

Telling the Real Story on School Voucher Programs

Introduction

Opponents of public schools have worked overtime to disintegrate the public's trust in institutions like public schools and libraries. And now, after billionaires invested in Idaho's elections from out of state, some elected officials are threatening to rip funds from our schools by enacting school voucher programs – sometimes called Tax Credits or ESAs – to bankroll private schools for the wealthy and hide their refusal to fully fund public schools and ensure that every child from the big cities to small towns has a neighborhood school where they can learn, grow and thrive.

Most of this country's children attend public schools, including over 310,000 children in Idaho, and yet some politicians and special interests have repeatedly denied our schools adequate funding to meet our constitutional obligation of a “uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools”. As a result, Idaho schools continue to rely on supplemental levies to pay for basic maintenance and operations. Now, they are speeding up their attempts to create separate and unequal schools by pushing legislation that will

funnel public funds into private institutions that share no accountability, transparency, or oversight. Worse, they want public schools to compete directly with unregulated entities.

This message guidance has been compiled to assist leaders to organize on this issue by telling a comprehensive story that not only pushes back at voucher programs but also drives us forward to the vision of public education that we seek.

Our communities deserve high-quality schools from Boundary County to Bear Lake, with everything in between. We, as leaders, must advocate for the children in our schools and communities to be given every opportunity to thrive.



Guidance

LEAD with shared values — great neighborhood public schools, every student having what they need to learn, etc. — in a way that names race and class while bringing people together.

FOCUS on public resources being given to private groups or wealthy families already paying for tuition who want to avoid paying into the public system that our entire state benefits from. Resist frames that reinforce your opponent's focus on individual choice.

DEFINE our opposition as self-interested politicians, wealthy corporations, etc. who put themselves ahead of everyone else. Do not focus on angry parents as villains.

DEMAND that we rewrite the rules, messaging from inevitability. Our families will have what

we need when we stop politicizing our children's education and demand our public schools are places where our children can thrive.

DELIVER a positive vision for the future we will create together. We have to help people see beyond what we are fighting against to envision what we are fighting for – which is a public school system where all children thrive.

AVOID the opposition frame and **DO NOT REPEAT** accusations, even to refute. Instead, expose how certain politicians and billionaires try to undermine social services by shaming and blaming the people who use them. Whenever confronted with euphemisms for vouchers such as “ESAs” or “opportunity scholarships” insist on calling them vouchers – link back to the word voucher.

Value, Villain, Vision, Action

Build your message by combining a Value, Villain, Vision and Action bullet together to make an effective statement. For example:

(Value) Most of us believe all children should have the freedom to pursue their dreams, so we must equip every public school with the resources to deliver quality education that prepares every child for the future, no matter their color, how much money their parents make or zip code.

(Villain) Certain politicians want to divide kids by race, place and faith. They take funding meant for our communities and give it to schools who are not required to provide protections to those same children.

(Vision and Action) Parents, educators and students are united with each other and the communities in which we live, learn and work. Our fates are intertwined. And every single day, we will provide for, protect and prepare our students for their future –one of promise, possibility and belonging. Please join me by denouncing efforts to defund our neighborhood schools through voucher schemes.



Value

- Every student deserves a well-rounded curriculum that will nurture their imagination and freedom to learn.
- Most of us believe all children should have the freedom to pursue their dreams, so we must equip every public school with the resources to deliver quality education that prepares every child for the future, no matter their color, how much money their parents make or zip code.
- Most of us want public schools that prepare students for their future and cultivate a lifelong love of learning. We want every neighborhood school to have: [choose 3: a band, teachers who are certified to teach critical core subjects, counselors to help students make healthy choices, caring and supportive staff who welcome families into the school, theater class, after-school sports, a chemistry lab, classes that offer college credit, debate, robotics, foreign languages, music] and much more.
- Most of us in [insert name of your state] believe all children -no matter their [choose 3: race/color, background, income, zip code, party, faith, ability, or age] should have the freedom to pursue their dreams.
- Our future depends on every child from every corner of Idaho receiving a great education where they live and play.
- Most of us want our schools to instill a love of learning, prepare our students for the future, and instill an understanding of how to work together and be responsible members of our communities.
- Whether we live in -[big city], [suburb], or [small town] -,most of us want our students to have an education that instills a love of learning and prepares them for the future.
- Our students and communities thrive when educators have the resources to ensure our freedom to educate our students so they can live into their brilliance. But educators and parents will not be fooled by these attempts by certain politicians to gain and hold onto power at the expense of our public schools, our educators and the students they serve.

