WHO'S AFRAID OF SCHOOL CHOICE?

Examining the Validity and Intensity of Predictions by School Choice Opponents

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EdCHOICE

ABOUT EDCHOICE

EdChoice is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to advancing full and unencumbered educational choice as the best pathway to successful lives and a stronger society. EdChoice believes that families, not bureaucrats, are best equipped to make K–12 schooling decisions for their children. The organization works at the state level to educate diverse audiences, train advocates and engage policymakers on the benefits of high-quality school choice programs. EdChoice is the intellectual legacy of Milton and Rose D. Friedman, who founded the organization in 1996 as the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Opponents of educational choice recycle the same false prophesies of doom without regard to the evidence or the size and scope of the proposals.

Part I of this report assesses the validity of choice opponents' predictions that choice policies will lead to significant losses of district school funding and declining academic performance. The evidence shows that these predictions of financial and academic disaster have not materialized. In states with the oldest and largest educational choice policies, the inflation-adjusted per-pupil funding has increased, and the average performance of district schools is as good or better than when the choice policies were first enacted. Indeed, a mountain of evidence points to the choice policies having modest but statistically significant positive effects on district school performance.

Part II of this report explores whether there is any relationship between the intensity of choice opponents' rhetoric and the size and scope of the choice proposal on which they are commenting. After analyzing the rhetoric during debates over the educational choice programs enacted in five states in 2021, we conclude that choice opponents' pessimistic predictions do not vary in intensity based on the size or scope of the proposal.

INTRODUCTION

Prophets of Doom: Cassandras or Chicken Littles?

Every year for at least the last three decades, state legislators have filed bills to create new voucher, tax-credit scholarship, and K–12 education savings account (ESA) programs. Without fail, choice skeptics have responded with a volley of predictions about their effects on district schools ranging from gloomy (e.g., "These vouchers will drain much-needed funds from our public schools") to apocalyptic (e.g., "These vouchers spell the end of public education"). Are these skeptics modern-day Cassandras, whose dire (albeit unheeded) warnings are accurate? Or are they merely Chicken Littles, screeching that the sky is falling after the proverbial cranial encounter with an acorn?

At one point in time, when educational choice policies were new and untested, such concerns were understandable, if often overwrought. Any change carries with it some uncertainty and risk, so a desire for caution—especially concerning the well-being of children—is eminently sensible.

What is not sensible, however, is to continue making predictions about the effects of a *longstanding* policy without assessing its real-life performance. A doctor who expresses concern that a new medication may carry the risk of certain side effects might be appropriately cautious. But if a medication has passed numerous clinical trials and has been on the market for decades without causing harm, the person ranting about its supposed dangers without regard to its actual performance is a quack.

We have reached the point at which it is no longer sensible to prognosticate about educational choice policies while ignoring their actual performance. Several states—such as Arizona, Florida, Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin—have had robust educational choice options for at least one or two decades, and much can be learned from analyzing their experiences. Indeed, it would be irresponsible not to do so.

Part I of this report assesses the validity of the two most common predictions of choice critics: (1) that choice policies will lead to less funding for district schools, and (2) that choice policies will lead to a significant—even catastrophic—reduction in the level of student achievement at the district schools. (Choice critics also make a variety of other claims, such as Arizona State University Professor David Berliner's infamously outlandish prediction in 1999 that voucher programs "could end up resembling the ethnic cleansing occurring in Kosovo," but this paper will focus only on the two most common claims.)[1] With a focus on the five aforementioned states with large and longstanding educational choice policies, Part I assesses these claims by looking at the changes in per-pupil spending and standardized test scores over time, as well as the research literature on the competitive effects of educational choice policies.

As detailed below, both these predictions of choice critics have failed to materialize. Even after adjusting for inflation, per-pupil spending in states with robust choice programs has risen over the last two decades. Likewise, standardized test scores in the robust choice states are generally improving and the research literature overwhelmingly finds that educational choice programs produce modest but statistically significant positive effects on the performance of district schools.

Despite the predictions of the school choice Chicken Littles, the sky has not fallen.

Rhetorical Intensity and Reality

Although the sky has not fallen, neither have the Chicken Littles stopped squawking. Nor, for that matter, is the intensity of their squawking related to the size or scope of the school choice proposals. Part II of this paper analyzes the rhetoric employed by choice opponents during the debates over educational choice policies enacted by five states—Arkansas, Kentucky, Missouri, New Hampshire, and West Virginia—in 2021. The size and scope of the policies in these states varied considerably, with the maximum participation ranging from less than 0.1 percent to 93 percent of the state's total K–12 student population. Statements concerning the effects of the choice proposals on the district school system were then rated on a 10-point scale from "mild concern" to "catastrophic" with a bonus level 11 of "apocalyptic."

We find that there is no relationship between the expansiveness of the educational choice proposal and the intensity of the anti-choice rhetoric. Opponents were just as likely to use inflammatory rhetoric predicting the "end of public education" no matter whether the maximum participation in the program was up to nine out of 10 students or fewer than one in a thousand.

PART I:

Assessing Predictions about Effects of Educational Choice Policies

DOES EDUCATIONAL CHOICE HARM DISTRICT SCHOOLS?

