

David Pepper weighs-in on the insane voucher expansion

The universal EdChoice voucher scheme has been flying mostly under the radar of Ohio's citizens. One probable reason that citizens are not fully aware of the outrageous voucher expansion is that the voucher scheme has been expanded by 11th hour insertion in budget bills: no debate, just stuffing voucher elements into state budgets.

David Pepper gives his perspective in the attachment.

NEW Data: The Voucher Explosion...

...Keeps Getting Worse

We all remember it well, right?

The original narrative (ie. sales pitch) was that private school vouchers were intended to assist kids in poverty and in struggling urban public schools in gaining access to "better" private schools.

And in many places, that's how it was designed. At the very beginning.

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And then...they got rid of all the criteria that served that stated goal.

No more income limitations. Or anything else.

Just a voucher.

And guess what's happening as a result?

Exactly as you'd expect—an explosion in overall spending on these vouchers. In Ohio and many other states. Budget-busting growth.

And as the video above makes clear (please watch it), [recent data unearthed](#) by Laura Hancock at Cleveland.com also makes clear *who* is claiming these vouchers, and *where* they are claiming them.

And that data essentially reveals that in a horrible twist (but a logical one once you think it through), the ***universal voucher programs in states like Ohio are basically doing the exact opposite of that initial public justification.***

Hundreds of millions (soon billions) of tax dollars in states are being used by folks ***already in private schools***, most of whom are doing well enough financially that they ***already could afford those private school, to keep going to the same private schools they already attended.***

So it's basically become a huge subsidy, disproportionately helping higher income families, to keep doing what they were already doing.

How did Cleveland.Com make this so clear?

As I explain in the video above, they looked closely at school districts in Greater Cleveland with the most growth in private vouchers, and then compared that growth to the population shift of the public schools in that same district.

And here's what they found:

1) Subsidizing Choices Already Made

First, they found that the biggest increases by far were in the suburbs, and not the City of Cleveland. We're talking about a true explosion, often up 5X or 10X or more, from just the year before. But at the same time, they found that the public schools in each district where these voucher explosions occurred lost very few students. Some even *gained* students.

Now that's odd, isn't it?

Well, no.

Because what it shows us is that these vouchers are almost entirely being scooped up by **families already in those private schools to begin with!**

Here are some examples:

Rocky River:

- Private vouchers: went from 16 (in February 2023) to 309 (this year)
- Public school student shift: -22

Bay Village:

- Vouchers: 13 to 229
- Public school student shift: - 30

Westlake:

- Vouchers: 41 to 581
- Public school student shift: -10

Lakewood:

- Vouchers: 89 to 438
- Public school student shift: -2

Strongsville:

- Vouchers: 61 to 791
- Public school student shift: +17

The pattern and point is crystal clear: The families using the vouchers were already at the private schools.

2) Disproportionately Helping Those Who Could Already Afford It, Almost Entirely in Suburbs and Exurbs

You'll see that I mentioned above that the big growth of private vouchers are in the suburbs, and not the City of Cleveland.

And it turns out, that is a statewide trend.

The explosive growth is generally happening in better-off and/or high-income suburbs of a few major cities. In fact, as [Jan Ressenger pointed out](#), the ten Ohio public school districts with the largest growth in students using a private voucher are in exurbs where "the median income is far above the state's median of \$41,132.59." Some of these communities boasted more than twice the median income of the state! And yes, almost all of these students also were already at the private schools.

Communities with less wealth—both rural and urban—are seeing little to no voucher growth.

As the Ohio League of Women Voters [concluded](#): "Public education is the only consistently available education choice in Ohio's 46 small counties...Rural taxpayers underwrite private choice in the state—but not where *they* live."

(No wonder rural Republican legislators in Georgia and Texas joined Democrats to vote against universal vouchers proposals in those states).

3) The Bigger Picture

And all this explains the broader data that keeps coming in on the use of these vouchers—trends that will only continue to accelerate in this deeply warped direction.

