

Wisconsin

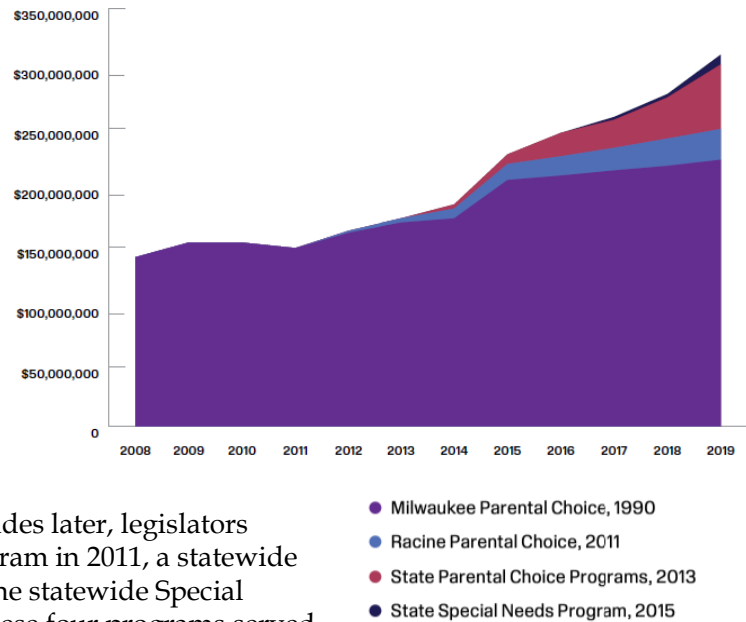
This excerpt is taken from the [Public Funds Public Schools](#) report [The Fiscal Consequences of Private School Vouchers](#) by Samuel E. Abrams and Steven J. Koutsaolis. The report documents the growth of voucher programs and spending in seven states between 2008 and 2019.

Wisconsin was the first state in recent history to enact a voucher program: the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program launched in 1990. Decades later, legislators passed the Racine Parental Choice Program in 2011, a statewide Parental Choice Program in 2013, and the statewide Special Needs Scholarship Program in 2016. These four programs served approximately 42,000 students in 2019. This total represented 4.9 percent of the state's nearly 860,000 PK-12 students.

In fiscal year 2008, total spending in Wisconsin for voucher programs amounted to \$141,700,347.* By fiscal year 2019, spending had increased to \$311,496,788, representing a jump of 119 percent in total spending and an annual growth rate of 7.4 percent. The state essentially froze its per-pupil funding for public education over this time period, barely lifting it from \$11,819 in fiscal year 2008 to \$11,854 in fiscal year 2019. The 49 other states, on average, increased per-pupil spending over this time period by 9.4 percent.

This freeze in per-pupil funding in Wisconsin cannot be attributed to economic duress. It coincided with a 3.2 percent annual growth rate in GDP for the state from 2008 to 2019, exceeding the 3.1 percent mean annual growth rate over this time period for the 49 other states.

In terms of educational effort, measured as the percentage of state GDP allocated to PK-12 funding, this freeze shows Wisconsin to be retreating in its commitment to public education at the same time it substantially increased its funding of private schooling. In fiscal year 2008, Wisconsin allocated 4 percent of its GDP to PK-12 funding, giving it a rank of 14 among the 50 states. In fiscal year 2019, Wisconsin allocated 3.4 percent of its GDP to PK-12 funding, conferring a rank of 25 among the 50 states. Like Ohio, Wisconsin experienced a drop in public primary and secondary enrollment, but not close in degree. Whereas Ohio experienced a drop of 7.2 percent, Wisconsin experienced a drop of 2.2 percent.



* All spending amounts presented here are in 2020 dollars.