Perhaps the most common claim of opponents of educational choice is that choice policies will drain the district school system's coffers and thereby undermine its performance—or even lead to its destruction. Here are but a few examples of claims that choice critics made just before educational choice policies were first enacted in the five states with the oldest and largest choice programs:

ARIZONA

> "Not only are the tuition tax credits a transparent diversion of public funds to private education, but they further weaken the public school system."
> –*Arizona Daily Sun,* editorial (April 12, 1997)[2]

> "This [lawsuit against the school choice program] is about all of our children and their right to a free, quality public education in this state … we are not willing to give up on the ideal of public education."
> –Kay Lybeck, president, Arizona Educators Association (September 30, 1997)[3]

FLORIDA

> "This is the day that will go down in the annals of Florida history as the day we abandoned the public schools and the day that we abandoned, more importantly, our children."
> – Florida Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (March 25, 1999)[4]

> "This will kill public education, and we're not going to let it happen. We'll go to court. We'll fight on every battlefield there is."
> – Leon Russell, chairman of the Florida Chapter of the NAACP (May 1, 1999)[5]

> "Vouchers, instead, subsidize abandonment of the public schools and abandonment of efforts to improve the public schools."
> – Howard Simon, executive director of the ACLU of Florida (May 16, 1999)[6]

> "Superficially, it looks reasonable. But again, I think it's an attempt to strip the public schools of the resources that they have, and the resources we have are not enough."
> – Debra Robinson, member of the Palm Beach County School Board (Feb. 9, 2001)[7]

INDIANA

> "So what we have is a proposal here that's going to damage our public schools because it's going to siphon needed money away from our schools. And in the end, we're going to have no improved achievement."
> – Indiana Rep. Matt Pierce (March 30, 2011)[8]

> "House Bill 1003 is unfortunately a very bad piece of legislation. It will go a long way in destroying public schools in the state of Indiana."
> – Indiana Sen. Vaneta Becker (April 21, 2011)[9]

OHIO

> "This [voucher] plan is the greatest threat to the public schools we have ever faced."
> –Oliver Ocasek, President, Ohio State Board of Education (October 5, 1993)[10]

> "I think vouchers would weaken and, in some cases, destroy public schools."
> – Ohio Rep. Karen M. Doty (March 20, 1995)[11]

> "I'm strongly opposed to vouchers. We're currently struggling with trying to adequately fund schools, and I feel that vouchers would contribute to the deterioration of schools. I think that it takes away from schools."
> – Ohio Rep. William J. Healy (March 20, 1995)[12]

> "But it's just another kick in the pants for public [school] districts many of which already are facing a financial crisis of epidemic proportions. Losing thousands of dollars per student who transfers out will only open more holes in an already sinking ship."
> – *Mansfield News Journal,* editorial (December 22, 2006)[13]

WISCONSIN

> "[State Superintendent of Public Instruction Herbert] Grover said the proposal could lead to declining enrollments in smaller school districts and to 'the privatization of schools' in Milwaukee."
> -*Marshfield News-Herald* (March 17, 1989)[14]

> "I think it is a serious attack on public education in Wisconsin and a watering down of one of the best public school systems in the nation."
> – Miles Turner, executive director of the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (Sept. 21, 2011)[15]

> "I know of no advantage to our corner of the state to supporting the choice program. It will only drain resources from our schools."
> – Jamie Benson, superintendent of the River Valley School District (Sept. 21, 2011)[16]

Critics of the educational choice proposals are putting forward two testable hypotheses. First, they predict that choice policies will lead to less funding for district schools. Second, they predict that choice policies will lead to a significant—even catastrophic—reduction in the level of student achievement at the district schools.

These predictions rest on several assumptions. First, the critics assume that, given the choice, parents would choose *en masse* to enroll their children somewhere besides their assigned district school. Second, they assume that the parents who leave the district school system will disproportionately be those who are more interested in education, on average, and therefore are more likely to have higher-performing students. Critics further assume that these dynamics will lead to a situation in which the district schools are disproportionately left with the hardest-to-teach students and less resources to teach them.

Are these hypotheses true? Have the district school systems in the states with the most robust educational choice policies seen significant losses in their funding? Is there any evidence that district schools in those states or elsewhere are harmed by the enactment of choice policies?

To assess the validity of the predictions of choice critics, this paper will focus on the states which have had educational choice policies the longest and have the highest "EdChoice share," which is the percentage of K–12 students who are participating in a private educational choice program (i.e., are using a voucher, tax-credit-scholarship, or K–12 education savings account). There are five states that have had educational choice programs for at least a decade and have an EdChoice share of at least 3.5 percent of the state's total K–12 student population. In order of their EdChoice share, those states are Arizona, Florida, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Ohio. (See Table 1.)

Arizona's Individual Income Tax-Credit Scholarship Program was the first of its kind in the nation, and the state later adopted the nation's first K–12 education savings account program. Wisconsin and Ohio had the first citywide vouchers in the nation, and both later adopted statewide vouchers. Florida's Opportunity Scholarship Program was the first statewide voucher in the nation, and though it was later struck down by the state supreme court, lawmakers had already adopted a tax-credit scholarship program that is now the largest in the nation.

If the financial ruin, academic losses, and other myriad harms foretold by the doomsayers were likely to appear anywhere, it would have been in these five states. Yet as the evidence presented below makes clear, these school choice prophets of doom are not Cassandras but Chicken Littles.

TABLE 1 EdChoice Share

State	EdChoice Share	Year Enacted
Arizona	6.6% statewide	Tax-credit scholarships enacted in 1997 / Education savings accounts enacted in 2011
Florida	5.5% statewide	State wide voucher enacted in 1999 (first publicly funded statewide voucher, later struck down) / Tax-credit scholarship enacted in 2001
Wisconsin	4.5% statewide / 27.4% Milwaukee	Milwaukee voucher enacted in 1990 / Statewide voucher enacted in 2013
Indiana	3.8% statewide	Tax-credit scholarship enacted in 2009 / Statewide voucher enacted in 2011
Ohio	3.5% statewide / 12.1% Cleveland	Cleveland voucher enacted in 1995 / Statewide voucher (Educational Choice Scholarship Program) enacted in 2006

