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A S U M M A R Y R E P O R T

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*Proposed  
Education  
Vouchers  
In  
Louisiana*

*Louisiana Advisory Committee  
To The U.S. Commission On  
Civil Rights*

*A summary report of the Louisiana Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights prepared for the information of*

*the Commission. Statements and viewpoints in the report should not be attributed to the Commission or to the Advisory Commit-*

*tee, but only to individual participants in the community forum where the information was gathered.*

## THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

The United States Commission on Civil Rights, created by the Civil Rights Act of 1956, is an independent, bipartisan agency of the executive branch of the Federal Government. By the terms of the act, as amended, the Commission is charged with the following duties pertaining to discrimination or denials of the equal protection of the laws based on race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap, or national origin, or in the administration of justice, investigation of individual discriminatory denials of the right to vote; study of legal developments with respect to discrimination or denials of the equal protection of the laws; appraisal of the laws and policies of the United States with respect to discrimination or denials of equal protection of the law; maintenance of a national clearinghouse for information respecting discrimination or denials of equal protection of the law; and investigation of patterns or practices of fraud or discrimination in the conduct of Federal elections. The Commission is also required to submit reports to the President and the Congress at such times as the Commission, the Congress, or the President shall deem desirable.

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LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

Louisiana Advisory Committee to the  
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights  
April 1988

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The Louisiana Advisory Committee submits this summary report for the purpose of briefing the Commission on key issues and viewpoints concerning a proposed education voucher system of Louisiana.

The report summarizes information received at a community forum convened by the Advisory Committee in Shreveport on September 12, 1986. Every effort was made to assure a balanced perspective on the issues by inviting participation from legislators, educators, church and school officials, and representatives of community and parent-teacher organizations with opposing points of view. Mindful of the Commission's jurisdiction, special reference was made to possible civil rights implications of the education voucher system.

While the information provided does not result from an exhaustive review of issues pertaining to the proposed education voucher system, it will be of value to the Committee for further program planning.

Respectfully,

MICHAEL R. FONTHAM, Chairperson  
Louisiana Advisory Committee

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## Introduction

In keeping with its responsibility to monitor civil rights developments throughout the State, the Louisiana Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights convened a community forum on education vouchers on Friday, September 12, 1986, at the Chateau Motor Hotel in Shreveport. The purpose of this forum was to brief the Advisory Committee on a number of key issues underlying the current debate on the vouchers. Mindful of the Commission's jurisdictional limitations, special reference was made to possible civil rights implications of implementing a voucher system in Louisiana. At this forum, legislators, educators, church and school officials, and representatives of community and parent-teacher organizations were invited to participate. Every attempt was made to assure a balanced perspective on the issues by inviting both proponents and opponents of the vouchers.

During the day-long forum the Advisory Committee focused on three broad topic areas relating to vouchers. These were:

- The major arguments for and against education vouchers in Louisiana.
- The civil rights implications of education vouchers.
- The prospects for implementing a voucher system in Louisiana.

Among those invited to brief the Committee on these issues were: State Representatives Benjamin F. O'Neal and Alphonse Jackson, Jr., of Shreveport, and Walter Lee, Superintendent of the Caddo Parish School District. Mr. Lee did not attend the community forum but was represented by Lola Kendrick. Also invited were: Emile Comar, Louisiana Catholic Conference, New Orleans; Dr. Margaret Pereboom, League of Women Voters, Baton Rouge; Donna Muldrew, U.S. Department of Education, Region VI, Dallas; Jackie Ducote, Vice President of Research and Programs, Louisiana

Association of Business and Industry, Baton Rouge; and Shirley H. Williams, President, Louisiana Association of Educators, Baton Rouge. In addition, Maria Farve, President, State Parents-Teachers Association, New Orleans; Leonard Fine, Assistant Superintendent for Development, Archdiocese of New Orleans; Victor Hodgkins, Executive Secretary, Louisiana Association of School Superintendents, Baton Rouge; William Stephens, Jr., Assistant Superintendent for Academic Programs, State Department of Education, Baton Rouge; and Clara Wells of Baton Rouge shared their views with the Committee.

