

## **The funding projections for Ohio universal vouchers will turn out to be a hoax**

Once upon a time in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two Ohio voucher zealots—a governor and an Akron industrialist—wanted each Ohio child to become eligible for a private school voucher. At that time, Ohio folks were not in favor of taking funds from the local school districts to support the zealots' voucher hobby. But the zealots were determined. They curried the favor of some sympathetic lawmakers and targeted a school district that, at the time, was too beleaguered with problems to resist their efforts. The district—Cleveland—was low-performing according to state measurements; additionally, the district had no allies to ward off the voucher-promotion twins. Cleveland was a perfect target for their original promotion propaganda—“rescue poor children from failing school districts” and “give poor kids the same opportunity to private schooling as rich kids”. How clever!

All the funds from the Cleveland voucher program came from the Cleveland school district budget. Very clever!

In that long ago time, the voucher movement got its foot-in-the-door. Soon the movement progressed and the “rescue of poor kids from failing school districts” battle cry (along with healthy campaign contributions from the privatization-of-public-common-schools militants) entered the psyche of the politically-imbalanced legislature.

By the time of the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the voucher movement took deep roots in Ohio. A somewhat newly-minted legislator sponsored a bill that would have made about two-thirds of Ohio students eligible for vouchers. That bill was rejected handily, but the sponsor has been persistent in the campaign to privatize public education. Voucher zealots seem to have convinced their legislative colleagues that the cost of vouchers is so low that the public common school system will not be negatively affected.

In recent years, the voucher programs have been costing Ohio taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. The universal voucher plan included in the State General Revenue Budget proposal for FY2024 and FY2025 will elevate the voucher cost to billions. Don't think that could happen in Ohio? Read headlines from other states:

- Iowa could pay millions more than budgeted to help families pay
- Indiana's school voucher program use at all-time high, but there are fewer low-income families
- Bankrupt our state: Expected school voucher surge to cost Arizona taxpayers a lot more money

The voucher expansion in the Senate version of the state budget for fiscal years 2024 and 2025 of 1 billion dollars is no doubt an understatement.