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NETWORK

BUILDING A
BETTER ARIZONA

Arizona: The Cautionary Tale of Universal Vouchers

Who We Are

We are a network of 20,000+ education advocates across Arizona.

SOSAZ Network is a nonpartisan, community-based organization fighting for strong public schools for a stronger Arizona.

www.sosaznetwork.org



The State of Public Education in AZ

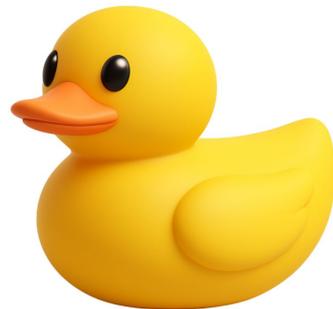
- ❑ Per-pupil funding is **48th** in the US
- ❑ **2nd most crowded** class sizes in the US
- ❑ AZ's teacher salaries rank in the **bottom 5** across the US → teacher retention crisis
- ❑ Student-to-counselor ratio **2nd worst** in US
- ❑ School facilities are **\$3B in the hole** since 2000



What's a Voucher?

- **A voucher is a voucher, by any name** – it's a mechanism to move public funds to non-public schooling
- **ESA Voucher** = Public, taxpayer dollars used for *private school, microschool & homeschool* expenses
- **STO Voucher** = Tax credit for private schooling (same as federal voucher)