As I explained in a prior post, my friend and education expert [Steve Dyer analyzed the data](#) found these stunning numbers across Ohio:

- "[M]ore new [] voucher (high school) recipients come from families making more than \$150,000 a year than families making less than \$120,000 a year;"
- "There are more new vouchers flowing to subsidize private high school students whose families make as much as \$250,000 a year (or MORE!) than there are flowing to subsidize private high school students whose families make less than 1/2 that much"
- "An astounding \$1.3 million of your tax dollars went to subsidize the private school tuitions of families who make **more than \$250,000 a year!**"
- "On the regular EdChoice voucher..., **\$242 million of the \$272 million** sent out to subsidize private school tuition went to families in the **highest income brackets.**"
- "That's **nearly \$9 out of every \$10 going** to subsidize private school tuitions through regular EdChoice went to subsidize families **who could already afford to send their kids to private schools.**"

And these trends are also seeing a dramatic racial skew in terms of who is benefiting from universal vouchers:

- “Of the 32,236 new applications for EdChoice Expansion (which used to be called the “income- based” voucher, but isn’t anymore for all practical purposes (SEE BELOW)), a stunning 28,238 went to White students — nearly 9 in 10”
- Of the 44,839 new vouchers issued this year in all 5 [voucher] program, 33,874 went to White students — about 3 of every 4.

Finally, of those small percentage students that did use a voucher to actually switch from public to private, the data has been clear that their scores actually fell precipitously. ***They are being subsidized to go to worse schools!***

4) The Even Bigger Picture

Now, of course, this is just Ohio data.

But if you’re not from Ohio, don’t let that comfort you for even a moment.

As ***Laboratories of Autocracy*** always do, countless states are following the exact same disastrous course Ohio is.

Some are even ahead of Ohio in this explosion (ie. Arizona), some are just getting underway.

2023 was actually the year that the universalization of vouchers spread like wildfire across America. As [ProPublica](#) wrote a few months ago: “vouchers have expanded to become available to most or all children in 10 states: Arkansas, Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah and West Virginia.”

And have no doubt, these “policies” will generate the exact same results in all these states. It’s all the ***very logical and inevitable conclusion*** of removing all restrictions to vouchers.

This is not a bug. It is the core feature.

5) Finally, Some Exposure

One of the only rays of hope amid this bleak data is where it came from: journalists.

As advocates have cried out for years, often ignored, it’s clear that mainstream journalists are starting to see what an enormous issue this has become.

So big, Cleveland.Com featured this story on the top of the front page when it first came out. Good!

Then [they wrote an editorial](#), decrying the problem:

“[L]acking conscious, targeted efforts to make sure low-income Ohioans in poor-performing schools primarily benefited, Ohio’s EdChoice expansion as implemented was not the school-choice program Statehouse leaders promised.

The data suggest instead it became just a big taxpayer subsidy for those students already in private schools.

That should outrage every Ohio taxpayer -- and every parent of students in struggling districts who were supposed to benefit.”

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The Editorial Board then called on **“Ohio’s legislature, to be true to its stated school-choice motive, [to] rewrite the rules to guarantee that this money goes to children in underperforming schools, possibly relying on state report cards to set the standard.”**

But while I laud the criticism and the much-needed attention, there’s only one problem with this final plea.

The corrupt and gerrymandered Ohio legislature **IS being true to its actual goals**. It is achieving **exactly what is is intending**. Many of them say as much directly. Those who back them (Devos, etc.) say they same.

So of course they’re not going to rewrite the rules. The rules (ie, non-rules) are accomplishing their clear intent.

They will not stop doing this until we expose what is happening to voters across the state—who should indeed be outraged while they pay for it all—and we vote out the officeholders so hell bent on destroying the basic public education system of the State of Ohio. And the other states.

They’re going for broke.

But the people are on our side.

Which means that fighting back politically is the only answer.

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