

Vouchers and School Prayer

According to the original constitution of Missouri, “no man can be compelled to erect, support or attend any place of worship, or to maintain any minister of the gospel, or teacher of religion” (Marks). However, shortly following the Civil War, Missouri added a provision to its constitution that stated, “That no preference can ever be given, by law, to any church, sect, or mode of worship” (Marks). Furthermore, in 1875, Missouri once again added a provision to eliminate a relationship between church and state. This provision, which stated, “That no money shall ever be taken from the public treasury, directly or indirectly, in aid of any church, sect or denomination of religion, or in aid of any priest, preacher, minister or teacher thereof, as such” (Marks), is still controversial today.

Vouchers

School vouchers are government issued certificates to apply toward the cost of private school. They offset the cost of private education, making private schooling a more affordable option for parents. During the Reagan administration there was a push for school vouchers. This movement led to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) during the administration of George W. Bush. The groups most often served by vouchers are students from low-income households, students with special needs, or students from low-performing schools as monitored through NCLB.

Currently Missouri does not have a school voucher or scholarship tax credit program. House Bill 639 (2005) would have diverted up to \$40 million per year from public schools to support vouchers to private, religious and home schools. In 2006, the

People for Public Schools traveled across Missouri to oppose House Bills 1479, 1783 and Senate Bill 962, which would allocate approximately \$40 million to finance vouchers. These funds would be cut from public school funding. Funding is not the only issue with Missouri residents when it comes to school vouchers, the fact that private schools are not held to the same standards and accountability as public schools is a set back for vouchers in the state.

The biggest issue with school vouchers in the state of Missouri is the lack of accountability upheld in the private school sector. In order to pass school vouchers in legislation, I believe that an accountability system would need to be established. One such way to address this issue is that all schools accepting vouchers, must provide documentation on how funding is being applied to classroom instruction, how students are being assessed, and a documentation showing how the schools curriculum ties into the state standards aligned per grade level. One method of ensuring this could mirror California's Independent School movement with equivalency testing (Bassett, 2004).

School Prayer

HJR62: Proposes a constitutional amendment guaranteeing a citizen's right to pray and worship on public property and reaffirming a citizen's right to choose any or no religion has a hearing scheduled for May 4, 2010.

Upon voter approval, this proposed constitutional amendment guarantees a citizen's First Amendment right to pray and worship in all public areas including schools as long as the activities are voluntary and subject to the same rules and regulations that apply to all other types of speech (MO. House of Representatives).

This would include public schools as long as the activities are voluntary and follow all regulations set forth by the U.S. Constitution. It is important to note that in Missouri, all schools who receive state funding would be required to display the Bill of Rights where they are viewable by the public once this bill passes. I foresee this bill passing without any major opposition as it is a freedom demonstrated in the U.S. Constitution.

Reference

- Bassett, P. (2004). Accountability and Independence for Schools. *NAIS - National Association of Independent Schools*. Retrieved April 26, 2010, from <http://www.nais.org/publications/ismagazinearticle.cfm?ItemNumber=147077>
- Marks, J. S. (n.d.). The Missouri Bar - Public Funding for School Vouchers Locke v. Davey. *Home ()*. Retrieved April 24, 2010, from <http://www.mobar.org/d5e1e29d-636a-4852-b559-c741e992e13c.aspx>
- Missouri House of Representatives. (n.d.). *Missouri House of Representatives*. Retrieved April 24, 2010, from <http://house.mo.gov/content.aspx?info=/bills101/bilsum/perf/sHJR62P.htm>