

# School News & Notes

## The Only Good Private School: A Public School?

(NAPSA)—On June 27, 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down its opinion in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, upholding the constitutionality of Cleveland's voucher program. For voucher opponents, the ruling has triggered a change in tactics.

In addition to their decision to ignore the Supreme Court and seek anti-voucher rulings on the state court level, voucher opponents indicate they will open a second front—a “red-tape war,” torturing the meaning of the word “accountability” until the only acceptable private school is one that transforms itself into a public school.

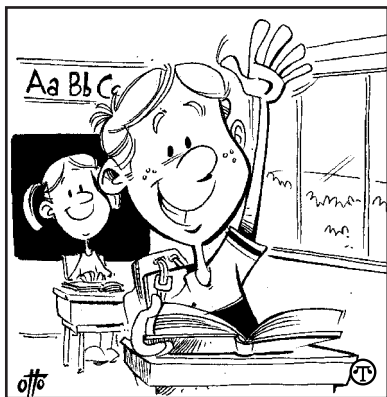
As Sandra Feldman, President of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), writes: “If [the Supreme Court's] decision brings new efforts to enact voucher legislation, we will fight these efforts. But we will also work with local, state and national policymakers to ensure that private schools that receive public funds are held accountable—just as public schools are.”

As the ACLU argues: “In short, federal funding to schools under this program would come with a free ticket to ignore the civil rights laws that have protected students in federally funded education programs from harmful discrimination for decades.”

### Accountability as a weapon

What the AFT and ACLU seek sounds benign enough. In practice, however, anti-voucher forces have made clear their intention to use “accountability” to impose a regulatory regime that would be far more restrictive than that demanded of public schools.

Witness Milwaukee, site of the ground-breaking Parental Choice Program passed in 1990. Even before the program took effect, the state superintendent, a zealous voucher foe, used his regulatory authority to impose massive compliance costs on inner-city private schools. Arguing that a hypothetical special needs student might elect to use a voucher to enroll at a private school, the superintendent demanded that each school prepare itself to accept a student with any and all conceivable disabilities,



**Many school voucher opponents are looking past the benefits of such programs, which give a parent the right to choose their child's school.**

requiring renovations of classrooms, doorways, bathrooms, hallways and playgrounds, and the hiring of special counseling, evaluation and teaching staff—without any adjustment in the value of the voucher, and in spite of the fact that no public school provides the same range of services.

Only a letter from the federal Department of Education prevented anti-voucher forces from winning the first regulatory battle in the red-tape war.

### The ultimate arbiters: parents

In their insistence that voucher schools are accountable to no one, voucher opponents ignore the ultimate arbiters of accountability: parents. The passage of a private school choice program does not compel a child to abandon his or her public school. No parent is forced to enroll their child with a voucher, and all parents—should they come to question the quality of education at their school of choice—are free to choose a different private school or accept a public school placement.

Everyone wants accountable schools. For that reason, we need to recognize the anti-school choice campaign for what it is: An attempt to use the banner of accountability to mask an effort to disenfranchise parents who make choices voucher opponents don't like.

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