

Public Funds for Public Schools

Research Shows Private School Vouchers Don't Work for Students, Harm Public Schools, Subsidize Wealthy Families, Wreak Havoc on State Budgets, and More.

Review this fact sheet to empower yourself to understand the threat of school vouchers to public schools and communities alike.

Idaho Schools are Already Among the Nation's Lowest Funded Public Schools, and Any Private School Support Program Will Intensify That

Many public schools around the nation are chronically underfunded, and despite large investments in recent years, Idaho is still 49th in the nation for what it spends per-pupil on Idaho's public-school students¹. Creating a program that is designed to fund students going to private school will exacerbate school funding challenges in Idaho. For example, the cost of Arizona's private school voucher program has increased 50-fold in 16 years, even as private school attendance in the state has decreased. A study of the voucher program in Wisconsin found that the program's expansion posed "a significant fiscal threat to public schools"². Moreover, these diverted funds are often misspent due to the lack of transparency and oversight of private corporations. In Florida, investigative journalists found voucher recipient schools had hired teachers without college degrees and falsified health and safety records.³ In Arizona, an audit of the voucher program found parents received funds after enrolling students in public schools and after purchasing items that were not permitted.⁴ Even after audits, Arizona taxpayers are funding "educational expenses" such as bounce houses, espresso machines, snow cone machines, ski trips, and more as their rural and low-income schools struggle to maintain staffing levels and student programs.

In states like Idaho, the creation and expansion of school voucher programs lead to property tax hikes. With over 90 school districts in Idaho relying on voter-approved levies, a private school tuition program is likely to increase their reliance.

After private school vouchers blew a hole in Wisconsin's school budgets, homeowners faced a \$577 million property tax hike⁵. The expense of voucher programs led the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction to report that local school boards must increase property taxes, use their fund balances, or reduce current expenditures to offset the loss of state aid.⁶ Here in Idaho, these same proposals have the same potential to siphon hundreds of millions away from public schools, increasing the need for levies and bonds to keep teachers, programs like music and sports, and other essentials in our neighborhood schools that are not fulfilled by the state.

Do students perform better in private schools? In states that were required to provide transparency on student outcomes, the evidence is "no." The rest is undeterminable, as no requirements exist to show evidence that learning is occurring in private schools.

For many years, studies of voucher programs across the country have found no improvement in student achievement. "Studies in Washington, D.C.⁷ and Alabama⁸ found no significant improvement in student test scores. Studies in Louisiana⁹, Indiana¹⁰, and Ohio¹¹ found that students who attended private schools using vouchers actually performed worse than their similar peers in public schools. These negative effects persisted over years, meaning they were not a temporary result of students' transition to a new school. The negative impact on academic achievement of attending a voucher school may be even worse than the impact of high teacher turnover and feeling unsafe at school.¹² Additionally, the Louisiana voucher program did not increase the rates of college enrollment among high school graduates. And parents do not report greater satisfaction with schools, nor a greater sense of safety, with the use of state-provided private school supports.



¹<https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/04/public-school-spending.html>

²https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PM%20Bruecker%20Funding_0.pdf

³<https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/education/os-florida-school-voucher-investigation-1018-htmlstory.html>

⁴https://www.azauditor.gov/sites/default/files/16-107_Report.pdf

⁵<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/politics/2022/02/22/bill-offers-vouchers-wisconsin-students-raising-property-taxes/6886427001/>

⁶[Danger_of_Private_School_Vouchers_Compressed_.pdf](https://www.dangerofprivate.vouchers.compressed.pdf)

⁷<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20194006/pdf/20194006.pdf>

⁸https://revenue.alabama.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/AAA_Report_Independent_Research_2016-2017.pdf

⁹<http://www.uaedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/Mills-Wolf-LSP-Achievement-After-4-Years-final.pdf>

¹⁰https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7758/rsf.2019.5.3.02#metadata_info_tab_contents

¹¹<https://fordhaminstitute.org/ohio/research/evaluation-ohios-edchoice-scholarship-program-selection-competition-and-performance>

¹²<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2018/03/20/446699/highly-negative-impacts-vouchers/>



Public schools serve all students. But do private schools?

