

## RESOLUTION

**Proposed by: Karitsa M. Jones, HCDE District 5 Board Member**

**A RESOLUTION** to express the Hamilton County, Tennessee Department of Education School Board's opposition to the use of public funds for private religious and non-religious schools.

**WHEREAS**, the Hamilton County School Board is charged with the responsibility to provide a quality local system of public education; and

**WHEREAS**, during their 2017 legislative session, the Tennessee General Assembly will discuss pending legislation that would create voucher programs that will allow public funds to pay tuition cost for students to attend private, religious, and non-religious schools; and

**WHEREAS**, vouchers, sometimes called Opportunity Scholarships, divert funding provided by the underfunded BEP to private entities. To appropriate tax dollars for tuition for even one student to attend a private school lessens the possibility of providing resources—textbooks, technology, lab equipment, etc.-- that benefit not only that one student but all students in a respective school building.

**WHEREAS**, vouchers have not proven to be effective at improving student achievement or closing the achievement gaps; while for years, proponents continue to spend millions of dollars attempting to convince the public and policy makers of the voucher program's efficacy, yet decades later, the program still remains unproven and controversial; and

**WHEREAS**, the State of Tennessee, through the work of the General Assembly, the Tennessee Department of Education, the Tennessee State Board of Education and local school boards have established high nationally recognized standards and measures of student and teacher accountability in public education; and

**WHEREAS**, private, religious and non-religious schools are not held to the same accountability standards as public schools pertaining to academic performance, academic instruction, or student access; and

**WHEREAS**, many private, religious, and non-religious schools in Tennessee have not adopted standards similar to public schools, refuse to administer the same assessments given to public school students, are not providing special education services that are required of public schools or accepting of all students regardless of ability, making it impossible to determine the academic value of funding private education; and

**WHEREAS**, voucher programs leave many students behind, including those students with the greatest needs, due to the exclusivity of choice that private, religious, and non-religious schools that are not required to accept ALL students and offer ALL services that may be needed to accommodate these students.

**WHEREAS**, vouchers give choice to the private, religious, and non-religious schools, not to the students and their parents, seeing that these schools are able to decide if they will accept vouchers, how many they will accept, and which students that they are willing to admit, and the potential arbitrary rationale for which the school may later dismiss students and force them to return to public schools while the funding derived from vouchers remains at the private, religious, and non-religious schools; and

**WHEREAS**, the motivation for taking funds from Tennessee's public schools comes primarily from groups in California, Texas, and Washington, D.C., that have no vested interest in our students or our public education system, and seek to establish and manage private schools on a for-profit basis; and

**WHEREAS**, the proposed voucher legislation comes at a time when the state's Basic Education Plan (BEP) is not fully funded, yet many legislators have openly expressed their desire to expand the use of limited funding through providing vouchers to ALL students regardless of their socio-economic, school or community status; and

**WHEREAS**, many that favor voucher programs argue that they give students a choice in education, but fail to recognize that Hamilton County Schools affords our students with many excellent educational choices for which adequate or increased BEP funding can enhance; including magnet programs at the elementary, middle and high school levels, STEM programs, Career Technical Education high school, CTE programs in high schools, workplace learning programs, VW Akademie, Polytechnic Academy, Advanced Placement courses, International Baccalaureate middle and high schools, and Hamilton County Collegiate High School. HCDE has also begun the implementation of the community schools model in our local schools. Through the Office of Student Support, we also support students who desire to attend other traditional public schools within the district through the transfer policy in place; and

**WHEREAS**, we find vouchers to an inefficient use of tax payer money because they compel tax payers to support two school systems, one public and one private, with the private system being unable to be held accountable to the taxpayers providing funds to it; and

**WHEREAS**, it is critical to the vitality of Hamilton County that we protect and sustain a system of public education that for many decades has proved to be a stable pillar for our county's most valuable assets, our children.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF EDUCATION WHICH OVERSEES THE HAMILTON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION** , that this Board fervently opposes legislation that requires appropriation of funding designated for public education in any Tennessee community for the use of voucher programs without statutory assurance that the schools receiving such funds will be required to comply with the curriculum, testing standards, and other measures of accountability currently required of public schools in the state of Tennessee and until the Basic Education Plan is fully funded by the Tennessee General Assembly.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the copies of this resolution be forwarded to the Hamilton County Legislative delegations and the Hamilton County Interim Superintendent of Schools.

Dated this 16<sup>th</sup> day of March, 2017