

Laura Hancock, Cleveland.com: Applications for Ohio-funded scholarships for private schools has more than tripled this school year over last.

The data provided in Laura Hancock's article should alarm every taxpayer, every public school advocate, every school employee who will benefit from the pension system in which enrolled, and every parent and student that will continue public school enrollment.

Quoted in the article is a Fordham Institute person who regurgitates the unconstitutional impulse that money should follow the kids.

24,000 to 82,000 students – and counting – after legislative expansion

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- [Laura Hancock, cleveland.com](https://www.cleveland.com/news/2024/02/laura-hancock-cleveland-com-applications-for-ohio-funded-scholarships-for-private-schools-has-more-than-tripled-this-school-year-over-last/)

COLUMBUS, Ohio – The number of applications for Ohio-funded scholarships for private schools has more than tripled this school year over the last after the state legislature increased both the cash amount of the vouchers and family income eligibility, according to new figures.

So far, the state has paid out \$166.9 million for private school tuition this year in one of the voucher programs that the legislature expanded.

But that amount will continue to rise. Most private schools collect tuition on a monthly basis, and not all applications to the program have been granted or even submitted. Parents have until the end of the June to submit voucher applications.

Public school advocates said the expanded vouchers are unconstitutional and will eventually destroy the public schools, since there are not unlimited funds for education and private school advocates have successfully lobbied lawmakers for more money. Lawmakers and private school advocates believe parents have the right to choose where they want their children to be educated, with the state money following them.

According to the latest figures from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce, the state's new K-12 agency:

- Thus far in the 2023-2024 school year, 82,610 students have been awarded scholarships to private schools in the one of the five voucher programs that the legislature expanded. In the 2022-2023 school year, families of 24,320 kids received vouchers.

-An additional 8,582 applications had been received as of Jan. 25 but were in need of a correction or were otherwise incomplete.

DEW has changed the way it's reporting the dollar amount, as reporters have published dozens of stories about the controversial growth in private school vouchers this year. Previously, it reported how much money the state had committed to private school vouchers in the 2023-2024 school year, based on approved student applications.

For instance, in late October, [it had committed \\$239.8 million](#) for 41,120 students whose applications had been approved at the time. That figure raised eyebrows because it suggested the state could go well over the \$397.8 million the General Assembly had budgeted for vouchers this school year.

Since then, the number of applications approved has more than doubled, but the state agency is reporting only how much it has paid out rather than its total commitments to date. Calculating that number is difficult without detailed data because the state awards scholarships based on a sliding income scale.

That means the state spend reported now is about \$73 million lower than what the state said in October. However, by the end of June, the amount of state money spent is almost guaranteed to be higher.

In the two-year state budget bill passed over the summer, lawmakers expanded voucher edibility to all families. Among the changes:

- The General Assembly raised the full voucher award from \$5,500 to \$6,165 this school year for students in K-8 and from \$7,500 to \$8,407 in 9-12.

- For the full voucher, lawmakers expanded family income eligibility to 450% of the federal poverty level, or \$135,000 for a family of four, from the previous 250% of the federal poverty level, or \$75,000 for a family of four.

- Lawmakers removed income caps for all families this year, meaning high-income families also can receive scholarships, but the award decreases the wealthier a family is. For instance, families at 451% to 500% of the poverty level are eligible for \$5,200 for K-8 and \$7,050 for 9-12.

The state has five private school voucher programs. Some are for children with special needs or for families who live in the boundaries of the Cleveland Metropolitan School District. The program with explosive growth this year is Education Choice, which is based on income eligibility. (That is different from an EdChoice program for families who live in the boundaries of low-performing public schools.)

So far this school year, 146,544 Ohio students are receiving a scholarship for one of the five voucher programs, costing the state \$428.5 million to date.

A Wednesday report about Ohio's private school vouchers by ProPublica found that parents with kids in private schools were being pressured to apply for vouchers, even if they were against it on principle. Schools pressured lower-income parents to obtain the scholarships first before asking for financial aid. Some schools appeared prepare to raise tuition, because the increase could be absorbed by parents, now that the state was paying a large chunk of their tuition, [the reporting found](#).

"DEW continues to communicate with participating schools telling them applying for EdChoice is a parent's choice and cannot be mandated by the school," said Lacey Snoke, a DEW spokeswoman.

"I've seen a lot of changes in public education," said Bill Phillis, a longtime educator who is leading a coalition of school districts [suing the state over the constitutionality of private school vouchers](#). "Of the last six decades, the very worst thing is universal vouchers."

[The state's constitution says](#) the legislature must provide a system of common schools throughout the state.

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But Aaron Churchill, the Ohio research director for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, which supports school choice, said the money should follow the kids.

“There was an increase in funding for traditional districts in the last budget,” he said. “Traditional public schools are receiving more dollars today than they actually ever have.”

The legislature, when expanding the EdChoice program, also funded the third and fourth years of the Fair School Funding Plan, which is designed to be implemented over six years.

For instance, last school year, the average spending per student in the CMSD was \$25,130. The sources of this funding was local, state and federal dollars. The state portion of this was \$9,565 last year, Churchill noted.

[Laura Hancock covers state government and politics for The Plain Dealer and cleveland.com.](#)