

VOUCHERS

Why we should invest in public education instead of diverting public funds to private and religious schools



Vouchers – as well as state-sponsored tax-credit programs that support private schools – are not the answer to ensuring America's children have a fair and substantive opportunity to learn. These programs divert resources from public schools, affect a limited number of students and, most studies show, don't improve children's educational experiences.

The privatization of public education through vouchers means that public dollars are used to subsidize religious and private schools. Unlike the public schools that are the backbone of our democratic system, these private schools that receive taxpayer dollars are free to discriminate against students on a variety of grounds, including religion, disability, and English language ability.

Each year, \$1 BILLION is redirected to private schools for voucher and tax-credit programs, according to ASCD – including nearly \$300 million in Florida alone. Wisconsin annually diverts

more than \$130 million in hard-earned taxpayer dollars to fund its voucher initiatives, while Pennsylvania drains its public coffers of more than \$52 million to support them.

Initially focused on low-income students in urban school districts, voucher proponents have expanded

“To build our public education system back up to its former world-class status, we must invest dollars there, not in programs, such as vouchers, that have **proven to be ineffective for thousands of children and communities across our nation.”**

their proposals to middle-income and suburban areas – such as those in Indiana, Wisconsin and Douglas County, Colo.

This political push comes at a time when reputable research on voucher programs in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Washington, D.C., indicates that these programs produce few if any statistically significant positive effects on student achievement.

In a recent national review of a decade's worth of research, the [Center on Education Policy](#) found that publicly funded voucher programs have failed to produce promised academic

gains for thousands of students.

Moreover, the Education Law Center of Pennsylvania recently challenged the legality of voucher programs due to the discriminatory impact on children with disabilities and English language learners. The ELC argues that expanding voucher programs would

substantially exclude these children from participating, which is prohibited by federal law.

Public education is at a crossroads. Critics of public schools want us to believe that all teachers and schools are failing. They want to impose their own unproven models that at best have succeeded for relatively few students. Such an ill-conceived approach is a recipe for national failure. Education is the underpinning of social justice – and economic opportunity. Public schools are the lifeline to opportunity. That lifeline must be there for all students.

The Opportunity to Learn Campaign, a national movement to eliminate the opportunity gap that is fueling a persistent achievement gap, aims to hold state and federal leaders accountable for ensuring that all



children, regardless of where they live, have equitable access to the core resources they need to have a fair and substantial opportunity to learn:

- high-quality early childhood education
- highly prepared and effective teachers
- rigorous college-prep curriculum
- equitable instructional materials and policies.



Source: Justice and Witness Ministries

Additional resources

Center on Education Policy: [Keeping Informed about School Vouchers: A Review of Major Developments and Research](#)

CEP examines a decade's worth of research on school vouchers, including the effects on graduation rates, public school achievement and taxpayer costs. Among the report's key findings is that vouchers have no clear positive effect on student academic achievement.

Education Law Center: [ELC Challenges the Legality of Tuition Voucher Proposals Due to the Discriminatory Impact on Children with Disabilities and English Language Learners](#)

The ELC argues that federal and state laws against disability and language proficiency discrimination would prohibit voucher programs.

