

The National Coalition

for

Public Education

March 10, 2008

Committee on Education and Labor
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative:

A hearing is scheduled before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and Labor to consider the federal afterschool initiative termed 21st Century Community Learning Centers. The National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE) strongly opposes programs that allow public money to be diverted to private schools through vouchers, and therefore urges you to oppose President Bush's proposal to replace the current federal afterschool initiative, called 21st Century Community Learning Centers, with an unworkable voucher program with a catchy new name: 21st Century Learning Opportunities Scholarships.

For approximately 1.5 million children, the 21st Century Community Learning Center program provides peace of mind, safety and inspires learning. Their value has been tested and proven. According to the U.S. Department of Education, nearly half the children who regularly attend these centers raise their grades in reading/language arts and mathematics. Three-quarters complete more homework and participate more in class. In 26 statewide referenda from coast to coast through November 2007 millions of American voters have rejected school vouchers or their variants by an average margin of two to one.

In contrast, the proposal for the so-called "learning opportunities scholarships" by the President is an unproven, ideologically driven voucher scheme that would permit federal funding of pervasively sectarian instruction and activities, and threaten the quality afterschool learning opportunities.

NCPE has consistently opposed the funneling of public money to private and religious schools through such mechanisms. We strongly urge you to reject such private school proposals that have been set forth by the Administration. We thank you for your consideration of our views on this important issue. If you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact Mary Kusler at (703) 875-0733 or MKusler@aasa.org.

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The **National Coalition for Public Education** is comprised of more than 50 education, civic, civil rights, and religious organizations devoted to the support of public schools. Founded in 1978, NCPE opposes the funneling of public money to private and religious schools through such mechanisms as tuition tax credits and vouchers.

Sincerely,

American Association of School Administrators
American Association of University Women
American Civil Liberties Union
American Federation of Teachers
American Humanist Association
American Jewish Committee
Americans for Religious Liberty
Americans United for the Separation of Church and State
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
International Reading Association
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Education Association
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition
National School Boards Association
People for the American Way
Secular Coalition for America
Union for Reform Judaism
Women of Reform Judaism

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