

The Arc Michigan Position Statement on School Vouchers

The Arc Michigan believes that all students should be educated together, regardless of students' abilities, while receiving the supports and services necessary to achieve educational success. The Arc Michigan works with legislators, educators, policy makers, and families to strengthen this position.

School vouchers are being discussed at the State and National levels. It is the opinion of The Arc Michigan, based on other states' school voucher and related programs, that there is a negative impact on students with disabilities, and that school vouchers do not align with the values of The Arc Michigan.

Our opinion is based on the following information:

- Most states require families of students with disabilities who choose vouchers and related programs to forfeit their legal education rights. These rights provide important protections to students with disabilities through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Private schools are not required to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education, consider the Least Restrictive Environment, or offer access to due process procedures.
- School voucher and related program funding is not equal to the actual cost of per pupil education, making parents pay large tuition fees.
- Eligibility criteria for school vouchers and related programs varies across states, and is often based on factors including family income, the status of the student's resident school district, and previous attendance at a public school.
- Selection criteria for eligible students was either vague or exclusionary and is often determined by the selecting school.
- There is a lack of independent research regarding outcomes and the impact of school vouchers and related programs on students with disabilities.
- Accountability is almost nonexistent.

The Arc of the United States does not have an official position on school vouchers and related programs but suggests that the following questions be asked when discussing school voucher and related programs. The Arc Michigan supports this list to ensure that all families are informed.

- 1) Are you prepared to give up some or all of your IDEA rights?
- 2) Do you have schools to choose from in a reasonable proximity to your home?
- 3) Can you afford to pay the difference between the voucher/scholarship amount and the full cost of tuition?
- 4) Does your child not need, or can you independently afford, special education and related services typically provided by your public school?
- 5) Can your child meet the admissions requirements for the private school(s)?
- 6) Are you comfortable with the school's accountability requirements?
- 7) Will your child's disability increase his/her chances of being disciplined or expelled?
- 8) Are your only options segregated settings?

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