

Legislative Issues

Tuition Tax Credits/Vouchers

What is a Voucher?

A voucher is basically a "due bill" that has a dollar amount attached to it. Parents who are provided with a voucher can take it to the private or religious school of their choice where it is used to cover at least part of the school's tuition cost. Typically, the money comes out of funds for public schools. Private and religious schools have the option whether or not to admit the voucher student.

What is a Tuition Tax Credit?

A designated amount of money taxpayers may take as a deduction on their state or federal income taxes for expenses associated with sending their children to private or religious schools. Tuition tax deductions lead to the loss of state or federal tax revenue and can lead to a reduction in funding for public schools. Charitable tuition tax credits are credits that taxpayers can take on their state taxes for contributions made to a private, non-profit entity that provides vouchers for students to attend private or religious schools. This approach masks state funding of private and religious schools as support for charitable giving.

Key Points:

Vouchers/Tax Credits/Scholarships drain money from Missouri public schools. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education estimates that approximately 105,000 students attend private and religious schools in Missouri. If all of these students were provided with a voucher, the cost would be more than \$200 million. The impact on Missouri's public schools would be devastating. Furthermore, tuition tax credits, another "voucher" type program, would reduce the state's tax revenues and decrease the amount of money available to fund public schools.

Missouri Constitution prohibits using public money to support or maintain religious organizations or private schools.

- Article I, Section 7 prohibits using funds from the public treasury, directly or indirectly, to support religion,
- Article IX, Sections 5 and 8 restrict the use of public funds to support private education,
- Article III, Section 38(a) prohibits using public funds for a private purpose.

Schools, not parents, do the choosing in "school choice." Vouchers are not about parental choice because a private or religious school makes the final decision as to which students to accept. This means that schools of choice will choose to accept and retain students who are easiest to educate. Missouri's public schools accept all students because Missourians understand the link between education and the preservation of rights and liberties. In the face of mounting challenges, our public schools need additional support, not less. Voucher plans hurt public schools and indirectly hurt children.

No credible research has shown that vouchers/tuition tax credits/scholarships raise student achievement. For example, a five-year study, one of the most thorough research of the Milwaukee School Voucher system, concluded, "there is no reliable evidence that voucher students achieved more than comparable public school students. If anything, there was a possible advantage for public school students on reading but no differences on math." (*The Market Approach to Education: An Analysis of America's First Voucher Program*)

Private schools accepting money are not subject to the strict accreditation standards of Missouri's public schools. Private schools are not required to meet State and Federal achievement standards. Private schools are not required to make spending practices nor student results public. Making public funds available to private schools that are not required to meet the same standards defeats the public policy behind the procedures.

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Special interest groups, such as All Children Matter (ACM), a pro-voucher organization, have been lobbying to implement "voucher/scholarship/tax credit" initiatives in Missouri, contributing more than \$500,000 to pro-voucher candidates. Many legislative initiatives have been defeated in past years. If these initiatives would have passed, millions of dollars would have been taken away from public education and taxpayers in general would have been forced to subsidize private and religious schools.