This report summarizes the information received by the Committee at the forum and in background preparations. The first section presents some of the basic concepts underlying the voucher system. Subsequent sections outline the views of each of the participants. The final section outlines key points discussed during the forum.

#### Education Vouchers: An Overview

The basic premise of education vouchers is that parents should have a choice in seeking the best possible educational environment for their children. Under a voucher system parents would be given a voucher which would enable them to send their children to the schools of their choice. A number of variations on this concept have been proposed and some have been implemented. In a briefing paper prepared by the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry eight major conceptual models are identified:

1. Unregulated Market Model: The value of the voucher is the same for each child. Schools are permitted to charge whatever additional tuition the traffic will bear.
2. Unregulated Compensatory Model: The value of the voucher is higher for poor children. Schools can charge whatever additional tuition they wish.

3. Compulsory Private Scholarship Model: Schools may charge as much tuition as they like provided they give scholarships to those children unable to pay full tuition.

4. The Effort Voucher: This model establishes several different possible levels of per pupil expenditure and allows a school to choose its own level. Parents who choose high expenditure schools are then charged more tuition (or tax) than parents who choose low expenditure schools.

5. Equalitarian Model: The value of the vouchers is the same for each child. No school is permitted to charge any additional tuition.

6. Achievement Model: The value of the voucher is based on the progress made by the child during the year.

7. Regulated Compensatory Model: Schools may not charge tuition beyond the value of the voucher, but this is sufficient to generate extra revenue from the increased enrollment of children from poor families or educationally disadvantaged children.

8. Conditional Vouchers: State financing of education programs through the issuance of vouchers based on one or many possible contingencies, provisions and/or conditions distributes educational resources and affects the market in light of special needs or political demands.

In 1985 Secretary of Education William J. Bennett presented to Congress a voucher program called the Equity and Choice Act of 1985.<sup>1</sup> The legislation proposed by Secretary Bennett was defeated by Congress but would have given the parents of some 4.8 million disadvantaged children a range of options with regard to school attendance. For example, under this bill parents could have received voucher assistance by choosing to:

1. Keep their children in public or private schools where they are currently enrolled to continue to receive any compensatory services now provided to them.
2. Transfer their children to other public schools in the same district.
3. Transfer their children to public schools in other districts.
4. Place their children in private schools.

In his letter of transmittal to Congress, the Secretary cited several important goals of the proposed legislation:



--It would increase educational opportunities for disadvantaged children by expanding the range of choices available to them.

--It would increase parental involvement by increasing parental choice, thereby improving the quality of education.

--It would promote a healthy rivalry among schools to meet the needs of disadvantaged children, and would allow parents to choose the program that best meets the needs of their children.

In Louisiana, a resolution was introduced in the State legislature in 1978 by then-Senator Edward Burham to study the feasibility of using a voucher system to fund education. In 1979 he introduced a bill<sup>2</sup> calling for the establishment of a pilot program. The bill would require the State Department of Education to establish guidelines for implementing voucher programs in each of the State's 64 parish school districts. However, the bill failed to get out of committee. More recently, in 1982, State Representative B.F. O'Neal of Shreveport introduced a bill<sup>3</sup> which would have given an "equal entitlement certificate" to parents of all kindergarten children statewide. This bill also failed to get out of committee.

