



## VOUCHER PROGRAMS

While school voucher programs theoretically expand choices for parents and students, any federally funded voucher program for students with disabilities would undermine the ability for these children to receive a free appropriate education. Families using school vouchers typically must relinquish all rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), including entitlement to an individualized educational program (IEP) and education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). NCLD opposes the use of federal funds for voucher programs for the reasons outlined below:

- 1. Voucher programs provide no guarantee of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with disabilities.**
  - A child with a disability using a voucher to attend a private school may be responsible for additional educational costs to obtain needed services, preventing many families of lower socio-economic status from participating in voucher programs.
- 2. Vouchers provide no requirement that teachers and paraprofessionals must be highly qualified or that their effectiveness be evaluated.**
  - Private school teachers are not required to be certified as highly qualified or to have their performance valued which is increasingly the norm for public school teachers. Because of this, teachers and staff in voucher programs may not be appropriately trained to teach students with disabilities.
- 3. Using vouchers eliminates the guarantee of a least restrictive environment for students.**
  - Since IDEA—which requires that students with disabilities be educated with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible—does not extend to private schools, voucher programs could potentially facilitate segregation of students with disabilities.
- 4. Using vouchers lowers academic expectations for students with disabilities.**
  - Private schools are exempt from federal accountability requirements, such as giving students statewide assessments and ensuring students meet proficiency goals for reading and math.
  - There is no federal requirement that students with disabilities who are educated in private schools under voucher programs must meet the same academic standards as their peers without disabilities.
- 5. Voucher programs prevent equal access to education.**
  - Private schools accepting vouchers can make admission decisions based on the individual educational needs of each applicant, ultimately resulting in the exclusion of many students with disabilities.