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Group: Grade all schools

BY WILL SENTELL

4 COMMENTS

Capitol News Bureau
February 15, 2012

Private schools that accept students who get state aid should face the same scrutiny as public schools, including annual letter grades, officials of the Louisiana Budget Project said in a report released Tuesday.

“A dramatic expansion of private school vouchers, like what the governor is proposing, demands an equally strong commitment to accountability and transparency,” the report says.

The group says it does independent, nonpartisan research on state fiscal issues and their impact on families and businesses. It is part of the Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations. Last year the group was part of a coalition that included teacher unions and called for a \$940 million tax increase to ease state budget problems.

Though no legislation has been filed, Gov. Bobby Jindal has proposed a major expansion of the state’s program for low-income students to attend private or parochial schools.

Jindal wants the change to apply to students attending “C,” “D” and “F” schools, as rated by the state Department of Education.

The governor calls the aid “scholarships,” and says they can help students escape failing schools.

Opponents call the assistance “vouchers” and say they drain vital dollars from public schools.

State Superintendent of Education John White, who is Jindal’s top public schools lieutenant, said last week that it makes no sense to give private and parochial schools letter grades because a relatively small number of students getting state aid would be attending.

But the report says private schools accepting students that get the aid

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should be given annual letter grades and those that “fail to make the grade” should be dropped from the program.

The review also noted that, under Jindal’s plan, 380,000 students would be eligible for the aid in a state where about 122,000 students attend private schools.

It says priority should be given to students in “F” schools and that, only after those are served should students in “D” and “C” schools qualify for the aid.

The study also noted that charter schools, which are public schools run by independent boards, are required to enroll a percentage of at-risk students, submit annual reports detailing academic progress and show gains to retain their authorization.

Jan Moller, director of the group, said Indiana uses a system that includes private schools with traditional public schools in rating student performance. “I think you have to have transparency and accountability across the board for parents to make a truly informed choice,” Moller said.

White has said the Jindal administration supports the idea of students who get the aid taking the same state skills tests as public school students, such as LEAP and iLEAP.

Kyle Plotkin, Jindal’s director of communications, said the Louisiana Budget Project stance differs fundamentally from the governor.

“We think parents know best,” Plotkin said Tuesday.

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Comments (4)

1) Comment by brresident - Wednesday, February 15, 2012
Who will force the boards of these private schools to change their enrollment policies? Who will ensure that tuition costs will not rise to keep the voucher kids out? BR private schools are filled with the children of the elite and they want to keep it that way. By the time people figure this out, the public schools system will be a corporate run prison factory - and that, too, is a Jindal initiative, isn't it?

2) Comment by timesright - Wednesday, February 15, 2012
Hope @ you will be lobbying along with the many who are strongly opposed to vouchers and the waivers of accountability. Just how fair is it to the taxpayers, whose money will be used for vouchers, parents who think everything is greener on the other side of the fence, and to the students?

3) Comment by @ - Wednesday, February 15, 2012

ALL students in ALL schools, public or private, should be required to take the SAME tests! How else will we truly be able to determine which schools are successful? Yes, parents deserve choices,....but how do they know that the private schools are actually doing a better job? Where is the data to show this? The state of Maryland requires all private and public schools to take the SAME state mandated standardized tests. Parents are then able to realistically compare the performance of both and make a real INFORMED decision. I teach at a public high school in a highly ranked school district. I don't like the idea of vouchers. But if you're going to do it.....TEST EVERYONE! Do it right! When I was in college, I worked at a local tutoring facility; we saw just as many private school students as we did public. They lacked many of the same skills as the public school student! If private schools are more effective, then why are these parents paying thousands of dollars for extra tutoring for their children??? Are the private school really doing a better job??? Test them and lets find out!□

4) Comment by Politivore - Wednesday, February 15, 2012

How would "parents know best" when they have no basis to compare their options? Based on the way the Governor and his people operate, my guess would go with the incredibly scientific reasoning of intuition and/or prayer. That's pretty much what the LBP is pointing out. I'm willing to accept that most private schools are "better" than most public schools based on student achievement at the moment (not that there is any real way to measure that). I don't think anyone would find that surprising as private schools can prohibit poorly performing students from attending. But if a wide-scale voucher program is put in place, what's to stop fly-by-night private schools from opening up to ride the gravy train? There would really be no way for a parent to "know best" if there is no way to rate the various options on a uniform scale.□

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