



Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education Position Statement on School Vouchers

Issued March 8, 2010

During the 2009 Georgia General Assembly, Senate Bill 90 proposed to offer universal vouchers to families with children in public schools. As dialogue and debate over the issue of vouchers ensued, the Georgia Partnership issued the statement below to inform policymakers and stakeholders. This year the conversation about school vouchers has returned. In addition to SB 90, the new Senate Bill 361 proposes to significantly expand Georgia's current special needs voucher program. If enacted, SB 361 would expand voucher eligibility to students in foster care, students of military families, and Section 504 students (certain students with disabilities). To help inform policymakers and stakeholders about the research and principles related to vouchers, the Georgia Partnership is reissuing our original statement on this topic.

Georgia has made great strides in the quest to provide an excellent education for all its youth, and now is not the time to derail our progress by enacting single-issue reforms such as vouchers for a limited student population. To build a world-class education system and workforce, we must collaborate and focus our efforts on a comprehensive plan for school success - a plan that replaces random acts with a focus on the interconnectedness of issues impacting our student achievement.

In these turbulent times, when money is tight and expectations are high, practitioners and policymakers often look for innovative strategies that will result in educational improvements. One strategy that continues to emerge in discussion and legislation is the use of school vouchers. You will find it discussed in our [Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2009](#) report.¹

Based upon a thorough review of research, political history, and policy implications, the Georgia Partnership believes that vouchers are not the silver bullet reform mechanism for which some policymakers are searching. Georgia's students need a commitment from policymakers and practitioners to focus on systemic reforms that will bring the promise of educational excellence to every classroom in the state.

The Partnership relies on research to evaluate policies and drive decision-making. Despite the theory that competition and parental choice should improve the public education system, empirical research about the impacts of voucher programs generates as many questions as definitive answers. To date there is no consensus among researchers that vouchers significantly improve students' academic opportunities or outcomes.

Some empirical studies do correlate student participation in voucher programs with improved academic achievement. However, in 2008 researchers from Princeton University and the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago conducted a review of existing research on the impact of education



vouchers on student achievement and concluded that “the best research to date finds relatively small achievement gains for students offered education vouchers, most of which are not statistically different from zero.”ⁱⁱ

In recent years, increased school accountability and the rise of business-inspired educational practices have brought private-sector expectations for performance and accountability for results to the forefront of the public school arena. Consequently, it would be expected that any new legislation concerning vouchers would require that private schools receiving taxpayer dollars adhere to the following practices: employ fully certified teachers; administer standardized tests used by the state to measure student achievement and report the results to the public; and publish the manner in which they expend the taxpayer dollars they receive. Voucher legislation that does not address these three concerns should not be supported.

ⁱ Georgia Partnership for Excellence in Education. (2009). *Top Ten Issues to Watch in 2009*. Atlanta, GA.

ⁱⁱ Rose, C. and Barrow, L. (2009). *School Vouchers and Student Achievement: Recent Evidence, Remaining Questions*. Annual Review of Economics.