

*LWV of the Cincinnati Area  
Education Committee  
Study Page*

## **State Voucher System Update**

February 2024

The League of Women Voters of Ohio (LWVO) has taken consistent and various positions opposing the privatization of public education, including the opposition of publicly funded vouchers for private education, since the State Legislature first introduced vouchers in the state more than 25 years ago. In the intervening decades, the State Legislature has gradually expanded the voucher system, increasing both the public funding going to private education and the number of students who are eligible to utilize the five different voucher programs across the state. In 2023, the Legislature drastically expanded the EdChoice voucher system, effectively creating Universal Vouchers across the State of Ohio. Students can use the vouchers at any private school, including those affiliated with a religion.

### **Brief Background on 2023 EdChoice Voucher**

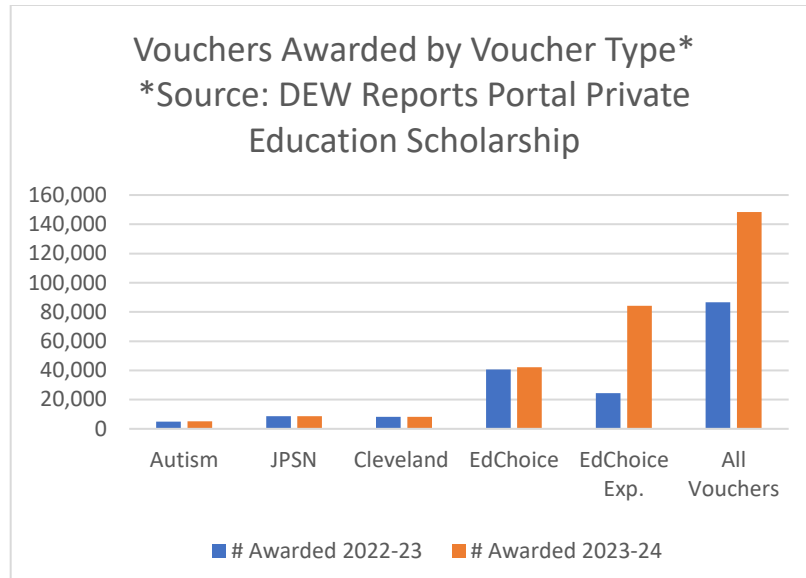
According to the LWVO Agenda for Action:

HB 33, the state budget bill adopted in 2023 retained all 5 of the (existing) voucher programs but raised the eligibility for EdChoice income-based vouchers to 450% of poverty and allowed partial support for families with income beyond 450%. Anyone already using a private school or wishing to use one could receive state funding if the private school admits them.

### **Immediate Impact of EdChoice Expansion**

Following the expansion of the EdChoice voucher program, the number of vouchers awarded to K-12 students in the State of Ohio in the 2023-24 school year ballooned to 148,378 – a 71% increase compared to just one year prior. This number is likely to continue to rise, as enrollment is ongoing throughout the school year. Racial breakouts of students utilizing vouchers demonstrate that the largest increase comes from White students, with a 302% increase in number of vouchers used in that racial subgroup.

Governor DeWine offered this rationale for universal vouchers: it empowers every family to choose the learning environment that best fits their children's needs. Critics point out that the Universal Vouchers Act did not incorporate accountability measures or require transparency of information. The private school students are not required to take the same tests that the public-school students are. Additionally, the private schools can choose which students they accept and which they do not.



A 2022 lawsuit is pending challenging the constitutionality of Ohio’s private school voucher programs. A large number of public school districts have joined the coalition bringing the suit. In an earlier case, the Ohio Coalition for Equity and Adequacy of School Funding successfully sued the state over an unconstitutional school funding system in 1997.

### What’s Next?

State spending on private school tuition is expected to exceed \$1 billion by next school year. The State legislature is currently considering expanding the privatization of education in the state even further through two pieces of legislation currently under consideration:

- HB 339 would extend vouchers to non-chartered nonpublic schools. <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Ohio-Education-Options/Private-Schools/Non-Chartered-Non-Tax-School-Information>
- Senator Matt Huffman and the Buckeye Institute have proposed that the school facilities funds within HB 2, the capital improvements budget, be opened to private schools.

### Arguments for Vouchers

- Parent Choice is a value greater than public accountability for funds spent.
- Recent expansion of the Ed Choice system could increase fairness to minorities and low-income families, in theory
- Some private schools are well-managed and successful, already receive transportation funding, and deserve more public support
- Private schools escape the demands of unionized teachers

## Arguments Against Vouchers

- Most parents of children already attending private schools want their kids to stay there at public expense
- Voucher funding doesn't compel private schools to admit more students
- Private schools don't have test scores to compare with kids in public schools
- Using tax money for private schools decreases the amount available for public schools
- Most voucher-supported students are white

## References

<https://www.news5cleveland.com/news/local-news/investigations/every-ohio-family-can-now-get-a-private-school-voucher-some-say-it-helps-students-experts-call-it-harmful>

<https://www.propublica.org/article/private-schools-vouchers-parents-ohio-public-funds> , 1/31/2024

<https://ohiocapitaljournal.com/2024/01/03/ohio-public-education-supporters-look-to-2024-lawsuit-to-hold-private-voucher-system-accountable/>

<https://www.lwvohio.org/post/privatizing-education>

## Questions for discussion:

1. What sorts of regulations on private schools would be justified given the use of public taxpayer dollars to benefit those schools? Currently, private schools can discriminate based on a number of factors, including sexual orientation whereas public schools cannot.
2. Do you think there is benefit in the universal voucher program to individual students and families? What could some of those benefits be?
3. What impact does the expanded voucher system have, if any, on our democracy and society as a whole?
4. If the expanded voucher program encourages new private schools to be created, how will this impact the strain on existing infrastructure and resources, e.g. teacher shortages, transportation costs and lack of bus drivers?