

Talking Points Against School Vouchers

School vouchers — a.k.a. “education savings accounts” (ESAs) or “education savings grants — siphon tax dollars away from our public schools to private education. Current vouchers bill in the statehouse: **SF2091**; similar House bill is expected to arrive soon. We know from the experiences of other states that voucher programs —

- Weaken public schools, which must maintain much the same overhead costs with fewer resources, causing cuts in staffing and programs and increases in class sizes.
- Harm rural schools—the heart of our rural communities—which are already under strain from high transportation costs and a smaller tax base than urban areas. If only 5 children leave a public school for private education, that represents a loss of \$33,000 to a local school.¹
- Do not guarantee a better education. [Private schools do not necessarily outperform public schools.](#)
- [Expose Iowa families to unregulated schools](#) that are not held to the same standards as public schools and put profit before students’ wellbeing. Voucher programs carry no safeguards against fraud.
- Do not guarantee a child access to a private school, which can raise rates at any time or reject any student for any reason. Only the public system can ensure that a quality school is available to every child, regardless of race, religion, ability, background, or identity. Public schools accept all.
- Lead to [more racial, religious, and socioeconomic segregation in schools.](#)

Other points to consider:

- Vouchers open the door to public involvement in the governance of private schools. It is reasonable to expect public monies to come with public accountability. Already there are calls for greater accountability for home schools and private cyber schools in Iowa. Do private schools want the government to tell them whom they can hire and admit and what they can teach?
- Vouchers are actually anti-choice for rural students, as few, if any, quality private school alternatives are available in many rural areas, and the overall drain on public education dollars weakens the public schools currently available to those students.
- Iowa already has school choice — one of the most progressive public school choice programs in the nation, with more than 30,000 students open enrolling in a public school outside their district.²
- Iowa already diverts more than \$52 million in taxpayer dollars each year to private and home schooling.³
- Over time, the cost of a vouchers program in Iowa would exceed \$200 million/year — at the expense of public schools.⁴

¹ Per pupil state spending in Iowa is \$6,600 per student.

² “Since 1989, Iowa law allows public school families to choose for their child to attend a public school in another community. 6.3% (30,000+) of Iowa students took advantage of the open enrollment choice in 2015-16.” [Promise of Iowa](#)

³ Source: Parents for Great Iowa Schools, <https://p4gis.org/printable-fact-sheets/>.

⁴ Under Vouchers Bill SF 2091, as new students apply for vouchers over time, all private and homeschooled students will eventually be covered. At today’s private and homeschool enrollment rates, the annual cost would be as follows (numbers are rounded):

- Private school enrollment in Iowa (K-12): [33,000](#) [Exact K-12 private school enrollment for 2016-17: [32,622](#)]
- Homeschoolers: 16,000 [The number of homeschoolers in Iowa is difficult to quantify, as homeschool families are not required to report their homeschooling decision to the state. Estimates range between roughly [16,000](#) and [19,000](#).]
- Total receiving private instruction: 49,000 students

- Everyone loves choice. The question is, *What choices should government pay for?* Our first priority must be to fully fund our public schools, which have been underfunded for 7 out of the past 8 years.
- More than half of Iowans do not have school-aged children, yet all Iowans, as well as Iowa businesses, pay taxes. We all, not just parents, have a say in how Iowa education dollars are spent.
- Iowa's public schools are strong, and with proper funding will only continue to improve. We have the nation's highest high school graduation rate (91.3%) — the only state above 90% — and an average ACT composite score of 22.1, above the national average of 20.8. Iowa leads the nation in ACT college readiness scores.⁵
- Public money is for public schools!

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- 49,000 x \$4,000 voucher = \$196 million annually

This number is based only on our current rate of private instruction and does not include numbers of public school students who might switch to private, nor does it include administration costs (est. \$1 million/year) or inflation.

⁵ Source: 2016 Condition of Education Report, Iowa Department of Education, via [Promise of Iowa](#).