict eligibility requirements on private institutions and nonpublic K-12 schools receiving public dollars through any state funded voucher, grant or scholarship programs, and at a minimum, require them to meet the same accountability standards at their cost as public schools, including, but not limited to:1) School wide participation in any statewide assessment program, by mandating all current standardized tests, i.e., FCAT and Florida Writes; 2) Assignment of an annual school performance grade category designation and improvement rating, to be published in the Commissioner of Education's annual statewide assessment report; 3) Compliance with Florida Public Records Laws and requirement for independent audits to assess how taxpayer money is being spent. 4) Regulations to ensure private institutions and nonpublic schools are adequately equipped to meet the educational needs of their students.

Background

Florida's A+ Education Plan signed into law in 1999, allows parents of public school students, who are currently in schools that are ranked as failing based on the results of the FCAT, to transfer their children to private/parochial schools financed by public tax dollars. In addition Florida's McKay Scholarships program allows students with disabilities to transfer from any public school (regardless of its rank) to a private/parochial school. Tax credit programs allow corporations to donate funds to foundations that issue vouchers to students for private institutions. These voucher programs do not provide accountability, since private/parochial schools are not required to follow the state standards for curriculum content, achievement measures, teacher certification, or instructional materials. Private schools are not required to report test or enrollment data, discipline records and practices, or other basic information.



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Talking Points

- The State of Florida has the power to regulate all schools public or private
- The A+ Education Plan holds all public schools accountable for student performance and penalizes schools that do not meet the standards set by the Florida Legislature.
- The Florida Department of Education, which distributes \$135 million in public dollars to private institutions, hasn't instituted even minimal safeguards to keep track of the money, students or schools that participate in the voucher/scholarship program.
- An audit performed by Florida's chief financial officer in December 2003, revealed a multitude of fiscal problems, including lack of financial oversight and leadership from the state that paves the way for "potential abuse or criminal activity."
- The Florida Senate recognized the need for accountability and formed a Task Force which was charged to find ways to curb abuses in the state's voucher program for disabled children
- A series of articles in the Palm Beach Post have revealed the lack of accountability and standards in all of the voucher programs that divert public tax dollars to private institutions.*

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