if it walks like a VOUCHER



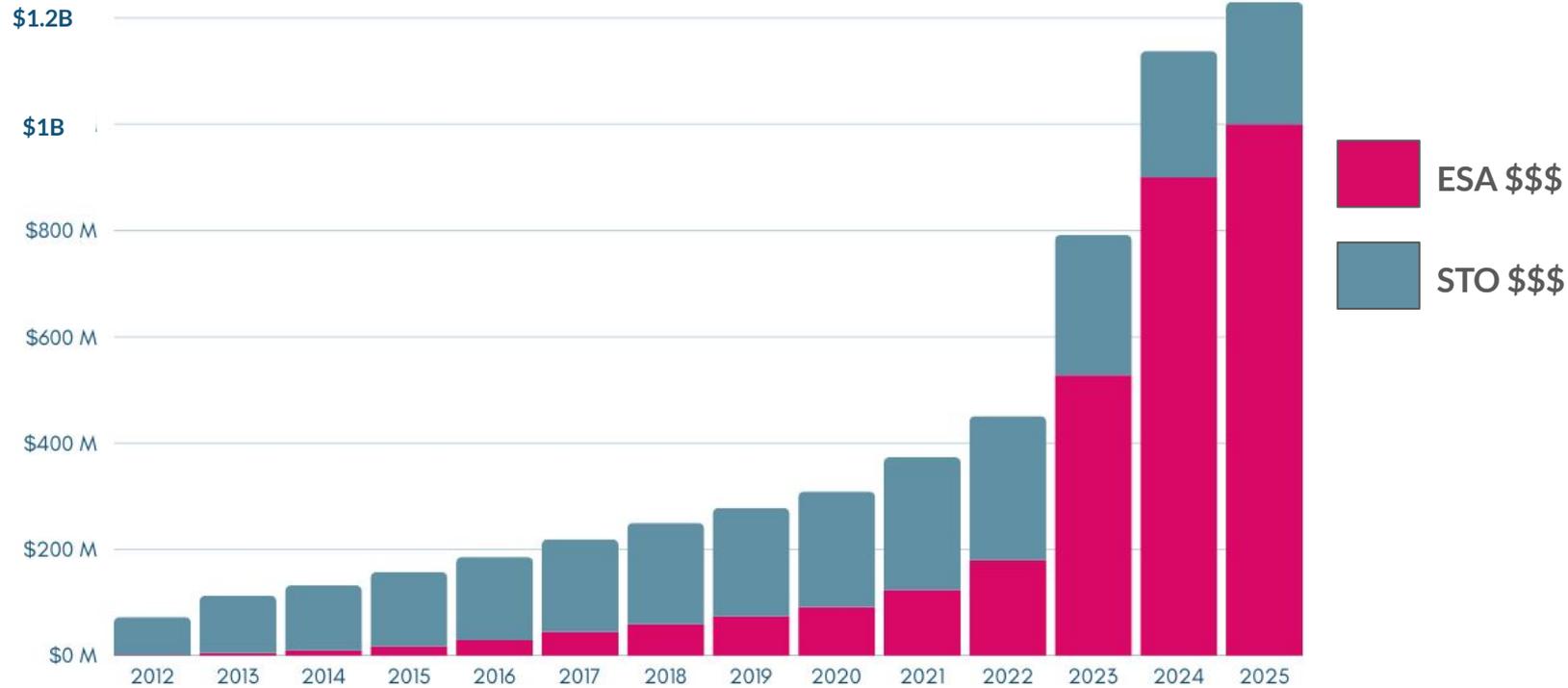
and sounds like a VOUCHER

Arizona's Vouchers by the Numbers

- ESA now enrolls **100,208 students** — nearly double any school district
- ESA now over **\$1 billion** per year, STOs over **\$230 million**
- The average ESA is **\$10,000** — up to **\$46,000** per student
- STOs can be stacked in an **unlimited** manner
- Now totals **12% of AZ's K-12 budget**



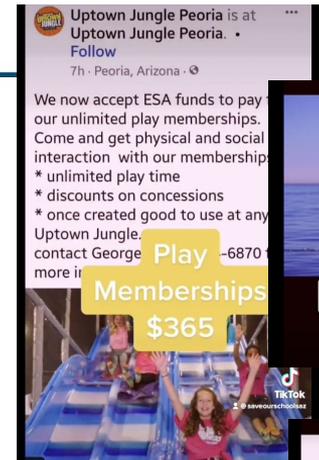
SKYROCKETING AZ VOUCHER COSTS



Sources: AZ Dept. of Education (2024) & AZ Dept. of Revenue (2024)

What Arizona Vouchers Fund

- **Private school expenses.** Tuition, uniforms, club fees
- **“Educational” expenses.** Bounce houses, espresso machines, snow cone machines, home gyms, chicken coops, zoo and bounce memberships, ski trips/lessons, lingerie, diamonds
- **Private lessons.** Swim, tennis, gymnastics, karate, music, cooking, horseback riding, archery, American Ninja Warrior classes, etc.
- **Curriculum.** Anything goes!



AZ's Vouchers Lack Any Accountability

- ✗ **Zero** cap or requirements
- ✗ **Zero** requirements for accreditation or state approvals
- ✗ **Zero** curriculum standards
- ✗ **Zero** requirements for certified teachers
- ✗ **Zero** background checks or safety standards
- ✗ **Zero** requirements for academic accountability, or
minimum hours/days of school
- ✗ **Zero** graduation requirements



It's Not "School Choice" – It's the School's Choice

Who is Benefitting?

- ✓ Higher income households
- ✓ Those were already enrolled in private school or homeschooling
- ✓ Whiter, more suburban households
- ✓ Private schools and unregulated pop-up schools

Who Misses Out?

- ✗ Students in low income areas, BIPOC students
- ✗ Students in public district and charter schools
- ✗ LGBTQ students, ELL students, students with disabilities
- ✗ Rural students

Vouchers Hurt Public Schools



EDUCATION

EDUCATION

This Phoenix-area school close more than 1/3 of it



Erick Trevino
Arizona Republic

Sept. 18, 2025 Updated Sept. 24, 2025, 2:50 p.m. MT



Amphi planned ahead of 2025

Tucson-area school district budget cuts

Posted Oct 2, 2025, 1:04 pm

Mia Kortright
TucsonSentinel.com



The Paradise Valley Unified School District enrollment numbers decline.

