

Diane Ravitch's April 21 blog featuring a Time Magazine article: How Voucher Programs Hurt Students.

State legislatures across the nation are enacting school voucher programs at the expense of public common schools in spite of the research that show the failure of such programs.

Attached is Diane Ravitch's April 21 [blog](#) which embeds a [Time Magazine](#) article by Michigan State University professor, Joshua Cowen.

[TIME: How Voucher Programs Hurt Students](#)

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[8](#)

Joshua Cowen, Professor of Education Policy at Michigan State University, [wrote the following article for TIME magazine:](#)

In recent months, state legislatures across the country have broadened efforts to subsidize private school tuition with taxpayer dollars. New proposals for these programs—collectively called school vouchers—have appeared in [more than a dozen states](#) and passed as major priorities for Republican governors like [Kim Reynolds in Iowa](#) and [Sarah Huckabee Sanders in Arkansas](#). Since 2021, [Arizona](#), [Florida](#), [Utah](#) and [West Virginia](#) have also created or expanded voucher plans. Meanwhile, a handful states like [Indiana](#), [Louisiana](#), [Ohio](#) and [Wisconsin](#) have run voucher programs for years. But do school vouchers actually work? We need to focus on what research shows, and what that means for kids moving forward.

As an [analyst](#) who has studied these and other forms of school choice for nearly two decades, I'm in a good position to give an answer. And based on data from existing voucher programs, the answer is almost unambiguously negative.

Let's start with who benefits. First and foremost, the answer is: existing private school students. Small, pilot voucher programs with income limits have been around since [the early 1990s](#), but over the last decade they have expanded to larger statewide initiatives with few if any income-eligibility requirements. Florida just passed its version of such a universal voucher program, following Arizona's passage in the fall of 2022. In Arizona, [more than 75%](#) of initial voucher applicants had never been in public school—either because they were new kindergartners or already in private school before getting a voucher. That's a problem because many [voucher advocates](#) market these plans as ways to improve educational opportunities for public school children.

And what about the students who do leave public schools? Some plans, like the [currently proposed](#) bill in Texas, restrict eligibility to students in public school for at least one year. But for the children who do transfer using a voucher, the academic results in the recent scaled-up statewide programs are catastrophic. Although [small, pilot-phase programs](#) showed some promise two decades ago, new evaluations of vouchers in [Washington, D.C.](#), [Indiana](#), [Louisiana](#), and [Ohio](#) show some of the largest test score drops ever seen in the research record—between -0.15 and -0.50 standard deviations of learning loss. That’s on par with what the COVID-19 pandemic did to test scores, and larger than Hurricane Katrina’s impacts on academics in New Orleans.

And these harmful voucher impacts from existing statewide vouchers [lasted for years](#), with [little else](#) on balance to show for it.

What explains these extraordinarily large voucher-induced declines? Aren’t private schools supposed to be elite educational opportunities? When it comes to private schools accepting voucher payments, the answer is clearly no. That’s because elite private schools with strong academics and large endowments often decline to participate in voucher plans. Instead the typical voucher school is [a financially distressed](#), sub-prime private provider often jumping at the chance for a tax bailout to stay open a few extra years.

In Wisconsin, 41% of voucher schools [have closed](#) since the program’s inception in 1990. And that includes the large number of pop-up schools opening just to cash in on the new voucher pay-out. For those pop-up schools, average survival time is just 4 years before their doors close for good.

Here’s another problem: for most students, using a voucher is a temporary choice to begin with. In states that have reported data on the question—[Indiana](#), [Louisiana](#), and [Wisconsin](#)—roughly 20% of students leave voucher programs each year, either because they give up the payment or because schools push them out. In [Florida](#), where vouchers just expanded, that number is even higher: around 30% per year in pre-expansion data.

That kind of turnover is bad for kids, even when they’re leaving under-performing voucher schools. Not least because [kids who leave](#) voucher programs tend to be students of color, lower income children, and kids struggling academically in the first place.

And it’s not just the academic results that call into question any rhetoric around [opportunities](#) created by vouchers. Private schools can decline to admit children for any reason. One example of that is tied to the latest [culture wars](#) around LGBTQ youth, and strengthened in current voucher [legislation](#). In Florida, a voucher-funded school made national news last summer when it [banned](#) LGBTQ children. In Indiana, pre-pandemic estimates showed

that more than [\\$16 million](#) in taxpayer funding had already gone to voucher schools with explicit anti-LGBTQ admissions rules.

Voucher schools also [rarely enroll](#) children with special academic needs. Special education children tend to need more resources than vouchers provide, which can be a problem in public schools too. But public schools are at least obliged [under federal law](#) to enroll and assist special needs children—something private schools can and do avoid.

When we look at all the challenges to accessing education with these programs it's clear that actually winning admission to a particular private school is not about parental school choice. It's the school's choice.

That is what research on school vouchers tells us. Vouchers are largely tax subsidies for existing private school families, and a tax bailout for struggling private schools. They have harmful test score impacts that persist for years, and they're a revolving door of school enrollment. They're public funds that support a financially desperate group of private schools, including some with active discriminatory admissions in place.

And [public support](#) for these programs is tenuous at best, highly dependent on state contexts. Recent media reports indicate that the latest voucher push is at least partly the result of well-funded campaigns [led by Betsy DeVos](#), the conservative billionaire and U.S. Education Secretary under Donald Trump. DeVos has championed vouchers for decades as an alternative to traditional public education in what she, Trump, and other supporters call "[government schools](#)."

But DeVos has acknowledged the poor track record for vouchers—at least when it comes to [academic impacts](#). Asked about the dismal results of the Louisiana voucher plan while she was a public official, DeVos avoided detailed comment, but her answer back then was as good a summary as any that a voucher expert like me could provide. That program, she said, was "[not very well-conceived](#)."

That goes for school voucher plans today, currently spreading across the country.