



Where We Stand on School Vouchers

Public dollars should remain in public schools. Students, parents, communities, and businesses rely on public schools to provide high-quality education and ensure a bright future for Texas. Vouchers divert public education funds to private schools, neglect our most vulnerable students, and lack transparency when it comes to spending and outcomes. Now more than ever, the Texas legislature needs to invest in the only education system with the capacity to serve the large and diverse student population of Texas.

Policy Recommendations

- ▶ Support school choice and innovation within the Texas public school system
- ▶ Oppose any form of vouchers that use taxpayer dollars to subsidize private schools and vendors

School Vouchers Don't Improve Student Outcomes

Taxpayer dollars should be invested in evidence-based solutions with proven results for our students. Research shows that the overall effects of vouchers are limited and inconsistent. A recent study of Milwaukee's voucher program, the oldest in the country, found no improvements in math or reading scores for students who used vouchers.¹ These findings echoed studies from 2021 that measured the effects of voucher programs in Louisiana and Indiana.^{2,3} Moreover, the ineffectiveness of vouchers is salient among our most disadvantaged students. In a recent study, researchers found vouchers had virtually no positive impact on college enrollment and completion rates for low-income or first-generation students of color.⁴

Voucher Programs Have History of Ballooning State Costs

Public schools are uniquely equipped to provide an equal opportunity for every student to succeed. In 2021, seven states expanded their voucher program eligibility to include higher-income families or students with no history of public school attendance.⁵ In these cases, vouchers cost the state more money to benefit families who already can afford private school tuition, leaving behind students who can't afford those private schools.

Voucher programs are a classic example of initiatives growing well beyond their intended scope. In most cases, what starts as a small, targeted program ends up expanding over time. Consequently, states with vouchers find themselves sending significantly more taxpayer dollars towards private school tuition. Ohio's largest voucher program – the Educational Choice Scholarship Program – has more than doubled in costs to the state, ballooning from \$175 million to \$444 million in the last seven years.⁶

A comparison of district schools and private school vouchers

	Public School Districts	Private School Vouchers
Required to accept all students	✓	✗
Require annual assessment aligned to state curriculum to track student progress	✓	✗
Public reporting and accountability for use of taxpayer funds	✓	✗
Public reporting and accountability for student performance	✓	✗
Require closure or state management for multiple years of low performance	✓	✗
Comply with federal protections for students with disabilities	✓	✗

Arizona recently passed the first universal voucher program in the U.S., making every student in the state, regardless of socioeconomic background or history of public school enrollment, eligible for a \$7,000 Empowerment Scholarship Account.⁷ Arizona has already seen its voucher program skyrocket from a \$2.5 million dollar cap in 2011 to costing the state more than \$150 million in 2021.⁸

As responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars, it is imperative the Texas legislature does not use taxpayer dollars to subsidize private school tuition. Public dollars should remain in public schools.

School Vouchers Leave Texans Behind

Despite being marketed as an alternative to public schools, vouchers are often inaccessible to many groups, including students with disabilities, low-income families, and rural communities.

In public schools, special education students are protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Public schools offer more avenues for parents to advocate for their child, including filing complaints and lawsuits for discrimination at the state and federal level. Special education students give up these rights when they enroll in a private school. Vouchers leave special education students behind.

Vouchers also fail to cover the full cost of tuition at a private school. The national average cost of K-12 private school tuition is over \$12,000, not including additional educational expenses.⁹ Previous proposals for vouchers in Texas also would not have covered all of the cost for private school tuition.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the median per-pupil cost of private school has increased over 40% in the last 10 years.¹¹ Vouchers leave middle- and lower-income students behind.

Access to private schools is limited in rural areas, forcing rural families and taxpayers to fund a program that they cannot access. Public schools are at the heart of rural communities, and nearly half of our state's school districts are rural.¹² Vouchers leave rural students behind.

School Vouchers Lack Accountability for Public Funds

Vouchers are taxpayer-funded government subsidies for private schools and vendors with no accountability for results. Vouchers reduce equitable access to educational opportunity, weaken rights for students with disabilities, and potentially expose taxpayers to fraud. Private schools are not required to administer the STAAR Test or end of course exams, be rated under the state's A-F school accountability system, or transparently account for their funds and spending. Texas students deserve more than a voucher.

Reject Any Types of Vouchers



Education Savings Accounts take money from the public schools and give it to parents so they can enroll their child in a private school.



Tax Credit Scholarships funnel tax credits to corporations or individuals who have donated to scholarship organizations that would pay for students to attend private schools.



Traditional vouchers strip money from public schools in the form of grants parents can use for their children to attend private schools.



Virtual vouchers divert funds from our public schools to private vendors in an effort to create a statewide network of publicly funded private virtual schools.

Sources

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- ¹² Texas Education Agency. Snapshot 2020: Community Type. 2020. Retrieved from <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/snapshot/2020/commtype.html>

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