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NEW AT 9

TENSE MEETING OVER ROOSEVELT ELEMENTARY SHUTTING DOWN

LATEST NEWS RUMP CHOOSES TV DOCTOR MEHMET

Century School Board

Scottsdale school board approves closures of 2 schools

By Nicole Krusean and Sara Filipis | Published December 9, 2025 8:27pm MST | Education | FOX 10 Phoenix | [➔](#)



TOP STORY

FOX LOCAL 10

TWO SCOTTSDALE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS SHUTTING DOWN
SUSD VOTES TO CLOSE PIMA ELEMENTARY & ECHO CANYON ELEMENTARY

Roosevelt Elementary School District held a board meeting on Tuesday to hear parent concerns about possibly closing schools due to a \$5

Florida K-12 Vouchers: A Cautionary Tale

Voucher Expansion in Florida

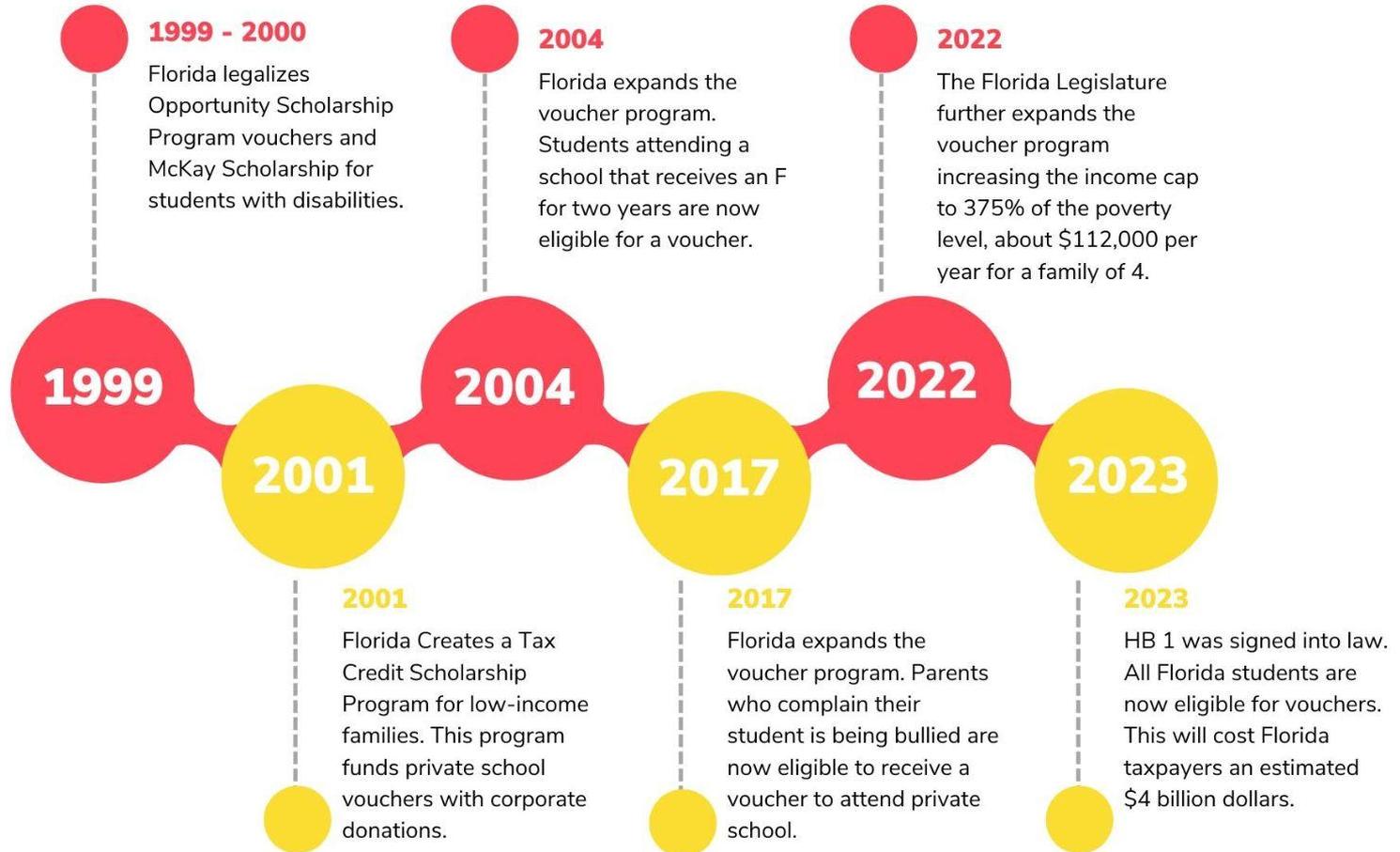




Table 1. Florida Voucher Expenditures and Number of Students by Program (FY 2023-24)

Voucher program	Funding	Number of Students
Family Empowerment Scholarships (FES)	\$2,068,081,395	220,964
Florida Tax Credit Scholarships (FTC)	\$942,217,712	129,007
Personalized Education Program (PEP)	\$140,881,542	19,302
Total	\$3,178,535,339	369,273

Regarding the FTC, Florida Policy Institute and Education Law Center analyzed data provided by the Florida Department of Education pursuant to a public records request.