Many of the rights and protections that apply to students in public schools do not apply to students using vouchers to attend private schools.¹⁵ In fact, students may face discrimination when they try to enroll in a private school or after they are admitted. English language learners and students with disabilities may be forced to give up rights under non-discrimination laws, and studies have found that students who attended private schools using vouchers actually performed worse than their similar peers in public schools. Private schools are not compelled to comply with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and rarely offer specialized education services to children with learning complexities or disabilities.¹⁶ While most voucher bills we've seen in Idaho are messaged to be supporting students with disabilities, they are often required to waive their right to a Free and Appropriate Education under IDEA. Compounding this concern is the fact that families are often not informed of the loss of these rights.¹⁷

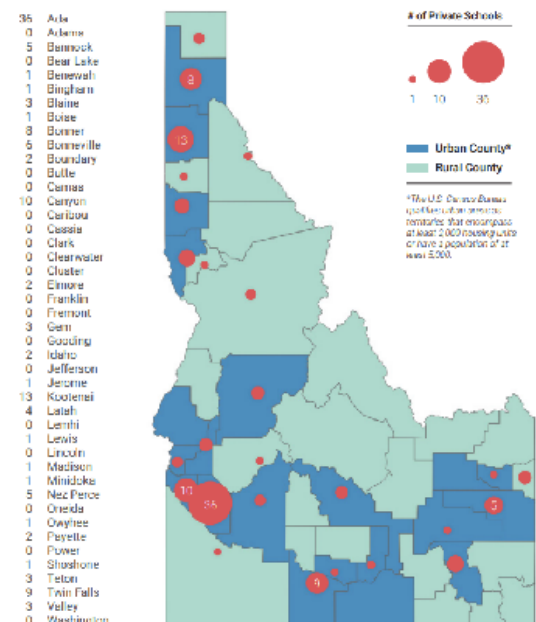
Educating students through voucher programs is more expensive to the states than educating them in public schools - especially when you consider waste and misuse of funds.

A 2018 study found the cost of educating a student through an Arizona private school voucher program was 75% higher than the cost of educating a public school student.¹⁸ Another study estimated that shifting to a system of private school vouchers could raise education costs by 25% or more when accounting for students who would have attended private schools without a voucher, plus the additional administrative costs for the program, such as record keeping and monitoring.¹⁹ A 2021 policy brief estimated that universal vouchers could increase the total public cost of education by 11-33%, amounting to \$66-\$203 billion per year.²⁰ Voucher programs become even more costly when factoring in misuse and waste. An analysis of North Carolina's voucher program found numerous private schools received more vouchers than they had students, totaling over \$2.3 million in fraudulent payments, and several others received voucher payments after they appeared to close.²¹ In Utah, the state auditor found that the third-party organization that distributes vouchers spent beyond the legal limits on marketing and administrative costs.²² In Wisconsin, voucher payments have been provided to private schools despite problems such as failure to meet financial and administrative reporting requirements and losing accreditation.²³ A state audit of Arizona's voucher program found parents received funds after enrolling students in public schools and purchasing non-permitted items.²⁴ And in Florida, voucher payments were sent to private schools that falsified fire and safety inspections and had unsafe facilities.²⁵ Moreover, audits and oversight to address such abuse consume additional public resources.

State-funded private school tuition programs are especially harmful to rural communities and force rural taxpayers to subsidize families in Boise to pay for private school tuition.

Nearly half of all counties in Idaho (20) do not contain a single private school, and only 22 percent of Idaho's 121 private schools are in rural towns. Further, rural towns in Idaho that do have a private school usually only have one. The majority of the state's private schools are in Ada County (Boise), meaning that rural taxpayers are essentially forced to subsidize families in urban areas who are sending their children to private school.²⁶

Students in Rural Idaho Lack Access to Private Schools



¹³https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/wordpress.uark.edu/dist/9/544/files/2019/04/Erickson-Mills-Wolf-LSP-Attainment_041719-final-1sm5w4s.pdf#:~:text=THE%20EFFECT%20OF%20THE%20LOUISIANA%20SCHOLARSHIP%20PROGRAM%20ON,increase%20rapidly%20in%20the%20last%20decade%20%28EdChoice%2C%20201

¹⁴<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2018/03/20/446699/highly-negative-impacts-vouchers/>

¹⁵<https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2019/05/10124230/Vouchers-and-Civil-Rights-2.pdf#:~:text=The%20Danger%20Private%20School%20Voucher%20Programs%20Pose%20to,for%20a%20federally%20funded%20private%20school%20voucher%20program.>

¹⁶https://ncd.gov/sites/default/files/NCD_Choice-Vouchers_508_0.pdf

¹⁷<https://www.ncld.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/SV-ESA-TI-White-Paper.pdf>

¹⁸https://grandcanyoninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GCI_Policy_Private_School_Program_Costs_2018_Sept_5_2018.pdf

¹⁹<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09645299700000023>

²⁰<https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/voucher-costs>

²¹<https://www.ncjustice.org/analysis-nc-private-school-voucher-program/>

²²<https://reporting.auditor.utah.gov/servlet/servlet.FileDownload?file=0151K000008NKuQAW>

