

# Fulfilling Our Obligations to Public Education

## Opposing Vouchers and Their Negative Effects on Our Public Schools

by Kim Rohadfox-Ceaser

It is the *expectation* that a community has an obligation to provide a quality education for every child. It is for this reason that Parents for Public Schools, Inc. is opposed to vouchers. That is why it was disappointing to hear President Bush in his final State of the Union address on Monday, January 30 support Pell Grants for Kids, a national voucher program that deprives public schools of critically needed taxpayer funds by diverting those funds to private schools with no taxpayer or educational accountability.

In his speech Mr. Bush stated: “We must also do more to help children when their schools do not measure up. Thanks to the D.C. Opportunity Scholarships you approved, more than 2,600 of the poorest children in our nation’s capital have found new hope at faith-based or other nonpublic schools. Sadly, these schools are disappearing at an alarming rate in many of America’s inner cities. So I will convene a White House summit aimed at strengthening these lifelines of learning. And to open the doors of these schools to more children, I ask you to support a new \$300 million program called Pell Grants for Kids.”

Vouchers are a quick fix for some when we need long-term solutions for all. Parents for Public Schools values public education as a community enterprise. Our 20 chapters in 11 states organize to recruit families to public schools, promote and focus positive attention on public schools, and work for improvements within the public schools. We strive to maximize parent involvement and consolidate community resources by working together to ensure a quality and equitable education for all children.

In keeping with our mission, PPS unequivocally opposes vouchers, tuition tax credits, or any programs which divert public resources from the public schools or divide the potential constituency for those schools. Parents for Public Schools values the rights and responsibilities of parents to be decision makers in the public schools and favors choice within the public school system. We believe the issues of such choice should be decided at the local level.

We believe that public education should be a community enterprise. A community should not abandon its public schools when they are failing. Conversely, poorly performing schools must not be tolerated regardless of whose children are under-served in these schools. This sets us apart from voucher supporters and other school choice proponents. Unless school choice ideas like vouchers guarantee every child a good school—which they do not—we must concentrate on improving the schools we have. We must also push for greater accountability because not all schools serve all children well. PPS members are not naïve about the condition of public schools. We are in them. The good schools across the country, and there are many, fire our optimism; the bad schools fuel our persistence. We believe that if excellence can be provided for some students, it can be provided for all students. Children succeed when families, schools, and communities work together. Together, we can make a difference.

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