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NSBA ADVOCACY FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

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Charting a future federal role in education

By Michael A. Resnick

NSBA has prepared a position paper redefining the federal role in education to frame our ongoing conversations with President-Elect Barack Obama's transition team and the new administration.

A New Era in Education: Redefining the Federal Role for the 21st Century [on the next page] was developed over the course of the past year and includes many of the ideas discussed by the state school boards association leaders at NSBA's regional meetings.

In addition to a forward-looking agenda, *A New Era* presents recommendations for dealing with pending issues, such as the withdrawal of certain harmful regulations and agency orders relating to the No Child Left Behind Act, Medicaid reimbursements to school districts, and procedures for funding the E-rate program. It also recommends the inclusion of school construction and bond relief in the evolving economic stimulus package.

The good news is that we see a close connection between the big picture ideas that NSBA is proposing and the general direction in which the new administration appears to be heading.

We are optimistic that the federal role will take a more bottom-up approach to

provide greater local flexibility in strategies to raise student achievement. Certainly, local educators want to be empowered, not confined, by an overly regulatory federal government in educating the children of their community. This would stand in contrast to the misguided and all-too-encumbering belief that Washington can effectively mandate one-way solutions to address public education in a nation that is as large and diverse as ours.

The incoming administration appears to be interested in a comprehensive set of program proposals that are aimed at ensuring America's schoolchildren will graduate from high school with an academic foundation that prepares them for college and the workplace. For example, these proposals include a major early education initiative and a wide range of initiatives to attract, retain, develop, and reward good teachers.

Without losing focus on closing the achievement gap for children most in need, Obama's education transition team appears to be focused on raising the achievement level of all students.

This broader view bodes well for the practical research into innovations, best

practices, and uses of technology that could occur at the national level, as well as the approach it might take on school accountability. In this regard, the transition team has indicated a preference for multiple assessments to better evaluate students' cognitive skills and uses of

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information in subject areas than what can be gleaned from the current emphasis on a single state standardized test.

Turning to the crucial matter of funding, campaign proposals for significant investments are being tempered by the financial crisis that is drawing large sums from the U.S. Treasury. Yet members of the transition team are publicly talking about a large investment in education that is still tiny compared to the federal deficit.

So while there is cause to be optimistic, as always, the devil will be in the details of legislation and agency policies that are developed. Even then, much will depend on whether Congress—even one controlled by the president's party—will

go along with his thinking about education policies or funding. Certainly, we can expect there will be many competing voices among the interest groups that will advocate for federal programs, policies, and funding priorities that will vary sharply with the goals of local school boards.

The point is that school boards cannot take the initial favorable signs as a foregone conclusion about the legislation that ultimately will be enacted. There is an opportunity for some major steps forward, but capitalizing on them will require hard work by school boards with their members of Congress.

Finally, before closing the chapter on the outgoing administration, it is helpful to take stock of what transpired over the last Congress.

The review appearing below describes what NSBA and our legislative network through the contacts made with members of Congress—as well as with the involvement of other groups on some issues—was able to accomplish. They included several advancements, as well as successful damage control on Medicaid reimbursements, the E-rate, and vouchers. ■

Michael A. Resnick is associate executive director of NSBA for advocacy and issues management.

The efforts of the Federal Relations Network have really paid off

Thanks to the many phone calls, e-mails, letters, and visits with members of Congress by members of NSBA's Federal Relations Network, it is time to celebrate the legislative successes accomplished this past year.

As a key member of our powerful grassroots team, in conjunction with their state school boards association and NSBA, the FRN spoke in one unified voice to Congress—resulting in critical victories for public education.

Here are some of the 110th Congress' key accomplishments for public education:

- **Congress extended the moratorium on the rules to limit Medicaid reimbursements to schools.** Implementation of federal regulations that would limit school-based Medicaid reimbursements for administrative and transportation services was delayed until April 2007.

