

# TRUTH IN EDUCATION FUNDING

*Your Guide to Understanding Vouchers  
and Supporting Public Education*



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<b>TRUTH IN EDUCATION FUNDING</b>	<b>1</b>
About The Guide	2
Understanding Vouchers	2
Library	3
The History Of Vouchers Is Rooted In Segregation	3
Voucher programs do not consistently prevent discrimination.	4
Different types of voucher programs can be disguised.	7
Voucher programs do not provide the academic advantages that are promised.	9
Voucher programs are not held to accountability standards and do not offer the level of accessibility they promise.	11
Voucher programs undermine public education.	14
Voucher programs drain funds from public education.	15
Understanding bills, legislation, and litigation can help fight vouchers	17
Research and data show that voucher programs don't deliver.	18
Toolkits and guides to help oppose private school voucher programs.	19
Partnering Organizations	22

# TRUTH IN EDUCATION FUNDING

Your Guide to Understanding Vouchers and Supporting Public Education

The Truth in Education Funding Guide offers key resources to understand the controversy surrounding vouchers and advocate for equitable and effective public education.

## About The Guide

In response to the growing rate of universal voucher legislation introduced across the country, several national and regional organizations came together to create this collection of resources.

This guide contains dozens of resources from parents, advocates, academics, coalitions and more all engaging in efforts to defeat proposed voucher programs in their communities.

The Truth in Education Funding guide was created with the following goals in mind:

- Help advocates, parents, students, and more better understand and respond to voucher policies;
- Connect people to the websites of national and regional organizations that focus on combating vouchers and privatization more broadly; and
- Provide examples from organizations that have successfully defeated universal voucher legislation.

You'll find fact sheets, policy briefs, FAQs, model legislation, reports, editorials, example letters to the editor, graphics, personal narratives, webinars, and more. These resources cover topics including the financial strain of vouchers, the evidence of student discrimination within voucher programs, the lack of accountability in voucher programs, the effects of vouchers on student success, and the ways in which vouchers undermine public education. By sharing tools and data that expose the truth about vouchers, we can work together to defeat these harmful policies.

## Understanding Vouchers

School voucher programs use public funds to pay for private education costs. These programs are spreading despite overwhelming evidence that they are harmful public policy. They have taken on different names and forms, including conventional tuition vouchers, "education savings account" (ESA) vouchers, and "tax credit scholarship" vouchers, and they are constantly evolving. In recent years, more and more states have introduced or expanded voucher programs, costing the public billions of dollars annually. Some of these programs even have universal eligibility, meaning they are open to all families, no matter how much they earn or if their children ever attended public schools. Often, these programs are in states that already underfund their public schools, where most young people receive their education.



Proposals for school voucher programs must be met with robust, sustained opposition because they harm students, schools, and communities. Public education guarantees students and families certain rights and protections. However, many of those rights and protections do not apply to students using vouchers to attend private schools. Some voucher programs even allow discrimination by private education providers based on characteristics such as disability status, religion, and sexual orientation and gender identity. Voucher programs also have been shown to increase racial isolation and lead to worse educational outcomes for students. Public schools often serve as the community's largest employer, while also creating hubs for community engagement. By undermining resources for public education, voucher programs threaten this critical community pillar, which serves all students across their strengths and needs.

## Library

### The History Of Vouchers Is Rooted In Segregation

School vouchers were first introduced during the Civil Rights era when efforts to desegregate schools were at a peak. At that time, publicly funded scholarships to attend private schools were intended for white families to escape state desegregation efforts. While current pro-voucher advocates don't put segregationist intentions on display, research shows that voucher programs increase racial isolation and offer no educational benefits.

Learn More:

- [Segregation Academies Across the South Are Getting Millions in Taxpayer Dollars](#) By Jennifer Berry Hawes and Mollie Simon for ProPublica.  
Private schools across the South that were established for white children during desegregation are now benefiting from tens of millions in taxpayer dollars flowing from rapidly expanding voucher-style programs, a ProPublica analysis found.
- [A History of Private Schools and Race in the American South](#) From Southern Education Foundation  
Private schools in the South were established, expanded, and supported to preserve the Southern tradition of racial segregation in the face of the federal courts' dismantling of "separate but equal." White students left public schools in droves to both traditional and newly formed private schools. From 1950 to 1965, private school enrollment grew at unprecedented rates all over the nation, with the South having the largest growth.
- [Overturning Brown: The Segregationist Legacy of the Modern School Choice Movement](#)  
From Public Funds Public Schools  
This PFPS webinar features Steve Suitts in a discussion about his must-read new book, "Overturning Brown: The Segregationist Legacy of the Modern School Choice Movement," with Dr. Sybil Jordan Hampton, to whom Suitts dedicates the book in honor of her lifelong efforts to advance equality for school children.



In *Overturing Brown*, Suits examines the parallels between southern segregationist practices and the modern school choice movement, exposing the fallacy behind the latter's so-called civil rights agenda. The book also highlights the risks facing America's underserved youth as expanding school voucher programs divert public funds to predominantly white, often wealthy private schools.

- [Preferencing Educational Choice: The Constitutional Limits](#) By Derek W. Black for Cornell Law Review

Rapidly expanding charter and voucher programs are establishing a new education paradigm in which access to traditional public schools is no longer guaranteed. In some areas, charter and voucher programs are on a trajectory to phase out traditional public schools altogether. This Article argues that this trend and its effects violate the constitutional right to public education embedded in all fifty state constitutions.

