

School Vouchers

Vouchers are any kind of public payment offered to parents to help send their children to private schools, including religious, home, alternative, and ability-specific schools. Under such a program, funds typically spent by a school district would be allocated to a participating family in the form of a voucher to pay tuition for their child's private school. Private schools are non-profit or for-profit educational organizations that are operated independent of the public education system.

Voucher programs have been around since the early 1990s. Nearly 30 states have private school choice programs that either directly pay students' tuition at private schools or provide generous tax credits to incentivize businesses and individuals to do so. In some states that have voucher programs, they are not available to all students.

Recently vouchers, sometimes called Education Savings Accounts, or Tax Credit Scholarships, have gained popularity with the school choice movement, because ???

Key Points in opposition to school vouchers:

1. Vouchers take funding from public schools, which serve over 90% of students. Currently, Idaho ranks 50th in public school funding per student.
2. Voucher funds are given to private and religious schools which are not accountable to taxpayers.
3. There is no evidence that school vouchers lead to increased student achievement.
4. Vouchers increase public education costs by requiring taxpayers to fund two systems, one public and one private.
5. Vouchers rarely cover a student's full tuition, so families who are promised admission are left paying for a significant portion of the tuition.
6. Vouchers undermine principles of accountability and equity.
7. Unlike public schools, private and religious schools can — and do — discriminate in admissions on the basis of gender, religion, sexual orientation, ability, behavioral history, prior academic achievement, standardized test scores, interviews with applicants and parents, and income.
8. Public schools are mandated to accept all students, including those with learning disabilities, behavioral and mental health issues, etc. With real dollars taken out of the schools' budgets they have to educate students of all abilities with less. Private schools can selectively choose students of high ability, and low behavioral issues, thus leaving the burden on the lower funded public school system.
9. Will vouchers be offered to all students, even those who are currently in private schools? If so this should be factored into the overall cost to the State's budget.

What the Proponents Say: Private school choice proponents contend that when parents can choose where to send their child to school, they will choose the highest

performing options. Those schools performing poorly will be forced to either improve or risk losing students and the funding tied to those students. While public school choice policies like charter schools serve a similar purpose, private schools have more flexibility in staffing, budgeting, curriculum, academic standards and accountability systems than charter schools. This flexibility, supporters argue, fosters the best environment for market competition and cost efficiency.

Fiscal Impact: Currently, Idaho is underfunding K-12 education by approximately \$700 million. Taking taxpayer money from public education would create an even greater deficit.

Impact on Idaho Children: An Idaho voucher program would dramatically hurt children in our state. Our schools are currently underfunded (as Idaho currently falls 50th in the US in terms of education spending) with many essential needs, such as Pre-K education not being met. Given the historic underfunding, the population growth, the needs of school age children across the state, technology needs, and the urban/rural demographics, taking money out of an already underfunded system would negatively impact all children in Idaho.

SUGGESTED FURTHER READING

<https://www.ncpccoalition.org/2017-dc-voucher-study>

https://www.epi.org/publication/book_vouchers/

<https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2017/02/can-a-universal-voucher-program-succeed/515436/>

<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/05/12/520111511/the-promise-and-peril-of-school-vouchers>