- **Congress restored \$1.645 billion for four years for the Secure Rural Schools program.** The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, which extends the program from fiscal year 2008 through 2011, provides a critical source of funding to 4,400 school districts and communities adjacent to nontaxable national forest lands that receive federal payments in lieu of taxes.

- **Congress opposed the administration's proposals to cut education funding** including the recommendation to eliminate more than 40 education programs in the FY 2009 budget.

- **A measure in the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 that would have had a chilling effect on local school districts was defeated.** The provision would have limited districts' ability to raise tax rates, which would have had an impact on school budgets.

It would have restricted taxpayers (who submit itemized federal tax returns) from claiming an additional standard tax deduction of \$500 (\$1,000 for those who file jointly) on their federal income tax returns if their local jurisdiction raised property taxes between April 2008 and January 2009.

The measure was modified to allow taxpayers to claim the additional standard deduction if they reside in a locality that increased property tax rates in 2008. Because of recent declines in property tax values in many communities, a number of local authorities are faced with decisions to raise the rate of taxation in order to maintain current revenue levels.

- **Discussions about the flaws in NCLB intensified, increasing the urgency to fix the law.**

With help from FRN members, NSBA gained greater exposure for its bill to improve NCLB.

The No Child Left Behind Improvements Act of 2007 (H.R.648) now has 29 bipartisan co-sponsors, and there is increased support for specific provisions in the bill in other pieces of legislation. More than 760 local school boards passed resolutions in support of H.R.648.

Additionally, we successfully lobbied for provisions that were contained in the House and Senate "discussion drafts." When it became apparent that the law would not be reauthorized during this Congress, we worked with Rep. Sam Graves (R-Mo.) to introduce legislation that would delay sanctions against schools and districts until Congress could complete the reauthorization.

- **Legislation was enacted to help districts recruit and retain high-quality teachers for high-need schools and subjects.** TEACH grants will help high-achieving students become teachers in hard-to-staff schools. Several provisions in the Higher Education Act strengthen teacher preparation programs.

- **Voucher proposals were defeated.** Congress rejected the president's 2007 and 2008 proposals for a national voucher experiment and made important progress to end the expiring Washington, D.C., school voucher program.

- **Awareness was raised about the importance of early education.**

NSBA worked closely with congressional sponsors to draft legislation—and urged school board members to ask their lawmakers to support legislation—to create a new early education program with its own funding stream and to expand and improve voluntary high-quality preschool programs.

- **Congress reauthorized Head Start.** The new law improves program quality standards, strengthens coordination with local schools, and aligns Head Start curricula and activities more closely with the expectations of local schools.

- **Congress supported a \$1.1 billion increase in FY 2008 funding for Title I grants for disadvantaged students.** This was the largest increase for Title I since NCLB was enacted in 2002.

Unfortunately, Congress folded funding for all domestic programs into a continuing resolution at last year's level. That measure remains in effect until March 2009 when Congress will make additional budget decisions. NSBA will be working hard to increase federal funding levels for education when the 111th Congress commences in 2009.

NSBA greatly appreciates all of your advocacy efforts throughout the past year. ■

A new era in education: A new federal role for the 21st century

“Education, then beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of man, the balance-wheel of the social machinery.”

—Horace Mann

Americans have always valued education and recognized its importance in opening the doors of opportunity to a better life for themselves and their children. Our nation's success on multiple fronts, from our economy to the functioning of our democratic society, is undeniably linked to the quality of the education provided to our citizens by our public schools.

Today's world of rapid changes, technological advances, and global competitiveness creates new challenges for our schools. A modern day paraphrasing of

Mann's quote might well read: Education is the great necessity.

This is not the first time America's education system has been challenged. Debates over who should be educated, to what degree, and at whose expense mark our history and at times ripped at the very moral fiber of our nation. Yet, in those previous challenges, America responded by expanding educational opportunity to more of its citizens.

