



Why Homeschoolers Don't Want School Vouchers

by [Dr. Susan Berry](#)

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The parental right to choose where and how one's child is educated is one that homeschooling parents say is the foundation of their commitment to home education. And while the phrase "school choice" may be a concept based in conservative philosophy, most of the highly independent and growing homeschooling population in the United States rejects the type of school choice known as the "school voucher" system.

As described by the [Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice](#) – named after American economists Milton and Rose Friedman – [school vouchers](#) allow all or part of the public funding reserved for a child's education to be given to a private or religious school of the parents' choice.

With homeschooling having [increased](#) 61.8 percent over the past decade, parents who choose to educate their children themselves have become a strong voice for education freedom in the United States. The reason for their objection to school vouchers can readily be seen in the current effects of vouchers on private schools in some areas.

States such as Indiana and Wisconsin have been vastly expanding their school voucher programs, a situation that causes many homeschoolers to be wary, as school vouchers often invite much more government regulation into private schools.

In May of 2014, the Friedman Foundation published a study by Andrew Catt titled "[Public Rules on Private Schools](#)," in which Catt provided a means for measuring the regulatory burdens placed upon private and religious schools that seek to participate in vouchers, tax-credit scholarships and education savings accounts.

While Catt [states](#) that just about all private schools have some level of regulation even without accepting school choice options, he found the voucher programs had more regulations associated with them.

The study led Jeff Spalding, director of fiscal policy and analysis for the Friedman Foundation, to [articulate](#) the problem of increased regulations for private schools that wish to participate in school choice programs:

With the surge in school choice legislation over the past five years, more attention has turned toward the effects of new regulations on the operations of private schools. A pressing concern is how new regulatory environments might impact the supply of participating private schools. This is a matter of significant importance to school choice advocates because, at a very basic level, there is no choice if there is no supply of real alternatives to traditional public schools.

In an earlier [study](#) in 2010 at Cato Institute, Andrew Coulson looked at the question of whether school vouchers and tax credits increase regulation of private schools. He ultimately found that “vouchers, but not tax credits, impose a substantial and statistically significant additional regulatory burden on participating private schools.”

Voucher programs, Coulson concluded, are more likely to “suffocate the very markets to which they aim to expand access,” because state funds—which invariably come with state regulation—are directly transferred, in the form of vouchers, to parents to spend in an alternate education setting.

In [Indiana](#), for example, a coalition of grassroots conservative groups recently protested any increase in regulations for private schools that agreed to accept school vouchers and any requirements that those schools accept the state’s rebranded Common Core-aligned standards.

“Particularly egregious is the requirement that voucher-accepting schools administer the new assessment aligned to Indiana’s rebranded/Common Core-aligned standards,” said the coalition.

In [Wisconsin](#), Republican Gov. Scott Walker is a champion for school vouchers, [referring](#) to them recently as a “moral and economic imperative.” In an address to the American Federation for Children (AFC), Walker said young people in the United States need access to a good education whether that is in a public school, a charter school, a private school, a virtual school or in a homeschool environment.

However, the [Wisconsin Parents’ Association](#) (WPA), a grassroots homeschoolers’ organization, is adamantly opposed to school vouchers for homeschoolers, and its members do not want to be included on the list of recipients.

In an [open letter](#) to Wisconsin legislators in January, WPA wrote:

Programs that give public moneys to homeschoolers would undermine our freedom to homeschool, as would legislation that attempts to guarantee our rights and freedoms. Government “favors” would require that homeschools be accountable to the government, which would make homeschools more like public schools. Our goal is to make your job as easy as possible and our homeschooling as successful as possible. No new homeschooling legislation is needed, and essentially any legislation would have drawbacks and risks.

“Parents already have rights and responsibilities,” states WPA. “They come from God or nature, not the government. Proposals that supposedly guarantee parental rights backfire because they give the government a way to define and control fundamental rights.”

Tina Hollenbeck, a homeschooling parent in Wisconsin, tells Breitbart News she is “deeply opposed to vouchers for anyone, especially homeschoolers.”

“What no one really seems to understand is that school vouchers also destroy academic freedom,” she said.

The general public rants about “separation of church and state,” etc., but that’s not the real problem. The real issue is that once a school takes state/taxpayer money, it is accountable to the state for how those funds are used – as it should be, really, since accountability is important. The problem is that the state can – and does – make rules that restrict academic freedom in those schools (i.e., the school cannot teach the tenets of its faith, the school must use Common Core, etc.). School vouchers are a Trojan horse for those schools, who foolishly believe they will get the money without any strings.

Hollenbeck said the same is true of the offer of school vouchers to homeschoolers.

“In Wisconsin, the idea is being put forth in order to snare us into taking their money and, thus, giving up freedom,” she added. “We homeschoolers are patently stupid if we think we’ll get the carrot without the stick, and we should not be willing to throw away our academic freedom for a few bucks. As Benjamin Franklin famously said, ‘Those who sacrifice liberty for security deserve neither.’”

Hollenbeck describes the very “carrot and stick” process by which most states adopted the highly unpopular Common Core standards. States were offered the opportunity to receive federal funds from Race to the Top, a program in President Obama’s 2009 stimulus bill, as well as waivers from the restrictions of No Child Left Behind in exchange for the adoption of a “common” set of standards, their associated tests, and massive student data collection systems.

Homeschoolers in other states also reject school vouchers and the governmental strings that are often tied to them.

Matthew Gerwitz, a veteran homeschooling parent from Florida, tells Breitbart News, “If we have learned anything about government involvement over the centuries, it is that nothing comes without strings.”

Gerwitz explains school vouchers should not even be necessary for any child.

“Even if school vouchers were offered with the best intentions, they could never remain that way because government, by default, seeks to control,” he said. “School vouchers are a bad idea that should be avoided at every level — especially among homeschoolers.”

“There is no need to eat the ‘king’s meat,’” Gerwitz continued. “Homeschoolers do not need the good graces of government to do what’s right by their kids; non-homeschoolers need to learn to stop depending on the government as surrogate parents. Vouchers are completely unnecessary if parents do their jobs.”

Kirsten Lombard, the Madison-based editor of [Common Ground on Common Core](#), tells Breitbart News that already in Wisconsin, as well as in Indiana, “voucher students are required to take Common Core-aligned assessments.”

She adds that voucher schools will eventually have to require all their students – not just those using vouchers – to take the Common Core assessments, and cites the reasons why:

First, the cost of maintaining two separate data systems will become inconvenient and/or cost-prohibitive. Second, having only voucher students taking the assessments is likely to cause voucher schools to appear as though they are ranking poorly in relationship to Common Core-aligned “accountability” systems; so they’ll need a larger sample of their students, particularly those that they believe will perform strongly, taking the assessments in order to ensure that they remain eligible to accept voucher moneys. Vouchers sound great, but ultimately they are little more than a recipe for government control of education.

The sobering reality that further entanglement with the Common Core standards and tests could come along with school vouchers is underscored by the fact that Common Core champions [Bill Gates](#), the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#), and [Jeb Bush](#) are all major supporters as well of school voucher programs and charter schools.