

Research Shows Private School Vouchers Don't Work for Students and Harm Public Schools

➤ PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS DIVERT SCARCE RESOURCES FROM PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Many public schools around the nation are chronically underfunded.¹ Diverting much-needed funding from public schools to pay for private school vouchers makes that situation worse. For example, the cost of Arizona's private school voucher program has increased 50-fold in 16 years, even as private school attendance in the state has decreased. A study of the voucher program in Wisconsin found that the program's expansion posed "a significant fiscal threat to public schools."² Moreover, these diverted funds are often misspent. In Florida, investigative journalists found voucher recipient schools had hired teachers without college degrees and falsified health and safety records.³ In Arizona, an audit of the voucher program found parents received funds after enrolling students in public schools and after purchasing items that were not permitted.⁴

➤ PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS DO NOT IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

For many years, studies of voucher programs across the country have found no improvement in student achievement.⁵ Studies in Washington, D.C.⁶ and Alabama⁷ found no significant improvement in student test scores. Studies in Louisiana,⁸ Indiana,⁹ and Ohio¹⁰ found that students who attended private schools using vouchers actually performed worse than their similar peers in public schools. These negative effects persisted over years, meaning they were not a temporary result of students' transition to a new school. The negative impact on academic achievement of attending a voucher school may be even worse than the impact of high teacher turnover and feeling unsafe at school.¹¹ Additionally, the Louisiana voucher program did not increase the rates of college enrollment among high school graduates.¹² And parents do not report greater satisfaction with schools, nor a greater sense of safety, with the use of private school vouchers.¹³

➤ STUDENTS HAVE FEWER PROTECTIONS AGAINST DISCRIMINATION IN PRIVATE, VOUCHER-FUNDED SCHOOLS

Many of the rights and protections that apply to students in public schools do not apply to students using vouchers to attend private schools.¹⁴ In fact, students may face discrimination when they try to enroll in a private school or after they are admitted. Voucher programs often do not prohibit discrimination based on religion or LGBTQ status, and there are numerous reports of private schools discriminating against students using vouchers based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.¹⁵ Additionally, English language learners and students with disabilities may have to give up rights under non-discrimination laws and the

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federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.¹⁶ Compounding this concern is the fact that families are often not informed of the loss of these rights.¹⁷

➔ VOUCHERS EXACERBATE SCHOOL SEGREGATION

Vouchers link back to a “sordid history” of segregation under Jim Crow.¹⁸ “On balance, voucher programs are more likely to increase school segregation than to promote integration or maintain the status quo.”¹⁹ These concerning patterns persist from Indiana, where the voucher system favors more affluent white families,²⁰ to Louisiana, where white families have used vouchers to leave more diverse schools.²¹

➔ KEEP PUBLIC FUNDS IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

To ensure that all children have access to thriving public schools, public funds should remain in the public schools. Public schools educate the vast majority of students, must follow anti-discrimination laws, and produce the best academic outcomes, yet continue to be underfunded across the nation.

To learn more about these and other studies, visit our website: <https://pfps.org/research/>.

Public Funds Public Schools is a national campaign that works to ensure public funds are used exclusively to maintain, support and strengthen our nation's public schools.

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