Our schools, reflective of our society, are at a crossroads again. The 21st century economy creates an urgent demand that our schools provide a high-quality education for all students so they will succeed in life and our country will remain globally competitive.

However, educating our children within that framework must remain a principal function of state and local communities, where the ownership and the commitment for student success are most prominent. The federal government has a limited, but important, role to play. In recent years, that role has taken an unhealthy and unproductive top-down approach.

With the arrival of a new president and new Congress, coupled with enormous economic challenges, NSBA recommends an immediate comprehensive re-evaluation of the appropriate federal role in making America's schools work for our students and the country and offers the following recommendations.

The role of the president

No person in America has a larger megaphone or can command the attention of the nation more than the president of the United States of America. NSBA believes the next president must make strengthening our nation's schools a major priority and compellingly convey to the American people the urgency to work on accomplishing the task and what it will take to do so.

The president should lay out a national vision for education that addresses:

- the correlation between strong schools in every community and the nation's long-term success;
- the need for continuous improvement to keep ahead of rapidly changing times;
- the role that parents, community-based and faith-based groups, and business leaders must play in strengthening our schools; and
- how a transformation of the federal role will enable states and local communities to improve public education.

However, that national vision cannot convey nor equate to national mandates or directives. And the details of this national vision should emanate from discussions with stakeholders both inside and outside of Washington.

That vision must reflect the understanding of current authority and constitutional responsibilities of states and redefine the role of the federal government so that it promotes national policies within a framework that supports states and local communities. This must include sufficient flexibility in their operations to effectively and efficiently address the unique challenges of their local communities.

Questions that should drive the discussion include:

(1) What skills, knowledge, and tools will our students need to be successful in the 21st century economy? What does such an education look like?

(2) What do our public schools need

to provide students with those skills, knowledge, and tools?

(3) How will schools, stateholders, and the public know that schools are succeeding?

Therefore, NSBA recommends that the next president, in conjunction with key congressional leaders, convene a series of town meetings or mini-summits across the country. While all voices should be heard, this process should not serve as a forum only for federal policymakers and think tanks with single interests that would impose one-size-fits-all recommendations on every community.

Rather, this approach should directly engage those with the primary responsibility in providing a high-quality education, as well as those who have the greatest stake in its outcome: students, teachers, principals, parents, school board members, local superintendents, state superintendents, employers, and postsecondary education leaders.

These discussions can help define what a 21st century education must look like and foster the necessary buy-in of the stakeholders who will be charged with carrying out the task. Special attention must be given to involve state and local leaders who are elected by the public and have responsibility for public education.

Additionally, these key stakeholders should review the current framework for funding public education in the nation and develop recommendations for:

- (1) improvements in the revenue streams for education; and
- (2) greater efficiencies in the use of federal, state, and local dollars targeted to public education.

The result of these deliberations should be a “Report of Findings and Recommendations” within 100 days that would assess the current and emerging challenges and establish improving public education as a top priority.

In selecting his key team for education, NSBA urges the president to ensure that those nominated for appointments have demonstrated their expertise and effectiveness in managing and leading school districts, in classroom instruction in addressing the challenges facing America's public schools, and/or successfully leading initiatives with demonstrated and significant increases in student achievement.

Finally, the president should demonstrate his commitment to education as a national priority in his recommended budget to Congress. America does not need to wait for a national crisis in the development of our work force before providing the funding that is urgently needed now.

The federal government's role

Clearly, the new role of the federal government must acknowledge the fact that the efforts over the previous decade to employ a top-down approach have not worked.

The new role must be one of partnership and support to the states, not only in terms of funding for those with the greatest needs (such as students affected by poverty or disabilities or English Language Learners), but also in serving as a clearinghouse to share and promote ideas and best practices regarding actions needed to overcome shortfalls in student achievement. A potential theme for a new federal role might be “facilitate, don't dictate.”

The new role must provide support to

states and local school boards in the development of evaluation tools to identify what is needed for college and work force success, to facilitate innovation, and to be a true measure of academic success.

