



FOR RELEASE | July 17, 2024

Déjà vu:

Public school supporters surpass signature goal to put repeal of LB1402 voucher scheme on the November ballot

LINCOLN – They had only 67 days – the shortest timeline for a petition drive in the state’s history – and Nebraska public school supporters rose to the occasion, again.

The Support Our Schools Nebraska coalition needed to collect 61,621 signatures to let voters repeal or retain a bill that spends millions of public tax dollars to pay for private schools. Today, the coalition submitted more than 86,000 signatures to the Nebraska Secretary of State to ensure the issue will appear on the November ballot. The group also exceeded the 38-county requirement with 5% of voters signing the petition in more than 60 of the state’s 93 counties.

“Since last summer we’ve collected more than 200,000 signatures from Nebraskans who believe voters should decide whether public funds should be used to pay for private schools,” said Jenni Benson, Support Our Schools Nebraska sponsor and president of the Nebraska State Education Association. **“The incredibly short timeline was a huge challenge, but Nebraskans wanted to sign this petition – many were appalled that LB1402 was passed to block citizens from voting on the issue and to impose a costly new voucher scheme on taxpayers.”**

This is the second time Support Our Schools Nebraska has collected enough signatures to ensure voters have a say on a legislative bill that diverts public tax dollars to pay for private schools.

Last summer, the group gathered 117,415 signatures in 85 days to put the repeal of a previous voucher bill, LB753, on the November 2024 ballot. Even after the Secretary of State certified that the LB753 petition met all statutory and constitutional requirements to put the issue on the ballot for voters to decide, the bill’s sponsor, Sen. Lou Ann Linehan tried to have the Secretary of State take it off the ballot. When her attempt failed, she introduced LB1402, a bill that denied Nebraskans their right to vote on LB753’s voucher scheme while imposing a new costly voucher plan on Nebraska taxpayers.

“Despite attempts by a few politicians and some wealthy special interests to ignore the will of the people, Nebraskans have once again affirmed their support for public schools. This direct democracy effort is a testament to the resolve of the people of Nebraska and highlights the immense importance of public schools in our communities,” said **Brad Christian-Sallis, Director of Power Building, Nebraska Table.**

“Our Nebraska neighbors have made two things very clear: they expect that the state of Nebraska will make responsible investments with their tax dollars, and they love their public schools. That’s why they have turned out once again to have the chance to vote to repeal this legislation in November,” said **Dr. Rebecca Firestone, Executive Director of OpenSky Policy Institute.** **“They have seen costs for similar programs balloon across the nation, like in Iowa, where the cost of the program is expected to triple, reaching \$345 million in just two years, or Arizona, where the cost of its universal voucher program has exceeded budget projections by 1,346%.”**

“The underestimated anger among voters about being denied their earlier chance to vote is palpable. I heard this sentiment frequently, often unsolicited, as voters lined up to sign the petition,” said **Cynthia Peterson, president of the League of Women Voters of Lincoln-Lancaster County and representing the League of Women Voters of Nebraska.** **“Nebraskans deserve the opportunity to vote on school vouchers—yes or no. Recently, even a nun signed our petition,**

jokingly acknowledging potential consequences but steadfast in her belief that voters should have the final say. Every Nebraska voter has a voice in our system of government. This referendum petition all boils down to letting the people decide.”

“Today, the people of Nebraska have once again exercised their constitutionally protected right to referendum, ensuring that their voices will always be heard. This moment stands as a testament to the deep and unwavering love Nebraskans have for their public schools, which remain the heart and soul of our communities. In this defining moment, we celebrate the power of democracy and the enduring spirit of our great state,” said **Dunixi Guereca, Executive Director of Stand for Schools.**

"PTA's mission is to make every child's potential a reality by engaging and empowering families and communities to advocate for all children. We value collaboration, commitment, diversity, respect, and accountability. Nebraska PTA is proud to stand with the Support Our Schools Nebraska Coalition. We align with the National PTA in advocating for the improvement of public education for all children and to guarantee that public funds are not diverted to any private school choice proposal and/or voucher systems," said **Christine Clerc, Executive Committee of the Nebraska PTA.** "Public dollars must remain invested in public schools for the benefit of all students and the future of our nation. We are so grateful for all the individuals who have signed the petition and collected signatures so that we might continue the Nebraska tradition of strong public schools in every corner of our state."

"Public Education is the great equalizer in ensuring that all children regardless of geographical or social location have access to learning, growing, achieving and giving back in service," said **Rev. Dr. Karla Cooper, LPS Foundation Board of Directors.**

"The overwhelming success of the Support Our Schools campaign falls in line with what the majority of Nebraskans believe and support. According to the Institute's 2023 public opinion poll, 64 percent of Nebraskans said they oppose using public dollars to subsidize private, religious, or charter schools. Simply put, state lawmakers should respect the will of the people and support our public education system, instead of undermining our community's interests and priorities," said **Hadley Richters, CEO of the Holland Children's Movement.**

"Nebraskans have wisely rejected public funding of private institutions at the ballot box three times previously and we need to do so again," said **Tim Royers, a sponsor of Support Our Schools Nebraska and president of the Millard Education Association.** "All we have to do is look at states with similar voucher programs. Those states and their taxpayers are struggling with the skyrocketing cost of these programs, as well as with the lack of transparency and accountability. Arizona's voucher program is a fiasco with the governor there saying it will likely bankrupt the state, that it does not save taxpayers money, and it does not provide a better education for students. Our neighboring state of Iowa passed a voucher program last year. It led to a huge spike in private school tuition while the cost to state taxpayers far exceeds the initial estimates, growing to nearly \$180 million for this coming year. We can avoid those problems by voting to repeal LB1402's voucher scheme at the ballot box this November."

This year's sprint to collect signatures was a grassroots effort from a broad base of nonprofits supporting public schools. **The effort included more than 2,800 volunteers who circulated petitions and coordinated more than 800 signing events.** More than 1,300 individuals have donated to the effort with an average donation of \$42.

The Secretary of State will forward the petitions to local election officials, who have 40 days to verify the petitions and the signers' information. Once all petitions have been reviewed and requirements met, the Secretary of State will certify the measure for the November 2024 General Election ballot.

For more information on the effort to repeal LB1402's voucher scheme, please visit:

Website: <https://supportourschoolsnebraska.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SOSNebraska>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/SOSNebraska>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/sosnebraska/>

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