Sources: Shaw, Michael, & Catt, Drew, (2021, April 14), *2021 EdChoice Share: Where Are America's Students Getting Their Education?* EdChoice, https://www.edchoice.org/engage/2021-edchoice-share-where-are-americas-students-getting-their-education/; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (March 2021). Common Core of Data: SY 2019-20 Provisional Release. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/tableGenerator.aspx.; EdChoice, (2021), *Ohio - Cleveland Scholarship Program*, https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/programs/ohio-cleveland-scholarship-program/; Ohio Department of Education. (2020). Fall Enrollment (ADM) – October 2019 Non-Public Buildings. Retrieved from https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Data/Frequently-Requested-Data/Enrollment-Data/nonpub_fy20.xls.aspx?lang=en-US; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, (2021, October 15), *DPI releases fall student count and revenue limit information*, https://dpi.wi.gov/news/releases/2021/fall-student-count-wisconsin-revenue-limits; Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Information System for Education. (March 12, 2020). Private Enrollment Master Data: 2019-2020 School Year. Retrieved from https://dpi.wi.gov/wisedash/download-files/type?field_wisedash_upload_type_value=Enrollment-Private-School&field_wisedash_data_view_value=All.

Effects of Educational Choice Programs on District School Funding

The choice critics' first hypothesis—that educational choice policies lead to the "defunding" of traditional district schools—is false. As a recent analysis from the Reason Foundation revealed, all but two states (Idaho and North Carolina) increased their inflation-adjusted average funding per-pupil since 2002.[17] In the five states with the most robust educational choice policies, inflation-adjusted funding per pupil increased between 1.2 percent (Arizona) to 12.7 percent (Ohio) since 2002, which is not long after four of the five states enacted their first educational choice policy.

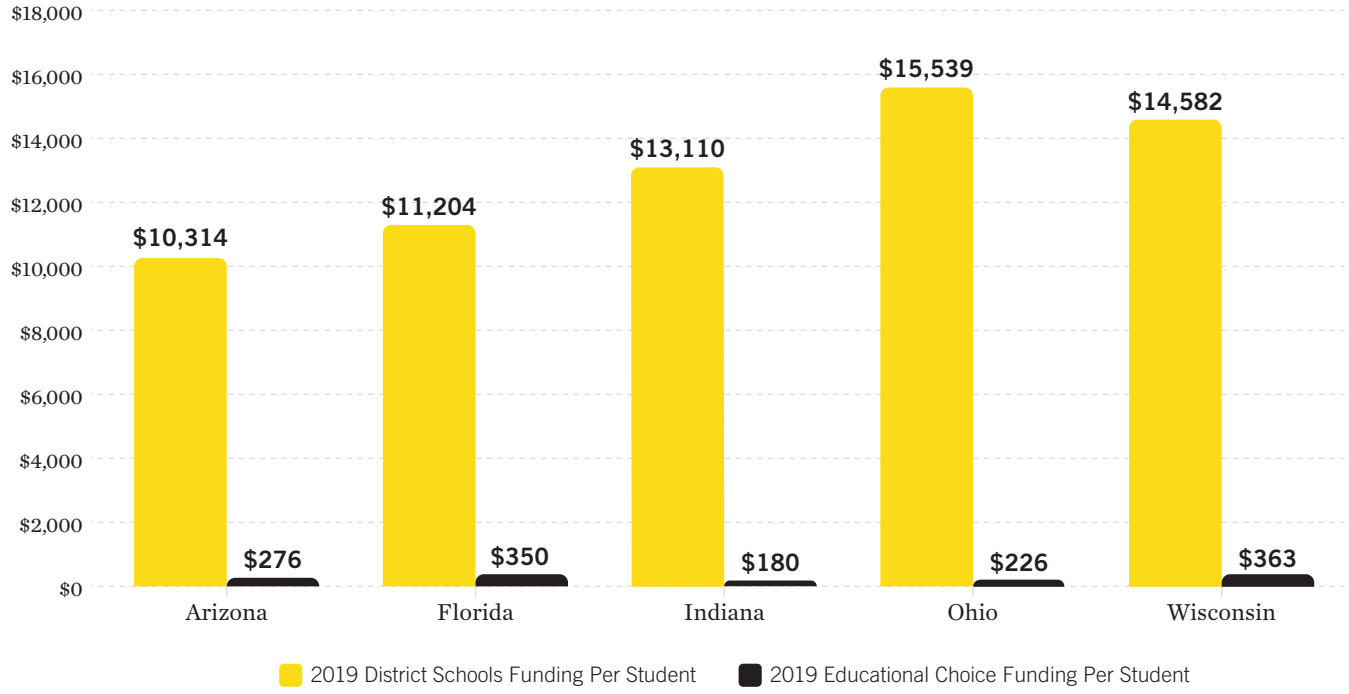
The states with robust educational choice programs may have had smaller-than-average increases in inflation-adjusted spending since 2002, but the per-pupil spending still went up, not down. Moreover, as a related Reason Foundation analysis illustrates, public spending on educational choice policies is a mere drop in the bucket compared to total K–12 public education spending. If spending on private educational choice policies is viewed on a per-student basis (including all K–12 students in the state, not just participating students), we can see just how spurious the "choice programs drain district school coffers" argument really is. As shown in Figure 1, the amount of funding per student (across all K–12 students) spent on educational choice policies is a tiny fraction of the spending per student at district schools, amounting to only 2.7 percent in Arizona, 3.1 percent in Florida, 1.4 percent in Indiana, 1.5 percent in Ohio, and 2.5 percent in Wisconsin.[18]

TABLE 2 K-12 Per-Pupil Funding (2019), Increase Since 2002

State	2019 Per-Pupil Funding	Percent Increase In Real Per-Pupil Funding Since 2002
Arizona	$10,314	1.2%
Florida	$11,204	6.3%
Wisconsin	$13,110	1.5%
Indiana	$15,539	12.7%
Ohio	$14,582	5.1%

