

## **Jan Resseger's 10 reasons why the Huffman voucher explosion is so dangerous**

Jan Resseger's [June 15 blog](#) sounds 10 alarms regarding the Huffman voucher frenzy. As one considers these alarms, one is alerted that the very fabric of Ohio communities and the state will be ripped apart. The endgame is tribalism.

## **10 Reasons Why Matt Huffman's Proposed Ohio Voucher Explosion Is So Dangerous**

Posted on [June 15, 2023](#) by [janresseger](#)

### **What is the Ohio Senate's private school tuition voucher proposal?**

While the Ohio House Budget passed last month would dangerously expand private school tuition vouchers (called scholarships by the legislature) by bumping up family eligibility to 450% of the federal poverty level, the Senate's explosive voucher entitlement for the rich exceeds the House plan. The *Columbus Dispatch's* [Anna Staver breaks down](#) the details: "Under the Senate's budget, the Legislative Service Commission estimates that Ohio would spend about \$1 billion per year on school vouchers. That's about \$180 million more than the House proposal... (The) plan would give families earning up to 450% of the federal poverty level (\$135,000 for a family of four) an estimated \$6,135 for K-8 students and \$8,407 for high school students. After that, scholarships would drop as incomes rose. Families at 550% of poverty would get about half the total amount, and those at 650% would get a quarter. The least a child could receive would be 10% of the original amount."

### **Why is the Ohio Senate's school voucher plan so dangerous?**

- 1. There is no control or cap on future growth of the Ohio Senate's proposed universal vouchers.** This plan is precisely what Senate President Matt Huffman promises: universal vouchers. The [Ohio Education Association's June 12, 2023 Legislative Watch explains](#): "The bill would make all K-12 students, regardless of their economic status or quality of their local schools, eligible for taxpayer funding for private school tuition." Once voucher plans are enacted, they tend to grow. Columbia University school privatization expert, [Dr. Samuel Abrams explains](#): "In fiscal year 2008, total spending on vouchers in Ohio was \$69,772,755. By fiscal year 2019, total spending for all five then-existing voucher programs amounted to \$360,646,965, an increase of 416 percent and an annual growth rate of 16.1 percent." While unlimited government entitlements are usually something conservative Republicans disdain, the Ohio Senate's proposed voucher program is an uncontrolled government entitlement.
- 2. The Ohio Senate's proposed voucher expansion is a windfall entitlement for the wealthy.** Ohio school finance expert, [Dr. Howard Fleeter explains](#) that the Senate's new plan—making students in families with income at 450% of the federal poverty level eligible for a full voucher, and students in families with even higher incomes eligible for a 50% or 25% or a minimal 10% voucher as family income gets higher—only exacerbates a current trend that tilts Ohio voucher use to middle and upper income families: "These recent changes reflect a pronounced change in the focus of Ohio's voucher programs from one of expanding opportunity (for poor children) to one where the state simply pays for vouchers

for students whose families have already demonstrated that they have the means to afford private school.”

3. **Most of the vouchers will be picked up as mere tuition-reduction coupons by students already enrolled in private schools.** Ohio school funding expert, [Dr. Howard Fleeter reports](#): “(M)ore and more vouchers are being awarded to students who were already attending private schools. In FY 19, only 7% of new EdChoice voucher recipients had attended a private school the year prior; however in FY23, nearly 55% of new voucher recipients were already attending private schools.”
4. **Vouchers serve the few at the expense of the majority of students** who depend on the services provided by their public schools. Columbia University’s [Dr. Samuel Abrams reports](#) that in Ohio, “The five voucher programs in place in 2019 served approximately 52,000 students. This total represented 3.1 percent of the state’s nearly 1.7 million preK-12 students.”
5. **The Ohio Senate’s proposed expansion of private school tuition vouchers threatens the Senate’s capacity fully to fund this year’s expected step in the phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan.** The Senate Budget’s proposal for voucher expansion along with yet another tax cut seem to have reduced the state’s capacity to continue fully phasing in new formula designed to fund the state’s public schools adequately and equitably. The [Ohio Association of State Business Officials reports](#) that the Senate’s adjustments to implementation of the new formula, “will cause a reduction in the state share of funding while increasing the local share... The formula will no longer be predictable or equitable.” The need for local school levies will increase if the Senate’s version of the budget prevails.
6. **Neither the House’s nor the Senate’s proposed private school voucher plan will be useful to most students in rural areas and small towns. However, citizens in small towns and rural areas will pay the state taxes diverted to the vouchers used primarily by students in cities, large towns and suburbs—** places with enough students to support a private school. The [Ohio League of Women Voters reports](#): “Public education is the only consistently available resource in Ohio’s 46 small counties, those with less than 8,000 public school students... There are 11 counties without any private schools; 15 have one (private school) and 14 have two... Private schools across these 46 counties serve a total of only about 7,000 students.”
7. **Private schools accepting vouchers are not accountable to the state which provides the funding.** [Here is Cleveland Heights-University Heights School Board member, Dan Heintz](#): “Private schools receiving taxpayer-funded vouchers are not subject to the transparency requirements under which public schools operate. We cannot even verify this money is being used for education. We know where it is sent not how it is spent.” Private schools are not required to employ certified teachers, and there is no public oversight of the curriculum in private schools. Some private schools accepting vouchers have been known to teach creationism in biology classes instead of the theory of evolution.
8. **Private schools can practice discrimination as they enroll students, and the public cannot protect the civil rights of the students enrolled in private schools.** The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities’ [Iris Hinh reminds us](#) that, “While public schools must adhere to federal civil rights protections,

students using vouchers to attend private schools can be explicitly or implicitly denied opportunities based on their race and ethnicity, gender presentation, and disability.”

9. **While private schools frequently promise special programs to serve the needs of English language learners and students with disabilities, the state cannot ensure that private schools provide the special services these students need.** The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities’ [Iris Hinh explains](#): “Many voucher policies explicitly waive students’ protections and rights under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to have funded services and supports for their learning needs. Inadequate services for students with disabilities can lead to students being denied entry or forced to leave the voucher program.” These students, who are expensive to educate, frequently find their way back to the public schools.

10. **Research demonstrates that students in private schools that accept vouchers do not achieve at the same academic level as their public school counterparts.** A Michigan State University professor who has been conducting voucher research for more than two decades, [Josh Cowen, summarizes research demonstrating](#) that private schools accepting vouchers do not serve students better academically than the public schools the students left when they accepted a voucher: “Although a few tiny studies from the late 1990s and early 2000’s showed small gains in test scores for voucher users, since 2013 the record is dismal. For the... kids who did use vouchers to leave public schools, their test score drops are between -0.15 and -0.50 standard deviations. That’s almost unprecedented... In [Louisiana](#), (and) [Ohio](#)—where those harmful voucher effects approach half a negative standard deviation—the loss is almost twice the pandemic’s academic impact.”

### **What Can We Conclude?**

In a commentary for the *Ohio Capital Journal*, [Marilou Johanek warns](#) Ohioans about the danger vouchers pose for the public schools that are the heart of our communities and the institution we all count on to help form our children as citizens of a democracy: “We’re talking a major blow to public education, an existential threat to the schools that educate 90% of our kids. That’s not hyperbole... Ohio Senate President Matt Huffman has made no secret of his intentions to undermine, not strengthen Ohio’s public education system... Now the ardent champion of the school privatization movement is going for broke. The GOP senate budget proposal is his personal vehicle to bulldoze traditional school districts with a bundle of the most extreme anti-public education measures yet.”