### Voucher programs do not consistently prevent discrimination.

School voucher programs create an illusion of parental choice. In reality, private schools choose their students. These schools can refuse to admit students who speak different languages, have special needs, belong to certain religions, or come from diverse backgrounds. Students who are LGBTQ+ or have LGBTQ+ parents can also be turned away. Voucher programs typically do not bar this discrimination. Students with the greatest needs are the most likely to be excluded from schools that accept vouchers.

Students with disabilities may even be required to waive their protections by federal special education laws in order to enroll in private schools. When voucher programs grow, public schools, which welcome and serve all students, end up with fewer resources to support them.

### Learn More:

- [Ohio's expanded vouchers are bleeding public schools that often outperform the private schools that benefit](#) By Jim Collier for Cleveland.com  
Vouchers emerged in the United States as a tool to combat public school integration in southern states following the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Led by Virginia, state legislatures provided public funds for white students to attend private schools — often referred to as “segregation academies.” A new era of vouchers rebranded as “school choice” has swept the country in recent years, including Ohio, resurrecting segregation academies on wealth and racial lines.
- [Don't Be Fooled By 'School Choice.' It's a Trojan Horse for Privatizing Education](#) By Jasmine Bolton and April Callen for U.S. News & World Report  
Since 2023, state legislators across America have introduced more than 200 bills to create or expand private school vouchers, using taxpayer funds to reimburse families who choose to send their children to private schools. Supporters of vouchers claim they promote “school choice” or even promote equity. The reality is they drain crucially needed resources from public education, the only system enshrined in all 50 states’



constitutions and committed to educating all students, regardless of abilities, economic circumstances, race, religion, gender or special needs.

- [Billions in taxpayer dollars now go to religious schools via vouchers](#) By Laura Meckler and Michelle Boorstein for The Washington Post  
Billions in taxpayer dollars are being used to pay tuition at religious schools throughout the country, as state voucher programs expand dramatically and the line separating public education and religion fades.
- [Wisconsin public schools held to higher standards than choice or voucher ones](#) By Bob Peterson for Milwaukee Journal Sentinel  
Supporters of Wisconsin’s voucher schools make it seem that the schools are just one of many variations of our public schools. Don’t be fooled.
- [Pennsylvania Taxpayers Are Funding Discriminatory Religious Schools](#) By Catherine Caruso for New Republic  
In Pennsylvania, as anywhere else in America, private schools can do pretty much whatever they want. They can refuse to accept disabled or LGBTQ applicants. They can expel students for getting pregnant and even for merely having LGBTQ friends outside of school. At the same time, they can require applicants’ families to attend church, not to mention teach students that God created the universe in six days.
- [CHOOSE Act passes legislature, awaits Ivey’s signature today](#) By Patrick Darrington for Alabama Political Reporter  
The Republican supermajority gave final passage in the Senate to Alabama’s school choice legislation as it now awaits signature from Gov. Kay Ivey. The bill, the CHOOSE Act, was passed 23–9 after apparent pressure from the governor’s office because Ivey has stated school choice is a top priority. The bill would create an education savings account, ESA, for \$7,000 to help parents pay for the cost to send their children to private schools primarily.
- [Feasibility of implementing new non-discrimination requirements for Invest in Kids voucher schools](#) From Illinois Families for Public Schools  
Many schools participating in the Invest in Kids voucher program are discriminating on the basis of disability status, gender identity, sexual orientation, language, pregnancy or parenting status, or religion.
- [False choice: Wisconsin taxpayers support schools that can discriminate](#) By Phoebe Petrovic for Wisconsin Watch  
State law prohibits public schools from discriminating against students on the basis of sex, sexual orientation or disability, but it does not extend the same protections to private schools – even those receiving public funds.
- [Pennsylvania Taxpayers Are Subsidizing Discrimination at Private and Religious Voucher Schools](#) By Peter Greene for Bucks County Beacon



In an early December interview with Business Matters, Governor Josh Shapiro once again voiced his support for school vouchers. Voucher advocates who had been stung by his veto of their previous attempt to bring more vouchers to Pennsylvania probably took heart.

- [Private School Vouchers: Diversion of Public Funds Through Expanded 529 Plans From Public Funds Public Schools](#)  
This is the fifth and final part in our series, Private School Vouchers: Analysis of 2020 Legislative Sessions. This annual PFPS analysis provides an overview of proposed voucher legislation nationwide and deeper dives on key states and issues. Read the first, second, third, and fourth parts.
- [Vouchers Fund Discrimination From Illinois Families for Public Schools](#)  
Public schools in Illinois can't discriminate on the basis of disability status, gender identity, sexual orientation, language, pregnancy or parenting status, marital status, or religion. But under the Invest in Kids voucher program, public dollars are now going to private schools in Illinois, many of which do discriminate against students in all these protected categories.
- [Pennsylvania Voucher Schools Use Tax Dollars to Advance Discrimination From Education Voters of Pennsylvania](#)  
Education Voters of Pennsylvania developed this report on the \$340 million in annual funding for EITC and OSTC programs that provide taxpayer-supported vouchers to students who attend private and religious schools.
- [Vouchers Impede Efforts to Create Diverse School Communities and Harm Academic Outcomes From Illinois Families for Public Schools](#)  
Illinois Families for Public Schools developed these talking points in English and Spanish on how the Invest in Kids voucher program hurts equity.
- [Letter re: SB 795 Private School Vouchers From Education Law Center Pennsylvania](#)  
The Education Law Center-PA wrote this letter urging the senate to reject SB 795. Funding private schools with public dollars, as this bill proposes, will not move the Commonwealth a single dollar closer to its constitutional mandate, which is to support and maintain a contemporary, effective public education system accessible to every child in the Commonwealth, regardless of their school district's local wealth. In fact, it does the opposite, redirecting funds away from public schools and making compliance with the court ruling harder to achieve.
- [Invest in Public Schools From Public Funds Public Schools](#)  
This policy brief focuses on Mississippi's ESA voucher program. In 2015, the Mississippi Legislature passed and the governor signed Senate Bill 2695, "The Equal Opportunity for Students with Special Needs Act."<sup>1</sup> The act established an Education Scholarship Account (ESA) voucher, which sends public money to private schools. The voucher was set up as a five-year pilot to test the effectiveness of voucher programs in Mississippi, and it will end in 2020. In the 2020 legislative session, lawmakers will decide whether



to continue funding this voucher program or allow public dollars to remain in public schools.

