



# The Freedom and Justice Foundation

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## **Policy Brief on Vouchers**

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### **Issue: Do vouchers improve or lower the quality of education?**

#### **Argument 1: School choice helps public schools perform better.**

-A poll conducted by the Texas Public Policy Foundation asked Texans: "Do you think public schools spend money in a wasteful fashion?" 56% of Texans answered "Yes." Vouchers in no way hurt public schools but rather have been shown to help better the performance of public schools in many instances. Voucher systems exist at Edgewood ISD (largest privately-funded voucher program in the US), Milwaukee, Florida, Arizona and Michigan, and research has shown that public schools increase in performance when they have to compete for students and money because of vouchers. Every school is forced to prove its academic value to the parent of every child. School choice (ex. vouchers, tax credits/deductions) drives school systems to be more efficient and to better academic performance. Although vouchers would funnel money out of public school finance, there is a considerable amount of research that proves that higher performing schools actually under-spend poorly performing schools.

-The US Supreme Court declared the voucher program in use in Cleveland, OH, constitutional in June of 2002. Parents of all economic and racial backgrounds in 10 different states now send their children to schools where they felt the educational needs of their children were better met than at public schools. Latino and African-American students across the nation are succeeding after taking advantage of voucher programs. Texas parents, like parents in the 10 states which have voucher programs, want their children to achieve their maximum potential and in order to do so, they need to have the choice to be able to send their children to the best of schools.

-Currently, students learn what they should have been taught in high school in the first year of college. Schools have not been economically efficient or been performing at the level of academic achievement that they could otherwise achieve. Dropout rates reach close to half of the student body in big cities. In 1998, Dallas ISD had a 48 percent dropout rate and a 61% dropout rate for Hispanics. 32% was the rate overall in Texas while the national average was 26%. There is a gap in educational levels of property tax rich and property tax poor districts as well as between urban/rural and suburban schools. Vouchers would alleviate the gap by giving every child the option to attend the best schools.

-Research by the RAND Corporation and others has shown real, long-term academic gains resulting from school choice programs, especially for under-achieving and disadvantaged students. RAND concludes that “in Texas, charter schools that focus specifically on students at risk for poor academic performance show an achievement advantage over conventional public schools.”

-60 percent of Texans overwhelmingly support vouchers. Parents of all socio-economic and political backgrounds support school choice for their children. 81% of registered voters without college degrees between the ages of 18-44 demand vouchers. 60% of college graduates between the ages of 18-44 support it as well. 66% of people earning less than \$30,000 a year who struggle to make ends meet want school choice. 57% of those who make \$30-\$50,000 want school choices, too. Nearly 60% of those women making less than \$50,000 want their children to have school choice. 57 % of Republican males and 61% of Democrat females want school choice. 56% of those who live in cities and 62% of those who live in rural areas support school choice. Texas’s poor, Hispanics (73%) and African-Americans (63%) demand educational access. (Patterson)

### **Argument 2: Vouchers negatively impact public schools.**

-Vouchers harm our schools by funneling out taxpayer dollars, which are already scarce, from our neighborhood classrooms. Fully funding public education is to everyone's interest. Although schools will lose some students due to vouchers, the cost of running a school will not minimize. The bond debt, personnel and program costs will remain the same. School boards will be forced to raise the property taxes of local businesses and citizens to meet budget needs. For a statewide voucher program in Texas, more than \$3 billion in public tax dollars would be taken from public schools to fund private and religious schools.

-Already, students learn what they should have been taught in high school in the first year of college. Already existing budget constraints have kept schools from being able to teach students to their maximum potential.

-The campaign for vouchers is misleading. The best private schools are very selective as well as expensive and a mere voucher would not be enough to pay tuition. Additionally, some private schools would not accept vouchers in order to avoid state accountability tests.

-There is also a risk of having private schools open strictly for the economic purpose of making money. These start-up schools would not necessarily be efficient, accredited, or qualified, but the state could not stop these schools from opening, making money, and then closing.

-No definitive evidence exists to conclude that vouchers better the educational performance of students who use them, while there is substantial research that shows that smaller classes, early reading intervention, a longer school year, and other reforms do work. Schools are already working to continually improve their curriculum and performance.

-Every child in Texas should be entitled to a first class education regardless of socio-economic background. Edgewood ISD is proof that private schools will use vouchers to recruit the most talented and academically motivated kids out of public schools. Perhaps, the students that most need academic help will be least served by vouchers. Even if a student could afford a private school education with the voucher system, he or she may be left behind.

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