

Jan Resseger's October 29, 2024, blog: Voucher Explosion Threatens Funding for Public Schools that Serve 90% of Ohio Students

Jan Resseger is an impassionate advocate of public education and a very talented blogger. Her October 29 blog provides an excellent review of how outrageous voucher expansion in Ohio threatens school district funding. Be aware that certain legislators will attempt to give the voucher scheme a gigantic financial boost, including private school facility funding.

Voucher Explosion Threatens Funding for Public Schools that Serve 90% of Ohio Students

Posted on [October 29, 2024](#) by [janresseger](#)

Ohio's outrageous voucher growth this year didn't quite cost the state a billion dollars, as public school educators and parents had feared, but the amount the state diverted to vouchers for the 2023-2024 school year came dangerously close. The FY 24 fiscal year ended on September 30, and the *Plain Dealer's* [Laura Hancock explains](#) the almost final cost:

"Ohio taxpayers subsidized families' private school tuition to the tune of \$970.7 million, according to all-but-final state numbers, a new high after the General Assembly expanded eligibility to include families of all income levels... Legislative fiscal estimates for the current (2024-2025) school year show the program will run up to an estimated \$1.06 billion."

[How did the Ohio Legislature expand vouchers](#) in the most recent state budget? In one of the state's five voucher programs, EdChoice Expansion, the amount awarded in each K-12 voucher was increased from \$5,500 to \$6,165 for students in K-8, and from \$7,500 to \$8,408 for high school students. The Legislature also raised the family income eligibility level from 150 percent of the federal poverty level to 450 percent of the federal poverty level (family income of \$135,000). And even wealthier families can qualify for a partial voucher, although the value ratchets down as incomes get higher. The minimum voucher for families earning above 750%, or \$225,000 or more for a family of four, is \$650 for each student in grades K-8 and \$950 per high schooler.

Hancock reports that the \$970.7 million cost of Ohio vouchers in the 2023-2024 school year includes the total amount the state spent for five different programs:

1. Autism Scholarships, \$141,732,927;
2. the original Cleveland Voucher Program, \$53,635,942;
3. Jon Peterson Special Needs Vouchers, \$95,557,314;
4. the original EdChoice Vouchers for students districts with low test scores, \$273,108,362; and
5. EdChoice-Expansion, which is Ohio's new universal voucher program, \$406,651,335.

The President of the Ohio Education Association, [Scott DiMauro](#) told the *Ohio Capital Journal's* Megan Henry, "When you have close to a billion dollars in public money that's going to private schools, that means a billion dollars in state money that's not available to meet the needs of the nearly 90% of kids that attend our public schools."

Senate President Matt Huffman has been Ohio's principle strategist for diverting public dollars to private schools through vouchers. Hancock quotes Huffman's spokesperson, John Fortney justifying school privatization and claiming that, "K-12 public schools received record funding from the \$25.3 billion that the (2-year state) budget directed toward education." That figure describes the state's investment in K-12 education over the two years the budget covers.

[Hancock more precisely traces](#) where those dollars ended up: “That \$25.3 billion figure, however, represents all education-related spending in the two-year state budget: Money for K-12 schools, money dispersed to private schools through vouchers and charter, STEM, and vocational schools and career centers. It also includes some one-time education spending such as Gov. Mike DeWine’s ‘science of reading’ initiative. The actual amount of state aid that lawmakers directed to public schools, which includes K-12 districts, as well as charter, STEM, and vocational schools, was \$9.6 billion.”

When Ohio’s legislature expanded school vouchers as part of the state budget, the state did so by raising the income eligibility level—creating a government-funded entitlement for all families no matter how high their income. Earlier this month, [Policy Matters Ohio confirmed](#): “Many households already sending their students to private schools—without help from the state—became eligible, applied for, and received EdChoice Expansion vouchers. In 2024, Ohio gave out nearly 70,000 new EdChoice Expansion Vouchers, but private school enrollment grew by fewer than 3,000 students.” Last spring, blogger and former member of the Ohio House of Representatives, [Steve Dyer examined](#) which families are benefiting from Ohio’s new school voucher entitlement: “According to state data, more new EdChoice Expansion 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... than there are flowing to subsidize private high school students whose families make less than 1/2 that much.”

Policy Matters Ohio reminds readers that the amount the state diverted to private school vouchers for the 2023-2024 school year would have been sufficient to fully fund the Fair School Funding Plan. For years, experts have shown that the state of Ohio has been failing to fulfill its responsibility to ensure that all of the state’s 610 public school districts are funded adequately and equitably. Legislators have responded by slowly phasing in the new school funding formula over six years. The Legislature has funded the first two steps of the phase in, with the final step due to be included in the next biennial budget. Debate on the budget, which must be passed by June 30, will begin this coming winter. After the exploding costs for school vouchers, Ohioans wonder if the legislature will still have the money to fund the Fair School Funding Plan.

The state’s enormous diversion of tax dollars to the EdChoice-Expansion voucher program further threatens the full phase-in of the Fair School Funding Plan, especially because the growth of vouchers only exacerbates the revenue shortage created by two decades of tax cutting by the Ohio Legislature. [Policy Matters Ohio recently reported](#) that the Legislature’s persistent tax cutting since 2005 has resulted in “a loss of about \$12.8 billion a year in revenue that could otherwise be used to meet the needs of Ohioans.”