#### Education Vouchers--Views and Opinions

In an opening statement at the forum, Emile Comar, a representative for the Catholic bishops of Louisiana on matters relating to governmental relations, stressed that the Catholic Bishops of Louisiana have not, at this time, been asked to endorse an educational voucher program for the State. But individual Bishops, he continued, both in Louisiana and around the Nation have spoken out in favor of vouchers, and the U.S. Catholic Conference has endorsed the concept. Speaking for himself, Mr. Comar said:

As an individual who supports student and parental rights in education and the concept of vouchers to achieve that end, I firmly believe that the constitutional guarantees this nation makes to individuals can be sustained only in providing aid in a form which would assist both government and nongovernment education or, more correctly, the parents or students who select either option.

He added that he did not believe that vouchers would "destroy" public schools as some have charged. He felt that many parents are looking to alternative schools to provide quality education within the value framework they want for their children, but that fewer and fewer individuals are financially able to make such a choice. Mr. Comar pointed out the problem the poor and minorities face in seeking a quality education for their children:

The tragedy is that the poor are locked into government school situations and will be there until the end of grade 12, no matter the quality of education or the values which the schools expounds. They cannot make the choice made even by many of their own teachers. For example, 50 percent of all teachers in Orleans Parish have opted to send their children to nongovernment schools because they can afford that option or wish to exercise their religious freedom rights.

With respect to racial discrimination, Mr. Comar felt that vouchers would lead to less segregation and greater choice for minorities. He added:

While emotional guesswork runs high on this issue, I note for you the fact that as various [other] forms of aid were made available for Louisiana students in nongovernment schools, more and more such schools sought and obtained State approval [for such aid], meeting Louisiana standards and the racial guidelines of the Federal court. Some 50 independent schools now meet these guidelines, along with all Catholic schools which have long done so.

A member of the Advisory Committee noted that the public school system in Orleans Parish is already more racially segregated than the Catholic school system. He asked whether the use of a voucher system would enable the remaining white students in the public school system to transfer to the Catholic or parochial system or to private schools and thus exacerbate segregation in public schools. Mr. Comar replied that he did not feel that such transfers should be allowed. When asked what would happen if such a situation were to occur, he responded by saying that he did not know what the ramifications would be. Mr. Comar added that it was impossible to know ahead of time what such ramifications would be.

Dr. Margaret Pereboom, representing the League of Women Voters, said that her organization was not in favor of vouchers. One reason for her opposition, she added, is that public funds should not be used for nonpublic schools. Another reason is that equal access will not be assured since private schools would not be responsive to public control. Dr. Pereboom noted that while the use of vouchers would enhance freedom of choice, this freedom has been used in the past to circumvent desegregation efforts. Freedom of choice, she explained, can only be effective if citizens are well informed, which is usually not the case.

She felt the use of a voucher system would be a nightmare with respect to administrative requirements. For example, would children attending nonpublic schools be given the same kinds of standardized tests that are so critical in determining overall progress? What about open school board meetings, school standards, and the problems relating to transportation? These and many more questions like these have not been addressed, she said. She noted that the important question relating to the separation of church and State has yet to be answered. Vouchers, she added, do not really provide for increased parent involvement in the education of their children. Moreover, she felt that the quality of education for all children, whether minority or nonminority, would suffer.

Choice, Dr. Pereboom explained, is a key element for those advocates pushing for vouchers, and the assumption is that parents will make their choice based on consideration of quality. She asserted, however, in those instances where choice was provided to parents in the past they usually based their decision on the location of the school, not the quality or extensiveness of its curriculum or staff. She also believes that white flight has been another end result of freedom-of-choice plans and that

consequently blacks would be negatively affected if vouchers are used on a wide scale.

The free market analogy, Dr. Pereboom stressed, is not applicable with regard to educational opportunity, and if we were to use that analogy there is still nothing to ensure that minorities and the disadvantaged would receive a quality education. It assumes, she explained, that everyone has an equal chance to acquire a quality education, which is not the case. She feels that vouchers are inherently discriminatory because their effectiveness is still tied to the income level of the family. If a family has a low income, no voucher--at least in terms of those systems currently being proposed--would provide enough money to enable its children to pay the tuition costs of most nonpublic schools. Such a system would not enhance integration. She asserted that, moreover, it would have a serious negative impact on special education students, as most private schools are not equipped to handle their needs. The result would be that they would have to continue to use the public schools. Dr. Pereboom's position is that public funds should be spent in a public manner, which requires that the schools be accountable to parents. Private or nonpublic schools are not subject to the same kinds of control and accountability, she said.