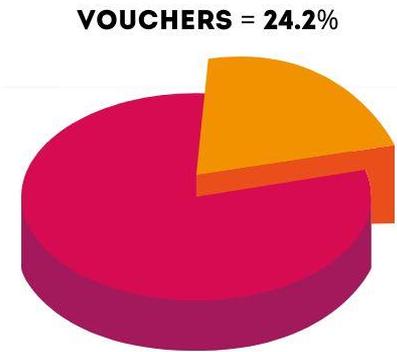
Data on the number of students receiving PEP vouchers was provided pursuant to a public records request; however, the amount awarded was not available at the time of publication. To estimate the cost of PEP vouchers, the cost of FTC was divided by the number of FTC students to create a per pupil cost estimate, which was then multiplied by the number of reported PEP students in the district.

Table: Florida Policy Institute and Education Law Center

VOUCHER EXPANSION

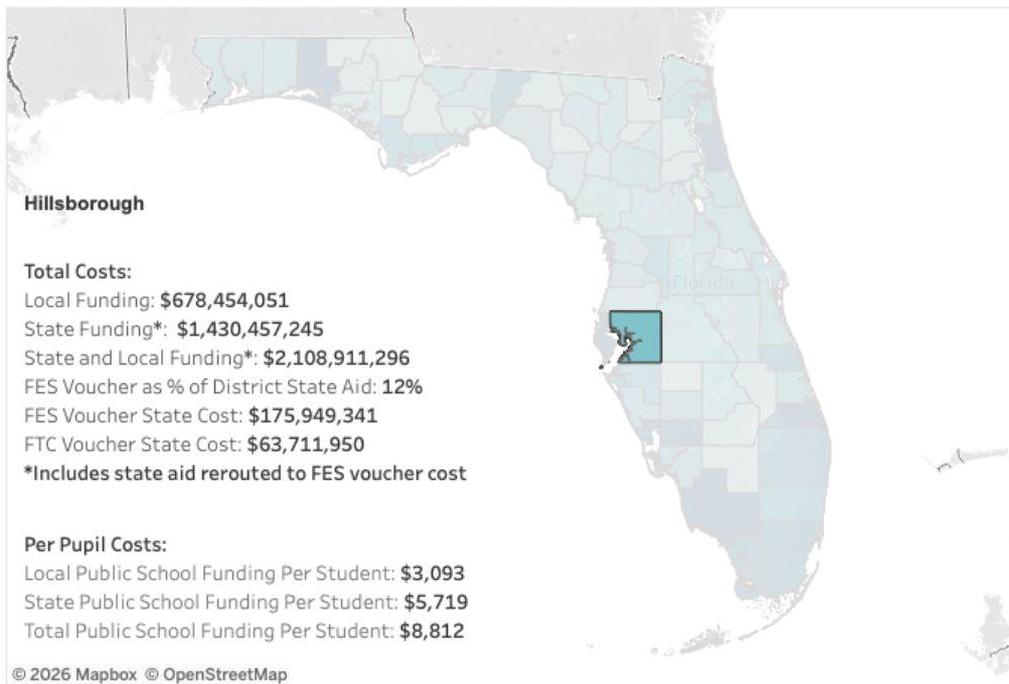
STATE VOUCHER FUNDING (FES) AS % OF FEFP

Year	Voucher Funding (FES)
2024–25	\$3.19 Billion
2025–26	\$3.84 Billion
Change	+\$655 Million (+20.6%)

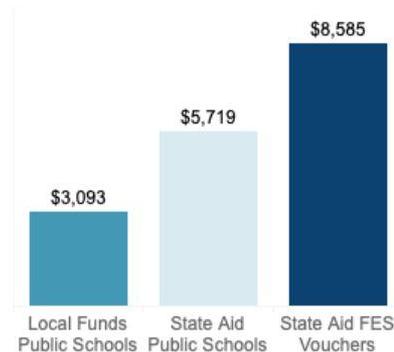


- ➔ **24.2% of FEFP funds now go to vouchers**, further diverting resources from public schools.
- ➔ Vouchers are growing **8x faster** than overall education funding.