- [Something to Lose: How School Voucher Programs Fail to Provide Civil Rights and Constitutional Protections From Public Funds Public Schools](#)

This webinar features Dr. Preston Green, Professor of Educational Leadership and Law at the University of Connecticut and the John and Maria Neag Professor of Urban Education at the Neag School. Dr. Green has extensive knowledge of education law and has published numerous articles and book chapters on legal and policy issues related to educational access and school privatization. Dr. Green discusses school voucher programs and how these programs fail to provide civil rights and constitutional protections to students. He also discusses protections for students participating in voucher programs.

### **Different types of voucher programs can be disguised.**

School vouchers divert funds meant for the public and funnel them into private schooling. The damage this can do to public education, and the fraud and abuse that occurs, are often clear and limit public support for voucher programs. In response, pro-voucher forces have come up with different names for vouchers, including “opportunity scholarship” vouchers, “education savings accounts” vouchers, “tax credit” vouchers, and “universal vouchers,” each with different rules, to hide their true intent. But, no matter the name or rule changes, all these voucher programs share a common theme: they shift public money to private schools, often without appropriate accountability, transparency, or safeguards for students and families. The resources gathered here describe these different types of voucher programs and explain how they work.

Learn More:

- [State lawmakers pass updated ‘Opportunity Scholarship’ bill](#) By Paul Hammel for Nebraska Examiner  
LINCOLN – Nebraska lawmakers gave final approval Thursday to an updated bill that will devote \$10 million a year in state funds for scholarships to attend K–12 private or parochial schools.
- [The Impacts of Universal ESA Vouchers: Arizona’s Cautionary Tale](#) From Save Our Schools Arizona  
Last year, Arizona lawmakers enacted universal Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) vouchers by a razor-thin margin, after voters overwhelmingly rejected the plan in 2018. On September 30, 2022, all students in Arizona became eligible for private school vouchers. One year into this failed experiment, the out-of-control growth of Arizona’s ESA voucher program spells economic crisis for the state, as well as the public schools that 92% of Arizona families choose.
- [In Nebraska, The Fate Of A New Voucher Program May Be Decided At Ballot Box](#)  
By Peter Greene for Forbes



On May 30, Nebraska's Governor Jim Pillen signed into law LB 753, creating tax credit vouchers for subsidizing private schools.

- [The State of Education Savings Account Programs in the United States](#) From National Education Policy Center  
Education Savings Accounts are a new form of private school choice and are arguably the most strongly promoted approach by voucher advocates. This policy brief examines the emerging policy, considering how it mirrors and differs from conventional voucher approaches and examining the legal issues that it raises.
- [Mississippi Voucher ESA Program](#) From The Parents' Campaign Research and Education Fund  
The Equal Opportunity for Students with Special Needs Act became law in 2015, establishing Education Scholarship Accounts (ESA) vouchers. The ESA voucher program allows Mississippi parents to use state funds to pay private school tuition for children with special needs. Initially, eligibility was limited to students who had an active IEP within the past 18 months; it was later expanded to students who had an active IEP within the past five years. The Legislature's Performance Evaluation and Expenditure Review (PEER) Committee issued a highly critical report on the program in December of 2018.
- [Letter to IRS on Section 1001 Regulation in 2023–2024 Priority Guidance Plan](#) From National Education Association  
The National Education Association and partners wrote a letter urging that the IRS return to the work it left unfinished in 2019 when it issued final regulations on "Contributions in Exchange for State or Local Tax Credits" (RIN: 1545–B089). Specifically, they suggest that the IRS issue a regulation clarifying the following: A contribution of property in exchange for a 100 percent tax credit should be treated as equivalent to a sale at market value ("other disposition of property" under IRC section 1001) and the taxpayer should either owe tax on the portion of that sale that represents a gain, or recognize a loss if appropriate. When the contribution is made in exchange for a tax credit worth less than 100 percent of the amount donated, the transaction should be treated as part gift and part sale.
- [The Truth About ESA Vouchers](#) From Save Our Schools Arizona  
In this video Save Our Schools Arizona outlines the truth about the Empowerment Scholarship Account voucher program.
- [Joint Letter re "Lifeline Scholarship" Proposal](#) From Education Law Center Pennsylvania The Education Law Center–PA, PSEA, AFT–Pennsylvania, AFL–CIO, AFSCME, SEIU, SEIU 32BJ, UFCW 1776, and the Pennsylvania Building and Construction Trades Council on behalf of their members wrote a letter to the Shapiro administration conveying deep concern and complete opposition to the idea of implementing any school voucher program in Pennsylvania, whether it is called "lifeline scholarships" or anything else.



