

March 21 Ohio Capital Journal: More than 91,000 have applied for Ohio private school expansion.

Ohio Capital Journal reporter, Megan Henry details the huge number of voucher applicants this year compared to 2022 and 2023. The 2024 applicants greatly exceed the number of applicants voucher-supporting politicians told the public they anticipated. Similar to experience in other states, voucher-supporting politicians told the public that the projected number would be much less than it turned out to be.

This [Ohio Capital Journal article](#) also pinpoints the spin the Lt. Governor is giving with regard to the voucher expansion. The Lt. Governor, when visiting a private school in Columbus said, “It’s fantastic because more kids are getting the opportunity to get a great education and a school of their choice.” Possibly the Lt. Governor is not familiar with the research. Voucher students do less well academically than their public school peers in the district of residence.

More than 91,000 have applied for Ohio private school voucher expansion

87,312 scholarships have been awarded as of March 18 — amounting to \$394 million in allocated funding, according to the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce.

BY: [MEGAN HENRY](#) - MARCH 21, 2024 5:00 AM

There have been more than 91,100 applications for Ohio’s private school voucher expansion program so far this school year — a dramatic increase compared to previous years.

Out of 91,157 voucher expansion applications, 87,312 scholarships have been awarded as of March 18 — amounting to \$394,015,641 in allocated funding, according to the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. Applications are continuing to be accepted through the end of the fiscal year.

There were 26,390 voucher expansion applications submitted in 2023 with 24,323 scholarships awarded, and 25,011 applications submitted and 21,873 scholarships awarded in 2022.

Ohio lawmakers expanded private school voucher eligibility to 450% of the poverty line — or a household income of \$135,000 or less for a family of four — in the state budget that was signed into law last summer. Families above the \$135,000 threshold can [still be eligible for at least 10% of the maximum scholarship](#).

K-8 students can receive a \$6,165 scholarship and high schoolers can receive a \$8,407 scholarship in state funding under the expansion. 63,798 K-8 students were awarded a voucher scholarship and 20,495 high school students were awarded a scholarship, according to ODEW.

When it comes to traditional EdChoice private school vouchers for this year, 43,330 families submitted applications and 42,477 were awarded scholarships — \$270,987,877 in allocated funding, as of March 18, according to ODEW. 40,629 students were awarded traditional voucher scholarships in 2023 and 38,543 received traditional voucher scholarships in 2022.

Ohioans are divided on this issue. Private school families who use the vouchers are obviously fans, but public school advocates oppose it.

“Our number one concern about the expansion of school vouchers is that it means significant resources are going to private schools at the expense of the nearly 90% of Ohio kids who are attending our public schools,” said Ohio Education Association President Scott DiMauro.

Ohio Lt. Gov. Jon Husted, who was the Ohio House speaker when the private school voucher program called EdChoice passed in 2005, recently visited St. Mary’s School in the Catholic Diocese of Columbus as part of a statewide tour of private schools.

“It’s fantastic because more kids are getting the opportunity to get a great education and a school of their choice,” Husted said during his stop.

St Mary’s School

Eighth grader Sorcha Sweeney has attended St. Mary’s in Columbus’ German Village neighborhood since she was in preschool and is on an EdChoice scholarship.

“I’ve never really been interested in going anywhere else,” she said during a recent roundtable discussion during Husted’s visit to the school.

She will receive a full scholarship to attend Bishop Hartley High School next school year.

“I wouldn’t have ever been able to afford (St. Mary’s),” Sorcha mom’s Megan Sweeney said.

“Without a scholarship, it just wouldn’t be possible. ... Without a private education, she wouldn’t be anywhere close to where she is.”

[St. Mary’s tuition for preschool through eighth grade costs \\$7,750 and](#) 97% of St. Mary’s families use EdChoice Scholarships, said principal Gina Stull. Between 60-70% of students couldn’t afford the tuition without the scholarships, she said.

The school currently enrolls about 400 students and expects to have 500 students next year and a waitlist, Stull said.

“Through those initiatives, EdChoice has been a conduit for the big word of evangelization — trying to spread God’s love,” said St. Mary’s Pastor Vince Nguyen. “... With the EdChoice voucher program we have tried to love every single kid, catholic or not catholic, that comes through our doors here at St. Mary’s School.”

Despite the explosion of private school vouchers in Ohio, DiMauro said there has been little impact on Ohio’s public school enrollment.

“The evidence is very clear that the vast majority of those vouchers are going to students who are already attending private schools,” DiMauro said. “... It is about subsidizing private schools.”

Husted said the vouchers have “accountability and oversight” safeguards in place so something like the Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow online charter school scandal from 2018 will never happen again.

ECOT was forced to shut down after the Ohio Department of Education said Ohio’s first online charter school needed to repay much of its state aid for the 2015-16 and 2016-17 school years after the school inflated enrollment numbers. ECOT still owed [the state \\$117 million](#) in 2022.

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“I actually just spoke with (Ohio Department of Education and Workforce) Director (Steve) Dackin about this the other day, and I asked him whether he felt the safeguards are in place to make sure something like that didn’t happen again and he reassured me he thought there were,” Husted said.

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