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Groups knock governor's voucher plan

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Written by **Mike Hasten**

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BATON ROUGE — Gov. Bobby Jindal scores an "F" in accountability with his plan to expand his New Orleans "scholarships" statewide, a government watchdog group says in a report.

Jan Moller, head of the Louisiana Budget Project, said Jindal is misleading parents on two levels — that private schools are necessarily better just because they're private and that there's room in private schools for the 380,000 students that could be eligible if the Legislature approves his plan.

Moller said his report goes beyond the argument of whether the state should be paying private schools, most of which are church-based, and looks instead to whether private schools actually provide a better education. He questions how Jindal can say they are when private schools don't administer the same tests that the state uses to grade whether public schools succeed.

"If I'm the parent, I want to know how the private school performs, compared to public schools," he said. "That's information I want as a parent and a taxpayer.

"If they're going to accept public funds to educate public school students, it's only fair that the private sector live by the same rules as the public sector," Moller said. "If they don't like it, they don't have to accept vouchers."

Moller's contentions are supported by two other groups, Educate Now! and Louisiana Progress.

Leslie Jacobs, a former Board of Elementary and Secondary Education member who guided creation of the state accountability system and founder of Educate Now!, pointed out in a recent report

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that the vast majority of students who participate in the New Orleans voucher program at private schools did not perform as well as students enrolled in Recovery School District schools.

Although entire classes at private schools are not tested using state instruments, students who attend on tuition vouchers are tested.

Two of the schools "are doing a fabulous job" and have more than 80 percent of voucher students performing at or above grade level, which exceeds the state average," Jacobs said. But four are "much worse than any New Orleans K-8 RSD school."

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