Sources: Smith, Aaron Garth., Schwalbach, Jude., Barnard, Christian., & Campbell, Jordan. (2021, September 30). *K-12 Education Spending Spotlight: An in-depth look at school finance data and trends.* Reason Foundation. https://reason.org/commentary/k-12-education-spending-spotlight/

FIGURE 1 Funding Per Student 2019



Source: Smith, Aaron Garth., & Campbell, J., (2021, September 30), *Benefit costs, not school choice programs, are the real drain on public education spending,* Reason Foundation, https://reason.org/commentary/benefit-costs-not-school-choice-programs-are-the-real-drain-on-public-education-spending/

The critics are wrong about the effects of educational choice on district school funding. Nevertheless, in some sense, the entire discussion of funding is a distraction from the main issue: performance. The choice critics assume that there is a direct correlation between levels of funding and performance, but this is hotly debated among researchers.[19] If a policy increased district school funding but reduced academic performance, it would be rightly viewed as a failure. Likewise, a policy that has an adverse effect on funding but boosts performance should rightly be viewed as a success. If a district school loses money because it is newly subject to competition, inducing parents to leave for better options, and that prompts the school to improve its performance, that should also be viewed as a success.

Effects of Educational Choice Programs on District School Performance

The choice critics' second hypothesis is that choice policies have deleterious effects on the performance of the traditional district schools—either due to reduced funding, private school "creaming," or both. As with their first hypothesis, this claim is also false. Contra the critics' predictions, the educational performance of district schools in these states has *improved*, on average, since the enactment of educational choice policies. How do we know this? We can look to three difference sources: (1) raw standardized test scores, which generally show rising performance; (2) the Education Freedom Index, which shows a strong correlation between the robustness of a state's educational choice policies and district school performance; and (3) the research literature on the competitive effects of educational choice policies, which overwhelming finds modest but statistically significant positive effects.

TABLE 3 Quality Counts Report

NAEP Gains from 2003 to 2019 / AP Gains from 2000 to 2020

State	4th Grade Math	8th Grade Math	4th Grade Reading	8th Grade Reading	NAEP Math Percent Advanced	AP high scores (3 or above)
U.S. Average	+6.1	+4.9	+3.0	+0.7	+4.8	+25.6
Arizona	+8.7	+8.8	+7.0	+4.2	+6.1	+16.7
Florida	+12.2	+7.2	+6.7	+6.1	+4.4	+35.3
Indiana	+6.9	+4.4	+1.4	+1.1	+5.1	+21.6
Ohio	+3.4	+4.1	+0.1	+0.5	+6.3	+22.3
Wisconsin	+4.9	+4.7	-1.1	+0.9	+6.0	+27.1

Outperforming the national average gains

Sources: EdWeek Research Center, (2021b, September 1), State Grades on K-12 Achievement: 2021 Map and Rankings, *Education Week*, https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/state-grades-on-k-12-achievement-2021-map-and-rankings/2021/09

Quality Counts K–12 Achievement Index & the National Assessment of Educational Progress

To assess the effects of choice policies on academic performance, perhaps the most obvious place to start is with national achievement tests. *Education Week*'s Quality Counts K–12 Achievement Index ranks states based on student performance across a variety of measures, including prominent standardized assessments like the Advanced Placement (AP) test and the U.S. Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which is often called "the nation's report card." If educational choice programs truly produced the catastrophic effects that many critics predict, then those effects should be visible in Quality Counts measures. That is not, however, what the report shows. Indeed, in the 2021 Quality Counts report, each of the states with robust educational choice policies are in the top or middle of the distribution of states.[20] Moreover, with the exception of Ohio, they all also improved their ranking since the first Quality Counts report in 2009. As shown in Table 3, in 2021, Florida ranked 3rd (up from 7th in 2009), Wisconsin ranked 8th (up from 21st), Indiana 15th (up from 25th), Arizona 22nd (up from 44th), and Ohio 26th (down from 14th).[21] It's worth noting that even Ohio improved its overall performance since the prior report; it was just overtaken by several states that saw larger gains.

Not only is there is no clear pattern of negative effects in the five states with robust, longstanding choice programs, but the states in question generally improved their performance over the last two decades. The trajectory of most of the states' scores hew quite closely to national patterns, with Arizona and Florida (the two states with the most robust choice programs) outperforming the national average gains, Indiana showing some gains albeit not always at pace with the national average, and Ohio and Wisconsin generally showing gains that somewhat underperform the national average. None of these states experienced the sort of catastrophic harms the critics predicted—or even any noticeable harm at all.

That said, it is impossible to prove causation by looking at raw NAEP scores. Educational choice policies do not exist in isolation. All sorts of other policies, changes in demographics, fluctuations in the economy, and numerous other factors can affect NAEP scores. It could be that the choice policies had negative effects that were outweighed by other positive factors, just as it could be that other factors blunted highly positive effects. At the very least, it is clear that *even if it were the case* that choice policies have negative effects on the public school system, the strength of those effects is negligible—nothing like what the critics predicted. In any case, to better understand what the effects of educational choice actually are, it is necessary to control for other variables.