- [Report to the Shapiro/Davis Team on Education in the Commonwealth](#) From Education Voters of Pennsylvania  
Education Voters of Pennsylvania developed this section on Pennsylvania’s EITC/OSTC school voucher programs with support from the PA Schools Work Campaign. The Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) and Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) voucher programs work by reducing taxes paid by businesses to the state when they contribute to scholarship organizations that provide vouchers for children to attend a private or religious school. The programs are administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED).
- [Taxpayer Funded Vouchers](#) From Education Voters of Pennsylvania  
Pennsylvania has two programs that provide students with taxpayer–funded vouchers to private and religious schools: the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) and the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) programs. Since their inception in 2001, the EITC and OSTC programs have provided more than \$2 billion in taxpayer–funded support for school vouchers. In 2022–2023 the EITC and OSTC programs will provide \$340 million to private scholarship organizations, which award tuition vouchers to families whose children attend private and religious schools.
- [PA EITC and OSTC School Voucher Programs](#) From Education Voters of Pennsylvania  
The Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) and Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) voucher programs work by reducing taxes paid by businesses to the state when they contribute to scholarship organizations that provide vouchers for children to attend a private or religious school. The programs are administered by the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED).
- [School Privatization Policy Brief](#) From Southern Education Foundation  
The Southern Education Foundation developed this policy brief in opposition to all school voucher programs, education savings accounts, tax credit scholarship programs, and any other efforts to fund private schools with public dollars. In the seventeen states SEF serves, twelve states operate school privatization programs that provide either school vouchers, tax–credit scholarships, or education savings accounts, resulting in 276,000 participating students and amounting to \$1.6 billion in state funding or tax benefits to fund private schools or pay for private education services.

**Voucher programs do not provide the academic advantages that are promised.**

Study after study has shown that voucher programs do not provide the academic advantages that are promised by pro–voucher advocates. In fact, some studies referenced below have shown significant losses in student achievement that persist over several years.

Learn More:

- [Here is the Truth: School Vouchers Just Don’t Work](#) From Southern Education Foundation



The table, which is linked, highlights key student achievement results from six southern states. The chart shows that none of the selected school voucher programs with publicly accessible data demonstrably met their goals of increasing student achievement across grade levels, in specific subjects, or on statewide college-readiness assessments.

- [A brief history of Wisconsin’s voucher school system: Less effective and more expensive than promised.](#) By Yesica Balderrama for UpNorthNews  
“It’s the \$700 million answer to the question, “Why are Wisconsin taxpayers seeing a record number of school referendums?” Voucher-funded schools. The once-small, Milwaukee-only experiment three decades ago is now a program that funds around 400 private, mostly religious schools in a “parental choice” program that has proven to be no better—and in some ways worse—than had those billions of dollars been invested in public schools.”
- [Education commissioner says voucher students fared poorly on state test](#) By Peter Greene for Tennessee Lookout  
Tennessee’s education chief admits students using public money to attend private schools haven’t performed well on achievement tests, raising questions about whether the state should start another voucher program.
- [School Choice: Myth vs. Truth](#) From The Parents’ Campaign Research and Education Fund  
The Parents’ Campaign Research and Education Fund provides a myth vs. truth about the impact of school voucher programs.
- [Achievement Impact of Private School Vouchers](#) From The Parents’ Campaign Research and Education Fund  
The Parents’ Campaign Research and Education Fund provides a state by state snapshot on voucher programs’ impact on student achievement.
- [What Do We Know About Voucher Schools](#) From National Education Association  
This National Education Association fact sheet sheds some light on Milwaukee’s school voucher programs. The research shows voucher schools are smaller than non-voucher private schools. They’re often financially distressed schools with high failure rates, and lower initial school quality indicators. A substantial portion of voucher schools are start-ups that did not exist before taxpayer support.
- [Vouchers for Private Virtual Education Are Misspent Public Money](#) From Public Funds Public Schools Research shows that virtual learning is simply not an effective, long-term substitute for brick and mortar schools.<sup>1</sup> Because private virtual schools are not held accountable in the same way as public schools, they usually don’t report data on funding, student outcomes, and other important measures, and are largely absent from studies of virtual education. But based on what is known about virtual schools, including virtual charter schools, as well as extensive research on the harmful effects of voucher programs, it’s



clear that voucher-supported, private virtual schools are a misuse of scarce public resources.

- [How School Voucher Programs Hurt Students](#) By Joshua Cowen for TIME

In recent months, state legislatures across the country have broadened efforts to subsidize private school tuition with taxpayer dollars. New proposals for these programs—collectively called school vouchers—have appeared in more than a dozen states and passed as major priorities for Republican governors like Kim Reynolds in Iowa and Sarah Huckabee Sanders in Arkansas. Since 2021, Arizona, Florida, Utah and West Virginia have also created or expanded voucher plans. Meanwhile, a handful of states like Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio and Wisconsin have run voucher programs for years. But do school vouchers actually work? We need to focus on what research shows, and what that means for kids moving forward.

**Voucher programs are not held to accountability standards and do not offer the level of accessibility they promise.**

Most states with voucher programs do not require the reporting necessary to adequately evaluate their impact on student experiences and outcomes. Furthermore, because of these lax or nonexistent accountability standards, voucher programs have been particularly susceptible to fraud and misuse.

School voucher programs are promoted as an effort to provide students from lower-income communities with a better education. But vouchers are often out of reach for the students they're supposedly set up to help. In fact, in states with longstanding voucher programs like Arizona, Missouri, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin, more than 75% of voucher applicants were already attending private schools. This suggests that vouchers are most often used by families that could already afford and had already chosen private education.

Vouchers generally do not cover the full cost of tuition at private schools, leaving families to pay the difference. Even where families can afford private school tuition, voucher programs incentivize private schools to increase tuition and use vouchers as a public subsidy.