The federal government must challenge and inspire educators—with an emphasis on creating constructive remedies, adequate funding, and locally developed strategies, rather than simply punishing and discouraging schools or students when they fall short. The new federal role must act to strengthen the local voice, not muffle it.

Most importantly for local school boards, the federal government must recognize the importance of local school district governance to promote democracy and civic engagement so that citizens, including the school boards they elect, have a meaningful opportunity to be enfranchised in the direction of their community schools and to ensure their schools are meeting their values, priorities, and needs.

Pending the transition to this new federal role in leading the national effort to define and develop a consensus on a 21st century education based on data, the federal government must immediately redirect its emphasis and involvement to the following key areas.

The federal investment

The current federal support to states and local school districts to close the achievement gap, particularly for those challenged by poverty, disabilities, and the lack of English proficiency, is noteworthy and must be strengthened to reflect the increased number of students currently enrolled in our schools and the significant increase in costs in delivering the education services that are needed.

The federal government should eliminate poorly conceived federal mandates and requirements and fully fund key federal laws, such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

No federal standards

The federal government should play a supportive role to the states in the raising of state academic standards that reflect the elements of a 21st century education, but should not be involved in the actual development of those standards. The federal government should provide technical support to states, if requested, to identify the essential skills that students should have to compete successfully in college and in the global work force—and to develop and assess those state standards.

The federal government must recognize that states and local communities have needs that must be addressed and that a one-size-fits-all approach will not work. Therefore, the federal government must not promote federal or national standards.

The federal government must increase its financial support to states for the development of state assessments that are valid, reliable and measure students as individuals. Further, the use of locally developed assessments, including observational standards, should be considered as part of a multiple assessment system that is applied to any federal accountability framework. The federal government must not develop national high-stakes tests for state and local accountability purposes.

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About NSBA

The National School Boards Association is the nationwide advocacy organization for public school governance. NSBA's mission is to foster excellence and equity in public elementary and secondary education in the United States through local school board leadership. Founded in 1940, NSBA is a not-for-profit federation of state associations of school boards across the United States and the school boards of the District of Columbia, Hawaii, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

About the National Affiliate Program

The National Affiliate Program extends NSBA's services directly to local school districts. School districts are eligible to join provided they are members in good standing of their state school boards associations.

About the Office of Advocacy and Issues Management

The Office of Advocacy and Issues Management implements NSBA's Action/Advocacy Agenda and carries out NSBA's lobbying efforts at the national level. By lobbying the Congress, the White House, and federal agencies, the office helps increase federal funding for local school districts and reduces costly federal mandates; helps improve federal education programs by making legislative and regulatory changes local board members support; protects the governance role of school boards from congressional attack; and promotes the role of school boards as a key democratic institution in our country's education system.

Effective accountability systems

The federal government must shift its current emphasis of accountability away from penalties and sanctions to one of increased technical support, incentives, and federal investments.

Accountability models need to recognize that students come from different environments, have different support bases, and learn at different rates. For this reason, a federal accountability framework should recognize the importance of student academic growth, not just static scoring.

Further, federal accountability determinations should not be based solely on high-stakes tests. Clearly, accountability for states, school districts, schools, and students must be measured differently, and the federal government should be able to provide technical assistance to help states determine the specific measures.

21st century teaching and learning

There are several ways the federal government can assist state and district efforts to create and sustain a 21st century classroom. For example, it can:

- provide incentives in partnership with states to help districts recruit and retain highly effective teachers and fill gaps in hard-to-staff schools and high-need schools, including incentives to support locally designed performance-pay programs;
- provide research, best practices, and

information that is easily accessible and geared for use by local educators and policymakers;

- support efforts to develop and expand instructional practices, including such emerging approaches as “universal design for learning,” through preparation programs to enable teachers to be successful in teaching 21st century skills and inspiring our evolving student population;
- support state efforts to establish 21st century standards, including identifying the skills and uses of information students will need, as well as new opportunities for early education programs, proficiency in foreign languages, world geography, math, science, and technology;
- support efforts to raise expectations and close the achievement gap while raising the achievement of all students through such approaches as alternate schedules and nontraditional public school structures such as distance learning and other proven methods of instruction; and
- support efforts to ensure students will be prepared to succeed in a globally competitive society and everyday 21st century life through the development of their cognitive and analytical skills, their application of knowledge, and their attitudes toward education and lifelong learning.

