

UNIVERSAL VOUCHERS

THE CASE AGAINST UNIVERSAL
VOUCHERS IN MISSISSIPPI



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- **Access to a quality public education is a good thing for the entire community. When education becomes privatized, it cripples a student’s ability to succeed and hinders progress for a better future Mississippi**
 - In Mississippi, 90% of students attend public schools, while 10% of students attend private schools.
- **However, quality public education is under threat from misleading rhetoric that promotes school choice as a way to privatize schools, shifting control, funding, and management from the public to private hands, and weakening public education overall.**
 - "School choice" originated in the 1950s as a racist response to desegregation, reinforcing segregation then and now. While parents already choose between public and private schools, ongoing divestment from public education risks recreating a system like the segregation of the 1950s.
- **Vouchers may be referred to as “Scholarships,” “Education Freedom Accounts,” or “Parent Empowerment,” but they all function the same—a deceptive way to remove public dollars from public education.**
 - In some extreme cases, school vouchers can divert [money](#) that’s already been designated for public schools through their state funding formula, sometimes by directly re-routing education funding to private schools, and other times indirectly by making it harder to pay teachers, buy new textbooks, and provide quality after-school programming.
 - And since the largest share of state spending is on public education, reducing overall state revenues almost inevitably reduces the available funding for public schools.
 - In addition, voucher costs often grow beyond what is projected, thus further reducing overall revenues for other state spending.
- **Funding does not simply return to the public schools once your child leaves a private institution.**
 - The Mississippi State Legislature is responsible for allocating funding for public schools, who in return, distributes it to school districts. These districts use the money to cover their schools’ annual operating costs. When your child enrolls in a private school, the money leaves the public school system and does not return if your child returns to public schools in the middle of the school year. As a result, your money is now invested into a private school system.
- **Private schools are not an option for most students.**
 - Private schools do not exist in every part of Mississippi, especially in rural areas. If voucher programs are expanded, fly-by-night private schools could pop up across the state, offering “choice” while profiting from public tax dollars.

- Providing vouchers to private schools may also [limit access to equitable education](#) for low-income families, students with lower test scores, students with disabilities, English language learners, students from rural communities, and students from marginalized racial or ethnic groups.
- **Vouchers impact public accountability.**
 - Mississippi's public schools are held to rigorous accountability standards, so lawmakers should not allow public, taxpayer dollars to be spent at private or religious schools that do not have to meet the same standards.
 - For example, private schools do not have to report student achievement data to the state, do not have to meet the same standards for hiring teachers, and do not have to meet the Every Student Succeeds Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Act.
 - As a result, vouchers leave behind many students, including the most vulnerable, because private schools are under no obligation to admit your child, even if they receive a voucher, and, if admitted, may not offer the special services they need.
 - For example, students with disabilities and English language learners are underserved in voucher schools. In addition, for years, less than 40% of the vouchers were used because students were denied admission, parents were unable to find suitable schools, and private schools charged more than the awarded voucher.
- **Vouchers do not raise student achievement for all.**
 - Vouchers have been shown to decrease, not increase, student academic achievement. Despite claims that school voucher programs lead to gains in student success, there has been no credible research to suggest that vouchers improve academic performance. In fact, research shows the use of school vouchers is equivalent to missing out on more than one-third of a year of classroom learning.
 - Not to mention, in states with voucher programs, most families who benefitted were already covering the costs of private schools and homeschooling prior to the voucher becoming available. [A study of school voucher programs](#) in seven states shows how state voucher spending from 2008 to 2019 increased by hundreds of millions of dollars annually, while K-12 spending for public education declined despite public school enrollment increases.
- **Instead of expanding voucher programs in Mississippi, state lawmakers should protect and support public education by:**
 - **Fully Funding Public Education:** Achieving more equitable and increased funding for public schools can decrease the perceived need for vouchers. State lawmakers can make quality public education a more attainable and an effective choice for families by ensuring that all public schools, regardless of zip code, are adequately resourced; and thus, able to meet the diverse needs of all students.

This requires fully funding the state's public school funding formula, keeping public dollars in public schools, increasing investments in public education in the state, protecting the state's income tax system, and increasing state revenue to ensure that more state funds are available to address the needs of students, teachers, schools, and communities across the state.

- o **Support Teachers and Staff:** Well-supported teachers and better public schools can reduce the appeal of private schools. To support teachers and school staff, state policymakers should raise teacher salaries to attract and retain qualified educators and provide additional resources for professional development and classroom support.
- o **Support High-Need Students and Schools:** Underperforming schools, particularly in communities experiencing poverty and rural communities in Mississippi, can be improved by directing more resources to those areas. This can be done by upgrading and maintaining school facilities, ensuring a safe and conducive learning environment for all students, and fostering strong community and parental involvement in shaping education policy. In addition, directing funds and resources toward tutoring programs, special education services, gifted programs, mental health supports, and summer enrichment programs can reduce the need for alternative options such as vouchers.



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