²³<https://archive.jsonline.com/news/education/state-moves-to-remove-private-school-from-milwaukee-voucher-program-b9917067421237092841.html>

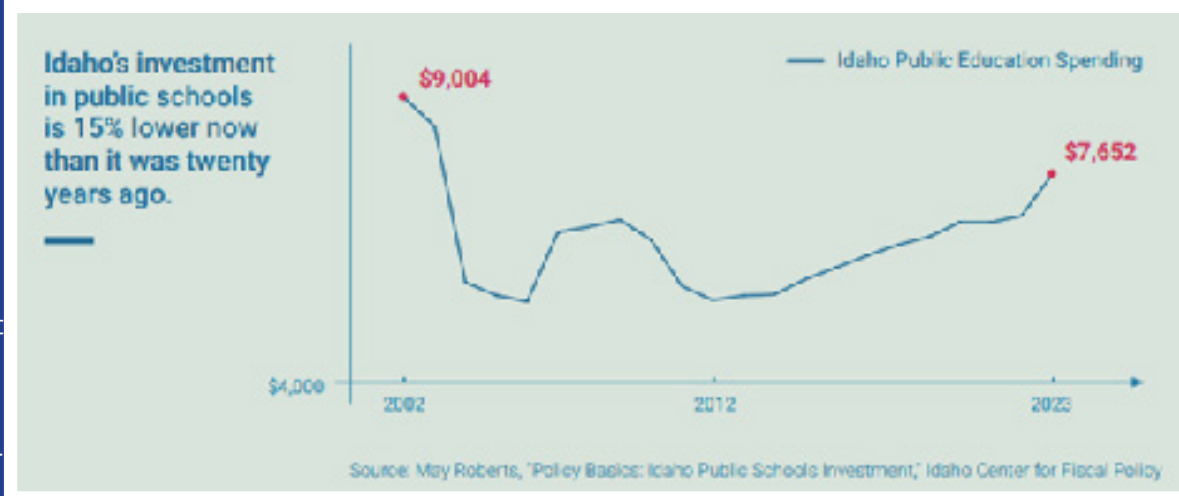
²⁴https://www.azauditor.gov/sites/default/files/16107_Report.pdf

²⁵<https://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/education/os-florida-school-voucher-investigation-1018-ht-m1story.html>

A fan of conservative, limited government? Then it should alarm you that the increase to school voucher programs grew immensely over short periods of time while public school investments dropped.

A report examining private school voucher programs in seven states found that from fiscal years 2008 through 2019, each state dramatically increased expenditures of public funds on voucher programs, with growth in Georgia reaching 883 percent. While Florida led the pack in voucher spending levels, nearly all the states were diverting hundreds of millions of dollars to voucher programs annually by the end of the period studied.²⁷ Another report on voucher spending in Florida found that public school funds diverted annually to private education increased by approximately \$1 billion between 2019-20 and 2022-23.²⁸ The state's

Empowerment Scholarship voucher programs cost \$1.4 billion in the 2022-23 school year alone.²⁹ Additionally, nearly \$1.1 billion in tax credits were offered to fund the state's tax credit voucher program in fiscal year 2023.³⁰ These costs do not include the dramatic expansion to universal voucher eligibility beginning in 2023-24. An analysis found that the North Carolina voucher program launched in 2014 has also grown significantly over the last decade. The program was initially capped at \$10.8 million per year, but funding more than doubled by 2016-17. Additional funding increases approved in 2016 are expected to bring the total to \$144.8 million per year by 2027-28. The program was further expanded in 2020, and the expansion could increase costs by more than \$270 million over the next ten years.³¹ **Meanwhile, the public school investments are down:**



ARIZONA

- Voucher Spending: +270%
- Public School Spending: -5.7%

ARIZONA

The PFPS report found voucher spending increased by 270 percent from 2008 to 2019, and per-pupil public education funding decreased by 5.7 percent during that time period.⁶ The state's education savings account voucher program, which now has universal eligibility, is projected to cost over \$940 million per year. While the Legislature appropriated \$624 million for the program in the 2024 budget, an increase of \$150 million over 2023, an updated estimate puts the cost at almost \$320 million higher. More than 50 percent of that is due to applicants who were already enrolled in private school or homeschooled. The updated figures show that 53 percent of all new K-12 education spending in fiscal year 2024 goes toward only 8 percent of Arizona students (those using vouchers).⁷

