

MYTHS vs. FACTS

About School Vouchers

Myth: "School Choice proposals save states money."

Fact: Vouchers and other state funded private school tuition are more expensive and less cost effective than public schooling.

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 an Arizona public school student.³⁸ 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, administrative costs like record keeping and program monitoring, and other expenses.³⁹ Private school voucher programs have costs beyond the face value of the voucher, including record keeping, information dissemination, and dispute adjudication.³⁸ Even states with lax accountability systems in their voucher programs must set up and implement the program, disburse funds, and interface with private schools. When more robust accountability systems are in place, state education departments must monitor the use of voucher funds by families and private schools. Requiring states to monitor two separate education systems is an inefficient use of limited resources.



Myth: "Public schools costs should go down if students utilize a voucher program, because there are less students to educate."

Fact: Voucher programs likely increase cost, even with less students, as it will concentrate students who require increased resources in public schools

Because private schools can refuse to admit or provide adequate services for students with disabilities, English learners, and others who may require increased resources for an equitable education⁴⁶, these students are more frequently educated in public schools. Private schools participating in voucher programs may also "counsel out" or expel students they deem "high cost."⁴⁷ In other cases, parents return their children to public schools when they realize they are not receiving the necessary services or support or are not entitled to the same legal protections as in public schools. Public schools continue to require sufficient resources to serve students with additional needs, even when public funds are diverted from them to pay for vouchers.

³⁸https://grandcanyoninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GCI_Policy_Private_School_Program_Costs_2018_Sept_5_2018.pdf

³⁹<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09645299700000023>.

⁴⁶https://nepc.colorado.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PB%20Mead-Eckes%20Privatization_4.pdf.

⁴⁷https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.copaa.org/resource/resmgr/docs/Policy_Docs/COPAA_Voucher_paper_final_R6.pdf.



Myth: "School vouchers and ESAs provide parents with more resources to educate their children."

Fact: Vouchers are sold to empower parents but instead shift expenses to parents

Where public schools provide transportation, special education services, and free or reduced-price lunches for qualifying students, these and other essential services must often be purchased separately by families using vouchers to attend private schools. "This is in addition to the frequent need to "top up" the value of a voucher to cover the full cost of private school tuition. Evidence from universal programs suggests that private schools tend to raise tuition when states expand eligibility for vouchers or ESAs to students.⁴¹

Myth: "Voucher programs help students exit failing public schools."

Fact: A majority of voucher programs subsidize or provide tuition-forgiveness for families who were already attending private school.

It is not true that voucher programs simply shift funds that would have been spent on public school students to pay for their private education, nor is there evidence that there is massive flight from public schools. Between 75% and 90% of Voucher users in states like Arizona⁴², New Hampshire⁴³ and Wisconsin⁴⁴ were already in private school before voucher programs were implemented. The disproportionate use of voucher programs by kids already in private school means taxpayers are left footing the bill for affluent families, and private institutions (including for-profit enterprises) walk away with unregulated and unaccountable handouts on the backs of taxpayers.



Myth: "School vouchers help save money for public schools."

Fact: Voucher programs do not change fixed costs in public schools.

Public schools, which serve the vast majority of students, have substantial "fixed costs." If students who participate in voucher programs exit their public school districts or charter schools from differing grades or classrooms, they are not able to proportionally reduce facilities, staff, programs, and other fixed costs to fully offset the loss of funding that is diverted to voucher programs.⁴⁵

⁴¹<https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/private-school-choice-continues-to-spread-3-things-to-know/2024/05#:~:text=Education%20scholars%20at%20Princeton%20University,schools%20respond%20by%20raising%20tuition.>

⁴²<https://azmirror.com/2022/09/01/private-school-students-flock-to-expanded-school-voucher-program/>

⁴³<https://newhampshirebulletin.com/briefs/most-education-freedom-account-recipients-not-leaving-public-schools-department-says/>

⁴⁴<https://archive.jsonline.com/news/education/75-of-state-voucher-program-applicants-already-attend-private-school-b99274333z1-%20259980701.html/>

⁴⁵<https://journals.sagepub.com/ doi/10.1177/1098214007307928>;