

STATE BUDGET 2024 MEETING THE MOMENT: INVESTING IN PUBLIC EDUCATION AND REJECTING VOUCHER SCHEMES IN PENNSYLVANIA



CONTEXT

On February 7, 2023, Judge Renée Cohn Jubelirer ruled definitively on an issue that we have argued for years: the way we fund public education in our Commonwealth is **unconstitutional**. It is immoral. And Judge Jubelirer has now, with finality, ordered Executive and Legislative branches of government to address this decades-long system of neglect.

URGENT NEED

Governor Shapiro proposed an historic investment in public education that serves as a **down payment** on rectifying the decades of neglect that have shortchanged Black and Brown children and children experiencing poverty.

We support the Governor's **\$1.1B funding allocation**, which includes nearly \$900M in a new formula in direct response to the court ruling.

- We also support increased funding for special education, sustainable school facilities funding, as well as myriad other items included in the budget proposals, including student teacher stipends.
- Further, we call for a multi-year plan to ensure that the Commonwealth Court's ruling is implemented with fidelity and closes the more than \$5B adequacy gap.

REJECTION OF VOUCHERS

Our organizations wholeheartedly support a true investment agenda in public education and **reject any form of voucher expansion**. [We urge you to review the NCPE one pager attached.](#) [More information on reverse.](#)



What Vouchers Do Not Do:

- Vouchers *do not* reinvest in a system of public education that for decades has been underfunded.
- Vouchers *do not* provide desperately needed resources for all students across the Commonwealth regardless of their race, their gender identity, their religion, or their disability.
- Vouchers *do not* remediate the toxic school buildings that are quite literally poisoning our young people.
- Vouchers *do not* actually address student outcomes and achievement.
- Vouchers certainly *do not* address the inequities in school funding that they are purported to address.

What Vouchers Do:

- Voucher programs **often discriminate** against students.¹
- Vouchers go, *half the time*, to students whose families earn more than **\$200,000**.²
- Vouchers go, a majority of the time, to students **already attending private schools**.³
- Vouchers do, unequivocally, underperform and decimate public education—the research is clear.⁴

Urgency of the Moment:

It is incumbent upon every lawmaker in our great Commonwealth: every State Representative, every State Senator, and Governor Josh Shapiro to double down on their commitment to enacting what Judge Jubelirer ordered in her definitive ruling. Our children deserve nothing less.

1 edvoterspa.org/tax-payer-funded-vouchers/

2 pfps.org/assets/uploads/SPLC_ELC_PFPS_2023Report_Final.pdf

3 ncpecoalition.org/voucher-recipient

4 brookings.edu/articles/research-on-school-vouchers-suggests-concerns-ahead-for-education-savings-accounts/

Fast Facts:

How School Vouchers Harm Students, Schools, & Communities

Private school vouchers take many names, including “scholarship” programs, tuition tax credits, education savings accounts, and portability plans. Regardless of what they are called, they use public dollars to fund private schools and divert scarce resources away from the public education system that serves 90% of American children.



Private school vouchers undermine public schools by diverting desperately needed resources away from the public school system, which accepts all students, to fund the education of a few, select voucher students. Given the fiscal constraints at the federal, state, and local level, we simply cannot afford to fund two different education systems—one public and one private—on our taxpayers’ dime.



Private school vouchers do not save taxpayer money. In voucher programs, the public schools from which students leave for private voucher schools are spread throughout a school district. The reduction in a few students from each public school, therefore, does not decrease operating costs like building maintenance and transportation. But it does decrease the amount of money the public school has to spend. That is one of the reasons why some voucher programs have resulted in multi-million dollar deficits and tax increases.



Private school vouchers do not improve academic achievement. Repeated studies of voucher programs across the country show that vouchers do not result in better test scores for students, and, in many states, have led to declines in academic achievement.



Private school vouchers do not lead to improvements in public schools. There are many proven ways to improve public schools such as reducing class sizes, offering a well-rounded curriculum, and increasing parental engagement. Resourcing our neighborhood public schools so that students have inviting classrooms, well-trained teachers, and support services such as health care, nutrition, and afterschool programs will ensure our children can compete in the global economy. Vouchers do not fund any of these improvements, and in fact, make it harder for public schools to implement them.



Private school vouchers do not offer real choice. Vouchers give a choice to private schools, rather than parents and students. Voucher programs are governed by different laws in different states, but most allow private schools to accept taxpayer dollars but still reject students with vouchers for a variety of reasons, ranging from disability to ability to pay. And even with vouchers, most parents still cannot afford the full cost of attending a private school.



Private school vouchers fail to provide accountability to taxpayers. Most voucher programs lack accountability measures, and according to studies of voucher programs, many also lack proper oversight to ensure they meet even the minimal standards that do exist.



Private voucher schools do not provide students with the same rights and protections they would otherwise have in public schools, such as those in Title VI, Title IX, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Every Student Succeeds Act. And students who attend private schools using vouchers are stripped of the First Amendment, due process, and other constitutional and statutory rights guaranteed to them in public schools.



Private school vouchers violate the fundamental principle of religious freedom because they pay for religious education with taxpayer funds. They also threaten the autonomy of religious schools by opening them up to government audits, control, and interference.



Private voucher schools do not adequately serve students with disabilities, often failing to admit them or provide them the same quality and quantity of services available to students in public schools, including those mandated under each student's individualized education program (IEP).



Private school vouchers do not adequately serve low-income students because the cost of tuition and fees at schools that accept vouchers generally exceeds the amount of the voucher, making voucher schools unaffordable for most low-income families.



Private school vouchers often fund poor quality schools. Because voucher programs lack accountability and oversight, vouchers often fund poor quality schools, including those that employ teachers with no credentials, operate in dilapidated buildings, lack proper facilities like restrooms, and teach questionable curriculum.