



"Backpack Bill" Voucher Expansion Would be a Huge Win for Ohio families

Bill Would Make Every Ohio Child Eligible For A Voucher Program

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Legislation introduced in the Ohio House of Representatives would ensure that every child in the Buckeye State would be eligible to participate in the state's highly popular Educational Choice Scholarship voucher program, or a program of similar design.

This "Backpack Bill" (as in education funds will follow a child like a backpack) has been introduced as a "Legislative Intent Bill" while lawmakers debate Ohio's education funding formula. The bill states, "It is the General Assembly's intent that sections of the [Ohio] Revised Code be amended, enacted, or repealed to create a thorough and efficient statewide foundation funding formula for the education of all students in this state, including students enrolled in city, local, and exempted village school districts, community schools...STEM schools...and nonpublic schools, that allows families to choose the option for all computed funding amounts associated with students' education to follow them to the schools they attend."

Currently, the state's Educational Choice Scholarship Program is only open to students from families with household incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. A little over 34,000 children in Ohio make use of this program. The Buckeye State also has two additional income-based voucher programs, the Income-Based Scholarship Program (16,000 participating students) and the Cleveland Scholarship Program (7,100 participating students), as well as two voucher programs designed for students with special needs: the Autism Scholarship Program (4,100 students) and the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program (6,800 participating students.) There is also just-launched, income-based Ohio Tax-Credit Scholarship Program.

Copious empirical research on school choice programs such as vouchers find they offer families improved access to high-quality schools that meet their children's unique needs and circumstances, and that these programs improve academic performance and attainment and deliver a quality education at lower cost than traditional public schools. Additionally, these

programs benefit public school students and taxpayers by increasing competition, decreasing segregation, and improving civic values and practices.

Research also shows students at private schools are less likely than their public school peers to experience problems such as alcohol abuse, bullying, drug use, fighting, gang activity, racial tension, theft, vandalism, and weapon-based threats. There is also a strong causal link suggesting private school choice programs improve the mental health of participating students.

It is probably for these reasons, and also because teacher unions have repeatedly played politics with school closings during the COVID-19 pandemic in direct conflict with students' best interests, that vouchers are more popular with parents than ever before. Polling done by EdChoice released in December 2020 found 73 percent support for vouchers among the general public and 78 percent among current school parents, the highest level of support these programs has received in the organization's eight years of polling on the issue. This represents a 6-percentage point increase over 2019. These findings are mirrored in the American Federation for Children's seventh-annual National School Choice Poll, released in January 2021, which saw 74 percent support for voucher programs.

Expanding access to the Educational Choice Scholarship Program via this "Backpack Bill" would be of monumental benefit to Ohio children. The goal of public education in the Buckeye State today and in the years to come should be to allow all parents to choose which schools their children attend, require every school to compete for every student who walks through its doors, and make sure every child has the opportunity to attend a quality school. There has not been a time when providing these opportunities has been more urgent and more needed than right now. Legislators should recognize that and allow families as many options as possible to get their children the education they need and deserve.

The following documents provide more information about school vouchers and education choice.

The 123s of School Choice (2020 Edition)

<https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/123s-of-School-Choice-2020-4.pdf>

This report from EdChoice is an in-depth review of the available research on private school choice programs in America. Areas of study include: private school choice program participant test scores, program participant attainment, parent satisfaction, public school students' test scores, civic values and practices, racial/ethnic integration and fiscal effects.

A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice (Fourth Edition)

<http://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/A-Win-Win-Solution-The-Empirical-Evidence-on-School-Choice.pdf>

This paper by EdChoice details how a vast body of research shows educational choice programs improve academic outcomes for students and schools, saves taxpayers money, reduces segregation in schools, and improves students' civic values. This edition brings together a total of 100 empirical studies examining these essential questions in one comprehensive report.

The Public Benefit of Private Schooling: Test Scores Rise When There Is More of It

<https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa830.pdf>

This *Policy Analysis* from the Cato Institute examines the effect increased access to private schooling has had on international student test scores in 52 countries. The Cato researchers found that a 1 percentage point increase in the share of private school enrollment would lead to moderate increases in students' math, reading, and science achievement.

The Effects of School Choice on Mental Health

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3272550

This study from Corey DeAngelis at the Cato Institute and Angela K. Dills of Western Carolina University empirically examines the relationship between school choice and mental health. It finds that states adopting broad-based voucher programs and charter schools witness declines in adolescent suicides and suggests that private schooling reduces the number of times individuals are seen for mental health issues.

Child Safety Accounts: Protecting Our Children through Parental Freedom

<https://www.heartland.org/template-assets/documents/publications/CSAccountsPB.pdf>

In this *Heartland Policy Brief*, Vicki Alger, senior fellow at the Independent Women's Forum and research fellow at the Independent Institute, and Heartland Policy Analyst Tim Benson detail the prevalence of bullying, harassment, and assault taking place in America's public schools and the difficulties for parents in having their child moved from a school that is unsafe for them. Alger and Benson propose a Child Safety Account program, which would allow parents to immediately have their child moved to a safe school – private, parochial, or public – as soon as parents feel the public school their child is currently attending is too dangerous to their child's physical or emotional health.