

Steve Hinnefeld: “Indiana Voucher Cost Nears Quarter Billion Dollars.” Indiana and Ohio Voucher Programs Seem to be on Parallel Tracks

Indiana and Ohio voucher advocates have pushed expansion of vouchers using the same playbook. Their playbook:

- First, we must rescue poor kids from so called “failing schools”
- Then, hand out vouchers to low-income families
- Then, eliminate the requirement that a student must attend a public school before eligibility for a voucher
- Then, raise the parents’ income threshold
- Then, increase the dollar amount of the voucher
- Then, advocate for the idea that school money should follow the child to wherever, which is their unstated goal all along.

Deceivers!

The goal of the voucher zealots is to destroy the constitutionally-required public common school system.

Indiana voucher cost nears quarter billion dollars

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Indiana awarded \$241.4 million in the 2021-22 school year to pay tuition and fees for students to attend private schools. That’s 44% more than the state spent on vouchers the previous year.

The increase, detailed in a [Department of Education report](#), isn’t surprising. The Indiana General Assembly in 2021 [vastly expanded the voucher program](#), opening it to families near the top of the state’s income scale and making the vouchers significantly more generous.

Nearly all the 330 private schools that received voucher funding are religious schools. [Some discriminate](#) against students, families and employees because of their religion, disability status, sexual orientation or gender identity. Indiana is bankrolling bigotry.

And many of the families receiving vouchers could pay private school tuition without public assistance. Some 20% of voucher households last year had an income of \$100,000 or more, well above Indiana’s median household income of about \$58,000.

The voucher program, created in 2011, was sold as a way to help children from poor families opt out of “failing” public schools. Mitch Daniels, Indiana’s governor at the time and a leading voucher advocate, said students [should attend a public school for two semesters](#) to qualify, giving public schools a chance to show what they could do.

But the two-semester requirement fell by the wayside. Students now have nine pathways by which they can qualify. If a family meets the income requirement, which is laughably lax, a private school can find a way to get them vouchers.

When the program started, supporters said it wouldn't cost anything, because, if the students didn't have vouchers, the state would be paying for them to attend public schools. They don't even pretend to believe that anymore. In 2021-22, 70% of voucher students had no record of having attended a public school in the state. Most voucher funding is going to families that intended all along to send their kids to private schools — and often had the means to do so.

The program initially served both low- and middle-income families. Last year, the legislature threw the door open to high-income families. Now, a family of five making \$172,000 can receive vouchers worth over \$5,400 on average per child. For about half of all voucher students, the award covers the full cost of tuition and fees at their private school.

[Voucher participation had stalled](#), but with last year's expansion, the number of voucher students exploded: 44,376 students had vouchers in 2021-22, up 24.3% from the previous year.

Over the years, Indiana's voucher population has grown whiter and markedly less poor. Nearly 60% of voucher students are white, an overrepresentation considering the program is most pervasive in urban areas, where there are many Black and Hispanic students. Only 10.5% of voucher students are Black, compared to 13.5% of Indiana public and charter school students.

The program might still seem justifiable if Indiana private schools were academically superior. They aren't. Researchers at the universities of Kentucky and Notre Dame found that [students who received vouchers fell behind](#) their peers who remained in public schools.

Indiana policymakers no longer care about that either. They've embraced the idea that parents should have complete control over their children's schooling and the public funds that pay for it. In a world of unrestricted school choice, state money will "follow the child," wherever that may lead. Standards, accountability and academic quality don't matter.

Doug Masson, a lawyer and blogger from West Lafayette, [has said for years](#) that Indiana legislators created the voucher program for three reasons: to reward their friends, to punish the teachers' unions, and to fund religious education. Every year proves him right.

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