And unlike public education, voucher schools often do not provide transportation (especially problematic for rural families), special education services, or free and reduced-price lunches – all additional costs that families must cover.

Learn More:

- [ESA Voucher Fraud Case Including Fake Children Raises Integrity Concerns About Universal Vouchers](#) From Grand Canyon Institute

On Monday, Dec. 2, news broke that an out-of-state couple were indicted for defrauding the Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) universal voucher program, by submitting applications for 50 children, 43 of whom do not exist, according to the Arizona Attorney General's Office.



- [Failing charter school closed by Az regulators reopened as a taxpayer-funded private religious school](#) By Eli Hager for Tucson Sentinel  
Arizona does no vetting of new voucher schools. Not even if the school or the online school “provider” has already failed, or was founded yesterday, or is operating out of a strip mall or a living room or a garage, or offers just a half hour of instruction per morning. (If you’re an individual tutor in Arizona, all you need in order to register to start accepting voucher cash is a high school diploma.)
- [School Vouchers Were Supposed to Save Taxpayer Money. Instead They Blew a Massive Hole in Arizona’s Budget](#) By Eli Hager for ProPublica  
Arizona, the model for voucher programs across the country, has spent so much money paying private schoolers’ tuition that it’s now facing hundreds of millions in budget cuts to critical state programs and projects.
- [Accountability in Action Hub: Voucher Transparency](#)  
From Wisconsin Public Education Network  
Voucher schools that use public funds for private education are not subject to the same assessment standards, teaching standards, or reporting standards as public schools; they are not overseen by publicly-elected school boards, required to hold public meetings, or subject to public records laws; they are not necessarily governed by nondiscrimination laws and are not legally required to serve students with disabilities.
- [School Vouchers Have A Transparency Problem](#) By Peter Greene for Forbes  
Pennsylvania has had a pair of tax credit scholarship school voucher programs (Educational Improvement Tax Credits (EITC) and Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credits (OSTC)) for over twenty years, leaving a \$2 billion hole in state revenues. One might think that taxpayers, or those accountable to taxpayers, would want to know how exactly that \$2 billion has been used.
- [The Heroes Fighting for Public Education](#) By Laura Pappano for Yes! Magazine  
The first thing to reflect on is this: Public schools gather everyone. All are invited. There is no test you need to pass, no amount of money or influence or fame you must possess to be allowed in. Do you know how rare that is in the United States today?
- [Hobbs calls for new rules on private schools using vouchers](#) By Howard Fischer for Tucson.com  
PHOENIX — Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs wants the Republican lawmakers who approved universal vouchers to impose new restrictions on the private and parochial schools that accept them.
- [Vouchers undermine efforts to provide an excellent public education for all](#) By Hilary Wething and Josh Bivens for Economic Policy Institute  
Since the early 2000s, many states have introduced significant voucher programs to provide public financing for private school education. These voucher programs are



deeply damaging to efforts to offer an excellent public education for all U.S. children—and this is in fact often the intention of those pushing these programs.

- [Critics blast school voucher expenses, including surfboards, TVs, theme park tickets](#) By Greg Fox for WESH ORLANDO  
Gov. Ron DeSantis in March signed House Bill 1, which expands school voucher eligibility to all, regardless of family income. The average amount that pays for options like private or homeschooling is \$7,800.
- [NEPC Review: Qualified Education Expense Tax Credit: Economic Analysis \(Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts, June 2023\)](#) From National Education Policy Center A recent report from the Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts examines the monetary costs and benefits of the state's Qualified Education Expense Tax Credit (QEEC). The QEEC is a type of voucher policy that provides a public subsidy for families to pay for private school tuition. Data show the tax credit results in \$81 million of forgone state tax revenue per year. The report argues the QEEC provides a net fiscal benefit for Georgia's state budget based on an estimate that the vouchers cause almost 20,000 students per year to choose private schools instead of public, thus removing the cost of educating those students from state and local budgets. However, because the report relies on unrealistic assumptions, its suggestion that program benefits outweigh costs is tenuous and risks misleading state education leaders. Instead, state leaders should invest educational dollars in policies that have a positive return on investment and therefore help, rather than harm, state and local budgets.
- [The Invest in Kids Program Must End Public Dollars, No Public Oversight](#) From Illinois Families for Public Schools  
This Illinois Families for Public Schools fact sheet depicts how the Illinois Invest in Kids voucher program is characterized by discriminatory revenue, low academic quality, and compulsory child labor.
- [Signs of fraud raise major red flags about expanding NC school vouchers](#) By Kris Nordstrom for The Charlotte Observer  
This op-ed by Kris Nordstrom calls out that many private schools in North Carolina have been awarded more vouchers than they have students. Yet shoddy financial oversight and potential fraud aren't the only reasons why vouchers are a bad idea for North Carolina. The new data is just the latest evidence that voucher expansion is a mistake. The only question that remains is whether voucher proponents will bother trying to justify this reckless agenda.
- [Voucher Talking Points](#) From North Carolina Justice Center  
This talking points document from the North Carolina Justice Center includes general talking points on the impact of school voucher programs and specific points in response to 2023 voucher legislation.
- [PEER Review of Vouchers: Fraud, Lack of Accountability; Unspent Funds](#) From The Parents' Campaign Research and Education Fund



Mississippi's PEER\* Committee issued a report on the state's ESA voucher program, which uses public funds to pay private school tuition for children with special needs.

