NCPE Opposes Title I Portability Measures

NCPE opposes any and all efforts to make Title I funding “portable” by allowing the money to follow a child to any public or private school. Such proposals would undermine Title I’s fundamental purpose of assisting public schools with high concentrations of poverty and high-need students. Some portability proposals would allow the funds to move to both public and private schools, which is simply a voucher by another name. Other Title I portability proposals would limit the funds to public schools, but they are designed to make it easier to implement private school vouchers in the future. Accordingly, we oppose any measures to create or support Title I portability in legislation—even if the funds would be limited to public schools.

PORTABILITY UNDERMINES TITLE I’S GOAL OF ADDRESSING ACHIEVEMENT GAPS IN POOR SCHOOLS

• Congress adopted Title I in 1965 to ensure that districts and schools serving large concentrations of students in poverty received a greater portion of federal funds to address the compounded impact of poverty on student learning. High-poverty school districts and schools benefit from increased federal investment by taking advantage of “economies of scale” to combine resources for school-wide services and whole school reforms targeted at economically and academically needy groups of students. However, the discussion draft of the “Every Child Ready for College or Career Act of 2015,” however, contains a portability provision that would dismantle the Title I funding formula, diluting the funds and their ability to address the needs of the very students Title I funding is intended to assist.

• To fulfill congressional intent, today’s Title I dollars flow to the states, which then distribute the dollars to districts based on the number of students in poverty and the percentage of total students in poverty in each district. As a result, districts and schools within the state receive different allocations of Title I funds. This weighted formula ensures that poorer, smaller, under-resourced districts receive a greater share of Title I funds than large, highly affluent districts.

• Portability would completely change the Title I formula for distributing money to districts and schools. The state would be able to fully disregard—and deny school districts the ability to address—the unique needs of schools and communities with a concentration of students in poverty when distributing Title I funds throughout the state. Under the Title I portability option in this discussion draft, every eligible child within a state would receive the same amount of Title I funds regardless of the district or school he or she attends. This ignores the unique challenges schools with high concentrations of poverty face, stretches the dollars thinner, diminishes the effectiveness of the funding, and undermines congressional intent.

PORTABILITY WOULD DENY DISTRICTS THE ABILITY TO BEST DIRECT TITLE I FUNDS

• Under current law, districts make local decisions about how to best use their Title I funding. This allows them to “pool” Title I funds so that the highest poverty schools in the district receive the funds. For decades, districts have also chosen to invest their Title I funds primarily in their highest poverty elementary schools because addressing student learning needs at the earliest age possible produces the greatest
return on investment. Districts, working with principals and school leaders, can also further target their federal dollars toward specific students within a school based on their academic needs. Portability would divest local school districts, principals, and other school leaders of this important decision making authority, diminishing the effectiveness of the funds and creating a cumulative negative effect on learning opportunities for high-need students.

**PUBLIC SCHOOL PORTABILITY IS A STEPPING-STONE TOWARDS VOUCHERS**

- NCPE opposes portability provisions even when they are limited to public schools because such provisions will serve as stepping-stones for an expansion of vouchers for private and religious school. We oppose vouchers for many reasons, including that they do not improve academic achievement; threaten religious liberty by predominantly flowing to religious schools; undermine civil rights protections; and contain virtually no accountability measures.

- That public school portability provisions might lead to private school vouchers is bolstered by the fact that there have been several failed attempts in the recent Congressional sessions to turn Title I funding into a private school voucher by making the funds portable to both public and private schools. In addition, the main argument made by the supporters of portability—that the funds should follow the child—mimics that of voucher proponents. Furthermore, by dismantling the Title I funding formula, not only would public schools and students in poverty be harmed, but portability would also allow the dollars to be more easily transferred to private schools to either create a voucher or to be combined with existing state voucher programs.