



'Limited' Private School Voucher Schemes: The Nose Under the Tent

As often happens with government programs, voucher proponents in various states have moved to expand limited schemes at great costs to taxpayers. They did so **despite a lack of credible evidence showing that voucher students were performing better than public school students.**

Ohio

Cleveland's voucher scheme, created in 1995, was the nation's first publicly funded plan that included religious schools. As of the 2010-11 school year, the program was diverting up to \$19 million a year from Cleveland public schools.ⁱ **The Ohio Legislature has enacted three additional statewide schemes over the last decade, increasing state spending on vouchers by more than tenfold.**ⁱⁱ

Utah

Utah created a limited voucher program for students with disabilities in 2005. Lawmakers in 2007 enacted what would have been the nation's first "universal" private school voucher program, available to all private school students.ⁱⁱⁱ **Angry Utah residents voted overwhelmingly, 62%-38% in November 2007, to repeal it.**^{iv} That vote marked the 11th time in 11 referenda that a state's voters have rejected specific voucher program proposals (including tax credit schemes). Texas has no similar voter-repeal mechanism.^v

Wisconsin

Milwaukee's voucher scheme is the nation's oldest, created by the Wisconsin Legislature in 1990. The program cost about \$131 million in 2010-2011, but **studies have repeatedly shown no major differences in test scores between voucher students and their peers in public schools.** Even so, state **expanded the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program and created the Racine Parental Choice pilot program** in 2011. Changes to the Milwaukee voucher scheme removed enrollment caps, expanded student eligibility and expanded school participation eligibility.^{vi}

Louisiana

Louisiana enacted a voucher scheme for New Orleans students in 2008. The program cost \$7.8 million in 2010-11. Limited test-score data and the lack of comparable public school numbers made the program's effectiveness almost impossible to judge.^{vii} **Lawmakers in 2012 expanded the program statewide anyway.** They also made **local school districts directly responsible for part of the funding,** costing those districts millions of dollars.^{viii}

ⁱ "Cleveland Voucher Program," National School Boards Association, <http://www.nsba.org/Advocacy/Key-Issues/SchoolVouchers/VoucherStrategyCenter/State-and-City-Voucher-Programs/ClevelandVoucherProgram>

ⁱⁱ "How Ohio Spent \$103 Million a Year on Private School Vouchers," State Impact/NPR, <http://stateimpact.npr.org/ohio/2012/06/27/how-ohio-spent-103-million-a-year-on-private-school-vouchers/>

ⁱⁱⁱ "Utah Voucher Program," National School Board Association, <http://www.nsba.org/Advocacy/Key-Issues/SchoolVouchers/VoucherStrategyCenter/State-and-City-Voucher-Programs/UtahVoucherProgram>

^{iv} "Vouchers killed," Deseret News, November 7, 2007, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/695225580/Vouchers-killed.html>

^v "Utah Voucher Program," National School Board Association, <http://www.nsba.org/Advocacy/Key-Issues/SchoolVouchers/VoucherStrategyCenter/State-and-City-Voucher-Programs/UtahVoucherProgram>

^{vi} "Milwaukee Voucher Program," National School Board Association, <http://www.nsba.org/Advocacy/Key-Issues/SchoolVouchers/VoucherStrategyCenter/State-and-City-Voucher-Programs/MilwaukeeVoucherProgram>

^{vii} "School vouchers have yet to prove their success definitively," New Orleans Times-Picayune, February 4, 2012, http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2012/02/voucher_results_have_yet_to_pr.html

^{viii} "Louisiana Voucher Program," National School Board Association, <http://www.nsba.org/Advocacy/Key-Issues/SchoolVouchers/VoucherStrategyCenter/State-and-City-Voucher-Programs/Louisiana>