- [Accountability and Private School Choice](#) From National Education Policy Center  
The report *Accountability and Private-School Choice*, released by the Manhattan Institute in October, 2021, addresses the question of how private school voucher programs should be regulated. That is, if private schools are to receive public funds, what accountability mechanisms can fairly and reasonably safeguard taxpayer dollars? The report advocates for relaxing accountability mechanisms that presently constrain some voucher programs, asserting that "more and better" private schools will participate in response, benefiting students academically. Such claims, however, are supported by a selective reading and intentional misreading of educational research. Insofar as that is the case, the report merely repeats well-worn ideological positions and neither advances what we know about the challenge of regulating private schools nor offers useful information for policy decisions.

### Voucher programs undermine public education.

There is a concerted effort to defund and dismantle public education, which serves the majority of the nation's students and is a critical foundation of our democracy. Challenges include political attacks against students of color and LGBTQ+ students, targeting inclusive curricula and full and accurate histories, and banning books. The push for school voucher programs feeds these other controversies, which in turn are used to create "demand" for privatization.

#### Learn More:

- [The Dark Money Defunding Rural Schools](#) By Maurice Cunningham for Barn Raiser  
Eleven states now have universal school voucher laws, with the harm falling especially hard on rural schools. Twenty-nine states and the District of Columbia have at least one private school choice program. In November 2023, when Politico tweeted out its story, "GOP states are embracing vouchers. Wealthy parents are benefiting.," Corey DeAngelis, DeVos's privatization point man, responded, "Fantastic."
- [Jeff Yass's Big School Choice Gamble](#) By Robert Huber for Philadelphia Magazine  
They strategized over PASS, the state program that would provide vouchers to students in the lowest-performing public schools. "I needed to get Yass's feedback," Williams says of the program's political viability, "because he is more in contact with Republicans than I am."
- [How Voucher Programs Undermine the Education Landscape in North Carolina](#) By Kris Nordstrom and Phyllis Nunn for North Carolina Justice Center  
In 2023, North Carolina lawmakers went all-in on vouchers. Via changes incorporated in the 2023 budget bill, North Carolina became the tenth state with a universal voucher program, one in which all private school students are eligible for state-funded subsidies regardless of their family income.



- [Inequity in School Funding](#) From Public Funds Public Schools, Education Law Center and Southern Poverty Law Center

This report from the Education Law Center and the Southern Poverty Law Center illustrates that while southern states are failing to adequately fund their public schools, almost all of them are funneling scarce education funding to private schools through voucher programs and otherwise engaging in “culture wars” that seek to undermine public education.

### Voucher programs drain funds from public education.

Voucher programs pose a significant threat to the fiscal health of state budgets and to funding for public education, which is often inadequate. Yet too many state legislatures are pouring more and more public funding into voucher programs, all while misrepresenting their fiscal impact. The following resources explain the fiscal impact of proposed or existing voucher programs on state budgets and public education funding.

### Learn More:

- [States Should Bolster, Not Undermine, Education Gains Made with ESSER Funds](#) By Joanna LeFebvre for Center on Budget and Policy Priorities Over half of states divert public dollars away from public schools to private schools through school vouchers. In 2024, 14 states enacted new, or expanded existing, school voucher programs, and Colorado and Kentucky are considering legalizing school vouchers through ballot measures. For example, Florida will spend almost \$4 billion on its school voucher program this year, an amount that could easily replace Florida’s total annual ESSER loss if invested in public, rather than private, schools.
- [How Religious Schools Became a Billion-Dollar Drain on Public Education](#) By Alec MacGillis for New Yorker The center had played a key role in bringing about one of the most dramatic expansions of private-school vouchers in the country, making it possible for all Ohio families—even the richest among them—to receive public money to pay for their children’s tuition. In the mid-nineteen-nineties, Ohio became the second state to offer vouchers, but in those days they were available only in Cleveland and were billed as a way for disadvantaged children to escape struggling schools. Now the benefits extend to more than a hundred and fifty thousand students across the state, costing taxpayers nearly a billion dollars, the vast majority of which goes to the Catholic and evangelical institutions that dominate the private-school landscape there.
- [How the Right Exploits ‘Moms’ to Privatize Education](#) By Maurice Cunningham for The Progressive Magazine  
Moms are allegedly at the center of a rightwing campaign attacking public schools and advocating for school vouchers. The latest entry in the “moms space” is called Moms on a Mission, which the organization’s website reveals is an offshoot of the Betsy DeVos-controlled American Federation for Children (AFC).



- [How Do Vouchers Defund Public Schools? Four Warnings and One Big Takeaway](#) By Josh Cowen for Albert Shanker Institute  
Over the past two years, school voucher systems and other related schemes that divert taxpayer revenue toward private K–12 tuition have passed state legislatures at unprecedented rates. Although these recent bills became law only, for the most part, in red states, their supporters include a handful of Democrats in other parts of the country as well. And all of this comes despite a decade of evidence that vouchers have led to some of the steepest declines in student achievement on record.
- [Research on school vouchers suggests concerns ahead for education savings accounts](#)  
By Josh Cowen for Brookings  
Private school choice is having quite a moment. Whether structured as traditional school vouchers paying direct appropriations for private tuition, scholarships funded by redirected state income tax liabilities, or as new education savings accounts (ESAs), the use of public funds for private schooling has never been more prominent. In 2023 alone, seven states passed new programs and nine expanded existing plans. This push is largely a red state phenomenon. Of the new or expanded private choice states, all but two went for Donald Trump in the 2020 election.
- [Tax Avoidance Continues to Fuel School Privatization Efforts](#) By Carl Davis for Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy  
One of the most disturbing recent shifts in U.S. public policy has been the renewed push to privatize the nation’s K–12 education system.[1] Originally born out of a desire to preserve school segregation and racial inequality more broadly, the so-called “school choice” movement is enjoying a resurgence as many state lawmakers look for ways to move more kids into private and religious schools.[2] That end is being hastened through the tax code in major ways. In short, school privatization proponents have managed to set up state policies that harness deficiencies in federal tax law and the self-interest of wealthy families to gin up enthusiasm for privatizing the U.S. public education system.
- [Economist Douglas Harris Makes The Free Market Argument Against Vouchers](#) By Peter Greene for Forbes  
Public school advocates have long argued that attempts to inject free market ideology and mechanics into education are misguided and destructive because the free market is a bad fit for universal public education. But in a new paper, Douglas Harris argues that the reverse is true: schooling is a bad fit for free market logic.
- [The Dangers of Private School Vouchers for Idaho Students, Schools, and Communities](#)  
From Public Funds Public Schools and Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy  
This report by Public Funds Public Schools (PFPS) and the Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy (the Center) explains why Idaho policymakers must continue to reject proposals for private school vouchers and instead invest in the state’s underfunded public education system, which serves the vast majority of children.



