Keep public funds in public schools

Messages and data for public school advocates against vouchers

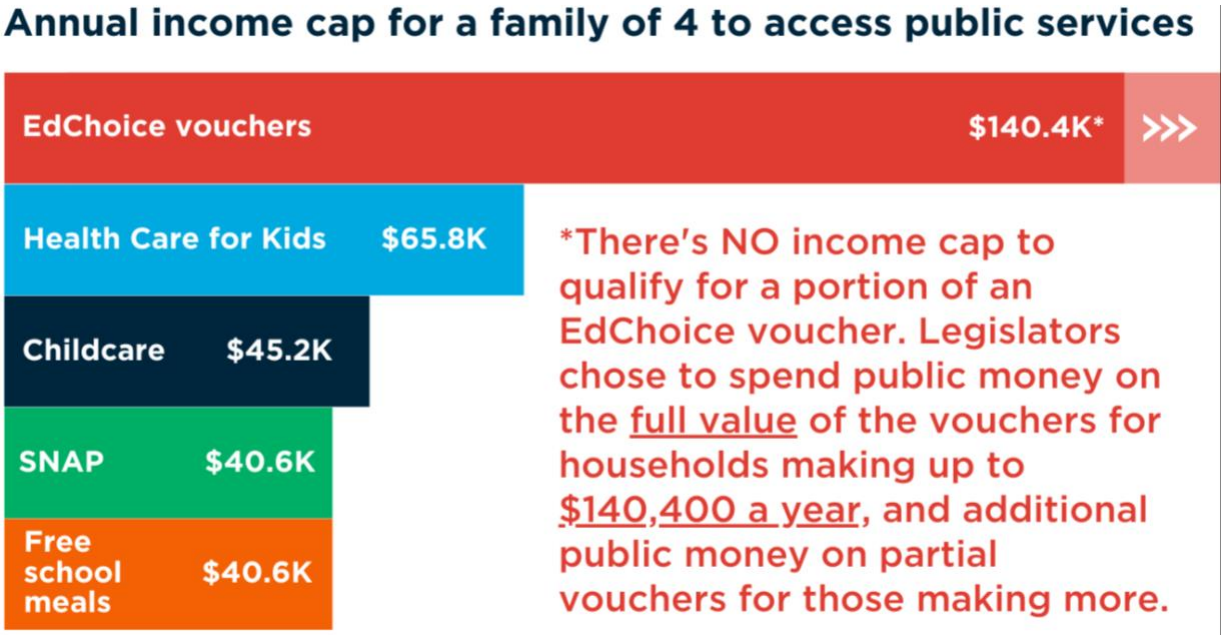
Ohio has five voucher programs, which provide public tuition subsidies at private K-12 schools. During the 2022-23 school year, the two most expensive, EdChoice and EdChoice Expansion, extracted from state coffers a combined total of **$353.7 million,** money that could have been spent to support public schools.

Vouchers have always been bad for Ohio's public school students and families, but state legislators recently made them universally available, dramatically increasing the harm they do.

What changed?

In the 2023-24 state budget, the legislature removed the income limit for EdChoice Expansion vouchers, making all households eligible for public subsidies to attend private schools. Households with incomes up to 450% of poverty qualify for the full value. For example, a family of four with $140K annual income qualifies for the full value of an EdChoice Expansion voucher. That's **$6,100** to subsidize private K-8 tuition and **$8,408** for private high school.

For comparison, Ohio has much lower limits on who can access food assistance, help affording childcare, and even health care for kids:



As a result, many households already sending their students to private schools—without help from the state — became eligible, applied for, and received EdChoice Expansion vouchers. In 2024, Ohio gave out nearly **70,000** new EdChoice Expansion vouchers, but private school enrollment grew by fewer than **3,000** students.

The cost of vouchers

The cost of Ohio's five voucher programs reached **$966.2 million** for the 2023-24 school year. That's enough to fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan.

The cost of EdChoice Expansion is the main driver of this skyrocketing cost: In just one year, the program cost increased more than three-fold from **$124.4 million** to **$405 million.**

Mentor Public Schools
For the 2022-23 school year, before state legislators made EdChoice Expansion vouchers universal, **73** students from Mentor used them to pay tuition at a private school. That jumped to **657** students during the 2023-24 school year. Only **81** qualified as low-income.

Ohio funds Mentor's public schools at a rate of **$2,618** per student in foundation aid. Ohio funds private school tuition vouchers up to **$8,408** per student.

How are voucher schools different from public schools?

They can reject certain kids. Despite accepting public funding, voucher schools can refuse to serve some children, including those with disabilities, behavior issues, or education challenges.

They can still price-out Ohio families. Many private schools already charge more than the value of the voucher or increase tuition to account for vouchers, raising the barrier for the families vouchers claim to help.

They are unaccountable. Voucher schools operate without public oversight and do not have to meet state standards for quality, accountability, or student rights.

They use public funding for religious education. Many voucher schools in Ohio include religious education as a foundational part of their mission.

Vouchers hurt everyone by increasing school district dependence on local tax levies. Many communities struggle with **high property taxes, inadequate resources or both,** resulting in part from the legislature's long-term failure to meet its obligation to the public. Residents have to make up the difference, which will only grow as vouchers siphon more state dollars.

Vouchers also threaten local communities' biggest assets: the great education they should be able to provide for all children, no matter where they live or how much money they have in the bank. That impacts everyone, whether they have kids in school or not.

What can school boards do?

Elected school boards have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure public funds are being used to serve the public good. Voucher schools operate **without** that accountability, but **with** our collective, public resources.

Vouchers put public schools at risk. Ohio has the resources to provide excellent, free, public education for all. When legislators instead pour public funds into unregulated, unaccountable private schools, they short-change the young people and families who choose public schools, those who can't access private schools, and those whom private schools turn away.

Initiatives that cause voucher expenditures to exceed state revenues for public schools strain budgets and create deficits. This has happened in Arizona, where in 2022 policymakers launched the largest school voucher program in the US – the universal Empowerment Scholarship Account voucher program – the most expansive and least accountable program in the nation.

Elected school boards are our community's experts on education: We rely on your experience and knowledge to keep us informed about important issues facing our schools and our students. Please share this information with parents, teachers, administrators and school communities. Consider supporting legislation that will hold voucher schools accountable, such as **House Bill 407** and talk to your community about joining the more than **140** Ohio school districts that have signed on to a lawsuit to end EdChoice vouchers in Ohio. You can learn more about the coalition at https://vouchershurtohio.com.