

Jan Resseger: Voucher program is already exceeding the budget.

Legislatures in states across the nation have enacted school voucher schemes even though such use of tax funds is unpopular among citizens. Voucher supporters use deceitful terms such as scholarships, tuition tax credits, and education savings accounts to slip daylight past the rooster. Voucher supporting legislators purposefully understate the cost of voucher schemes when they enact those programs.

Jan Resseger discusses the Ohio voucher cost overruns in her October 10 blog.

Voucher Program Is Already Exceeding Cost Estimates

It is already clear that Ohio's new universal school voucher program is going to cost more than anybody predicted. The *Columbus Dispatch's* [Anna Staver provided](#) an update on the financial impact as of mid-September: "With more than a month left for parents to enroll, Ohio's new universal school voucher program appears to already be more expensive than estimated.... (T)he state has received applications totaling approximately \$432 million for the 2023-2024 school year. That's \$34 million more than the Legislative Service Commission forecasted. And interest in EdChoice Expansion scholarships isn't slowing. The Ohio Department of Education says it receives between 900 and 1,000 applications daily... When Ohio's two-year budget was drafted, LSC (the Legislative Service Commission) estimated that EdChoice Expansion... would cost \$397.8 million for fiscal year 2024 and \$439.1 million in FY 2025. The state awarded 24,320 EdChoice Expansion vouchers for the 2022-2023 school year. This year, ODE (the Ohio Department of Education)... received 70,487 applications as of Sept. 6."

How many of Ohio's new school voucher applicants are seeking a voucher to leave a public school for a private school, and how many are simply applying for a voucher to offset private school tuition families are already paying? For *Education Week*, [Mark Lieberman explores](#) one of the reasons for the rapid and unplanned diversion of state revenue to school voucher programs. Lieberman describes the findings of Michigan State University voucher researcher Josh Cowen, who confirms that, "state lawmakers often assume that the costs of paying for private school tuition will be offset by the reduction in per-pupil costs caused by a drop in public K-12 enrollment. However, if the state is instead taking on new students for whom it is financially responsible---students who were previously attending private school without state assistance---that's a new cost that could strain budgets, he said."

Staver reports that Ohio has not even been collecting data about whether or not voucher applicants are seeking to exit public schools or are already enrolled in private schools: "Ohio isn't tracking how many new voucher applicants already attend private schools... That means it will be difficult to discern whether the spike in EdChoice scholarships came from parents looking to leave public school or those whose children already attend (private schools)." One serious problem here is that the voucher expansion is to be paid for out of the school foundation budget that also pays for the state's public schools.

Education Week's Lieberman recently examined data from several other states that do track whether the students taking vouchers are exiting public schools: "In Iowa, 40 percent of more than 17,000 applicants to the state's new universal education savings account program have left public schools,

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while the remaining 60 percent were not enrolled in public schools before applying.... The gap is even wider in Florida, where 69 percent of roughly 122,000 new applicants... were already in private schools before applying.... Another 18 percent are children entering the K-12 system for the first time as kindergarteners...."