FLORIDA

- Voucher Spending: +313%
- Public School Spending: -12%

FLORIDA

According to the PFPS report, Florida increased spending on voucher programs by 313 percent from fiscal year 2008 to 2019. During the same period, the state decreased spending on public schools by 12 percent.⁸ Another report on voucher spending in Florida found that public school funds diverted annually to private education increased by approximately \$1 billion between 2019-20 and 2022-23.⁹ The state's Empowerment Scholarship voucher programs cost \$1.4 billion in the 2022-23 school year alone,¹⁰ and nearly \$1.1 billion in tax credits were offered to fund the state's tax credit voucher program in fiscal year 2023.¹¹ Expansion of the Empowerment Scholarship vouchers to allow universal eligibility beginning in 2023-24 could bring the total cost of the program as high as \$4 billion.¹²



Thank you to Public Funds Public Schools and the Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy.

²⁶Danger_of_Private_School_Vouchers_Compressed_.pdf

²⁷https://pfps.org/assets/uploads/SPLC_ELC_PFPS_2023Report_Final.pdf

²⁸<https://edlawcenter.org/assets/Florida/Florida-Hidden-Voucher-Expansion.pdf>

²⁹<https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7507/urlt/22-23FEFPFourthCalc.pdf>

³⁰https://floridarevenue.com/taxes/tips/Documents/TIP_22ADM-05.pdf

³¹<https://www.ncjustice.org/publications/legislative-changes-to-voucher-program-will-likely->



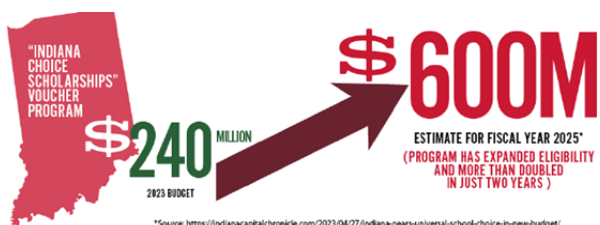
Universal ESA's are the "Gold Standard" of Voucher Groups. Look How the Costs Have Risen:

Arizona's universal voucher program was initially projected to increase costs to the state by about \$65 million in fiscal year 2024.³² The Legislature appropriated \$624 million for the program in the 2024 budget, an increase of \$150 million over 2023. However, updated figures released by the Governor's Office put the estimated cost almost \$320 million higher, or over \$943 million in total. More than 50% of that is due to applicants who were already enrolled in private school or homeschooled. The updated figures show that 53% of all new K-12 education spending in fiscal year 2024 goes toward only 8% of Arizona students (those using vouchers).³³ This information contradicts claims by some state officials that the voucher program would save the state money. The cost of New Hampshire's education savings account voucher program was severely underestimated at the time of its enactment in 2021. It was projected to cost the state about \$130,000, but by 2023, spending on the program was nearly \$15 million.³⁴

Eligibility for the program was expanded in 2023, though the fiscal impact of the expansion was deemed "indeterminable" by the New Hampshire Department of Education as the number of new students who will use vouchers is unknown.³⁵ An independent analysis projects that the expanded voucher program could cost \$48 million per year.³⁶ A fiscal analysis by the Florida Legislature projected that expanding the state's Empowerment Scholarship vouchers to allow universal eligibility would lead the program to cost an additional \$209 million in year one. But an independent analysis estimated that the true additional cost would be several times that number, and the total cost of the program could reach \$4 billion.³⁷



*Source: <https://azninet.com/2023/05/01/arizona-school-voucher-program-growth-explodes-to-900-million-for-the-upcoming-school-year>



*Source: <https://indianacapitalchronicle.com/2023/04/27/indiana-nears-universal-school-choice-in-new-budget/>



*Source: <https://www.deseret.com/utah/2024/2/12/4958251/school-voucher-program-150-million-appropriation-utah-fits-all-legislature>



*Source: <https://www.cleveland.com/education/2023/11/ohio-ranks-near-top-of-states-for-school-voucher-spending.html>

³²<https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/55leg/2R/fiscal/HB2853.DOCX.pdf>

³³<https://azgovernor.gov/office/arizona-governor/news/2023/07/governor-katie-hobbs-statement-new-school-voucher-cost>

³⁴<https://progressive.org/publicschools-advocate/empty-expensive-school-vouchers-greene-030423/>

³⁵<https://progressive.org/publicschools-advocate/empty-expensive-school-vouchers-greene-030423/>

³⁶<https://reachinghighernh.org/2023/05/25/school-voucher-expansion-could-come-with-a-48-million-price-tag/>

³⁷<https://edlawcenter.org/assets/Florida/FL%20HB1%20Cost%20Estimate%20Comparison.pdf>