

2025 ISBA RESOLUTION NO. 8 (PROPOSED)

IN OPPOSITION TO DIVERTING PUBLIC DOLLARS TO PRIVATE OR PAROCHIAL SCHOOLS INCLUDING VOUCHERS, THE GRANTING OF TAX CREDITS FOR SCHOLARSHIP DONORS, OR AMENDING ARTICLE IX, §5 TO ALLOW PUBLIC FUNDS TO BE USED FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

WHEREAS, the Idaho State Constitution provides for “the free and thorough public education for children”; and

WHEREAS, the Idaho State Constitution, Article IX, §5, Idaho Code ensures the separation of church and state in Idaho by prohibiting the flow of public money to private or religious institutions for education; and

WHEREAS, public school districts and charter schools receiving public funds from the legislature are required to meet state accounting standards, use state-approved curriculum standards, and submit student achievement reports to receive those funds; and

WHEREAS, an additional layer of state infrastructure would have to be created to manage the public money distributed to either individual families or to private or religious institutions; and

WHEREAS, Idaho’s students have increasing access to a wide variety of school choice options in the state of Idaho, and parents are free to choose educational services through Idaho’s public education system or educational options in the private sector; and

WHEREAS, most private schools are in large urban areas. The majority of the statewide taxpayer funds will go to supporting private school students in those large urban areas, and rural Idahoans will see a lack of investment in their children's education in order to subsidize urban private schools; and

WHEREAS, in other areas of the country that have adopted voucher programs, student achievement has suffered, especially among those children receiving vouchers; and

WHEREAS, in other areas of the country that have adopted voucher programs, the vouchers have overwhelmingly gone to students who were already in private school, therefore not increasing choice but establishing a third system of publicly funded schools without any accountability or transparency to the taxpayer; and

WHEREAS, public schools act as community centers, especially in rural areas, and the loss of these schools will leave a void in those communities with the funding of homeschooling; and

WHEREAS, in other areas of the country that have adopted voucher programs, the cost of the program has greatly expanded putting a financial strain on the taxpayers of those

states and decreasing funding available to public schools.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Idaho School Boards Association strongly oppose any effort to divert public dollars to private or parochial schools, grant tax credits for tuition, costs, or scholarship donations, or amend the Constitution of the State of Idaho, Article IX, §5, Idaho Code, also known as the Blaine Amendment, to allow public dollars to finance private or parochial education in the K-12 education system of the State of Idaho.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

School choice is an integral part of public education in the state of Idaho. Public school choice includes charter, magnet, at-risk alternative, virtual, and traditional schools where dual language, classical, harbor, international, Montessori, Career Technical, STEM, and STEAM programs, etc. are offered. These programs are an integral part of what public education already offers across Idaho, funded by state tax dollars.

The Heritage Foundation ranks Idaho's current (2023) investment in our children's public schools as the lowest in the country. Reducing the general fund by offering a tax credit for tuition, costs, and donations to scholarship programs or diverting already scarce resources to provide vouchers to private schools will further erode funding to current public schools all across Idaho. If our state constitution is changed, Idaho's investment in public education will become even smaller as our taxes will be siphoned off to unaccountable private and parochial schools.

States that have implemented vouchers have had detrimental effects with little to no positive impact. In Indiana, vouchers have led to a decrease in public school funds and an increase in taxes. In Arizona, the original cost estimate for their program was \$65 million. The cost to the state's taxpayers for vouchers has increased to \$723.5 million (FY24) in just two years since implementation. That amount exceeds the total of all education bonds and levies in Idaho.

In Arizona, 80% of voucher recipients were already attending private schools prior to the adoption of the voucher program, meaning an increase in costs to the taxpayers by adding new students to the state budget. On top of that, only 5% of voucher recipients are from rural or low-income areas.

Private schools are also not accountable to the state, and as recently proposed, private/parochial schools/parents would have no accountability for the tax dollars that have been given. There would be nothing to ensure the students in the private schools are receiving a quality education in exchange for tax dollars. Private schools rarely accept or support special education students leaving those students without equitable access to a voucher program. There would also be no way to prevent a private school from increasing their tuition costs by the exact amount of the state voucher ensuring that no new students could afford to attend the school, but allowing the private school to greatly increase their revenue at the expense of the taxpayers. This has the opposite effect of creating a level playing field for a competitive education system. It puts public

schools at a great disadvantage as they operate within the strict requirements of the state and with reduced funding.

A voucher, tax credit, or scholarship program would irreparably harm our existing system of public school districts and charters, especially in rural Idaho, and would likely harm overall student achievement. For the reasons outlined above, we oppose amending the Idaho State Constitution, Article IX, §5. Idaho already has substantial choice in its public school system.

Submitted by Boise School District No. 1

Caldwell School District No. 134

Melba School District No. 136

Moscow School District No. 281

Madison School District No. 321

Highland Joint School District No. 305

West Bonner County School District No. 83

Recommendation of the ISBA Executive Board: DO PASS

Brian Pyper, President-Elect, will address the Executive Board Recommendation at the ISBA Business Session.

PASSED

AYES 7281

NAYES 674

TOTAL 7955