Coordination of services

While federal agencies continue to increase their efforts to effectively address the needs of families in poverty (such as

housing, health, and protective services), there is a critical desire for increased efficiency of services. The federal government must redirect and strengthen its efforts to ensure better coordination and collaboration among federal agencies that serve the needs of students in poverty.

Research demonstrates the need to improve the quality of life of students in poverty. All too often, students who are shortchanged in education also are shortchanged in other aspects of their lives and can benefit from improved services in those areas that would complement schools’ ongoing efforts to raise student achievement. Therefore the federal government should provide incentives for more effective and efficient collaboration and coordination among those federal, state, and local agencies that serve the unique needs of students in poverty. Additionally, improving the quality of education for students in poverty should entail the engagement of communities, parents, and students in their education if we are to close the achievement gap.

Initial legislative priorities

NSBA expects Congress to direct much of its initial attention toward strengthening the economy, which must include a specific focus on public education. However, given the unique challenges currently facing the nation, and the expected delay in the reauthorization of ESEA, NSBA recommends the immediate suspension of sanctions against schools and local school districts and the

adoption of technical amendments needed to address accountability flaws under the No Child Left Behind Act.

Additionally, although there will be key legislative issues affecting education during the 111th Congress, members must also direct their attention to several priority issues involving current legislation:

- reauthorization of ESEA to amend NCLB so the program or any subsequent accountability program is free from the policy and operational flaws contained in current law, and to amend the narrow, high-stakes testing approach and instead support state and local efforts to provide a 21st century education to all students that includes higher-order, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills;
- reauthorization of IDEA to provide for policy changes to address emerging issues associated with students with disabilities;
- federal funding to meet the needs of all eligible Title I students, make good on Congress’ promise to fund 40 percent of the cost of IDEA services, support early childhood education programs at the state and local level, permanently protect the E-rate program, and assist state and school district efforts to attract and retain effective teachers with an emphasis on hard-to-staff schools and high-need subjects; and
- end federal funding for school vouchers.

More detailed recommendations on these legislative issues follow. ■

Increase federal funding for education

The top federal funding priorities for school boards are Title I grants, which are the principal source of funding for NCLB/ESEA, and grants to fund special education under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act.

Unfortunately, funding for these programs—and for education overall—has not kept pace with the educational needs that those programs are designed to meet, the amount that the federal government promised to provide, or the rising costs and rising expectations of students’ performance associated with the mandates of those programs.

Current funding is tens of billions of dollars below what Congress authorized for each federal program. For example, the cumulative federal shortfall for Title I from fiscal year 2002-07 totaled more than \$43 billion.

For IDEA, the federal government has never come close to fulfilling its promise to pay 40 percent of the average per-pupil excess costs for special education and currently provides just 18 percent of the total costs for this federally required program.

Accountability is a two-way street. When the federal government demands more of schools and students, as it has, it

needs to deliver on its part of the equation by providing sufficient funding, instead of passing those shortfalls on to local and state taxpayers.

We believe the next administration and Congress should:

- fulfill federal promises to fund important and mandated education programs;
- increase Title I grants for disadvantaged students by at least \$2.5 billion annually; and,
- increase IDEA grants for special education by at least \$2.5 billion annually.

In considering these recommendations, it is important to remember that

federal funding for K-12 accounts for only about 1.5 percent of the entire federal budget, so reasonable increases recommended for education would amount to a small fraction of 1 percent of total federal spending.