- [The Privatization of Everything](#) By Donald Cohen and Allen Mikaelian  
As people reach for social justice and better lives, they create public goods—free education, public health, open parks, clean water, and many others—that must be kept out of the market. When private interests take over, they strip public goods of their power to lift people up, creating instead a tool to diminish democracy, further inequality, and separate us from each other.

## Understanding bills, legislation, and litigation can help **fight** vouchers

This section equips advocates with key tools to challenge voucher programs **effectively**. Below, you'll find real-time insights into ongoing legislative and legal battles across the country, crucial for formulating robust advocacy strategies. It also features comprehensive resources and pivotal research on academic performance and cost impacts. Additionally, this topic connects to other topics like discrimination, accessibility, and the undermining of public schools, providing a holistic view to strengthen your work in support of public education.

### Learn More:

- [Federal Voucher Program – FAQs](#) From Public Funds Public Schools  
The expansion of private school vouchers through the inclusion of a federal voucher scheme in the budget reconciliation bill passed in July is part of a broader assault on public education designed to privatize one of the most important common goods underpinning American democracy. Opting in to the federal program (the state's choice), even to use voucher money for public education students, broadly endangers public education and opens the door to further voucher expansion, whether vouchers are already available in a given state or not.
- [Big Ugly Bill Implications for Our Public Schools](#) From Illinois Families for Public Schools  
These slides summarize the impact of the national voucher program and cuts to SNAP/Medicaid in the Trump administration's budget reconciliation bill.
- [States Must Reject Harmful Voucher Program](#) From Public Funds Public Schools  
The federal voucher program contained in the budget reconciliation bill passed in early July will divert federal tax dollars from the U.S. Treasury and from services, including public education, that Americans rely on, to give to private and religious schools that pick and choose whom they educate and openly discriminate against some students and families.
- [Trump's 'Big Beautiful Bill' Will Devastate Public Schools. America's Kids Will Pay the Price](#) By Jessica Alcantara and Laura Petty for TIME This week, Republican lawmakers are attempting to pass a budget reconciliation bill that pays for unprecedented handouts to the wealthiest Americans on the backs of cuts to programs that benefit most people. Hidden in this budget package before the House is a national private school voucher program funded through tax breaks for the wealthy that threatens to dismantle our system of public schools.



- [Megabill Takes Cap Off Unprecedented Private School Voucher Tax Credit, Potentially Raising Cost by Tens of Billions Relative to Earlier Version](#) By Carl Davis for Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy

The tax and spending legislation signed on Friday by President Trump will create an unprecedented, dollar-for-dollar federal tax credit designed to support private and religious K-12 schools. The credit will fully reimburse donors for the first \$1,700 they give to groups that hand out tuition vouchers to attend private schools. There is no other cause—not children’s hospitals, veterans’ groups, or disaster relief—that taxpayers can contribute to and see the entire cost of their contribution bankrolled by the federal government.

### Research and data show that voucher programs don’t deliver.

This section provides data-driven insights into the complexities of voucher programs, with detailed studies and reports covering a wide range of topics including academic performance, civil rights issues, and the impact on specific groups like students with disabilities, those of different religious backgrounds, and the LGBTQ+ community. It also delves into the broader implications of voucher programs on public education, such as their effect on segregation, accountability, and overall accessibility. Below, you’ll find empirical evidence and thorough analysis necessary to understand and effectively challenge the dynamics of voucher systems.

#### Learn More:

- [Directional Signals: A New Analysis of the Evolving Private School Choice Landscape](#) By Bella DiMarco for FutureEd  
Three years ago, Arizona became the first state to allow all students—regardless of income or need—to use public dollars for private school tuition and other educational expenses. The move marked a sweeping shift in the scale and scope of school choice in the United States.
- [Voucher Take-up Rates](#) By Josh Cowen  
This document lists articles from different states on the percentages of voucher students who never attended public school or were already in private school.
- [The five-alarm fire that public education is facing](#) By Hilary Wething for Economic Policy Institute  
All children deserve to attend welcoming and well-funded schools where they can learn and grow, regardless of race, disability, or income. But funding for public schools, where nearly 90% of all U.S. students learn, is at a near crisis point. The Trump administration’s goals, which are taken right out of Project 2025, seem to be to defund public education to the point that it doesn’t work, then offer private school vouchers as a solution to a manufactured problem. In this post, we highlight five ways public education is on fire in the United States and the damage this will do to students’ abilities to learn and thrive. Instead of cutting funds, lawmakers should invest in public schools, one of the best tools we still have to build a prosperous, equitable country.



