



Private School Vouchers

Types of vouchers

Conventional vouchers pay for all or part of a student's private school tuition with direct payments from a public treasury to a private school.

Education Savings Account (ESA) vouchers are public funds deposited into a personal account that can be used to pay for a student's private school tuition or other education expenses, such as tutoring, online courses, transportation, or school supplies. Mississippi has an ESA voucher program that is limited to students with special needs. Mississippi's ESA voucher had a value of \$6,779 in the 2023-24 school year and increases each year by the same percentage that the public school base student cost increases.

Tax credits for private schools typically provide a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for tuition payments to private schools. Mississippi has a tax credit program that provides a dollar-for-dollar credit for donations to private schools, up to 50% of a corporation's (can be LLC or sole proprietorship) state tax liability or up to 50% of an individual's ad valorem tax liability. Currently, the program is capped at \$9-million statewide.

Vouchers at a glance...

The majority of vouchers go to children who already were attending private school and whose parents already were paying the private school tuition. Private schools limit the "choice" parents have by:

- Refusing admission to students they don't want
- Raising tuition beyond what the voucher covers
- Denying transportation and meal services
- Declining to provide services such as tutoring and accommodations for students with special needs

Vouchers are bankrupting states:

- [Arizona spent](#) \$700-million on two voucher programs in the 2023-24 school year, contributing to a [massive state budget shortfall](#)

Voucher students [lose ground academically](#):

- Students who leave public schools to attend private schools show significant, persistent learning loss
- Students who leave private schools to attend public schools show improved academic achievement

Voucher schools receive state funds, but unlike public schools, they:

- Deny admission to students they don't wish to serve
- Are not required to meet state standards
- Are not accountable to taxpayers for how they use state funds or for the quality of education they provide

Voucher programs are rife with fraud, using taxpayer dollars to fund trips to Disney World, pianos, big-screen TVs, kayaks, and countless other outlandish expenditures.

Every time vouchers have appeared on statewide ballot initiatives, voters have defeated them, most recently in 2024 in Colorado, Kentucky, and Nebraska. In Nebraska, voters rescinded a voucher law their legislature had enacted.

Where Mississippi public schools are thriving, local communities are thriving. Diverting state investments to private education will harm communities, economic development, and local property values.

Voucher Details

In states where school choice measures have passed, taxpayers are footing the bill for unaccountable voucher and tax credit programs that are bankrupting their states, largely to pay tuition for children who already were attending private schools. In Mississippi, [private schools have opposed](#) direct voucher payments, fearing accountability and pressure to admit students they don't want. Instead, they favor tax credits, which essentially are money laundering for private schools. Parents get dollar-for-dollar tax credits for donations to private schools, and the schools avoid any public scrutiny. All of these programs take money from the state budget, reducing the funds available to chronically underfunded public schools.

In states with broad voucher programs, the [majority go to children who already attended private schools](#) (were never enrolled in public schools).

- In the first year of Arizona's universal voucher program, the majority of vouchers went to children who already were attending private school
- In Iowa, 60% of voucher participants never attended public school
- In Florida, 69% of applicants to the voucher program already were attending private school
- In year one of Arkansas's voucher program, [less than 5% went to children who had attended public school](#)

Because private schools charge more than vouchers cover, most vouchers go to wealthy families who can afford to pay the remaining tuition and fees.

- 75% of Arizona's vouchers went to [children in wealthy zip codes](#)

[Studies of voucher programs](#) in Indiana, Alabama, Ohio, Louisiana, and Wisconsin showed that voucher students who move from public to private schools experienced persistently lower achievement and learning loss. From [Brookings](#): In Louisiana, two separate research teams found negative academic impacts as high as -0.4 standard deviations—extremely large by education policy standards—with declines that persisted for years. To put these negative impacts in perspective: Current estimates of COVID-19's impact on academic trajectories hover [around](#) -0.25 standard deviations.

Since Mississippi's ESA voucher program was implemented in 2015, only 38.8% of the vouchers assigned have been used. [Parents told the PEER committee](#) they couldn't use the voucher because:

1. Private schools would not admit their children
2. They couldn't afford the tuition and fee balance that the voucher doesn't cover
3. They couldn't find a private school that could serve their children's learning needs

Private voucher schools have no public oversight and are not subject to state academic standards or assessments, providing no accountability for the taxpayers who are footing the bill.

Voucher programs in other states fund questionable expenses that parents claim are "education-related":

- Florida vouchers [paid for](#) TVs, kayaks, and trips to Disney World
- Arizona vouchers [paid for](#) Ninja training, ski resort passes, and pianos
- Oklahoma vouchers [paid for](#) gaming consoles, electric fireplaces, and outdoor grills