



## **Illinois' planned scholarship tax credit is not a voucher program**

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One of the parts of Illinois' latest plan to pay for schools is a scholarship tax credit program. And despite what Illinois' teachers unions are saying, a tax credit program is not the same as school vouchers.

Both school vouchers and a scholarship tax credit program allow parents more of a choice in where they send their kids to school.

Still, they aren't the same thing. Neal McCluskey with the Cato Institute said a voucher program gives parents taxpayer money to choose a school for their kids, while a scholarship tax credit program gives people a tax break when they donate their own money to a private school, which then can offer kids scholarships.

"Not only do taxpayers choose whether or not they want to make these donations, [but] depending on how the law is written, they choose to whom they give them," McCluskey said. "They may give them to Catholic schools, they might give them to Baptist schools, they might give them to arts-based schools, they might give them to Montessori schools. They have all sorts of options."

Illinois' plan would allow for a five-year, \$75 million scholarship program that would provide donors a tax credit.

Multiple reports say Illinois' teachers unions, including the politically powerful Chicago Teachers Union, adamantly oppose the plan.

McCluskey said there's something noteworthy that teachers unions fear any kind of school choice.

"The irony here is essentially a concession," McCluskey said. "They don't say it. But it's a concession that the public schools aren't providing what most people would pick if they had the ability to take their money, money that may have gone to public schools, to private schools."

McCluskey noted scholarship dollars are not dollars that would have gone to public schools.

If Illinois lawmakers are interested in a true voucher program, McCluskey said they can look to Wisconsin.

If, McCluskey said, legislators want to see a state with robust school choice, they should check out Florida's system.