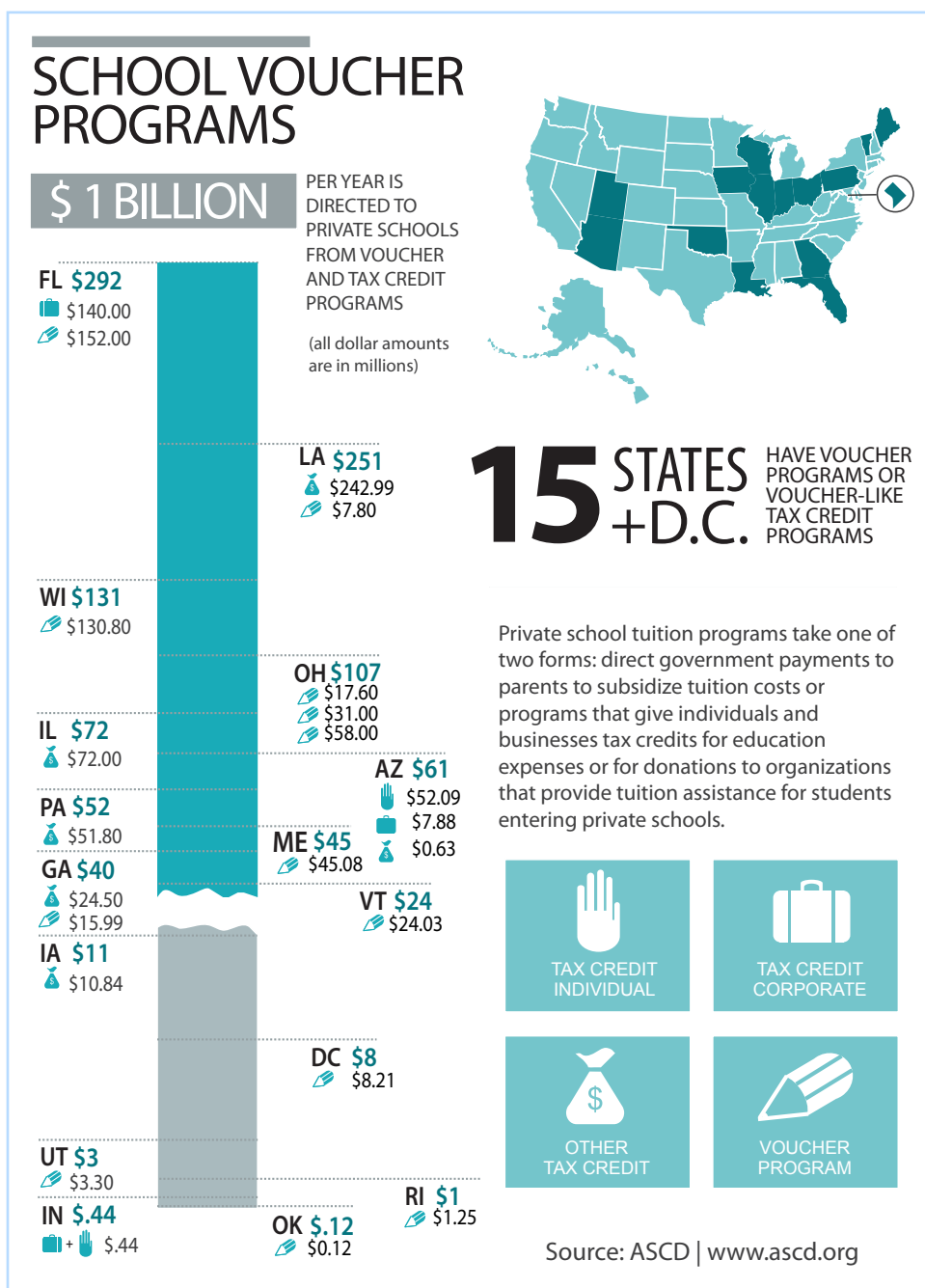
People For the American Way: [Vouchers Vs. Public Education](#)

This national civil liberties group provides a review of voucher issues including accountability to parents, the public and taxpayers; separation of church and state; and, the GAO study of D.C.'s voucher program.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State: [Religious School Vouchers](#)

This nonpartisan group maintains that taxpayer-funded school vouchers to cover private and religious school tuition violate our nation's constitutional principle of church-state separation. [10 Reasons Why Private School Vouchers Should Be Rejected](#)

The high price of voucher programs



Contact us

Website: www.otlcampaign.org

Facebook: National Opportunity To Learn Campaign

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TALKING POINTS

Vouchers for private and religious schools undermine our public schools.

- The privatization of public education through vouchers means that public dollars are used to support private schools. Vouchers and similar tax-credit programs divert already scarce resources from public schools, impact a limited number of students and generally don't improve children's educational outcomes.

Vouchers take valuable resources from the traditional public schools that educate most children.

