

August 4 Akron Beacon Journal Editorial: Vouchers undermine Ohio public education

Recently Akron Board of Education passed a resolution of joinder in support of the EdChoice voucher litigation. This action seemed to have provoked some community discussion, including the attached Beacon [editorial](#).

The editorial raises some important questions about the accountability of private schools to the public. Since the public is footing the bill for the choice of private individuals, the public has the right to know how the voucher money is being spent. Since private schools are receiving tax money, these institutions should be required to be accountable and transparent to the general public.

EDITORIAL

Vouchers undermine Ohio public education

Ohio lawmakers continue trying to funnel taxpayer money into the hands of private schools under the guise of school choice.

But peel back the layers of such a choice offered under the state's now-expanded vouchers program, and the consequences become clear. Private schools, often religious, get public funds to spend with little oversight while draining public education systems of their desperately needed resources. It's another dangerous step toward crossing the line between church and state, and one that undermines the institutions responsible for educating 90% of students in Ohio.

Akron Public Schools is one of the latest school boards that voted to join the Ohio Coalition for Equity & Adequacy of School Funding's lawsuit against the state for its EdChoice voucher program. Numerous other districts across the region are involved, including Canton City and Canton Local school districts. The lawsuit is slated for a Nov. 4 trial date.

The effort to redirect funds back to the children and areas that need it the most is timely, as Akron Public Schools is seeking both a levy and a bond issue on the ballot this year.

Gov. Mike DeWine signed a bill last year to base eligibility on families' income. Now, nearly every student in Ohio is eligible for at least a partial scholarship, with amounts based on household income.

While opening the option to all students may seem equitable, it appears to be playing out similarly in Ohio as it has in other states, like Arizona, that have expanded their vouchers programs: The majority of students taking advantage of the program are not financially disadvantaged, and many have never even stepped foot in a public school system.

This is evident in state data, which shows that of the roughly 3,000 students within the Akron Public School district who used EdChoice vouchers in fiscal year 2024, nearly 85% are not low-income qualified. In Canton City Schools, 93% of voucher students are not low-income qualified.

Low income is considered to be at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. For a family of four, that's a household income of \$62,400.

In other words, taxpayers are not funding private school students who need it the most. In many cases, they're funding the private school students who can already afford to be there.

It's also a costly program. The Legislative Service Commission estimated that EdChoice Expansion vouchers would cost \$398 million in fiscal year 2024, but reports indicate it went over budget. The LSC estimated it will cost \$439 million in FY 25.

When students use EdChoice vouchers to attend private schools, their local public school districts receive less state funding - plain and simple.

Lawmakers who support vouchers have said they offer another choice rather than supporting failing school districts. But we ask why these lawmakers trust private schools that aren't subject to state testing to make better decisions than the system in place made to be held accountable?

It shouldn't take another ECOT scandal--one that cost taxpayers \$117 million after it was found the charter school fudged enrollment figures -- to realize handing funds over to private entities is a risky endeavor.

We can all agree that our children deserve quality education. Can we also agree that we as parents and taxpayers deserve to know exactly *how* our money is being used?

We will be closely watching in support of our regional districts as they cooperate with nearly 250 others across the state in pushing for transparency, accountability and providing the best education possible. When it comes to educating the future generation, money is not something to play with.

This piece was written by Akron Beacon Journal Opinion and Community Engagement Editor Teresa Bennett on behalf of the editorial board of the Beacon Journal. Editorials are fact-based assessments of issues of importance to the communities we serve. These are not the opinions of our reporting staff members, who strive for neutrality in their reporting.

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