Donna Muldrew from the Region VI Office of the U.S. Department of Education briefed the Committee on provisions of the current administration's proposed education voucher program. The program, she said, would enable parents of educationally disadvantaged children to obtain education vouchers. These would authorize the use of Federal funds, by either public or private schools, to provide services to such children. Typically, these services are provided during the regular school day by trained specialists in separate classrooms. Under the voucher program, Ms.

Muldrew explained, parents could use vouchers to keep their children in the schools they currently attend, and continue to receive any compensatory services provided for them there. Parents also could transfer their children to other public schools in the same district, or into other districts if they accept interdistrict transfers. Parents would also have the option of transferring their children to eligible private schools where the vouchers could be used for tuition or compensatory services, or both. Finally, parents could use a combination of schools, public or private, where they could choose one school for regular services and another for compensatory services.

Ms. Muldrew added that the program would increase educational opportunity for those who need it the most--the disadvantaged--by enabling parents to choose the educational program that best meets the needs of their children. It would also increase parental involvement and enhance competition and diversity among schools.

She felt that there would be many other benefits. For example, it would enhance social equity by giving poor families some of the educational choices currently available to affluent families. It would also encourage greater integration through voluntary means, for she felt that there would be a tendency for minority parents to move their children from schools with higher minority concentrations to those with lower ones. In effect, Ms. Muldrew added, schools would have the opportunity to desegregate themselves without waiting for a court order or some other intervention. She assured the audience however, that in those districts currently under court-ordered desegregation, the voucher program would not be allowed to evade or undermine the court order.

Ms. Muldrew concluded by explaining that funds under this proposed program would go to the parent. The parent would make the choices. At the present time parents have no choice since Federal funding for remedial programs is awarded to schools based upon the number of disadvantaged children enrolled.

Shirley H. Williams of the Louisiana Association of Educators explained that while everyone favors greater choice in the area of education, she does not believe that vouchers are the answer. For one reason, she pointed out, the cost of tuition for private schools is usually more than the \$600 estimated to be the average annual value of a voucher. Consequently, she added, poor families still could not afford to send their children to the best schools.

Another problem, Ms. Williams stated, is the question of the separation of church and State. Essentially, public funds under the voucher system would be used to support private schools, many of which are operated by churches. Transportation to the school of choice would be another problem area, especially in rural areas. Administration of the voucher system, she said, including allocation of funds to various schools, would be a major task which has yet to be tried and could lead to chaos.

Moreover, Ms. Williams felt that the voucher system would have an adverse impact on public schools in the State in several ways. She concluded, for example, that it would lead to more racial segregation. Because a voucher system would provide only a portion of the cost for attending a private school, all children would not have equal opportunity to attend the schools of their choice. Children whose parents already have the funds to send their children to private schools would benefit the most. She felt that in most cases those children whose parents could not

cover the balance required would be left in the public schools, and that more than likely these children would be from lower and middle income families.

Ms. Williams stressed that although her organization would not interfere with the implementation of a voucher system, the association is strongly opposed to providing public funds to support private schools. She also noted that many of the school districts in Louisiana are under court order to desegregate, which would reduce the extent to which the system could be integrated. She said there is some division of opinion in the minority community about the voucher system, but that much of this is based on a serious misunderstanding of just what the voucher system implies.

Jackie Ducote, of the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry explained that one reason her organization is interested in the voucher system is its frustration with public education in Louisiana. She noted, for example, that students score very low on the SAT and that four out of every ten students in the State's public schools never graduate. She also pointed out that half of those who do graduate and enter State colleges and universities have to take remedial work in basic subjects.

