

### **A consequence of universal vouchers in Arizona: new private schools.**

We have previously predicted that universal vouchers in Ohio would attract a bevy of new private schools. This is already happening in Arizona, Diane Ravitch's [August 2 Blog](#) reports.

Many folks can smell a dollar a mile away. Tax money appropriated for public services is an inviting venue when state and federal officials open the public trough to individuals and private groups. Those who set-up shop to gain access to public funds do so to make a profit or propagate their creeds, dogma, and beliefs. One of the consequences of the universal voucher system will be the proliferation of mediocre, substandard educational entities. State officials will NOT muster the courage to require the same standards for all institutions that receive public money for education.

#### **[Arizona: New Private Schools Open to Take Advantage of Universal Vouchers](#)**

[By dianeravitch](#)

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The Arizona Republic [reported an increase in new private schools](#) that opened in response to the state's expanded voucher program. All children, regardless of family income, can now get vouchers to spend for religious schools, private schools, online schools, or home schooling. The voucher funding will decrease funding for public schools, which enroll the vast majority of students in the state. The voucher program in Arizona was expanded despite a state referendum in 2018 in which 65% of voters opposed voucher expansion.

The story focuses on Majestic Grace Christian Academy, which opened with an enrollment of 10 or 12 students. It hopes to double its enrollment next year. Christian values infuse the teaching in every subject.

*As a small private school that sprang up just this past school year, Majestic Grace exemplifies the private school revolution stemming from the [universal expansion of school vouchers](#). It is one of many recently launched private schools taking advantage of newly available public money. But while Majestic Grace and other private schools accept public funds in the form of school vouchers, there is [little public oversight of what students are learning](#), whether they are achieving at their grade level and the training their instructors receive...*

*All the students attending Majestic Grace last year were school voucher recipients, said school founder Jed Harris, the retired banker. Majestic Grace is not the first school Harris has helped open in Arizona. He also worked to launch Tipping Point Academy, a private school in Scottsdale that promises to integrate a Biblical worldview into every lesson....*

*Grand Canyon Private Academy, an online school for students in grades K-10 that opened this past school year, notes prominently on its website that the Arizona school voucher program will cover all of the school's tuition, which is up to \$6,500 for the full year. ...*

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*Before the 2022-23 school year began, the Empowerment Scholarship Account program served about 12,000 students. Now, more than 60,000 students receive funding through the program for private school tuition, tutors or educational materials.*

*While it is unclear how many of those students receive funding for private school tuition rather than special therapies or at-home learning supplies, the voucher vendor list includes many private schools.*

*As the school voucher program has grown so have concerns about public money supporting private schools that are poorly understood beyond their physical or virtual walls. Gov. Katie Hobbs' office [released a memo in July estimating](#) the school voucher program will cost more than \$950 million in the current budget year, leading to a budget shortfall of nearly \$320 million.*

*Voucher opponent Beth Lewis, who heads the public school advocacy group Save Our Schools, wonders whether private schools serve students better or are just shielded from the scrutiny of public schools, which are legally bound to provide information for accountability's sake.*

*"Arizona's ESA program is the least accountable in the entire country," said Lewis. "Public dollars are going to strip mall private schools, popping up with zero accreditation and no requirements that they adhere to curriculum or state standards. In a public school, you need to have all of those things."*

*State law requires the Arizona Department of Education to give every public school — district and charter — an A through F letter grade. It is based on factors including statewide assessment tests and graduation rate.*

*In contrast, Arizona law's academic requirement for a family's acceptance of a school voucher is that "a portion of the ESA must be used in at least the subjects of reading, grammar, mathematics, social studies and science," according to the 2023-24 school voucher parent handbook. Those subjects must also be taught in private schools under Arizona law.*

*Those demands do little to alleviate Lewis' concerns about academic accountability for private schools accepting taxpayer dollars.*

*"If you spend five minutes writing a sentence about grammar, that is not putting together a robust education," Lewis said.*

*Furthermore, students lose legal protections when they leave public schools to accept a school voucher. For instance, private school students are [not protected under a federal law that governs special education](#), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, like public school students.*

*Private schools also have less rigorous legal requirements for staff.*

*Most public school employees are required by law to undergo a form of background check to ensure they don't have a criminal history that would disqualify them from working with children. That's not required for private schools or vendors accepting voucher dollars.*

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*In addition, full-time, permanent classroom teachers in public schools must have at least a bachelor's degree. There's no similar requirement for private schools, and the voucher program only requires vendors, like tutors, to have a high school diploma when it's related to the service they're providing.*

*With school vouchers, private schools and other educational vendors are answerable to the parents, according to the head of the program, who recently resigned. While the state provides a list of vendors and schools approved to receive voucher money, it is the parent's responsibility to ensure a provider has satisfactory credentials and provides adequate services.*

The voucher schools are exempt from state testing requirements. They are not accountable to the state.