Villian

- Certain politicians want to divide kids by race, place and faith. They take funding meant for our communities and give it to schools who are not required to provide protections to those same children.
- By taking our money out of our community schools, certain politicians are allowing private voucher schools to take public funds and deny children who they don't want to serve --even if based on their race, faith, or ability. By coming together to support public education we can ensure that children are free to be themselves, learn in a school where they are respected and protected and have a good life.
- When our leaders choose to fund voucher programs, they are favoring the wealthiest few over most kids' freedom to learn and grow. By redirecting our leaders to fully fund our public schools, we will ensure that all our children have the freedom to learn, grow and thrive.
- School Leaders across Idaho, from [insert the name of city/town] to [insert the name of city/town], are working hard to provide a quality education. But the same politicians opposing our freedom to learn from the good & the bad of our history are proposing failed policies that divide our communities by faith, abilities, and what's in our wallets.
- Instead of making our public schools stronger and moving us all forward together, some politicians are choosing to defund our public schools. Parents, students & educators are coming together to demand that our leaders get serious about what works --fully funding our public schools so we can continue working together to improve our neighborhood schools, where most of our children learn and grow and where we all can have a say.
- Out of state interests try to turn us against schools & teachers, or point the finger at parents, to keep us from coming together to demand that all our public schools have the resources to provide every child a quality education.
- Some politicians and special interests divide and distract us so they can line the pockets of their wealthy donors through voucher programs without any public oversight or transparency, rather than ensuring parents and educators continue to work together to unlock every students' potential.
- Certain special interests and politicians are trying to undermine the resources our schools need to support our students and deny our students access to neighborhood schools where they can thrive. They may want to divide us, but we are joining together across, race and place, from (city) to (town), to demand that our leaders fully fund our public schools and our students' dreams.
- Some politicians are sowing seeds of division so they can grab and hold onto power. They hand kickbacks to the rich and defund our schools. Then they turn around and point the finger at parents, students and educators for our separate and unequal education system.

Vision & Action

- We must equip the public schools where our kids learn and grow with the resources to deliver quality education that prepares every child for the future by taking action today. Call your [insert elected official] to demand that they push back against the push to fund private schools over the majority of Idaho students.
- If we're serious about every child's future, let's get serious about doing what works. This means fully funding our neighborhood public schools so that students have inviting classrooms, a well-rounded curriculum, access to workforce opportunities, class sizes that are small enough for one-on-one attention, and support services such as health care, nutrition, and after-school programs for students who need them.
- We should fully fund the things that make schools great, the things that build curiosity and instill a love of learning. That's what every student deserves, and it shouldn't be available based on how much their parents make, what language they speak at home, and where they live. Join us by [inserting your call to action].
- Parents, educators and students are united with each other and the communities in which we live, learn and work. Our fates are intertwined. And every single day, we will provide for, protect and prepare our students for their future --one of promise, possibility and belonging.
- Together, we can demand our lawmakers rewrite the rules so every public school has [choose 3: smaller classroom sizes, teachers who are certified to teach physics and calculus, expansive CTE opportunities, counselors to help students make healthy choices, school nurses who can help students when they aren't well, state-of-the-art equipment and buildings] and provides them with everything they need to learn, grow and thrive.