Education Freedom Index

While the raw NAEP scores are useful, an even clearer picture emerges when adjusting the scores to account for certain variables that can affect performance. In 2021, researchers at the University of Arkansas released a study that examines the relationship between states' Education Freedom Index (EFI) score, which measures the availability and accessibility of private, charter, homeschool, and public school choice across the 50 U.S. states and Washington, D.C., as well as student achievement. The study employs a regression analysis, which makes it possible to "establish whether higher levels of education freedom are systematically associated with higher levels of academic achievement and improvement in academic achievement over time," though such an analysis cannot conclusively establish a causal relationship.[22]

After controlling for state-level measures of per-pupil spending, student/teacher ratio, socio-economic status, and race, the study found a "strong and statistically significant association… between education freedom and both academic scores and academic gains." Indeed, the study found a positive correlation between the EFI and combined NAEP score levels equivalent to 29 percent of a standard deviation. For context, the study's authors note that "the average size of the effect of every education intervention evaluated through a random-assignment study in the U.S. from 1995 to 2011 on student achievement broadly measured was 8 percent of a standard deviation in elementary grades and 15 percent of a standard deviation in middle grades." In other words, there is a much stronger relationship between NAEP scores and education freedom than the typical education intervention. As the study concludes:

> [T]he positive association between education freedom and state NAEP scores tends to be more than three times as large as the average effect of an elementary school intervention on student test score gains and about twice as large as the average effect of a middle school intervention on student achievement gains. The positive association between education freedom and state NAEP gains tends to be about twice as large as the average effect of an elementary school intervention on student test score gains and equal to or slightly larger than the average effect of a middle school intervention on student achievement gains.[23]

TABLE 4 Education Freedom Index Rank

State	2000 Overall	2021 Overall	2021 Private Choice
Arizona	#1	#1	#3
Florida	#35	#7	#5
Indiana	#25	#2	#4
Ohio	#18	#8	#12
Wisconsin	#3	#4	#6

Sources: Wolf, Patrick. J., Greene, Jay P., Ladner, Matthew., & Paul, James D. (2021, March). *Education Freedom and Student Achievement: Is More School Choice Associated with Higher State-Level Performance on the NAEP?* (Page 18). Department of Education Reform, University of Arkansas. https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/wordpressua.uark.edu/dist/9/544/files/2018/10/education-freedom-and-naep-scores.pdf
Research on Competitive Effects

In conclusion, the study finds no evidence to support the claims of choice skeptics that choice policies cause harm. Indeed, quite to the contrary, the study finds a robust, positive association between education freedom and a state's overall academic performance.

Even better than looking at raw NAEP scores or running a regression analysis is to directly study the effects of educational choice programs on district schools. There have been 28 empirical studies on the effects of voucher or tax-credit scholarship programs on the academic performance of students who remain at their traditional public schools.[24] Of these, 25 find statistically significant positive effects, one finds no visible effect, and two find a small negative effect. As highlighted in Table 5, 11 of these studies were of choice programs in Florida (three concerning the tax-credit scholarship and eight concerning vouchers), three studied vouchers in Ohio, two studied vouchers in Indiana, and six studied the voucher program in Milwaukee, WI. The conflicting studies regarding Indiana's voucher program are discussed below. The only study to find a negative effect in Florida was of a voucher program that had been declared unconstitutional before it had gone into effect (researchers looked at the *threat* of competition to see if it made a difference, although they could not analyze the effect of *actual* competition).

Likewise, the most recent systematic review of the research literature on the effects of school choice policies on district school performance, published in the September 2019 edition of *Educational Policy*

TABLE 5 Public School Students' Test Scores from Empirical Studies

Study	Location	Program Type	Any Positive Effect	No Visible Effect	Any Negative Effect
Canbolat (2021)	Indiana	Voucher			✓
Egalite and Mills (2021)	Louisiana	Voucher	✓		
Egalite and Catt (2020)	Indiana	Voucher	✓		
Figlio and Karbownik (2016)	Ohio	Voucher	✓		
Bowen and Trivitt (2014)	Florida	Voucher			✓
Chakrabarti (2013)	Florida	Voucher	✓		
Carr (2011)	Ohio	Voucher	✓		
Winters and Greene (2011)	Florida	Voucher	✓		
Mader (2010)	Milwaukee, WI	Voucher	✓		
Greene and Marsh (2009)	Milwaukee, WI	Voucher	✓		
Chakrabarti (2008)	Milwaukee, WI	Voucher	✓		
Forster (2008)	Ohio	Voucher	✓		
Forster (2008)	Florida	Voucher	✓		
Carnoy et al. (2007)	Milwaukee, WI	Voucher	✓		
Greene and Winters (2007)	Washington, D.C.	Voucher	✓		
Figlio and Rouse (2006)	Florida	Voucher	✓		
West and Peterson (2006)	Florida	Voucher	✓		
Greene and Winters (2004)	Florida	Voucher		✓	
Greene and Forster (2002)	Milwaukee, WI	Voucher	✓		
Hammons (2002)	Maine	Voucher	✓		
Hammons (2002)	Vermont	Voucher	✓		
Hoxby (2002)	Milwaukee, WI	Voucher	✓		
Greene (2001)	Florida	Voucher	✓		
Figlio et al. (2021)	Florida	Tax-Credit Scholarship	✓		
Figlio and Hart (2014)	Florida	Tax-Credit Scholarship	✓		
Rouse et al. (2013)	Florida	Tax-Credit Scholarship	✓		
Gray, Merrifield, and Adzima (2016)	San Antonio, TX	Private Scholarship	✓		
Greene and Forster (2002)	San Antonio, TX	Private Scholarship	✓		

Sources: EdChoice, (2021, April 15), *The 123s of School Choice*, https://www.edchoice.org/research-library/?report=the-123s-of-school-choice-2/; Figlio, Daniel N., Hart, Cassandra M. D., & Karbowni, Krzysztof, (2020), Effects of Scaling Up Private School Choice Programs on Public School Student, *NBER Working Paper No. 26758*, 4; Canbolat, Yusuf, "The Long-Term Effect of Competition on Public School Achievement: Evidence from the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program," Working Paper, July 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353365196_The_Long-Term_Effect_of_Competition_on_Public_School_Achievement_Evidence_from_the_Indiana_Choice_Scholarship_Program.

