



Students Deserve to Attend Fully-Funded Public Schools That Affirm and Sustain All Aspects of their Identity

IDRA Testimony Against Senate Bill 233, Submitted to the Georgia House Education Committee on March 20, 2023

Chairman Hilton and Honorable Members of the Committee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. My name is Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed., and I am the Georgia Director of Advocacy for IDRA, an independent, non-partisan, education policy and research non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

IDRA opposes Senate Bill 233 because students in Georgia deserve the opportunity to attend excellent, fully funded schools that affirm and sustain all aspects of their identity. SB 233 would undermine public schools across our state, and it would create an educational system that is more racially segregated and compromises the civil rights of our students.

Providing students the very best, well-rounded, equitable, public education is at the core of the mandate outlined in Georgia's Constitution in Article VIII, Section I. Our constitution states "The provision of an adequate public education for the citizens shall be the primary obligation of the State of Georgia." The scholarship voucher program outlined in Senate Bill 233 would divert significant funds from Georgia's current public schools and reduce these schools' ability to provide all students not just an adequate education, but the excellent and equitable education they deserve.

Furthermore, research on similar voucher programs shows that students in voucher programs fare worse academically than their public school peers. A 2017 multi-state review of voucher programs by the Economic Policy Institute found that students in voucher programs scored significantly lower than public school students on reading and math tests, and vouchers did not lead to improved public school performance (Carnoy, 2017).

Another study showed that participation in voucher programs had negative effects on student achievement, with students enrolled in the Louisiana Scholarship Program increasing their chances of failing math by 50% (Abdulkadiroğlu, Parag & Walters, 2018). Students in Indiana using vouchers to attend private schools consistently scored lower on reading and math tests than their public-school peers (Dynarski, 2017).

The evidence simply does not justify the significant risk to the academic futures of Georgia students.

Additionally, voucher programs like SB 233 have been shown to increase racial and economic school segregation (Potter, 2017). Research shows that strong schools are integrated, diverse, well-resourced schools. In fact, decreasing racial and economic segregation in schools benefits all students academically, socially and emotionally (Seigel-Hawley, 2012).

However, voucher programs – including those like the program in SB 233 that focus on schools with the lowest performance measures – do nothing to support our systemically-underfunded public schools that serve the majority of Georgia students. This bill would continue a history of apathy and state divestment from the schools that serve the largest proportions of Black students, other students of color, and those from families with limited wealth and incomes.

Sending Georgian students to private schools will expose them to less diverse environments (Hinojosa, 2017). White students are significantly overrepresented in private schools while Black and Latino students are significantly underrepresented based on their proportion of the school-age population (NCES, 2018; NCES, 2019).

Furthermore, a significant proportion of private schools in Georgia are racially segregated. According to 2019-20 data, nearly 5% of Georgia's private schools are 100% white, 18% are over 90% white, and nearly 43% of these schools are 75% white (NCES, 2019). We encourage leaders to invest in other public-school options that will not exacerbate current patterns of racial and economic segregation in schools.

All students should be able to attend schools that affirm and support all aspects of their identity, but voucher programs like that in SB 233 threaten civil rights protections for students. While the bill does reference that schools participating in the program would have to comply with antidiscrimination laws listed under 42 USC Section 2000d, this provision only prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color and national origin. Notably absent from SB 233's requirements are protections for students based on sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or disability or protections for emergent bilingual students.

Unfortunately, we have seen students be discriminated against on these grounds in other places that have implemented private school voucher programs (Mead & Eckes, 2018; Welner & Green, 2018). Sadly, many parents are unaware that their student will no longer have these important civil rights protections in private schools (GAO, 2017).

Recommendation

Because of the potential impacts on funding for public schools, school diversity and students' civil rights, we ask the committee not to move this bill forward and to instead invest in modernizing our quality basic education formula to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our student population and providing all our students access to a fully-funded, diverse, integrated, culturally-sustaining public schools.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. For more information, please contact Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed., IDRA Georgia director of advocacy, at mikayla.arciaga@idra.org.

Resources

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- Mead, J.F., & Eckes, S.E. (2018). How School Privatization Opens the Door for Discrimination. National Education Policy Center. <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/privatization>
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- Siegel-Hawley, G. (October 2012). How Non-Minority Students Also Benefit from Racially Diverse Schools, Research Brief. National Coalition on School Diversity. <http://www.school-diversity.org/pdf/DiversityResearchBriefNo8.pdf>
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IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.