The voucher system, Ms. Ducote feels, would offer parents a greater degree of choice in the education of their children, and would send a message to school officials that there is dissatisfaction with the present mode of operation. She noted that a recent Gallup poll showed that over half of all black respondents supported a voucher system. As to whether education vouchers would reduce segregation and improve educational opportunity, she concluded that the type of system implemented would be the determining factor.

In the opinion of Alphonse Jackson, Jr., a State Representative from Shreveport, vouchers would violate constitutional provisions, hasten the return of discrimination in the public schools, and seriously retard the democratization of public education. Vouchers, he felt, would also be used to circumvent court orders to desegregate schools in the State. From an administrative standpoint it would be a "nightmare," he added. It would also reduce equity for poor and minority students and possibly lead to more segregated schools. Moreover, he felt that education vouchers were a "hoax" for providing public monies to private schools.

On the other hand, Benjamin F. O'Neal, also a State Representative from Shreveport, supported the use of vouchers. He explained that, historically, public education in the United States has stressed diversity and plurality and that the role of government in early America was to encourage education, not support it. Early schools in the United States, he pointed out, were mainly operated and controlled by religious institutions, and it was not until the 1870's that the first public schools came into existence.

Mr. O'Neal reported that the 1940's and early fifties were a period of transition for public education in this country when school districts were consolidated and enlarged. When this happened, public input into school policy declined. This, he said, has led to a concomitant decline in the quality of public education. Despite reform efforts, dropout rates have continued to climb while achievement scores have dropped. He would like for parents once again to be given a choice of schools in seeking the best possible education for their children and feels that education vouchers are the best way of accomplishing that. He feels that without a drastic change in the system of public education the likelihood of developing a poorly



educated "underclass" in the United States is increased. Mr. O'Neal explained that under the voucher system the public schools would not be done away with. Only the method of funding would change, making them more responsive to the needs of the community and enhancing the quality of education.

Maria Farve, president of the State Parents Teachers Association (PTA), stated that her organization is opposed to vouchers as it believes that public funds should be used for public education and not for the support of nonpublic schools. Although the PTA is aware that changes in public education are needed, it feels these changes should not be made at the expense of public schools. It was her personal opinion that implementation of the voucher system in Louisiana would increase the level of segregation in the public schools.

Leonard Fine, Assistant Superintendent for Development for the Archdiocese of New Orleans, agreed that educational reform is necessary, but sees the voucher system as a logical alternative. However, he believes that vouchers should be referred to as "equal entitlement certificates." Such certificates would give the less affluent a choice in the education of their children which they never had before. In his opinion, this would provide them with opportunities for a better education. He noted that, as a result, all children would benefit whether they attend public or nonpublic schools.

A member of the Advisory Committee observed that many of the places reported to have operational voucher systems also seem to have small or nonexistent minority populations. Mr. Fine agreed that the situation in Louisiana would be different in that respect, and he said that careful attention would have to be exercised to ensure that the use of vouchers would not lead to segregation in the schools.

Victor Hodgkins, executive secretary of the Louisiana Association of School Superintendents, reported that he was very pleased with the progress that public schools have made in recent years. Despite the fact that public schools in Louisiana are still faced with many problems, he feels that educators have attempted to deal with them. With regard to vouchers, he explained that efforts have been made at the national level to institute some form of voucher system to be used by parents of elementary and secondary students which would provide them with a wider choice of schools, both public and private, for their children to attend.