journal, found "small, positive effects of competition on student achievement."[25] That review consisted of a meta-analysis of more than 90 studies of the effects of competition on the performance of district schools, whether the competition stemmed from private school choice, charter schools, or both. The review also found that private school choice policies or the combination of private school choice and charter schools "had larger associations between competition and student achievement" than those areas that have only charter schools but lack private school choice.[26] The review's authors conclude: "The lack of an overall negative impact on student outcomes might ease critics' concerns that competition will hurt those students 'left behind' due to school-choice policies."[27]

The three most recent studies of the competitive effects of private school choice policies include one concerning Florida's tax-credit scholarship program and two concerning Indiana's voucher program. The Florida study specifically looks at the effects of scaling up school choice, concluding:

> We find evidence that as public schools are more exposed to private school choice, their students experience increasing benefits as the program scales up. In particular, higher levels of private school choice exposure are associated with lower rates of suspensions and absences, and with higher standardized test scores in reading and in math.[28]

As the study's authors noted in *Education Next*, the study found that choice and competition produced "gains for virtually all students" in Florida, most especially the disadvantaged. The study found that the "most positively affected are students with the greatest barriers to school success, including those with low family incomes and less-educated mothers."[29]

The two recent studies of Indiana's voucher reach opposite conclusions. One finds no statistically significant effects on district schools overall, but "consistent evidence of small positive effects for low-income children."[30] It's worth noting that Indiana's voucher program is limited to students from low-income (and, more recently, middle-income) families, so effects are likely to be concentrated on low-income students.

By contrast, the second report finds that "although competition has a positive effect in the earlier years, it is detrimental in the long term," potentially leading to slightly lower "proficiency rates in public schools that faced higher competition."[31] When controlling for school demographics, the study finds that "a 1% increase in district voucher participation is correlated with 0.840 and 0.922% lower proficiency in ELA and math, respectively."[32]

The apparently contradictory results are likely explained by the two studies' differing research methods. Whereas the first study analyzes student-level data, the second looks at *school-level* data. It could be the case that *student* performance is increasing overall, on average, while the average *school-level* performance simultaneously slightly decreased. A thought experiment from Jeremy Smith of the Fordham Institute illustrates how:

> Imagine a population of one hundred students. Suppose that, before [the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program] existed, all of these students would have attended the same public school, and that fifty of those students would have achieved proficiency at that school. That's a proficiency rate of 50 percent. With the ICSP in place, however, twenty of these students decide to use it to attend other schools, sixteen of whom would have achieved proficiency at the public school. At the same time, the public school makes some improvements so that four students who would have not have been proficient under the old system now achieve proficiency. Suppose also that all students who would have achieved proficiency at the public school without the scholarship program also achieve proficiency at the public school with ICSP. Overall, the effect on students was positive, since four more are now proficient. But our public school now has thirty-eight students who are proficient, and forty-eight students who are not proficient, a proficiency rate of 44 percent![33]

Analyzing school-level data can create the statistical illusion of decreased performance even if all the individual students actually increased their performance. That is why analyzing student-level data is superior to using school-level data. What is most important is whether individual students are improving their academic performance.

Contrary to the predictions of choice skeptics, the overwhelming conclusion of the research literature on the effects of educational choice programs on district school performance is that such programs not only *do not cause harm*, but they actually *improve* performance.

PART II:

Comparing Anti-Choice Rhetoric Across Proposals

As Part I of this paper demonstrates, there is no evidence to support the claim that educational choice policies cause harm, and a great deal of evidence suggesting that they improve the overall education system. Nevertheless, opponents of educational choice not only persist in making such specious claims, but their rhetoric also lacks any sense of proportion.

Take, for example, the following two assertions:

> "I believe [this ESA bill] would be the beginning of the end to public education."
>
> "The sales pitch [for the school choice bill] is that all parents should get school money and take it where they want. The final cost is the end of America's great egalitarian school system."

Were they, perhaps, about West Virginia's Hope Scholarship bill, which created an ESA for every single K–12 student switching out of a district school or entering kindergarten? Not even close. The first assertion was made by Kentucky Gov. Andrew Beshear about a bill that provides funding for a maximum of about 0.6 percent of Kentucky students.[34] The second assertion was from Max Brantley, a political commentator in Arkansas, concerning a tax-credit scholarship capped at $2 million that will serve fewer than 0.1 percent of Arkansas students.[35]

Overheated rhetoric in politics isn't hard to find, but are the above examples outliers or representative? More to the point, is there any correlation between the expansiveness of a choice proposal and the level of alarm raised by opponents of educational choice?

To answer this question, we analyzed the rhetoric of the opponents of five of the seven new educational choice policies enacted in 2021: Arkansas' new tax-credit scholarship (SB 680), the new education savings account (ESA) policies in New Hampshire (HB 2) and West Virginia (HB 2013), and the new tax-credit ESA policies in Kentucky (HB 563) and Missouri (HB 349).[36] This paper excludes Indiana's new ESA because it is limited to students with special needs, which means the rhetoric concerning the proposal cannot be directly compared to policies that serve a broader population. This paper also excludes the new tax-credit scholarship in Ohio because it was a rather late addition to a budget bill that contained hundreds of pages of policy changes, hence it did not attract the sort of attention that stand-alone proposals generally do.

The size and scope of these policies vary considerably. The most expansive new educational choice policy is West Virginia's aforementioned Hope Scholarship, for which about 93 percent of West Virginia's 295,000 K–12 students are eligible. Funding is available for all eligible students.

