

October 20, 2015

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of AASA, The School Superintendents Association, representing more than 10,000 school administrators across the United States, I write to urge you to oppose the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) Reauthorization Act, H.R. 10, which would reauthorize the District of Columbia private school voucher program.

As the representative of local school district leaders, we are the national organization most invested in returning control over critical education funding and decision-making back to the local level. As such, we find it considerably disconcerting that the House is considering the reauthorization of the D.C. voucher program without reflecting on whether the people elected to represent D.C. residents want the program to be maintained or whether the continuation of the program benefits the majority of students educated in the District. We urge you to consider the viewpoints of the D.C. Council, a majority of whom [submitted a letter](#) opposing the expansion of the program to new students. Please respect the viewpoints of local leaders and oppose the continuation of this program.

The D.C. voucher program has not and cannot sustainably and comprehensively improve educational outcomes for students. More egregiously, by siphoning limited dollars away from the public schools, which must serve all students, and redirecting these funds to private schools, the D.C. voucher program only hinders the progress of administrators who are attempting to enhance educational outcomes for the students attending the public schools in these communities.

In particular, the D.C. voucher program, which is the most studied voucher program in the nation, has failed to demonstrate that students attending private schools authorized by the D.C. voucher program have experienced significant improvements in reading and math achievement.¹ The studies also indicate that many of the students in the voucher program are less likely to have access to key services such as ESL programs, learning supports, special education supports and services, and counselors than students who are not part of the program.²

In addition, the quality of the D.C. private schools serving students using federal funds is of great concern. A special investigation conducted by the *Washington Post* found that many of

¹ *Final US Dep't of Educ. Report* at xv, xix, 34; *2009 US Dep't of Educ. Report* at 39; *2008 US Dep't of Educ. Report* at 34, 36-38; *2007 US Dep't of Educ. Report* at xvii, 44, 46.

² *Final US Dep't of Educ. Report* at 20; *2009 US Dep't of Educ. Report* at xxii, 17; *2008 US Dep't of Educ. Report* at xviii, 16

the private schools in the program are run-down and lack adequate facilities.³ It described one school that consisted entirely of voucher students as existing in just two classrooms in “a soot-stained storefront” where students used a gymnasium two miles down the road.⁴ Another voucher school was operated out of a private converted home with facilities so unkempt that students had to use restrooms in an unaffiliated daycare center downstairs.⁵ Congress cannot justify reauthorizing a program that uses federal funds to place D.C. students in such schools.

Vouchers also do not offer a meaningful choice to parents or students. Private schools can reject students based on prior academic achievement, economic background, English language ability, or disciplinary history. Also, the D.C. voucher allows religious schools to discriminate against students on the basis of gender.⁶ In contrast, public schools serve all students who live in D.C.

Certain groups of D.C. students have less access to voucher schools than others. For example, students with special needs often cannot find a private school that can, or chooses to, serve them. The Department of Education reports show that a significant number of students with special needs had to reject their voucher or leave their voucher school because the schools failed to offer them needed services⁷ that would have been available to them had they remained in a public school.

With limited federal dollars we must invest available funding into the public schools that help the greatest percentage of children. It is the children left behind by vouchers who are at the greatest risk. Scarce taxpayer dollars should be focused on interventions to improve education for all students, rather than diverting funds to enable a select few out of the public system.

Washington, D.C. already offers a multitude of public school choices for parents through its expanding charter school system. If the city wishes to maintain the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program, it can do so with local funds. Taxpayers across the nation should not be forced to subsidize an ineffective program that sends small numbers of D.C. students to private schools.

Thank you for the consideration of our viewpoints. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to us.

Sincerely,



Sasha Pudelski
Assistant Director, Policy & Advocacy

³ Lyndsey Layton, D.C. School Voucher Program Lacks Oversight, GAO Says, WASH. POST (Nov. 15, 2013)

⁴ *Id.* (revealing details about Academia de la Recta Porta).

⁵ *Id.* (discussing Muhammad University of Islam, which enrolled one-third voucher students).

⁶ P.L. 108-199 Stat. 3 (2004).

⁷ *Final US Dep't of Ed. Report* at 24.