



Students Deserve to Attend Fully Funded Public Schools that Affirm and Sustain All Aspects of their Identity

IDRA Testimony Against Senate Bill 601, Submitted by Terrence Wilson, J.D., to the Georgia Senate Education & Youth Committee on March 8, 2022

Dear Chairman Payne and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Terrence Wilson, J.D. I am the Regional Policy and Community Engagement Director for IDRA, an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

IDRA opposes Senate Bill 601 because students in Georgia deserve the opportunity to attend excellent, fully-funded diverse schools that affirm and sustain all aspects of their identity. We believe that this bill will likely create a Georgia educational system that is more racially segregated and that does not provide adequate protections for students' civil rights.

Providing students the very best, well-rounded equitable public educational system is the core mandate outlined in Georgia's Constitution in Article VIII, Section I. Our constitution states, "The provision of an adequate public education for the citizens shall be the primary obligation of the State of Georgia." The scholarship voucher program outlined in Senate Bill 601 would divert significant funds from Georgia's public schools and likely significantly reduce these schools' ability to provide all students an adequate education.

Furthermore, research conducted on similar voucher programs does not show that academic gains from this approach are worthy of the investment. For example, a 2017 multi-state review of voucher programs by the Economic Policy Institute found that students in voucher programs scored significantly lower than traditional public-school students on reading and math tests, and there was no significant effect of vouchers leading to improved public school performance (Carnoy, 2017). In fact, in some states, participation in voucher programs had negative effects on student achievement, with students enrolled in the Louisiana Scholarship Program increasing their chances of failing math by 50% (Abdulkadiroğlu, et al., 2018). Students in Indiana using vouchers to attend private schools consistently scored lower on reading and math tests than their public-school peers (Dynarski, 2017). The evidence simply does not justify the significant risk to the academic futures of Georgia students.

Additionally, IDRA knows and research agrees, that strong schools are integrated, diverse schools. In fact, decreased racial segregation benefits both non-white and white students academically, socially and emotionally (Seigel-Hawley, 2012). Voucher programs like Senate Bill 601 have been shown to be more likely to increase school segregation rather than promote integration or maintain the status quo (Potter, 2017). Sending Georgian students to private schools will expose them to less diverse environments. White students are significantly overrepresented in private schools while Black and Latino students are significantly underrepresented based on their proportion of the school-age population (NCES, 2018a; NCES, 2018b). Furthermore, a significant proportion of private schools in Georgia are racially segregated. According to 2017-18 data nearly 7% of Georgia's private schools are 100% white, 21% are over 90% white, and nearly 47% of these schools are 75% white (NCES, 2018b). We encourage leaders to invest in other public school options that will not exacerbate current patterns of racial segregation in schools.

All students should be able to attend schools that affirm and support all aspects of their identity. While the bill does reference that schools participating in the program would have to comply with antidiscrimination laws listed under 42 USC Section 2000d, this provision only prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color and national origin. Notably absent from SB 601 are protections for students based on sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or religion. Unfortunately, we have seen students be discriminated against on these grounds in other places that have implemented private school voucher programs. (Mead & Eckes, 2018; Wellner & Green, 2018).

Recommendation

Because of the potential impacts on funding for public schools, school diversity and the protection of students' civil rights, we ask the committee not to move this bill forward and to instead invest in research-based methods to achieve fully-funded, diverse, integrated, culturally-sustaining public schools.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Terrence Wilson, J.D., Regional Policy and Community Engagement Director, at terrence.wilson@idra.org.

Resources

- Abdulkadiroğlu, A., Parag A.P., & Walters, C.R. (2018). Free to Choose: Can School Choice Reduce Student Achievement? *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 10, No. 1, 175-206. <https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20160634>
- Carnoy, M. (February 28, 2017). *School Vouchers Are Not a Proven Strategy for Improving Student Achievement*. Economic Policy Institute. <http://www.epi.org/files/pdf/121635.pdf>
- Dynarski, M. (July 12, 2017). *On Negative Effects of Vouchers*, Evidence Speaks Reports, Vol 1, #18. The Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/on-negative-effects-of-vouchers/>
- Mead, J.F., & Eckes, S.E. (2018). *How School Privatization Opens the Door for Discrimination*. National Education Policy Center. <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/privatization>
- NCES. (2018). Common Core of Data: America's Public Schools. <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/ccddata.asp>
- NCES. (2018). Private School Universe Survey. <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pss/>
- Potter, H. (2017). *Do Private School Vouchers Pose a Threat to Integration?* The Century Foundation. <https://tcf.org/content/report/private-school-vouchers-pose-threat-integration/>
- Siegel-Hawley, G. (October 2012). *How Non-Minority Students Also Benefit from Racially Diverse Schools*, Research Brief. National Coalition on School Diversity. <http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo8.pdf>

Welner, K.G., & Green, P. (2018). *Private School Vouchers: Legal Challenges and Civil Rights Protections*. UCLA Civil Rights Project. https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/private-school-vouchers-legal-challenges-and-civil-rights-protections/Welner-Green-JT_022818-for-post.pdf

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.