- Each year, \$1 BILLION is redirected to private schools for voucher and tax credit programs, including nearly \$300 million in Florida alone. Wisconsin annually diverts more than \$130 million in hard-earned taxpayer dollars to fund its voucher initiatives, while Pennsylvania drains its public coffers of more than \$52 million to support them. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/policy-priorities/vol17/num02/Private-School-Tuition-Programs.aspx>

The evidence shows that vouchers produce few if any significant positive effects for students.

- Reputable research on voucher programs in Milwaukee, Cleveland and Washington, D.C., indicates that these programs produce few if any statistically significant positive effects on student achievement. In a recent national review of a decade's worth of research, the [Center on Education Policy](#) found that publicly funded voucher programs have failed to produce promised academic gains for thousands of students.

Voucher programs do not provide equal educational opportunities for all children.

- Private schools often discriminate against students with physical and learning disabilities and English language learners, some of our most vulnerable students. In 2000, Wisconsin state education officials found "probable cause" that some Milwaukee voucher schools were using admission fees, religion and other criteria in violation of the state law requiring schools to admit students on the basis of random selection. www.pfaw.org/content/vouchers-vs-public-education/what-are-the-issues

Private schools that accept vouchers are less accountable for results than public schools.

- Because private schools aren't required to meet the same standards as public schools, voucher programs encourage a lack of accountability. A 2000 audit of Milwaukee voucher schools found that a number had no accreditation and, in fact, were not seeking accreditation. An audit of Cleveland voucher schools found nearly \$2 million in questionable expenses for the first year alone. <http://www.pfaw.org/content/vouchers-vs-public-education/what-are-the-issues>

Voucher programs violate our nation's basic principles of separation of church and state.

- Because voucher programs are funded with taxpayer dollars, they violate the principles of separation of church and state. Individual taxpayers end up supporting religious schools whether they want to or not. Some states have recognized this inherent problem with voucher programs. For example, in 2004, Florida's 1999 voucher law was struck down for a third time because it violated the state constitutional bans against public funds being used to "directly or indirectly" aid sectarian institutions and a number of other state constitutions have similar language. www.pfaw.org/content/vouchers-vs-public-education/what-are-the-issues

RESOURCES

Keeping Informed about School Vouchers: A Review of Major Developments and Research

<http://www.otlcampaign.org/resources/keeping-informed-about-school-vouchers-review-major-developments-and-research>

Pennsylvania School Boards Association Taxpayer-funded Tuition VoucherWatch

<http://www.psba.org/issues-advocacy/issues-research/vouchers/>

Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program

<http://www.otlcampaign.org/resources/evaluation-dc-opportunity-scholarship-program-final-report>

Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program: Summary Report, 1998-2004, 2006

<http://www.otlcampaign.org/resources/evaluation-cleveland-scholarship-and-tutoring-program-technical-report-1998-2004>

Robert Bifulco, Helen Ladd, & Stephen Ross, Public School Choice and Integration: Evidence from Durham, NC (2008)

http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1189&context=econ_wpapers&sei-redir=1#

KEY ORGANIZATIONS

Americans United for the Separation of Church and State

<http://www.au.org/issues/religious-school-vouchers/>

People for the American Way

<http://www.pfaw.org/content/vouchers-vs-public-education/what-are-the-issues>

Education Law Center

<http://www.elc-pa.org/vouchers.html>

ARTICLES ON VOUCHERS

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http://www.pennlive.com/editorials/index.ssf/2011/05/voucher_proposal_is_wrong_step.html

The Washington Post: *Report: How the voucher landscape is widening*, July 28, 2011
http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/report-how-voucher-landscape-is-widening/2011/07/27/gIQA7uyxel_blog.html

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<http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/11/0725/1301>

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Institute for America's Future: *Please Don't Roll Out This School 'Reform,'* July 26, 2011
<http://institute.ourfuture.org/blog-entry/2011073026/please-dont-roll-out-school-reform>

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<http://www.garynorth.com/public/8202.cfm>

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<http://www.news-sentinel.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20110727/NEWS/107270320>

The Journal Gazette: *School voucher surrender*, *The Journal Gazette*, July 19, 2011
<http://www.journalgazette.net/article/20110719/BLOGS13/110719542/1002/local>