

## **‘Echoing at the state Capitol’: Arizona Prop. 305 to expand school vouchers defeated**

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A grassroots group of parents successfully overturned the massive school voucher expansion supported by the state's Republican establishment, as the "no" vote on Proposition 305 won by a wide margin, the Associated Press has projected.

The "no" vote victory on Prop. 305 has major implications for the school-choice movement in Arizona and nationally, as the state has long been ground zero for the conservative issue and Republican leaders have crowned the [Empowerment Scholarship Account expansion](#) as a national template.

The grassroots group who [launched the referendum by obtaining more than 111,000 signatures](#) to put it on the ballot celebrated as the results came in Tuesday night, said Dawn Penich-Thacker, spokeswoman for Save Our Schools Arizona.

"We are over the moon. We set out to send a message to the state government and the nation," Penich-Thacker said. "This defeat should be echoing at the state Capitol and all the way to Washington."

She said voters showed they want to put more money into public schools and "not into more privatization schemes."

"This is bigger than party. This is bigger than special interests," Penich-Thacker said.

Jenny Clark, spokeswoman for Yes for Ed, which supported the measure, didn't return calls and texts for comment.

The vote overturns the ESA expansion that would have allowed all 1.1 million Arizona public school students to use public money to go to private school. The number of students receiving the funds would have been capped at 30,000.

Parents receive 90 percent of the funding that would have otherwise gone to their local public school districts. The voucher money, loaded on debit cards, is intended to cover specific education expenses such as private or religious-school tuition, home-school expenses and education-related therapies.

The expansion would have made the program about six times larger — it now serves about 5,600 students at a cost of about \$62 million.

The ESA rules will now stay as they are now, growing each year by about 0.5 percent of the total 1.1 million public school population, which is now about 5,500 students. That means the cap for next year would be about 9,500 students, said Department of Education spokesman Stefan Swiat.

However, the program has never reached the cap because only students in six categories qualify for ESAs: students with special needs, attending D- or F-rated schools, living on an Indian reservation, from military families, in foster-care and siblings of students in the ESA program.

Prop. 305 was launched after investigations into the program by *The Arizona Republic* showed [students were using the ESA program to leave wealthier and better performing schools](#) and that the program was [plagued by lax oversight and misspending](#).

[Poll data showed that voters were initially deeply confused by the ballot language of the measure](#).

However, the huge margin that the "no" vote gathered showed voters were no longer undecided on the measure.

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