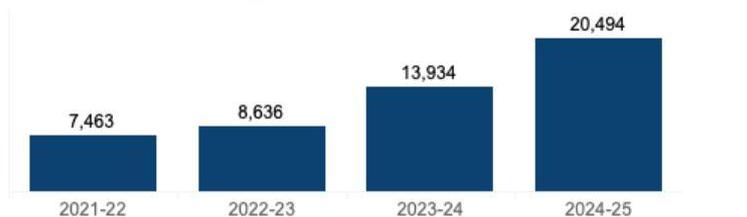
Select a district to view estimates for a specific school district. Click outside of state on map to view full state information.



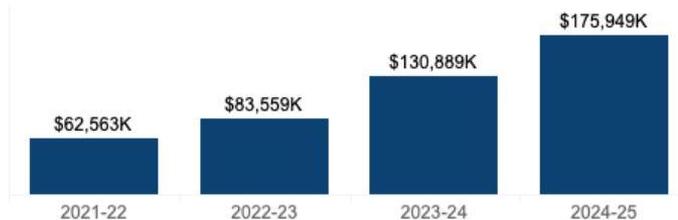
Hillsborough Per Pupil Aid to Public Schools and FES Vouchers



Hillsborough Student FES Voucher Use



Hillsborough FES Voucher Cost



Accreditation

There is no state law requiring private schools to be accredited. However, some private schools do choose to become accredited, and there are many independent accrediting organizations for private schools to select from. Postsecondary training programs, colleges and prospective employers may require that the applicant's high school diploma and transcript be from an accredited school. It is wise to check with the college, university, or prospective employers to determine whether or not they accept diplomas and transcripts from a specific private school. Requests for information about the acceptance of credits from a specific private school for postsecondary education admittance should be directed to the local community college or university admissions office.

Florida school vouchers can pay for TVs, kayaks and theme parks. Is that OK?

A new list of allowable expenses for the publicly funded program is raising eyebrows.



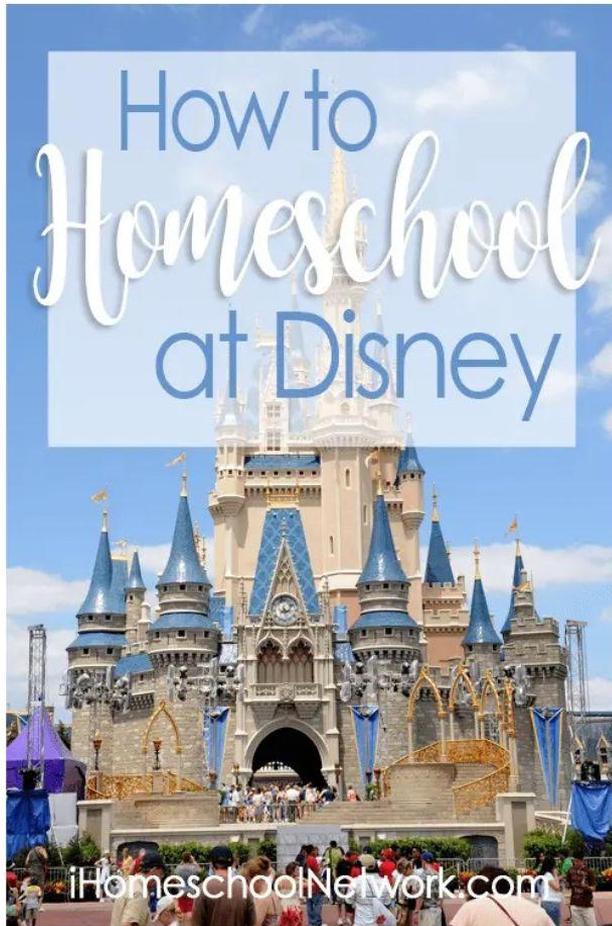
Florida struggles with school vouchers as program expands

