

HR 610 Education Funding Summary and Proposed Actions

H.R. 610 is an assault on our public elementary and secondary school system, which serves 9 out of 10 of the nation's children ([NCES data](#)). The bill shifts taxpayer funds to homeschooling and private schools, 69% of which have a religious orientation or purpose ([NCES data](#), p. 10 of 57), thus violating the [principle](#) that tax dollars should not pay for religious education (see also [Blaine amendments](#)).

The bill's main features are (1) repealing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and its subsequent reauthorizations, and (2) limiting the authority of the Department of Education (DOE) to award block grants. The merit of voucher systems for student achievement is [disputed](#); vouchers fail to meet the needs of [rural](#) communities; and vouchers [will not provide equal access](#) for high-need students. Yet the bill embeds vouchers at the heart of U.S. educational policy and requires states to comply with this voucher system to receive federal funding. In H.R. 610, no prior elements of assistance survive from previous legislation to high-need and special-needs students, support for preschool programs, measures to ensure, accountability, or adherence to performance standards.

A second part of H.R. 610, ironically called the No Hungry Kids Act, repeals important nutritional standards for children living in poverty. The goal is reducing costs, but it comes at the expense of the health of children who receive free or reduced cost meals.

Why this matters: The proposed voucher system will harm children in public schools, especially high-need children and those in rural communities. The nation's children will be better served by investment in accountable, effective local public schools.

Calls to Action: Spend public dollars for public schools

Action 1: Watch video for further insight into H.R. 610 and what it means for schoolchildren.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phDZh3aUzu8&feature=share>

Action 2: Ask MoCs what their positions are and tell them yours.

Call: Your representative in the House ([lookup](#)).

Script: Hi! I am a constituent from *ZIP*. I'd like to hear Representative *_NAME's_* views on H.R. 610 and its impact on rural and high-need students who will lose resources if the bill becomes law. I urge Representative *_NAME_* to oppose shifting public dollars away from public schools.

Action 3: If you are a constituent of the bill's [sponsor](#), [co-sponsors](#), or members of the House [Committee on Education and the Workforce](#), write a postcard or email: "H.R. 610 pushes privatization of schools at the expense of our public school system. Public dollars should go to public schools! Stand up for the best interests of our children and say no to H.R. 610. "

History of primary antecedents to HR 610

“The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was signed into law in 1965 by President Johnson... ESEA was a civil rights law, supporting low-income students, funding for special education centers, and scholarships for low-income college students.”

[\[https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn\]](https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn)

ESEA has been updated through many reauthorizations since, including No Child Left Behind (NCLB) under the Bush administration, and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) under Obama. ESSA retained NCLB's requirements for rigor, while returning control of assessment back to the states. Both reauthorizations maintained protections and support for high-needs students and directed resources toward raising school performance.

HR 610: Compulsory Vouchers

[\[https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/hr610/BILLS-115hr610ih.pdf\]](https://www.congress.gov/115/bills/hr610/BILLS-115hr610ih.pdf)

HR 610 has two sections.

Title I -- Choices in Education Act attempts three things:

- 1.) embed a voucher system at the heart of US educational policy,
- 2.) require states to comply with this voucher system to receive block grants, and
- 3.) constrain the discretion of the Secretary of Education solely to awarding block grants.

No elements of assistance to high-need students, support for preschool programs, or adherence to performance standards from previous legislation survive in this act.

Title II--No Hungry Kids Act, does two things:

- 1.) Repeals a complicated (81 pages of dense, 3 column type) FDA nutritional standard articulated in the January 26, 2012 Federal Registry:

<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2012-01-26/pdf/2012-1010.pdf>

- 2.) Amends the Richard B. Russell National school lunch act

[\[https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/NSLA.pdf\]](https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/NSLA.pdf) (see addendum A below).

Public Reaction to HR 610

There is considerable outcry from many organizations that support public schools and recognize the need for federal oversight and support of state and local education agencies, especially preservation of funding for high-need students, directed assistance for low-performing schools, and support for early childhood education, largely on predictable ideological lines.

The changes in Title II may be motivated by economics, complexity of compliance, ideological

perspectives, or simply politics. The immediate impact of these changes, given that the Russell School Lunch Act is left largely intact, is lower than the assault on public funding of public schools, though it should be noted that the act repeals important nutritional standards for children living in poverty.

Home school advocates endorse the emphasis on choice, but object to the threat of government registration/potential regulation that are implicit in the voucher system:

<https://www.hslda.org/docs/news/2017/201702140.asp>

Other pertinent information as needed (like additional contact information)

Addendum A: The second part of Title II in HR 610 mandated the following change in wording:

“SEC. 9. [42 U.S.C. 1758] (a)(1)(A) Lunches served by schools participating in the school lunch program under this Act shall meet minimum nutritional requirements prescribed by the Secretary on the basis of tested nutritional research, except that the minimum nutritional requirements— “

Section 9(a)(1)(A)(i) is amended from:

“shall not be construed to prohibit the substitution of foods to accommodate the medical or other special dietary needs of individual students; and”

To:

“shall not be construed to prohibit the substitution of foods to accommodate the medical or other special dietary needs of individual students, to establish a calorie maximum for individual school lunches, or to prohibit a child from eating a lunch provided by the child’s parent or legal guardian; and”

Addendum B: Strategic considerations regarding opposition to HR 610

1. Get people on the record. One successful basis for overturning the travel ban was the charge of *intent to discriminate*, based on public statements made by some involved. So, don’t just urge... “vote no”... ask MoCs what will happen to the high-need students who will lose resources, and how can they justify these changes in light of those needs?
2. Federal support for preschool funds has been a vital part of expanding access to high quality pre-K education, especially in high-poverty areas. It is by no means evident that this support will survive this bill. Concern for these programs should be part of the demand to MoC to go on the record about these critical programs.
3. Think hard about how best to market these issues... the children of 80 percent of American families are educated in public schools. Make clear the risk to the educational

system that is most important to them.

4. What percent of all EDU funding comes from the federal government? Around 8%. See [\[https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html\]](https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html). These federal funds disproportionately impact the neediest students. They pay for critical services including additional staff to support ELL students and students with disabilities and those who are not achieving on grade level.

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