

## **Jan Resseger's March 5 blog provides a review of the voucher escalation by Cleveland Plain Dealer's Laura Hancock.**

Jan Resseger's [March 5 blog](#) reviews Laura [Hancock's March 3 article](#), while adding additional information and context. Resseger's blogs are timely, adding valuable insights regarding public policy, especially with regard to education. The attachment is worthy of your consideration.

### **As Expected, Ohio's New Voucher Expansion Benefits Wealthy Students Already Attending Private Schools**

Posted on [March 5, 2024](#) by [janresseger](#)

The *Cleveland Plain Dealer* placed [Laura Hancock's expose about Ohio's wildly expanded school voucher program](#) on the front page above the fold in Sunday's paper. It is good to see this dangerous threat to public schooling—inserted into the state budget with minimal public discussion—receiving the attention it deserves.

Hancock's message? Ohio isn't helping poor kids in public schools, the original promise of Ohio's first voucher program in Cleveland in the 1990s. Instead, the new vouchers are a gift to middle income and wealthy families whose children are already enrolled in private and parochial schools:

"The number of Cuyahoga County students (students in greater Cleveland) receiving state-funded scholarships to attend private schools has skyrocketed this year after state lawmakers expanded a voucher program, but state data suggests that doesn't necessarily mean more kids have opted out of public schools. Across the county's 31 districts, the number of students receiving tuition payments in the EdChoice-Expansion scholarship... has increased nearly four-fold, from 2,500 students last year to nearly 9,200 this year. Those districts, however, have not seen a corresponding loss in student population, indicating that most of the families newly benefiting from the vouchers were already enrolled in private schools rather than fleeing a school district."

Hancock profiles, for example, three of Cleveland's middle and upper income suburbs where the vouchers now serve as a tuition-reimbursement entitlement for families of students already paying private school tuition: "Enrollment in Rocky River City School District fell by just 22 students between last year and this year, even though the number of kids receiving vouchers shot up from 16 to 309. In Bay Village City School District, there are 30 fewer students despite a voucher jump from 13 to 229. Westlake City School District has 19 fewer students; vouchers in the district spiked from 41 to 581."

Hancock lists the ten Ohio public school districts with the largest growth in students accepting a voucher under Ohio's huge expansion of school vouchers this year. Three are exurbs of Cleveland; one is a shared exurb of Cleveland and Akron; one is an exurb of Akron; one is an exurb of Columbus, and four are exurbs of Cincinnati. In every one of these districts, according to [data from the Ohio Department of Education](#), the median income is far above the state's median of \$41,132.59. In Indian Hill, a Cincinnati suburb, the median income is \$96,508.50. Median income in Hudson, part of suburban Cleveland and Akron, is \$82,183.00, and in Olentangy, a Columbus exurb, median income is \$79,892.50.

Why are the ten school districts with so many students taking vouchers for the first time all wealthy suburbs? Hancock explains: "because the legislature... removed income eligibility caps

for EdChoice-Expansion. Last year, the cap was 250% of the federal poverty level for a scholarship, or \$75,000 for a family of four. Now there are no income caps, although families only get partial scholarships when they earn above 450% of the poverty level, or above \$135,000 for a family of four.”

Hancock adds that the state is giving away a whole lot of money in each voucher: \$6,167 for grades K-8 and \$8,407 for grades 9-12. Thomas S. Poetter, a professor at Miami University of Ohio, who recently edited the new [Vouch for This!](#), adds that the vouchers are worth more than the state school funding formula has established as the base cost public schools are expected to spend per student—the amount that includes the state and local contributions required by the school funding formula. Poetter writes: “(T)he fact remains that the state will be spending more per pupil on individual children in private high schools with its voucher program... than it will for individual public school students across the state... That has been the case for nearly the entire life of the EdChoice ‘Scholarship’ program (it’s a voucher program) but it really hits home with the high figures coming at us in the new budget. And just think of all that could be done in our public schools to better our offerings... if we weren’t sending more than \$1 billion a year into private hands to be used in ways that none of us would ever approve of in public education...” (*Vouch for This!*, pp. 130-131)

Hancock quotes Troy McIntosh from the Ohio Christian Education Network and the Center for Christian Virtue enthusing about the new voucher expansion. She quotes Senator Andy Brenner, Chair of the Ohio Senate Education Committee, explaining that families ought to get the vouchers because they are paying taxes and therefore ought to get a personal reward for their children. She adds that after the voucher expansion, “the Catholic Diocese of Columbus is looking to potentially build schools in areas that currently don’t have a Catholic school.”

Hancock’s article omits one urgently important issue with Ohio’s new voucher expansion: over half the state’s counties are rural and entirely lack a private school where students might potentially carry a voucher. The expansion of private school tuition vouchers will shift the distribution of money from the state’s school foundation budget away from the state’s rural school districts because private school tuition vouchers can be used only by students in areas where private schools exist—places with larger and more concentrated populations. In a report last year for the Ohio League of Women Voters ([You should scroll down and then download report.](#)), Susan Kaeser explains: “Most of the public school population is concentrated in Ohio’s 8 largest urban counties, and so is the private school population. The 8 largest counties have 46% of the public school population and 71% of the private school students... Public education is the only consistently available education choice in Ohio’s 46 small counties, those with less than 8,000 public school students... Private schools across these 46 counties serve a total of only about 7,000 students.” “Rural taxpayers underwrite private choice in the state—but not where they live.”

Hancock reminds readers that “over 130 public school districts... are suing the state over the constitutionality of the vouchers.” Coincidentally on Sunday, the *Plain Dealer* also published a [commentary by William Phillis](#), Executive Director of the Ohio Coalition for Equity and Adequacy of School Funding, which is a co-plaintiff with the public school districts in the Vouchers Hurt Ohio lawsuit. Phillis provides the history, beginning in 1819, of Ohio’s efforts to establish and support public education. Our system of public common schools, Phillis reminds us, is protected by the language of the 1851 Ohio Constitution in Article VI, section 2: “Convention delegates crafted language that required the legislature to secure, by taxation, a

thorough and efficient system of common schools and clarified that religious sects or other sects shall not control any part of school funds of the state.”

The school voucher explosion for the wealthy that was slipped into Ohio’s FY 2024-2025 state budget last summer epitomizes what we were warned about last year in the conclusion to [\*The School Voucher Illusion\*](#), edited by experts Kevin Welner, Gary Orfield, and Luis A. Huerta and published by the Teachers College Press: “As currently structured, voucher policies in the United States are unlikely to help the students they claim to support. Instead, these policies have often served as a facade for the far less popular reality of funding relatively advantaged (and largely White) families, many of whom already attended—or would attend—private schools without subsidies. Although vouchers are presented as helping parents choose schools, often the arrangements permit the private schools to do the choosing... Advocacy that began with a focus on equity must not become a justification for increasing inequity. Today’s voucher policies have, by design, created growing financial commitments of taxpayer money to serve a constituency of the relatively advantaged that is redefining their subsidies as rights—often in jurisdictions where neighborhood public schools do not have the resources they need.” (*The School Voucher Illusion: Exposing the Pretense of Equity*, p. 290)