

## **The treacherous school privatizers in the Ohio legislature have put another menacing, unconstitutional, student harming proposal in the House version of the state budget—Education Savings Accounts (ESA's)**

The ESA's legislation to funnel tax funds into NONCHARTERED NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS has been bouncing around in the legislature in previous years but has not had the support to pass. The school privatization legislators have put it into the House version of the State Budget. This is the route that all other school privatization legislation has been enacted—through the State Budget Bill process. This bill is as dangerous to the preservation of the public common school as a king cobra in one's bed.

The nonchartered nonpublic schools in Ohio are established and operate with no public oversight or regulations; currently these institutions are not eligible for any tax support available to chartered private schools.

The school privatization zealots in the legislature have devised a way to steal more funds from the public treasury by giving to parents of those students enrolled in these "schools" money to transfer to the "school".

These "schools" can be started and operated by merely notifying the school district superintendent that they are up and running. No verification. No questions asked. No accountability. No transparency. Just give me the money and get out of my face!

Try to imagine how many of this kind of "schools" will be started when folks find out that tax money is available to them. What are these legislators thinking? Where is the outrage?

### **'Vouchers by another name:' Ohio House unveils private school expansion plan**

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Lawmakers propose new educational savings accounts for certain religious schools with minimal state oversight, despite concerns about accountability. Ridley Hudson | MLive.com

By

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COLUMBUS, Ohio - Republican state lawmakers want to offer more tax dollars to private schools, with the Ohio House last week unveiling proposals that offer tens of millions of dollars for parents with children in private schools that are virtually unregulated by the state.

These schools, known as "nonchartered nonpublic" schools, are exempt from state chartering requirements because of "truly held religious beliefs," [according to state law](#). They face far fewer state regulations than chartered private schools.

Parents would get an estimated \$35.1 million via state-funded "educational savings accounts" to spend on expenses associated with the schools, according to the [proposal unveiled last week in the Ohio House's version](#) of the budget.

The proposal is the latest in a series of moves Ohio lawmakers have made to expand public funding for private schools. The General Assembly extended EdChoice-Expansion vouchers to families of all income levels starting last school year, resulting in an explosion in voucher spending to [nearly \\$1 billion](#).

EdChoice-Expansion scholarships are available to most private schools. But nonchartered nonpublic schools are not eligible for those scholarships, or any other the state currently offers.

The House budget would give them new access to tax dollars. It also seeks to expand eligibility of two of the five existing private school voucher programs and increase tax credits for homeschooling families.

The money for the unchartered private schools could create constitutional problems, as those schools cater to Ohioans with strongly held religious convictions who prefer less state oversight, said Scott DiMauro, president of the Ohio Education Association. [The First Amendment's Establishment Clause prohibits](#) government from establishing a religion or promoting one.

“At a time when legislators claim there’s not enough resources to fully and fairly fund public schools, which serve 90% of all kids, this is a direction that is completely wrong-headed,” he said.

Public education advocates had wanted the legislature to fund the final phases of a six-year school funding overhaul plan, which would have injected billions of new money into public schools. [The Ohio House largely rejected](#) that plan.

Aaron Baer, president of the conservative Center for Christian Virtue, said the funding mechanism proposed for the unchartered private schools – state-funded educational savings accounts for parents - are preferable to school vouchers.

Currently, vouchers can only be used for tuition. But the House’s educational savings accounts would allow parents to spend money on uniforms, tuition, school fees, books and other expenses.

Baer hopes in the future, all voucher programs are converted into these savings accounts.

“We love EdChoice. We’re big advocates of it,” he said. “Our dream situation would be an ESA (education savings account.) I think most folks that advocate for school choice would say ESAs are the gold standard on maximizing freedom for families. That’s the direction we’d like the state to move.”

However, ESAs have had been controversial in other states.

[The Tampa Bay Times reported](#) that Florida parents used money for Disney World passes. In Arizona, parents spent ESA money on ski lift tickets, a grand piano, horse therapy and other eye-raising items, [Politico reported](#).

Baer acknowledged concerns about waste and fraud.

“I think for the most part, if you look at the Arizona (and Florida programs) the accusations of fraud and waste, you’ll find a handful of things, audacious things that people make a big deal out of,” he said.

### **Up to \$6,306 per student**

The House proposal would provide families with a child in unchartered private schools with a savings account containing up to 75% of the value of a full EdChoice voucher.

That would provide \$4,625 for students in K-8 and \$6,306 for 9-12.

The EdChoice voucher amount decreases for higher-income families. Similarly, the House plan proposes a reduction in state funding for savings accounts for wealthier families.

### **READ MORE: [Private school vouchers: Ohio’s richest families access scholarships](#)**

“It’s state money,” said DiMauro, the OEA president. “It’s another voucher program. Educational savings accounts are vouchers by another name.”

Under the House’s plan, the accounts could be used beginning in the 2026-2027 school year.

### **Differences in private schools**

[To receive a state charter](#), Catholic and other chartered private schools must provide the state documents about its governing board, an affidavit of intent to not discriminate and racial non-discriminatory policies,

teacher and staff handbooks, and other paperwork. The Ohio Department of Education and Workforce also visits the site.

Chartered public schools are expected to use data to inform their improvement plans and must be accredited by organizations whose standards have been reviewed by the state.

Unchartered private schools' requirements are lighter [under state law](#).

The schools are required to certify in a report to parents -- that's also submitted to the state -- that the school meets minimum education standards. The standards include minimum instructional hours, recording student attendance, and the teaching of most subjects, such as English language arts, math, science and social studies. Teachers must have a bachelor's degree.

Schools must comply with applicable health, fire and safety laws.

DiMauro said it's problematic that these schools will financially benefit under the Ohio House's plan.

"The reason these schools are in the law in first place is historically they've said, 'We don't want any state oversight. In exchange for state oversight, we understand we don't qualify for state taxpayer dollars,'" he said.

Baer, from the Center for Christian Virtue, argued that government regulation doesn't guarantee quality education, pointing to the struggles of many Ohio public school students in reading and math.

"We want to make sure these dollars are used responsibly," he said. "That's why we see this as a good first step."

Over the long run, Baer said he hopes the state ends the distinction between chartered and unchartered private schools.

### **Other proposed school choice boosts**

The House version of the budget would increase the tax credit offered to homeschooling families. The tax credit, to be used for education expenses, is currently \$250 per household.

State Rep. Brian Stewart, a Pickaway County Republican and chair of the House Finance Committee, announced during the budget unveiling last Tuesday that the proposed tax credit would increase to \$250 per homeschooled student.

The House proposal also would expand eligibility for the Jon Peterson Special Needs and Autism scholarships, two of Ohio's five voucher programs.

The House's plan expands the John Peterson scholarship to three- and four-year-olds. Currently it begins in kindergarten.

It would clarify that the Autism Scholarship is available if the child is at least three years old and up to 22 years old.

This will likely increase scholarship payments, according to [a budget document](#), but the House budget also allows the scholarships to be used for remote services, so that could offset the increases.

The House also wants to boost the maximum awards for both scholarships from the current \$32,445 up to \$34,000 a year.

For the Autism scholarship, that will increase voucher spending by \$7.7 million in the fiscal year that begins July 1 and by \$8.3 million the following fiscal year. Spending for the Jon Peterson scholarship would increase by \$2.7 million in the fiscal year that begins in July and \$2.9 million the following year.

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