

**U.S. Senator Jon Husted championed charter schools and school vouchers in Ohio and now is a voucher zealot in the U.S. Senate.**

At an ECOT charter school event, an ECOT administrator remarked that there would be no ECOT without the support of Jon Husted. How did ECOT turn out? Hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars paid to ECOT for which no students were served.

Mr. Husted was a powerful supporter of the Ohio voucher scheme as a state official. Now as a U.S. Senator, he is pushing the voucher scheme with zeal.

**Voucher champion Jon Husted takes the school choice debate to a national stage**

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WASHINGTON - After championing school voucher programs in Ohio throughout his political career, U.S. Sen. Jon Husted brought his advocacy to a national stage at a Wednesday Senate committee hearing.

"Every child has a different background, they have a different need, and we can't expect public schools to meet all of those needs," the Columbus-area Republican told a Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing on "Empowering Families Through Educational Choice in America."

Coming the day that [Trump signed an order](#) recognizing "National School Choice Week," the hearing highlighted a nationwide tax credit program established under last year's "One Big Beautiful Bill" that will allow a \$1,700 deduction for contributing to a scholarship-granting organization.

It also featured testimony from Cris Gulacy-Worrel of Powell, Ohio, who is vice president and founding team member of Oakmont Education, a network of dropout recovery public charter schools that serves more than 5,500 students across Ohio, Iowa and Michigan.

Oakmont focuses on students who have dropped out or are struggling in traditional settings, she told the committee. She said its average student is over 18 years old, reading at a fourth or fifth grade level, and has attended three or more high schools before enrolling at Oakmont.

"For far too long, we've been told school choice is about essays or public charter schools," Gulacy-Worrel testified. "What we're really talking about is educational plurality, a system with room for many models and many pathways to success."

Through career technical education, students earn industry-recognized credentials in fields including skilled trades, community health and wellness, and business and entrepreneurship. She said Oakmont graduated 1,309 students last year and has placed more than 4,500 young people directly into the workforce over the past three years.

The hearing also featured sharp criticism of school choice programs, particularly education savings account vouchers.

Marisol Garcia, an eighth-grade social studies teacher in Phoenix and president of the Arizona Education Association, testified about what she called the "consequences" of Arizona's universal voucher program, which lawmakers enacted in 2022.

"Today, Arizona has hundreds of school options, but fewer children play on the same sports teams, wait for the same bus or graduate from the same schools as their neighbors," Garcia testified. "Many of you come from close-knit towns, and I ask you to consider the role of your neighborhood schools in your development and making your community stronger, and what we lose when these disappear."

Garcia said a November study by the RAND Corporation found that 70% of Arizona voucher recipients were already attending private schools or homeschool programs before accepting vouchers. Students with disabilities, who once made up a majority of voucher recipients, now represent only 20% of the program, she said.

Since Arizona's program has no income cap, Garcia said a disproportionate share of funding flows to wealthy families.

She noted that private school tuition in Phoenix can exceed \$20,000 a year, leaving families thousands of dollars short even with vouchers, and that private schools can reject students for any reason.

"For low income families, vouchers often only offer the illusion of choice," said Garcia.

Garcia also raised oversight concerns, saying voucher-funded schools in Arizona are not required to conduct background checks or be accredited. She cited reports showing taxpayer dollars going to "diamond rings, lingerie and other items" after the state announced it would automatically approve \$2,000 expenditures in 2024.

"Roughly a billion dollars a year is diverted from public schools in our state to private hands, and districts have had to lay off educators and close schools," Garcia testified.

U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont, the committee's top Democrat, criticized what he called the creation of "a two tier education system in America, private schools for the wealthy and well connected and severely underfunded and under resourced, public schools for low income, disabled and working class kids."

Sanders cited data showing that since 1967, there have been 18 state ballot initiatives to create private school vouchers, and "voters have rejected every single one."

"We should not be taking money from public schools and giving it to private schools that get to pick and choose which students to teach," Sanders said. "Private schools that reject students because they have a disability. Private schools that reject students because of their religion. Private schools that reject students based on the income of their families."

Husted, who served in Ohio's legislature and as lieutenant governor before being appointed to the Senate, was more sanguine. He recounted his history with school choice legislation in Ohio, beginning with his first bill to create a charter school option in the 1990s when Dayton had "the worst school district in the whole state."

"We tried to work with the Dayton public schools to change things. We couldn't change it," Husted said. As speaker of the Ohio House, he helped create the EdChoice Scholarship, which started with 4,000 students and now serves 160,000 students in Ohio, he said.

"The amazing thing about what school choice does and what Chris is talking about is that every child has a different background, they have a different need, and we can't expect public schools to meet all of those needs," Husted said. "They do a great job in many cases, but there are also unique pathways to serve the unique needs of every student."

#### [Sabrina Eaton](#)

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