However, Mr. Hodgkins reported that the Louisiana School Boards Association and the Louisiana Association of School Superintendents have opposed voucher legislation in the past on both the national and State levels and probably will continue to do so for the following reasons:

1. Without adequate safeguards the money from vouchers spent in private schools could easily become general aid. Those safeguards are not evident in the proposed legislation.
2. Most voucher proposals would either supplement or replace programs to assist disadvantaged children. Such programs, though proven successful, have already been greatly reduced. These programs now reach only 45 percent of the eligible children and serve 700,000 fewer children than were served in 1980. Further cuts in funding are forthcoming due to the Gramm-Rudman-Hollings legislation.
3. The monetary value of vouchers that are currently being proposed would not permit disadvantaged youngsters to attend prestigious private schools because tuition costs, even with the aid of the voucher, are out of reach for parents of practically all of these children.
4. In Louisiana almost all public elementary and secondary schools are under Federal court orders which greatly restrict transfers from one school zone to another and from one school district to another. This would make it difficult under a voucher arrangement for students to transfer from one public school to another while facilitating the transfer from public to private schools.
5. Housing patterns usually place a high percentage of disadvantaged students long distances from the schools to which they would logically transfer under a voucher arrangement. The required transportation would entail extra expense for parents or the public.

6. Public schools would be placed at a disadvantage in that they must accept every child who applies, whereas private schools could pick and choose as they please.

Mr. Hodgkins was also convinced that the implementation of a voucher system would lead to increased racial segregation in the public schools of Louisiana. He said:

In Louisiana in the late 1960's and early 1970's when the conversion from a dual public school system to a unitary system was initiated, largely by Federal court order, many white children were pulled out of the public schools by their parents who banded together and formed private academies. Others left the public schools and went to long-established parochial schools. Many white parents were willing to pay the cost of tuition to escape the integrated public schools. This trend has remained fairly constant. Children have come back to the public schools in sizeable numbers only when an economic downturn has made it difficult for the parents to pay tuition.

He added:

It is reasonable to believe, then, that if education vouchers are provided so that tuition costs are paid, this return to public schools would not occur and would likely result in students, largely white children, leaving the public schools because more parents could, by use of vouchers, afford to send their children to non-public schools. This would lead to a greater concentration of minority children in the public school system of Louisiana. This type of situation feeds upon itself; that is, as the percentage of minority children in a school increases there is a greater tendency for the other children to leave that school. Furthermore, a much higher percentage of disadvantaged children is minority. The parents of many of these children are absent from the home or, if present, are disadvantaged themselves; and, as such, are much less likely to go to the trouble to secure vouchers and seek out alternate school placement for their children.

Another official, William Stephens, Jr., Assistant Superintendent for Academic Programs with the State Department of Education, said his department has also taken a position opposing education vouchers. He believes that the more affluent would benefit most from such a program and the public schools would become a "dumping ground" for disadvantaged and minority students.

Mr. Stephens said that a key question to be addressed is how the voucher system could be implemented in those school districts currently

under court order to desegregate, which is the case for practically every school district in Louisiana. In such districts no student can transfer from one public school to another within the same district, but only to private and parochial schools.

Lola Kendrick, representing Walter Lee, Superintendent of the Caddo Parish School District, stated that economic factors are a key variable in determining the district's program. Though it has 13 magnet schools currently in operation, she felt that a voucher system would provide even more options for parents in selecting schools. However, she questioned whether parents would be provided the information necessary for them to choose the best alternatives. She also felt that, though an influx of black students into the now predominately white private schools in the district might result from the implementation of a voucher system, it would also result in an exodus of white students from the public schools. This, she believed, could negate any progress toward integration. Furthermore, she concluded that neither the State nor the Federal governments have developed any effective monitoring process to prevent private schools from discriminating against black students.

The last person on the agenda was Clara Wells, a resident of Baton Rouge. She believed that if public schools are to improve, then the education voucher is the only hope for that improvement since it would introduce competition into the education system. She said that for the past three years her grandchildren had been in private schools and they have done well, but this year they are in public schools and she has not been pleased with the results. With regard to equal educational opportunity Ms. Wells said:

Poor black and poor white children have been paying the highest price for the public's failure to deliver quality education. The schools were desegregated to give blacks an equal educational opportunity, but [in reality] what black children have been given is a long bus ride to a school far from their neighborhoods where they are unwelcome and made to feel like intruders. You tell me how children can learn under such a hostile environment and then I will ask you to share that wisdom with the rest of the country.

