

SOAR – DC Private School Voucher Program



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The SOAR Act, the DC private school voucher program, diverts funds from public to private schools while budget cuts are hurting students by leaving key federal programs like Title I and IDEA severely underfunded. All *public* schools need sufficient funding as they begin implementing the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In light of these realities, we call on Members of Congress who support public education to oppose continuation of the DC voucher program.

- ▶ **Vouchers deprive students of important rights and protections.**
 - Private schools that participate in the DC voucher program receive public money, but they are not subject to all the federal civil rights laws that public schools must meet—they may discriminate against a student based on his or her gender, disability, religion, economic background, national origin, academic record, English language ability, or disciplinary history. Instead of taking funds away from public schools and handing them over to private schools, we should enhance opportunities that help equip all students for success and close opportunity gaps.
 - Students with special needs who use vouchers lose many rights granted under IDEA and may not have the protection of an individualized education plan.
 - A significant number of students with special needs reject vouchers or leave voucher schools because they fail to provide essential services ([Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program](#), U.S. Department of Education, June 2010).

- ▶ The U.S. Department of Education’s [most recent report](#) on the SOAR Act’s impact on the DC voucher program, published barely a year ago, found that:
 - **Most vouchers still do not cover the full cost of private school tuition.** In 64 percent of the participating schools, tuition exceeds the voucher cap. In light of this reality, the program can ultimately only help students from families with the means to make up the difference.
 - **Vouchers still do not help kids most in need.** While 69 percent of the students who apply for vouchers live in wards 1, 5, 7, and 8 (the least affluent areas of the city), less than half (43 percent) of the participating schools are located there. Many voucher students do not come from public schools labeled “in need of improvement,” but from other public—or even private—schools. If the program’s true goal is to lift up kids in poverty and expand their educational opportunities, it fails to do so.

- ▶ All four congressionally mandated **U.S. Department of Education reports on the DC voucher program’s impact on student achievement** (published in [June 2010](#), [March 2009](#), [June 2008](#), and [June 2007](#)) **found no significant improvement in reading or math scores among participants.**
 - The program also had no impact on students’ satisfaction, motivation, engagement, or perceptions of school safety.
 - Moreover, participating students were less likely to have access to key services such as ESL programs, learning supports, special education supports and services, and counselors.

- ▶ **Government Accountability Office reports from 2007 and 2013 document that the D.C. private school voucher program has repeatedly failed to meet basic and even statutorily required accountability standards.**
 - The 2013 report concluded that the D.C. Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation (Trust), has continually failed to ensure the program operated with basic accountability measures and quality controls and even failed to maintain adequate records on its own financial accounting.