

Jan Resseger weighs in on how the EdChoice voucher scheme is HURTING OHIO

Jan Resseger's March 20 blog is timely. It should be shared.

Ohioans are becoming alarmed about the EdChoice voucher raid on the Ohio tax budget.

[Journalists and Advocates Share Key Resources to Address Public School Funding in Ohio Budget Debate](#)

By **janresseger** on March 20, 2025

As the Ohio Legislature debates the new biennial FY 2026-2027 budget, which must be passed by June 30th of this year, an issue of enormous concern is the impact on state public school funding of what turned out to be the annual billion dollar universal private school tuition voucher program the state launched as part of the budget passed in 2023. As the legislature continues to debate, here are three issues that should be the subject of legislative advocacy this spring by Ohio's citizens who value public schools.

No Matter How High a Family's Income, All of the Kids Now Qualify for a Voucher

The *Plain Dealer's* [Laura Hancock just printed](#) graphs and tables documenting that, thanks to the legislature's making EdChoice Expansion private school tuition vouchers universally available in the current budget, "Nearly 20% of state spending on private school vouchers now goes to families at the top income brackets in the state." In a program that defines "welfare for the wealthy," the state of Ohio now awards private school tuition vouchers to 35,000 students whose family income is above \$140,400 dollars per year. Hancock adds: "For context, the median annual income of a household in Ohio was \$69,680 between 2019 and 2023, according to the Census Bureau."

"EdChoice Expansion amounts are determined by a family's income level relative to federal poverty rates." Ohio families can qualify for a full voucher for each of their children with income up to 450% of the federal poverty level---\$140,400---and a reduced-size voucher if family income is higher.

Each private school student in the state from a family whose income is \$140,400 or below can qualify for a full voucher worth \$6,166, if the student is in grades K-8, and \$8,408, if the student is in grades 9-12. For families with higher incomes, the amount of the per-pupil voucher diminishes. If a family's income is in the top bracket, above \$234,000, each of that family's K-8 students still qualifies for a private school tuition voucher of \$650, and each high school student qualifies for a \$950 voucher.

Hancock's graph shows that in the current year, nearly 35,000 students qualified for vouchers even though their family income was above \$140,400, and that that 17% percent of all students now carrying vouchers to private schools are in the very top bracket---with family income over \$234,000. She adds, however, "that most of the families new to EdChoice were not new to private schools." These students were already enrolled in private schools and merely experienced a tuition reduction from when they applied for a voucher.

Ohio Legislature Plans to Grow Private School Vouchers, Which Get a Bigger Funding Boost than Public Schools In the Governor's Proposed Budget

In February, Ohio's most experienced school funding expert, [Howard Fleeter estimated](#) that, in Governor DeWine's proposed budget---even if, as part of the budget, the legislature fully passes the last part of a six-year phase-in of the new Fair School Funding Formula---the legislature has found a way to reduce public school funding by plugging outdated numbers into a formula which was designed to measure what it really costs to educate a typical public school student. This deception will result in a \$103.4 million decrease in public school funding from what the state spent in FY 25. By contrast, vouchers, which come out of the same School Foundation part of the budget, are proposed by the Governor to increase by \$265.4 million

over FY 25 levels. ([This blog recently explained](#) in more detail how, in his budget proposal, the Governor managed to cut public school funding even while fully phasing in the new formula, which was originally designed by experts to be fair, equitable, and adequate.)

Vouchers Especially Hurt Public Schools in Rural and Small Town Ohio

The Ohio League of Women Voters [just released an updated report](#) by education specialist, Susan Kaeser, showing that the impact of school privatization (at public expense) on the state's distribution of public school funding is complicated by a rural/urban divide that spreads the cost of the vouchers across the state, but makes the vouchers useful only in a few counties that have sufficient population to support the existence of private schools.

Kaeser explains: "With the adoption of the first phase of the Fair School Funding Plan in 2021, public schools, private schools and charter schools are now in the same line item in the state budget... Every student who uses a charter school or a private school (with a publicly funded voucher) reduces state funding awarded to the state's public schools... An individual choice has consequences for all the children who attend a public school. Every time a student leaves a public school (with a voucher), costs rarely decrease (for the school district that loses that student) but funds for those who remain are diminished. This is especially important in rural schools where the public schools are the primary education resource and essential community institution..."

In the report's [separate executive summary](#), Kaeser continues: "Most of Ohio relies heavily on public schools but taxpayers are funding charter schools and private school vouchers that are concentrated in 13 counties." "(P)ublic school enrollment as a share of (total) enrollment... is smallest in six urban counties.... They are Lucas, Montgomery, Summit, Hamilton, Cuyahoga, and Franklin counties." In other words, most students who use vouchers or attend charter schools in Ohio live in cities---Toledo, Dayton, Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus---or the suburbs that surround them.

When additional students choose private school tuition vouchers, whether they are leaving a public school or using a voucher to pay the private school tuition their parents are already covering, the state extracts the vouchers from the School Foundation budget and thereby reduces the amount of state money available for funding public schools. Local school districts must then put operating levies on the ballot to raise local property taxes for hiring enough teachers and school counselors, for providing the required basics, and for affording advanced math, a school library, and art and music. We all ought to remember that in the [DeRolph decision](#), one of the reasons the Ohio Supreme Court found Ohio's school funding unconstitutional was the state's "overreliance" on local property taxes.

[Kaeser concludes the primary report](#): "Public education is available everywhere; is the dominant education provider in every county; and is the cornerstone institution of rural communities... Any time a student leaves a public school it reduces the funds available to the students left behind. There is a double impact if that student uses a voucher to pay tuition. Because charter schools and private schools are concentrated in a few urban counties, a significant share of the state's education resources are being directed into urban counties to (private or charter) schools that don't exist in most of the state, and away from the public schools..."

To assist public school advocates during the current state budget debate, [Kaeser's report includes](#) detailed maps and tables showing the mass of rural counties where students depend primarily and sometimes exclusively on the community's public schools.