NEWS / THE EDUCATION GRADEBOOK

Vouchers benefit existing private school students most

Governor Ron DeSantis Applauds and Urges Swift Action in Special Session of the Florida Legislature to Increase Florida's Sanctions on Iran and Address Pressing State Needs

October 20, 2023, in News Releases, by Staff



 Florida School Choice Scholarships
(Step Up for Students/AAA)
Anonymous participant · 2d · 

Would a baby grand piano be eligible for reimbursement through PEP?

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 8

Most relevant ▾

 Yes but there's a problem with musical instrument reimbursements at the moment so I'd recommend waiting. We've been waiting on a reimbursement for our Roland since the beginning of April, over 70 days now and no answer when it'll get approved. Many people are having the same issue. Just FYI!

2d Like  3

 Florida School Choice Scholarships (Step Up for Students)

Anonymous participant · 17h · 

We'll be visiting family near NYC and I want to take my student to see Hamilton. Has anyone gotten pre-approval for a musical and if so what did you put for the educational benefit?



Florida School Choice Scholarships (Step Up for Students)

10/20/2017 10:11h • 🌐

EO. If school is closed for a month due to Milton. If all students are moving to public school will this impact scholarship?

*don't have all details. Asking for friend.



Like



Comment



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'Funding did not follow the child': State audit displays school choice woes

'Whatever can go wrong with this system has gone wrong.'

How Florida lost track of 30,000 students, a 'cautionary tale' for vouchers

The state's auditor general found "a myriad of accountability problems" in the nation's largest voucher program.

December 8, 2025

🔊 8 min ✨ Summary ➦ 📌 🗨 303

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Senate passes bill to add more oversight and transparency on school choice vouchers

The state doesn't know where 30,000 K-12 students are every day. The Senate wants more oversight.

With a bipartisan unanimous vote, the Senate has passed a bill to add more oversight for the taxpayer-funded private school voucher program because thousands of students – and the money that follows them – are missing in the system.

SB 318 does not currently have a House companion bill even though the lengthy package of reforms was cleared by the upper chamber.

Florida's \$4 billion universal school choice industry has experienced explosive growth but left an education system ripe for abuse.

"On any given day of the week, the (Florida) Department of Education (FDOE) can't find 30,000 students we're paying for," Sen. **Don Gaetz**, the SB 318 co-sponsor, said on the Senate floor. "That's \$270 million we're paying for students we can't locate. The Auditor General criticizes our funding model as 'pay and chase,' and they don't mean it as a compliment."

NO HOUSE COMPANION



Florida School Choice Scholarships (Step Up for Students/AAA)

11h ·  

While applying for this year, I saw a notice about a new program called Step up, Step Further that it says you can be eligible in addition to PEP. Anyone have any information about this?

 2  11 



Most relevant ▾



 · 11h ·  by

Author ·  Moderator

It is a new federal program there is no other info about it.

Reply  2



Federal Vouchers Aim to Dismantle Public Schools

- The federal voucher program is designed to *accelerate the privatization* of public schools
- Tax credit voucher is *designed for the rich* – allows tax credits for individuals, uncapped, for perpetuity w/ no accountability
- Disburses funds for *private school, homeschool, microschools with no transparency* – potentially public school students, as well
- *No such thing as free money* – it will be used to rob public schools



Vouchers are taxpayer-funded discrimination

Like AZ's ESA vouchers, taxpayer dollars would flow to discriminatory private schools

Families waive protections

No requirement to serve disabled students and English learners

What's the End Game?

- **Privatizing public education.**
- Billionaire-backed special interests have pushed voucher programs across the US in order to convert our free, accessible public school system into a for-profit model that can pick and choose students
- Project 2025 carries out the final plan.

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Moving Forward

- Once vouchers are introduced in a state, there is no stopping, no compromise
- The goal is the full scale privatization of education and dismantling of public education
- Never a better time to **stand strong and unite around local public schools**
- Voucher lobbying orgs will stop at nothing to continue expanding – better to stop it in its tracks at the outset



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