Ms. Wells also commented that most of those who oppose vouchers say that it will lead to resegregation. But, she noted, that is already happening. She pointed out that the public school system in New Orleans is almost 95 percent black, and in Baton Rouge blacks are over half of the student population. A voucher system in New Orleans and Baton Rouge, she believed, would provide poor blacks and poor whites an opportunity to get into a private or parochial school. She concluded her statement by saying:

Frankly, I think it is more than a little patronizing for some so-called well-educated white person or black person to sit here and say that poor black and poor white people can't make good decisions about the education of their own children. We can make better decisions for our children than the government has been doing, or that some computer does when it assigns a child to a school. And we certainly can't do any worse. I support the education voucher because I believe that it will empower all poor people, regardless of their color, and it will give us at least some choice in what happens to our children. Give us a break. Give us a chance by giving us a choice.

### Summary

As noted, this report summarizes information received in preparation for the September 12, 1986, community forum conducted by the Louisiana Advisory Committee in Shreveport, and from those who participated in it. It should not be considered an exhaustive review of issues pertaining to the education voucher system proposed for the State. Rather, it provides a cursory look at issues and concerns which the Advisory Committee may decide merit further investigation and analysis.

Participants presented a wide variety of viewpoints and arguments for and against education vouchers. These are outlined below.

Proponents of the voucher system argued that:

--Parents would be able to have more choice in and be able to exercise more control over the education of their children.

--Vouchers would encourage competition among schools, which would lead to an increase in their efficiency and the quality of education.

--Schools would be made more responsive to the needs of students and the variety and quality of special programs would be enhanced.

--School integration efforts would be aided by enabling minority students to attend a school of their choice, an opportunity not otherwise available to them.

--A voucher program offers the best combination of the constitutional guarantees of personal freedom and the right to an education.

--A voucher program would increase opportunities for the handicapped and disadvantaged, who would be given mobility to gravitate towards the schools offering the best programs for their needs.

--The government should return to its traditional role as a supporter, not provider, of education.

--The decline in the quality of public education, which began when the consolidation of schools systems reduced local input, would be reversed by the more responsive voucher system.

Opponents of the voucher system argued that:

--Parents may not obtain the necessary information before making a choice between schools, and may base their decisions solely upon convenience.

--Indirect support for nonpublic schools may become general aid and might blur the separation between church and State.

--It would compound administrative and transportation problems to the point where the costs would become excessive.

--Insufficient funding would be provided to allow poor students choice of all private schools.

--White students with higher incomes would be able to leave the public school system, exacerbating the problems of "white flight" and segregation.

--The desegregation orders now affecting most Louisiana schools would preclude the transfer of most students and hamper the implementation of the voucher program.

--Private schools are not as accountable to parents as are public schools, and cannot be prevented from discriminating against students.

--The quality of education for all children will suffer; the voucher program is a "hoax" offering benefits only to those parents already sending their children to private schools.

It should be noted that the Louisiana Association of Business and Industry identified eight major conceptual models of education vouchers. These different forms of the voucher system were not addressed by participants in the forum, but might well have an impact on concerns raised by the speakers.

To date, enactment of proposed education voucher legislation in Louisiana has failed. Though long-term prospects for implementing a voucher system in the State remain cloudy, it was felt that the issue will be raised again in the legislature.

Notes

1. H.R. 5409, 99th Cong., 1st Sess. (1985).
2. S.B. 244, 1979, 5th Regular Session of the Louisiana State legislature under the Constitution of 1974.
3. H.B. 880, 1982, 8th Regular Session of the Louisiana State legislature under the Constitution of 1974.