



PHILADELPHIA

FEDERATION of TEACHERS

TO: MEMBERS OF THE PENNSYLVANIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

FROM: JERRY T. JORDAN, PRESIDENT, PHILADELPHIA FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

RE: OPPOSITION TO VOUCHERS (HB2696/SB1230)

SEPTEMBER 30, 2020

On behalf of more than 13,000 Philadelphia educators, I urge you to **VOTE NO on **HB2696/SB1230**, duplicitously titled as a bill aimed at getting PA students “Back on Track.”**

Education Savings Accounts are simply vouchers by another name and are frankly the furthest thing our students need. Education Savings Accounts are not just unproven, they are detrimental to the future of public education and the children we serve. The [research is clear](#), and our union has long opposed ESAs for myriad reasons.

I urge you to look at some of the facts on vouchers and the research behind them from the team at [Public Funds Public Schools](#). **Vouchers can, and do, cause irreparable harm to public education and the students they are charged with educating.** The research compiled by PFPS shows a pattern of harm, including information on the following:

- Private School Vouchers Don't Improve Student Achievement
- Private School Vouchers Divert Needed Funding from Public Schools
- Private School Voucher Programs Lack Accountability
- Absence of Oversight in Private School Voucher Programs Leads to Corruption and Waste
- Private School Vouchers Don't Help Students with Disabilities
- Private School Vouchers Don't Protect Against Discrimination
- Private School Vouchers Exacerbate Segregation

Our society is reeling from the effects of a triple crisis: COVID, racial injustice, and an economic downturn. To consider investing \$500Million into a voucher scheme is simply unconscionable and especially egregious. Far before COVID upended life as we knew it, our union has been fighting for a fair and equitable system of public education.

Vouchers have never been, and will never be, the solution to decades of disinvestment in our public schools. *I am disgusted that instead of looking for solutions, the legislature*

is yet again considering investing in a discriminatory program that will only leave our most vulnerable students further shortchanged.

This spring, educators were widely lauded as the glue that holds our society together. They were praised, commercials were made, parents suggested massive salary boosts for their children's teachers. And the response at a federal level and now at the state legislature? Attempting to upend the entire education system for a discriminatory program that only furthers the already massive chasm between the haves and the have nots. **It's a disgraceful attempt to profit off the backs of the most vulnerable among us.** And let's be clear: these programs are not aimed at wealthier, whiter school districts. They are aimed at districts like ours--districts where the vast majority of the children we serve are Black and Brown and experiencing poverty.

Our students and their educators are continually asked to do more with less. Enough is enough. The Commonwealth, and in turn each of you, has a constitutional and moral mandate to ensure that the students we serve--each and every one of them--receive the thorough and efficient public education to which they are entitled.

It is incumbent on the General Assembly to find legislative solutions to the devastating disparities in public education. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these inequities and should serve as an indisputable reminder that public education is a public good, and public schools are to the fabric of communities.

The \$500 million from the PA CARES funds should be funding our public schools. Our Fund our Facilities Coalition has consistently called for meaningful investment in schools, and in the lens of our Coalition, we have specifically called for investment in school facilities. We continue to grapple with the asbestos, lead, and mold crisis that remains an utmost priority. You can read our most recent [correspondence with Governor Wolf here](#).

I urge you to reject HB2696/SB1230, or vouchers by any name. Invest in our children, not in destructive schemes aimed at dismantling public education in the name of a profit.