

Republicans Introduce Federal School Voucher Program

“While we were distracted by Trump, Republicans advanced these 9 terrifying bills.”

That was the headline from [March 4th's Resistance Report](#), a left-leaning news site.

One of the so-called “terrifying bills” is House Bill 610, which would establish a federally-funded education voucher program. For eligible families, it would provide parents with funds so they can send their child to a private school or homeschool.

The [summary of the bill](#) reads:

“This bill repeals the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and limits the authority of the Department of Education (ED) such that ED is authorized only to award block grants to qualified states.

The bill establishes an education voucher program, through which each state shall distribute block grant funds among local educational agencies (LEAs) based on the number of eligible children within each LEA's geographical area. From these amounts, each LEA shall: (1) distribute a portion of funds to parents who elect to enroll their child in a private school or to home-school their child, and (2) do so in a manner that ensures that such payments will be used for appropriate educational expenses.

To be eligible to receive a block grant, a state must: (1) comply with education voucher program requirements, and (2) make it lawful for parents of an eligible child to elect to enroll their child in any public or private elementary or secondary school in the state or to home-school their child.”

House Bill 610 also proposes to eliminate the (outdated) nutrition standards of 2010's "Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act", i.e., "Michelle Obama's School Lunches."

The above-mentioned [Elementary and Secondary Education Act \(ESEA\)](#) of 1965 was part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "war on poverty." It's most significant and famous element was "Title I," which gave states federal funding to distribute to school districts based on their number of students in poverty.

In 2001, ESEA was reissued by George W Bush's under the title "No Child Left Behind," which tied funding for students in poverty to their progress on standardized tests.

Federal funding only represents about 10% of a state's K-12 education revenue. But that 10% has certainly been enough of an incentive for states to jump through the federal government's education hoops. 2001's No Child Left Behind act effectively created a culture of standardized testing in America. The Obama administration succeeded in getting states to buy into the much-maligned Common Core Standards by offering federal stimulus funds in exchange for their acceptance. And you might remember stories about the [droves of hungry children](#) that resulted from the school lunch changes championed by Michelle Obama.

House Bill 610 is still in committee. But if it happens to eventually become law, I'm guessing that states will similarly comply by happily taking federal funds and becoming voucher providers.

Over the years, many voices on the Republican side have called for the elimination of the Department of Education and all federal meddling in education. At the same, some of these same voices have been advocates of increased school choice and vouchers.

It now seems that the former is the Republicans' choice instrument for getting its wish on the latter.

As Mark Twain once said, "Principles aren't of much account anyway, except at election-time. After that you hang them up to let them season."