As states and localities must operate within a faltering economy, it is more difficult for local taxpayers to make up the difference when the federal government fails to do its part. And, in doing its part to sufficiently fund Title I and IDEA, it should not have to reallocate funds from the general education program in order to meet the requirements of federal mandates. ■

Fix the No Child Left Behind Act

School boards expect the next administration and Congress to hit the ground running in revamping the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act/Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and correct the law’s many flaws. Prolonged inaction would be a disservice to students, parents, teachers, and taxpayers.

The next iteration of this major federal law should reflect an appropriate federal role. That is, one that provides discretion and flexibility for the effective education of students to the level of government actually responsible for delivering it: local school districts.

K-12 education is a state and local

responsibility, and the appropriate federal role should be one that assists those entities in providing all students with the education that will serve them well in postsecondary education and in the workplace of the 21st century. It should provide an accountability system that is based on achievable goals and comprises a true measure of student learning and recognizes justifiable adjustments for local conditions.

More specifically and regardless of what the new law is called when enacted, it must:

- inspire expectations in student achievement that are high and attainable and will be reinforced by an accountabili-

ty system that constructively supports those outcomes;

- provide states and districts with greater overall flexibility to make educationally sound decisions and be free of mandates that unnecessarily or counterproductively hinder school districts from achieving their goals;
- ensure high-quality, valid, and reliable assessments for all students, especially for English language learners and students with disabilities;
- use multiple measures of academic achievement that will more accurately determine students’ knowledge and performance that reflect the kind of well-rounded education necessary to be suc-

cessful in the 21st century economy, as opposed to judging success on their performance on a single assessment;

- permit the use of growth models and other measures of student achievement that more accurately reflect student and school performance;
- facilitate strategic interventions that are designed at the local or state level and are targeted to students and schools most in need, rather than impose ineffective and costly sanctions; and,
- be fully funded, along with other federal assistance programs that are critical to achieving the new law’s goals. ■

Support 21st century skills

Our nation's global competitiveness and democracy rest squarely on a strong education system. The continued success of this system requires ongoing support and investment at all levels.

In order for students to gain the skills and knowledge they need to be successful citizens in the 21st century, school districts must:

(1) be able to provide a rigorous curriculum that is integrated with modern technologies and tools;

(2) provide an education program that includes the uses of knowledge and cognitive development at levels that meet the realities and standards of a competitive global economy and emerging everyday life; and

(3) present a strategic focus on math, science, and foreign languages that are necessary in a global economy that

increasingly will require competency in these areas.

The federal government can play a critical role in helping shape our nation's economic future by supporting districts in these efforts.

For example, the federal government should:

- provide flexibility in federal laws to enable school districts to teach students the higher-order, critical-thinking skills that are important for the 21st century workplace;

- invest in research and innovation and disseminate best practices, including identifying the skills and uses of knowledge that students will need to succeed in the 21st century workplace, such as cognitive skills, problem-solving abilities, creative and analytical thinking, teamwork and communications skills, intellectual curiosity, and a commitment to life-

long learning;

- invest in making broadband Internet access available to all schools, including E-rate-related services;

- invest in professional development to enable teachers to adequately teach 21st century learning, as well as effectively use technology resources in the classroom; and

- provide incentives to help states and districts fill teacher shortages in high-need subject areas vital to our future economy, such as math and science.

While the federal government should play a supportive role in building local and state capacity that furthers districts' efforts to provide students with a 21st century education, it should not engage in setting national academic standards or compliance requirements that hinder districts' work. ■

Invest in early childhood education

School board members recognize the critical role that high-quality early childhood education plays in preparing children for success in school and life, and they believe strongly in the need for an increased federal investment in this area.

Unfortunately, the United States has relatively low enrollment and invests fewer public resources in preschool programs than other developed countries. In contrast, Belgium, France, and Italy offer universal, voluntary, and free preschool programs for children ages 3-6 and enroll 95 percent of children within that age group.

