

February 8 Columbus Dispatch: Vouchers surge with changes in Ohio law.

The Dispatch headline—Vouchers surge with change in Ohio law—is not really a new revelation for most Ohioans. However, many of the details are shocking in the article. Some specific data presented in the article should peak the attention of the taxpaying public:

- Ohio has awarded more than 82,000 vouchers for the 2023-2024 school year—triple the number of the previous year.
- If all of the 91,200 voucher applicants are approved (82,000 have already been approved and no doubt all 91,200 will be), the cost to taxpayers--\$452.5 million so far this school year. This is more than the Legislative Service Commission predicted and more than voucher supporting legislators were suggesting.
- White students comprise 82% of the EdChoice expansion vouchers for 2023-2024 school year compared to 66% in recent years.
- Black students comprise 6% of the EdChoice expansion vouchers in the 2023-2024 school year compared to 15% in previous years.

Some excerpts from The Dispatch article from voucher advocates and voucher opponents:

- Proponents of universal vouchers say it's important for parents to have a choice in where their children attend school.
"Children should never dread going to class, and parents should always have confidence that their children are walking into a positive, results-focused learning environment," Senate President Matt Huffman, R-Lima, said after the changes were approved.
Opponents say the state shouldn't be shelling out taxpayer money for private, oftentimes religious, education.
William Phillis, executive director of the Ohio Coalition for Equity & Adequacy of School Funding, said the concept seems even more ridiculous when you apply it to other public services.
"If I want to join a country club instead of using the public parks, I shouldn't be entitled to a voucher to cash in at a private country club," Phillis said. "Or if I don't want to swim in the public pool, I'm not entitled to a voucher to build a backyard pool at my residence."
The debate is also the subject of a pending lawsuit in which 100 school districts sued the state to stop the private school voucher program.
- It's not yet clear how many of those vouchers went to students choosing a private school for the first time versus students already enrolled in private education. "A sizeable portion" likely came from the latter, said Chad Aldis, director of Ohio policy at the provoucher Thomas B. Fordham Institute.
- "Current private school students, until I see otherwise, I will assume, were the bulk of the new applicants," Aldis said. "If that's the case, then you would expect them to be a little whiter, a little wealthier, whatever the general private school description would be."
Vouchers for high school students also increased dramatically, a nearly five-fold jump from the previous school year.
- "Universal vouchers is kind of a halfway point for some of these voucher advocates," Phillis said. "There's this huge appetite on the part of some state officials to take as much money away from the public system as possible for the benefit of increasing the private school enrollment."

- Rep. Gary Click, R-Vickery, has proposed creating educational saving accounts for students at non-chartered, nonpublic schools, many of which are religious. House Bill 339 would cost about \$238 million per year if all 32,000 of their estimated students obtained a savings account, according to a Legislative Service Commission analysis.
“The state should not be in the business of picking winners and losers,” Click told lawmakers in committee.