



Education In Our Community

Controversial Law Threatens Voucher Programs

(NAPSA)—*Whether you are for or against school vouchers, this article may help clear up many of the myths and misconceptions surrounding the issue.*

A June 2002 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court ruled school vouchers to be constitutional—but the legality of school vouchers is still being tested.

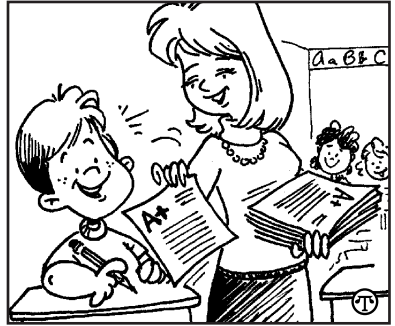
School choice opponents in Florida recently sued the state and its governor, Jeb Bush. They won their case, arguing that vouchers are in violation of the so-called “Blaine Amendments”—a group of laws considered by many to be biased and antiquated.

The amendments date back to the 1860s and '70s when then Speaker of the House, James G. Blaine, is said to have used them to preserve Protestant influence against Catholic immigrants to the U.S. The original Blaine Amendment was aimed at changing the U.S. Constitution to prohibit aid to religious institutions. Opponents of the amendment say it's an old and prejudiced law that provides a legal loophole used by those wishing to slow education reform.

While Blaine failed on the federal level, 36 states—including Florida, adopted look-alike amendments to their own constitutions.

School choice supporters point out the U.S. Supreme Court wrote the Blaine Amendments “should be buried now” and were written at a time of extreme prejudice against the Catholic Church. They say the Florida decision was based on an irrelevant and unjust law.

Perhaps equally important, opponents of the ruling say playing the “Blaine game” has been detrimental to the educational system in Florida—and is dangerous to the country as a whole. A study



A study found one state's public and private schools improved when a voucher system was in place.

recently summarized in *The School Choice Advocate* seems to confirm their position.

The study, called *An Evaluation of the Florida A-Plus Accountability and School Choice Program*, was written by Jay Greene, PhD, Senior Fellow for the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. It found that all schools—public and private—performed better on standardized tests while the voucher system was being used. According to the study, “the [voucher] program appears to be providing schools with the incentives to use their resources effectively and improve the quality of education at failing schools.”

Should the Florida voucher ruling reach the U.S. Supreme Court, recent cases indicate it has little chance of standing, and the vouchers will most likely be reinstated. Until that happens, however, school choice proponents say the “Blaine game” could cost thousands of children the chance of a quality education.

More information about this issue is available by visiting the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation Web site at www.friedmanfoundation.org.