



February 2, 2021

Mr. Chairman and Members of the House Education Committee,

I come before you today, amplifying the voices of more than 17,000 educators across the state, all strongly opposed to House Bill 20 and the implications it would have for our students and our state.

We all know that in New Hampshire, we have some of the best public schools in the country. Why? Not surprisingly, we believe that it is in large part due to the amazing educators we have across our state.

Their dedication shines through in spite of all of the obstacles they face, not of their own making: an increasingly inequitable funding model, a mental health and substance abuse crisis that is part of our classrooms now, the threat of an active shooter in our school buildings and, of course, the novel coronavirus.

Every day, our educators adapt or triage these challenges to ensure the children of New Hampshire can realize their full potential.

In the spring, educators turned on a dime to institute remote learning.

Today, many are working in constantly changing models of instruction to react to the outbreak situation in their district that week. Many are teaching classes in a room-and-Zoom model, where some students are in the class and some are remote – at the same time. This drastically reduces the time necessary to prepare lessons and extends the educator's day late into the evening.

Our support staff, in areas of high need, have continued to provide meals to students throughout the pandemic because educators know access to nutritious meals is key to ensuring the health and well-being of all students. Food is a need, not a want, and if we want kids to be able to concentrate and grow and be healthy and happy, we must see to it that they are fed. The importance of public schools meeting this basic need has come into sharp focus during the pandemic.

But this bill ignores all these contributions.

The pandemic of the last year has only exacerbated the challenges our school communities (parents, students, and educators) attempt to overcome:

- Rural communities who cannot access broadband internet;
- Property poor communities who struggle to make up for the less than adequate state support;
- Our families who rely on our schools as a source of meals;
- Older school buildings with poor ventilation in them because they haven't been able to upgrade them, making them less safe when a pathogen can be spread through the air.

While our educators, parents and communities persevere through these challenges to produce the high-quality public education we are accustomed to in New Hampshire, it begs the question: why would we embark on a plan like the one contained in HB 20? This legislation would disadvantage our communities further instead of seeking to solve the needs this pandemic has put before us.

Instead of addressing the school funding inequities in our system, this legislation exacerbates them by subsidizing private and religious schools who are already able to receive publicly-subsidized scholarship funds and have private scholarship programs of their own. By subsidizing private and religious schools with public tax dollars, HB 20 would create a voucher system that makes it harder to support a high-quality public education. In order to execute this program, the bill implements a structure that is untethered from transparency, accountability or any real minimum standards.

In addition to the philosophical issues and financial issues that led to a similar bill being defeated only a few years ago, this bill would also allow a scholarship organization to skim up to 10% of the voucher awarded which can amount anywhere from approximately \$3,400 to nearly \$8,500 or \$340 to \$850 per student using a voucher.

There are very little restrictions on the types of expenses that this money can be used for. If I am a financially advantaged parent who is already enrolling my child in a private school, I can take the adequacy money used to support my community's school district and buy the latest Apple computer.

On top of that, this bill includes little oversight over these precious funds that our communities will be left without. The oversight provisions of the scholarship organization and education providers seem much like when the FAA allows plane manufacturers to inspect their own work.

What does this say to the teachers in our state who spend, on average, \$423 out of their own pockets each year on classroom supplies or the parents and educators we have heard from this past spring who drive to their library to access a wi-fi signal to take part in class or complete assignments? Not only are we subsidizing private schools using public dollars with this legislation, we are also allowing a third-party to recoup extraordinary administrative costs and provide little to no oversight over that.

To make matters worse, we would be doing all this and not helping the most important element every educator cares about, their students. Voucher programs have not shown to improve outcomes and some studies even indicate that over the long term they produce worse outcomes in critical STEM areas. This legislation also does not require that private or religious schools which would be subsidized by tax dollars would be held to the same standards in academics that public schools are.

We should be helping our communities and our schools come out of this pandemic stronger than before, not weaker.

More than 90% of the students in NH attend public schools and all efforts should be made to intelligently and creatively invest in making sure every child has a great public school in their neighborhood.

Public school funding is open and transparent. Voucher spending is private and shrouded in secrecy. Public schools are owned, operated, and managed by the public. Private voucher scholarship companies are designed to make a profit.

There are no laws or limits that prevent parents from choosing to send their children to a private, religious, or home school. Every family is free to make that choice. But that choice should never diminish another child's education or obligate any other family to help pay for their tuition. HB20 is an intrusion into the future of public-school children and the imposition of a financial burden on taxpayers across the state. This bill has no place in the Granite State.

Three years ago, this committee sent a similar bill to the finance committee that contained so many issues that the finance committee simply could not fix them. I urge the members of this committee not to do the same thing again, and respectfully ask that you find House Bill 20 Inexpedient to Legislate.

Respectively,



Megan Tuttle  
NEA-New Hampshire President