Currently, many families do not have access to public preschool programs and are limited in terms of the quality of program they can afford. To ensure that our children are prepared to succeed in and adapt to an ever-changing world, we must ensure that they have a strong foundation on which to build.

The federal government can assist states and local districts by:

- increasing federal funding to support Head Start programs for disadvantaged students to help close the achievement gap between low-income children and their more affluent peers;

- create a new federal grant program that will increase funding over the next five years to develop, expand, and sustain voluntary high-quality preschool programs for all 3 and 4-year olds;

- devote specific resources to helping school districts develop and implement joint training and professional development programs for preK-3 instructors to help ensure a more seamless transition between preschool, kindergarten, and the elementary grades; and

- provide tools and incentives to replicate effective models and improve program quality. ■

Protect Medicaid reimbursements

Under federal law, school districts are eligible for reimbursement from Medicaid for the costs of certain administrative activities and transportation services delivered to children with disabilities from low-income families. The reimbursements also cover administrative activities, such as outreach for enrollment and monitoring of medical care for children with disabilities.

The Bush administration issued regulations intended to halt these reimbursements, but Congress rejected those efforts with a series of temporary moratoriums on their implementation. School boards believe the federal government

should not pursue cutting these important reimbursements to school districts and are seeking a permanent withdrawal of those regulations.

We believe the federal government should ensure that districts continue to receive Medicaid reimbursements.

Ending the reimbursements would cost school districts \$3.6 billion over five years. As a result, districts might be forced to cut education services or replace lost Medicaid dollars with additional state or local taxpayer dollars—which are stretched thin.

Furthermore, the federal government already is woefully behind in its commitment to fund special education. Ending

Medicaid reimbursements would exacerbate that shortfall and make it even more difficult for school districts to provide needed services to children with disabilities.

Some advocates of cutting the reimbursements have cited reports that described faulty billing practices by some school districts. But the problems mentioned in these outdated reports are no longer prevalent, as those districts have made the needed corrections.

Additionally, the federal agency that oversees the program acknowledges that schools are uniquely positioned to enroll eligible children in Medicaid and to provide access to available benefits. ■

Oppose private school vouchers

School vouchers are education tax dollars that typically are diverted from public schools to help subsidize the tuition of private and religious school students. While a few states and cities have limited voucher programs, the only federally funded one is an expiring pilot program in Washington, D.C.

School boards believe vouchers and tuition tax credits are poor public policy for numerous reasons, including these:

- Vouchers divert attention, commitment, and dollars from public schools to pay private school tuition for a few students, including many already in private school;

- Vouchers eliminate public accountability. Private voucher schools do not face NCLB or state accountability standards, do not make achievement and budget information public, and do not have to accept all students. Existing programs have been plagued by scandal.

- Vouchers are no way to raise student achievement. A U.S. Government Accountability Office report on Cleveland's and Milwaukee's voucher programs found no overall difference in achievement between voucher students and their public school peers.

A federal evaluation that looked at the first two years of Washington's program also found no benefit.

- Vouchers waste money by forcing all taxpayers to support two school systems: one public and one private. Existing private school students are often eligible, creating a new cost to taxpayers.

- Vouchers leave behind many students, including those with the greatest needs.

- Vouchers give choices to private schools, not parents. Private schools decide if they want to accept vouchers, can limit available seats, can maintain admissions standards, and can dismiss students at any time. Milwaukee's program is known for being a revolving door with many students dismissed.

- Voters have rejected vouchers and tuition tax credits by enormous margins 11 out of 11 times. Most recently, 62 percent of Utah citizens voted to repeal a universal voucher program in 2007. ■

For additional information on any of the issues addressed here, contact NSBA's Office of Advocacy and Issues Management, (703) 838-6722, or visit us online at www.nsba.org/advocacy