New Hampshire has the second-most expansive policy enacted in 2021. Students are eligible for an Education Freedom Account if they are from families with a household income up to 300 percent of the federal poverty line ($79,500 for a family of four in 2020–21). About 31 percent of families statewide are income eligible. As in West Virginia, funding is available for all eligible Granite State students.

At the low end of the spectrum, Kentucky, Missouri, and Arkansas restrict eligibility to students from low- and middle-income families so that about half of students in the state or fewer are eligible (49 percent in Kentucky, 51 percent in Missouri, and 38 percent in Arkansas). However, each of these states also has caps on the funding available. Both Kentucky and Missouri cap the available tax credits at $25 million per year, which would mean tax-credit scholarships would be available

TABLE 6 Choice Proposal Eligibility and Maximum Participation

State	Eligibility (Percent of Total K–12 Enrollment)	Maximum Participation (Percent of Total K–12 Enrollment)
West Virginia	93%	93%
New Hampshire	31%	31%
Kentucky	49%	0.6%
Missouri	51%	0.3%
Arkansas	38%	<0.1%

Sources: Bedrick, Jason & Tarnowski, Edward J., (2021, August 19), How Big Was the Year of Educational Choice? *Education Next,* https://www.educationnext.org/how-big-was-the-year-of-educational-choice/

for only up to 0.6 percent and 0.3 percent of students, respectively. In Arkansas, only $2 million in tax credits are available, so fewer than 0.1 percent of students will be able to receive a tax-credit scholarship.[37]

For each state's proposal, we compiled statements made against the proposals in legislative committee testimony, floor speeches, media interviews, op-eds, and editorials. As with the first part of this paper, we limited our analysis to assertions that the proposal would have negative effects on the district school system, hence we do not address purely philosophical objections, concerns about constitutionality, or other issues raised by opponents. We then measured the rhetorical intensity of each statement using a 10-point scale of concern from "mild" to "catastrophic," with a bonus level 11 in the spirit of Spinal Tap ("these go to 11") for "apocalyptic" rhetoric.[38] The relevant comments and their scores are compiled in the appendix.

Scale of Anti-Choice Rhetorical Intensity

(2) Mild: Concerns about potential negative effects that should be monitored, but do not rise to the level that the policy should be opposed.

(4) Moderate: Temperately stated concerns about likely negative effects, particularly on funding streams.

(6) Strong: Strongly worded concerns about likely negative effects, particularly on funding streams. (e.g., siphon, divert, etc.)

(8) Severe: Strongly worded concerns that the policy will significantly disrupt district school operations. (e.g., drain, harm, weaken, diminish, erode, undercut, etc.)

(10) Catastrophic: Alarmist claims that the policy will fundamentally undermine the ability of district schools to function. (e.g., degrade, cripple, hobble, deplete, attack, privatize, etc.)

(11) Apocalyptic: Alarmist claims that the policy will lead to the destruction of public education. (e.g. destroy, dismantle, eliminate, end of public education, etc.)

Aggregate Anti-Choice Rhetorical Intensity Scores

For each state, we divided the relevant anti-educational choice statements into four different categories of speakers: policymakers, district school personnel, interest groups, and commentators. *Policymakers* is primarily made up of state legislators but can also include governors or other elected or appointed public officials, such as the head of the state education agency. *District School Personnel* includes teachers, principals, superintendents, and other staff and administrators, as well as the unions and associations that represent them. *Interest Groups* include think tanks, advocacy organizations, public interest law firms, and other organizations that seek to influence public policy (excluding those in the District School Personnel category). *Commentators* include journalists, columnists, thought leaders, bloggers, etc., as well as newspaper editorials and letters to the editor.

For each category in each state, we provide a rhetorical intensity score comprised of the average of all the statements within that category. We then provide two aggregate scores for each state: one average across the scores for each of the four categories, and one average across all the statements we scored.

The most obvious takeaway from our analysis is that there is no relationship between the expansiveness of the educational choice proposal and the intensity of the anti-choice rhetoric. Indeed, the rhetorical intensity of choice opponents in the three states with extremely modest proposals (maximum enrollment of fewer than one percent of K–12 students) generally exceeded that of the rhetoric in states with more than 30 percent (New Hampshire) or 90 percent (West Virginia) maximum K–12 student enrollment. To give a sense of the level of rhetorical intensity across states (without having to read through the entire appendix), here are typical examples of anti-choice rhetoric from each state based on the results in Table 7:

TABLE 7 Anti-Choice Rhetorical Intensity Score

	State (Percent Max. Participation)					Average
	Arkansas (<0.1%)	Kentucky (0.6%)	Missouri (0.3%)	New Hampshire (31%)	West Virginia (93%)	
Policymakers	9.5	8.5	7.8	7.8	7.8	8.3
District School	7.0	7.0	8.0	6.0	11.0	7.8
Interest Groups	7.0	7.5	8.0	9.0	5.0	7.3
Commentators	11.0	7.0	9.3	7.7	8.3	8.5
Aggregate (categories)	**8.6**	**7.5**	**8.3**	**7.6**	**8.0**	**8.0**
Aggregate (total)	**8.8**	**7.6**	**8.2**	**7.5**	**8.0**	**8.0**

ARKANSAS (8 - Severe Concern)

> "Private school vouchers leave our public schools that serve the vast majority of Arkansas students without the resources they need. [...] Having to play catch up because schools were underfunded is why most of our children are left behind."
> – Laverne Sims, Concerned Citizens of Marvell, Arkansas[39]

KENTUCKY (8 - Severe Concern)

> "[The Kentucky Education Association] opposes this bill. Despite its presentation, it's going to be detrimental to our public schools. [...] These pseudo vouchers and tax bill are nothing more than attempt to subsidize the private schools at the expense of public schools and other critical services. [...] This bill is dangerous. This bill is bad education policy, it's bad fiscal policy, and it's bad public policy."
> – Eddie Campbell, president, the Kentucky Education Association[40]

