

Talking Points on Voucher Portion of SB1

Voucher:

- **Senate Bill 1 will cost hundreds of millions of dollars** and the Republicans expect that *less than 1 percent of Pennsylvania students will be affected*. **Public education was devastated in the 2011/12 budget** by more than \$900 million in cuts because Republicans claimed that there was “no money”. Now, they are pushing a bill that will further reduce funding to the poorest schools, cost hundreds of millions of dollars, and direct scarce state funds to private and religious schools.
- Article 3 of the Pennsylvania Constitution prohibits the use of state funds to support religious schools. *A strong argument can be made that SB1 violates the provisions of Article 3.*
- According to a recent poll, **67 percent of Pennsylvanians oppose** vouchers.
- **The poorest schools in our state are already drastically underfunded**. Taking millions of dollars more away to subsidize private schools, leaves the majority of students left behind in those public schools with even fewer resources.
- Senate Bill 1 provides public funds to private schools without requiring those same schools to report on the academic progress of voucher students. Private schools are not required to use the same standardized tests that we require public schools to administer.
- The Corbett administration has indicated that they will **not apply for flexibility under the NCLB [No Child Left Behind] regulations**, as permitted by the U.S. Department of Education. This means that Pennsylvania’s public schools must meet the more stringent requirements for **Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)** in 2012-13. Given the devastating budget cuts of 2011-12 and additional loss to public schools if SB1 is approved, what chance of success is there for public education in the near future?
- Meanwhile, in Senate Bill 1, non-public and private schools continue to be **exempt from the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements** that public schools must meet.
- **Public schools across the state have already reported more than 14,000 jobs lost**, class sizes increased, and reduced or eliminated educational opportunities ... all due to the devastating Republican cuts in this year’s Pre-K to 12 education budget. Under the Republican voucher scheme, even more resources will be taken to benefit *select* private schools.
- Any religious school accepting a voucher student is permitted to **require that student to participate in religious instruction**. An amendment to allow a student to opt-out of religious instruction was defeated by the Senate Republicans.

- **Neighboring public schools do not have to accept voucher students** and have little incentive to do so.
 - Why accept students who will likely bring fewer voucher funds than the receiving public school currently needs to educate students?
 - Why accept students who may already be performing poorly on state assessments and risk a potential downturn in the receiving district's AYP status?
- **One clear winner in this voucher program are the parochial schools heavily subsidized by their religious organization.** Because support from certain religious organization(s) keeps their private school tuition modest, a voucher will likely fund all or nearly all of the tuition; unlike other private or parochial schools where tuition can be \$15,000, \$20,000 or more per student.
- **A non-public or private school is NOT required to accept all voucher students or provide services beyond what they currently offer, including special education.**
 - *Home-school, charter, cyber charter school and vo-tech students are among those students excluded from participating in the voucher program.*
- School districts must pay out a voucher in the amount of the state revenue they receive for their student, ***even if that amount is above the cost of the non-public/private school tuition.*** Under SB1, beginning in 2013/14, that “excess” money is then collected by the state in a restricted account and used to offset the commonwealth cost for other vouchers. ***This means that taxpayers will be footing the bill for voucher students who do not even reside in their school district.***