

Guest editorial: Private school vouchers—the forbidden fruit

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In the beginning, temptation appeared as a fruit. Today, it appears as a voucher. As tempting as it may be for private religious schools to pluck the low-hanging fruit of “free” public money, the cost is too great. I say this as a pastor. I say this as a Christian school leader. I say this with certainty.

Has someone bothered to ask faith-based schools if they should take the money? In Florida, 82 percent of students receiving voucher money attended a religious school, according to *U.S. News & World Report* (Aug. 28, 2014).



Kyle Henderson What will it mean for hiring employees at the religious school? Will this public money be used to tell the school who they can and can't hire? Look at incidents around the country where religious schools are being taken to court for releasing employees who undermine the core ethical stances. The courts are telling them which parts of their school qualify as faith-based.

Strings attached

Vouchers come with government strings attached.

I have been a pastor more than 30 years. I have been the pastor of a 150-year-old Baptist church in East Texas 18 years. We operate a distinctively Christian grade school averaging 75 students. Our students have thrived, going on to high academic success.

I know how tempting it could be to take voucher money. I know the burden on families who scrimp and save to send their kids to our school. I have bought lots of cookie dough, sponsored walk-a-thons and attended fundraisers. I also know the freedom of operating a school that is able to talk openly about Christ, a place where prayer is a part of each class, where sharing Christian testimony is encouraged, and where chapel and worship are a regular part of the school.

Payouts seek to fill in for faith

These government payouts seek to fill in for faith. They whisper from the shadows they are the answer to the problems of funding a Christian school.

God does not need vouchers.

Vouchers and all their versions, including “school-choice options,” rightly come with responsibilities and obligations to the government. But Jesus told us we cannot serve two masters. These vouchers are either a grab to control faith-based schools or an irresponsible, unaccountable disbursement of public funds. Either the government will start exerting control over faith-based schools, or it will send money to schools not required to meet any standards.

The only viable choice for a faith-based school is to reject the funds.

Faith is strong and alive in America because of the freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. In the places where this is not true, the church is an empty shell. Depending on the state for funds is a death

sentence for free religion and vibrant faith.

There are, however, some faith-based schools ready to receive the funds. I don't want tax dollars diverted to them any more than I want them diverted to my school. In North Carolina's voucher program, 8 percent of the public money is diverted to a single school, the Greensboro Islamic Academy, according to [North Carolina Policy Watch](#). Louisiana's voucher system only passed the state legislature when an Islamic school's request for funds was withdrawn. Where public funds are diverted to faith-based schools, all faiths will have access to the funds.

Bearing the cost

I prefer the system where those who love faith bear the cost of that faith. We don't need vouchers to solve the problems of education in the state of Texas. We need legislators who are courageous enough to help public schools thrive, to return full funding to Texas schools and even to increase it.

I am part of [Pastors for Texas Children](#) because we are mobilizing all over the state to fight for children. We fight for freedom of religion and against a private view of education that draws money away from already-struggling schools.

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