- [About That Urban Institute Voucher Study: Q&A With Josh Cowen](#) From National Education Policy Center and Joshua Cowen The Urban Institute released a report on April 22nd that has been gaining excessive attention among advocates of private-school vouchers. In the Q&A below, National Education Policy Center director Kevin Welner asks Josh Cowen of Michigan State University to help us understand that study and why there has been so much interest among folks who have otherwise been shielding their eyes from recent voucher research. Prof. Cowen was lead author of a similar study published in 2013, so we thought he would be the ideal person to comment on this new one. Cowen is the author of the 2024 book, *The Privateers: How Billionaires Created a Culture War and Sold School Vouchers* (Harvard Education Press).
- [The Fiscal Impacts of Expanded Voucher Programs and Charter-School Growth on Public Schools: Recommendations for Sustaining Adequate and Equitable School Finance Systems](#) From National Education Policy Center  
The U.S. Department of Education has projected enrollment declines over the next decade, leading to budget cuts for school districts, which will be particularly impactful in urban and rural areas serving vulnerable students. As federal COVID-19 funds expire, districts will face challenges in cutting costs, potentially leading to layoffs or school closures. Meanwhile, many states have expanded voucher programs and charter schools, diverting funds from public schools despite limited enrollment growth. Research shows these shifts harm traditional public school financing. To address this, policymakers must ensure equitable funding for public schools and hold charter and private schools to the same standards as public ones.
- [Decoupling Property and Education](#) By Nicole Stelle Garnett for Columbia Law Review The first step in stopping the privatization movement is to understand it. This report takes up where our 2018 report left off. Not only do we grade the states based on their willingness to commit exclusively or primarily to democratically governed public schools open to all, but their willingness to put sufficient guardrails and limits on publicly-funded alternatives to ensure that taxpayers, students, and families are protected from discrimination, corruption and fraud in the programs they have.
- [Public Schooling in America: Measuring Each State's Commitment to Democratically Governed Schools](#) From Network for Public Education The first step in stopping the privatization movement is to understand it. This report takes up where our 2018 report left off. Not only do we grade the states based on their willingness to commit exclusively or primarily to democratically governed public schools open to all, but their willingness to put sufficient guardrails and limits on publicly-funded alternatives to ensure that taxpayers, students, and families are protected from discrimination, corruption and fraud in the programs they have.

### Toolkits and guides to help oppose private school voucher programs.

To effectively oppose private school voucher programs, these toolkits and guides provide detailed information on a wide array of topics about the ways vouchers undermine public



schools and impact our communities. You'll find valuable guidance on constructing arguments and rapid response strategies, addressing issues such as cost impact analysis, accessibility, and the importance of maintaining accountability in education.

Learn More:

- [Save Neighborhood Schools – Say No to Private School Vouchers!](#) From Public Funds Public Schools and Advancement Project Public schools welcome and serve all children in local communities for free. They provide vital access to education and services for the whole community. They teach children and young people the fundamentals of civic engagement and provide special education services, adult role models, and extracurricular activities. Local public schools also contribute to vibrant communities by providing gathering spaces, polling places, hometown sports teams, and locations to hold adult education classes, health clinics, and other needed services.
- [Protect Public Schools: An Advocacy Toolkit to Fight School Voucher Programs](#) From EdTrust School voucher programs and their many iterations (education savings accounts, tax credits, etc.) drain funds from public schools while disproportionately harming Black and Brown students from low-income backgrounds and students with disabilities. This toolkit provides the resources and information communities need to launch effective advocacy campaigns against school voucher programs in their state.
- [PFPS Launches New Interactive Tool Examining Public and Private School Student Populations](#) From Public Funds Public Schools Public Funds Public Schools has created an interactive research tool designed to inform and assist advocates in the fight against vouchers. The tool provides 2021–22 data on the numbers, geographical location (city, suburb, rural), and composition (race, income) of public and private school student populations in the states. It also shows the percentage of students attending religious schools and racially segregated schools.
- [Stop Vouchers Webpage](#) From IDRA Texas Governor Abbott called a special legislative session in October 2023 to press legislators to establish Texas' first-ever private school voucher program, funded by all Texas taxpayers. Instead, Texas needs to invest in public schools that serve 5.4 million students and their families. The proposed voucher program would cost \$500 million. Get resources here to help Texas say no to vouchers!
- [Toolkit: School Privatization Explained](#) From Network for Public Education The Network for Public Education Toolkit: School Privatization Explained was first created in 2017 to alert the general public regarding the various forms that privatization takes and the consequences associated with each. We've updated the toolkit to ensure the information is up-to-date. This toolkit presents evidence of what we already know about charters, vouchers and other forms of privatization. It is organized around key



questions, providing answers in clear language to the questions we at NPE are most often asked.

- [Conversation Points With Clergy From Pastors for Texas Children](#)  
This toolkit includes talking points and fact sheets from anti-voucher arguments to the imperative of faith/school leader partnership.
- [Opposing Private School Vouchers: A Toolkit for Legislators and Advocates](#) From National Coalition for Public Education  
This toolkit is designed as a resource to help legislators and pro-public education advocates oppose attempts to create new or expand existing private school voucher programs. In recent years, a network of anti-public-education politicians and lobbying groups has been emboldened in its push for private school vouchers. Billionaires like the DeVoses, including former Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, the Kochs, and the Waltons are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on these campaigns. These funders are using their war chests to lobby for voucher bills in state legislatures, contribute to the political campaigns of pro-voucher candidates, and seed astroturf petition drives to put vouchers on the ballot.



## Partnering Organizations

