



Arizona Association
of School Business
Officials

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Contact: Tracey Benson, Media Relations, Arizona School Boards Association at O - (602) 254-1100 x 106, C - (602) 571-4233, or tbenson@azsba.org

Contact: John Hartsell, Public Relations, Arizona Education Association at O - (602) 407-2315, C - (602) 369-4506, or john.hartsell@arizonaaea.org



Court ruling against vouchers praised by parent, education, civic groups

PHOENIX - A coalition of parent, education and civic organizations is lauding a decision today by the Arizona Court of Appeals, which ruled that tax-payer funded vouchers that subsidize private school tuition are unconstitutional.

The decision resulted from a lawsuit filed by the coalition on Feb. 20, 2007, in response to two statutes enacted by the Arizona Legislature in spring 2006. The statutes authorized the state to give public tax-dollars to religious and other private schools through tuition vouchers.

Lawyers for the coalition argued that the programs violate the state's Constitution by appropriating funds for religious instruction and directing aid in advance of religion. The two provisions, found in Arizona's Constitution, are distinct from and more expansive than the U.S. Constitution's religion clauses of the First Amendment.

Public education advocates in Arizona and throughout the nation have long criticized private school vouchers as a threat to the basic right of every child to an excellent public education.

"Vouchers are not sound education policy," said Panfilo H. Contreras, Executive Director of the Arizona School Boards Association. "They divert funds from an already strapped system and channel them to private organizations that, unlike public schools, are not required to be accountable for how the money is spent or the level of achievement that results. Vouchers also create inequities for students, particularly those who live in rural areas, where few private schools exist."

In addition, vouchers lack support of the voting public. Since 2000, voters in three states (California, Michigan and Utah) have overwhelmingly rejected vouchers as an unnecessary choice for parents and students in their states.

John Wright, President of the Arizona Education Association, said, "Just like voters in other states who have declined vouchers, Arizonans understand that public schools are our pathway to great public schools that serve every child equally and that vouchers only divert funding and attention away from public schools."

Coalition partners in this legal challenge are the Arizona School Boards Association, the Arizona Education Association, the Arizona School Administrators, the Arizona Association of School Business Officials, American Civil Liberties Union of Arizona, Arizona Federation of Teachers, Arizona Parent-Teacher Association and the Arizona Rural Schools Association.

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