

Steve Dyer Sheds Light on the Cost of the Buckeye Institute Education Savings Account (Voucher) Plan

The Buckeye Institute, along with the Fordham Institute (both anti-public school organizations), recently sponsored a meeting in which panelists passionately advocated for a voucher plan that would fund all students individually—not the constitutionally-required public common school system.

Steve Dyer exposes the hypocrisy of the Buckeye Institute plan.

Why Won't The Buckeye Institute Tell Us How Much Their Education Savings Accounts Will Cost?

Hint: They could be really, really, really expensive. Like \$6.35 billion expensive.

Stephen Dyer

I have to hand it to both the Fordham Institute and now the Buckeye Institute. They sure like advocating for expensive policies without ever telling you how expensive they could be. Pretty ballsy for “institutes” who claim to be fiscal watchdogs.

Take the Buckeye Institute’s most recent report in which Greg Lawson argues that Ohio should respond to the COVID learning loss by giving anyone making less than 400% of poverty a \$5,500 or \$7,500 check to put in an Education Savings Account (ESA) to be used on whatever they want.

Oh yeah, and it could be used on top of any tuition subsidies those folks would get under the state’s voucher system. And on top of the current ACE Education Savings Account, which Lawson wants bumped up from \$500 to \$1,000 through American Rescue Act funding — a bill not a single Republican voted for and Buckeye condemned at the time. And on top of a private-school tax credit that Lawson wants boosted from \$750 to \$2,500. Though he hints that making the tax credit as big as the state’s current \$7,500 publicly subsidized tuition voucher should be a legislative goal.

Let’s look at what providing an ESA to every Ohio student whose family makes less than 400 percent of poverty would cost, shall we? Luckily, the Ohio Legislative Service Commission broke down how many students fit into that definition not long ago. And while the numbers have changed, they haven’t changed that much. Remember that more than 80 percent of Ohio households would qualify for this ESA because 400 percent of poverty for a family of four is more than \$110,000 now.

[Chart]

According to the data, if every child who qualified had an ESA established for them under Buckeye’s plan, it would cost \$6.35 billion. That’s right. It would cost as much as the state spent on its total net school funding formula in the 2015-2016 school year.

That’s quite a lot of money.

And might explain why Lawson hid the cost under this particularly delicate bob and weave:

“Establishing a broad-based ESA program will take some time and planning.”

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That's it.

One sentence.

That's the extent of Buckeye's ESA fiscal "analysis".

Can you imagine if someone on my side of the issue suggested starting a program that could cost \$6.35 billion annually and all we said about its cost and implementation is one sentence claiming that it will "need to be worked out"?

Does that seem like a serious policy suggestion to you?

Because it doesn't to me.

Meanwhile, using the same LSC data from above, Lawson wants to set aside as much as \$850 million in federal American Rescue Plan money for the current ACE Accounts of \$1,000 each (which are for students living at less than 300 percent of poverty). I don't need to remind anyone that American Rescue Plan money is a huge reason why 55 percent of Ohio school districts are now within 5 percent of their pre-COVID test score results. Yet Lawson wants to set aside a significant portion of that for \$1,000 checks (they are currently \$500) to be used on whatever.

[Chart]

I don't think it will surprise you to learn that the Buckeye Institute wasn't a fan of the American Rescue Plan. Here's what their official statement was at the time:

"Today, President Joe Biden comes to Ohio to tout not just the latest unnecessary spending bill – the American Rescue Plan – but also the Affordable Care Act, two one-size-fits-all solutions that fail to address the states' unique challenges and needs," said Rea S. Hederman Jr., executive director of the Economic Research Center and vice president of policy at The Buckeye Institute. "These one-size-fits-all solutions will only lead to higher taxes and fewer health care options for Ohioans. This is not the prescription Ohio needs to fight the pandemic."

Unless that prescription leads to more money going to private, unaccountable schools, right, guys?

I know.

Stunning.

But here's the issue I have: The Buckeye Institute has demanded fiscal transparency for public sector institutions for years (never mind that its donors are hidden from public view), but when people demand transparency on their plans for our tax dollars?

A single sentence saying, "It'll take time," will suffice.

But here's the real secret of Buckeye's push: It won't cost \$6.35 billion. Or \$850 million.

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Because the overwhelming majority of Ohioans and Americans are satisfied with their public schools — schools that are doing a far better job of navigating their post-COVID challenges than the privately run schools Buckeye and Fordham push on us.

All Buckeye's plans do is shovel millions of unaccountable tax dollars to folks who have already decided to send their kids to privately run schools.

Because Buckeye is all about putting #StudentsFirst.

Whatever.

To access charts and embedded hyperlinks, open in your browser:

[Why Won't The Buckeye Institute Tell Us How Much Their Education Savings Accounts Will Cost?
\(substack.com\)](https://www.substack.com/p/why-won-t-the-buckeye-institute-tell-us-how-much-their-education-savings-accounts-will-cost)