MISSOURI (8 - Severe Concern)

> "I feel that this is a terrible failure on the part of all of us. And we should think deeply about why we want to defund public education and give it to private entities because we are unwilling to do our job."
> – State Rep. Barbara Phifer[41]

NEW HAMPSHIRE (8 - Severe Concern)

> "[Public school students] will be significantly hurt by this undercutting of our fiscal support for their education."
> – State Sen. Tom Sherman[42]

WEST VIRGINIA (8 - Severe Concern)

> "With West Virginia continuing its lurch toward more charter schools and broader vouchers, prepare for a further weakening of public schools and common curricula. Get ready for cuts in teacher positions, salaries and benefits."
> – Susan Johnson, *West Virginia Gazette*[43]

Moreover, as shown in the appendix, each state's proposal had at least one policymaker, district school representative, interest group, or commentator "go to eleven" with their apocalyptic predictions. For example:

ARKANSAS (11 - Apocalyptic)

> "I've watched this state privatize public education every piece of the way. This bill represents the last aspect of public education that has not been sold out to private interests. I'm asking you to [...] vote this bill down. If not, vote yes and put us out of our misery, put the final nail in the coffin of public education."
> – State Rep. David Tollett[44]

KENTUCKY (11 - Apocalyptic)

> "We once again see public education with its neck inside a guillotine, getting ready to have his head cut off."
> – State Sen. Reginald Thomas[45]

MISSOURI (11 - Apocalyptic)

> "This latest legislative move in Missouri has been sold as one that will benefit low-income families, but public school leaders fear it's a step toward the dismantling of public school districts and the privatization of public education."
> – *Kansas City Star* editorial[46]

NEW HAMPSHIRE (11 - Apocalyptic)

> "All of this legislation is carving public education apart."
> – State Sen. Lou D'Allesandro[47]

WEST VIRGINIA (11 - Apocalyptic)

> "Voucher zealots are thrilled. West Virginia is hurtling rapidly backward into the nineteenth century."
> – Diane Ravitch, education blogger[48]

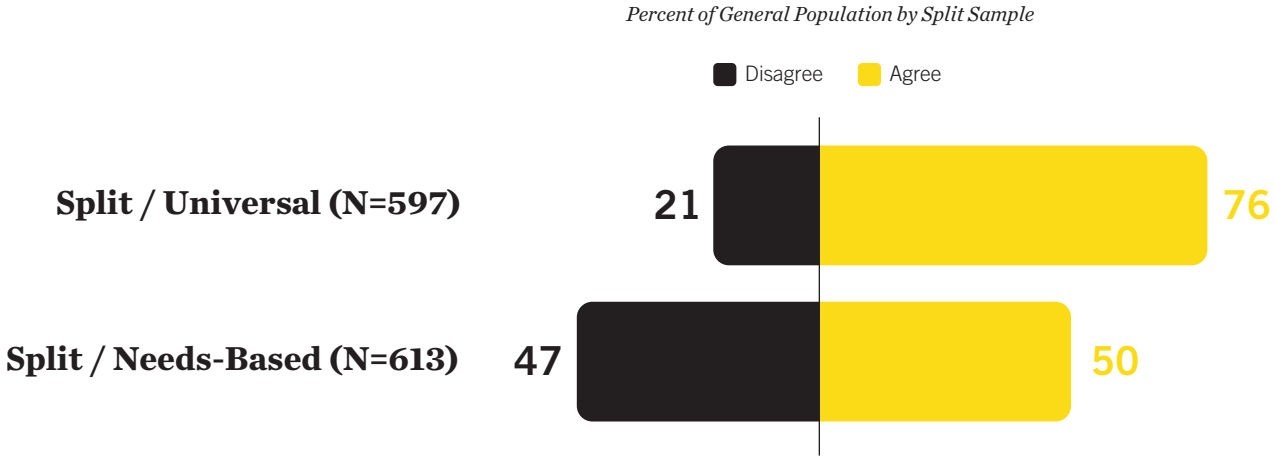
It's worth reiterating just how divorced from reality these claims are. Rep. Tollett of Arkansas claims that a tax-credit scholarship program that fewer than 0.1 percent of students will be able to access is "the last aspect of public education" that has not been privatized, and the "final nail in the coffin" for public education. Despite decades of experience with expansive educational choice programs in states where the district school systems not only still exist but are also *improving*, Sen. Reginald Thomas of Kentucky claims that up to 0.6 percent of students using a tax-credit ESA entails public education having "its head cut off." These statements are simply preposterous.

Unfortunately, the overheated rhetoric can sometimes intimidate choice supporters. Supportive lawmakers will sometime propose more limited legislation in the hopes of reducing the rhetorical temperature of attacks on the proposal. However, there is no evidence that moderating a choice proposal by limiting funding or eligibility induces opponents to moderate their rhetoric. Such limitations only result in limiting the appeal of the

FIGURE 2 Universal vs. Needs-Based Education Savings Accounts (ESAs)

Question Wording A: Some people believe that ESAs should be availiable to ***all families***, regardless of income and special needs. Do you agree or disagree with that statement?

Question Wording B: Some people believe that ESAs should be availiable only to families ***based on financial need***. Do you agree or disagree with that statement?



Sources: EdChoice, Charter Member AAPOR Transparency Initiative (American Association for Public Opinion Research), & Braun Research. (2021, July). *2021 Schooling in America: What Do the Public and Parents Say About K-12 Education and Schooling During the COVID-19 Pandemic?* https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/2021-Schooling-in-America-PROJECT.pdf

proposal to the public. As EdChoice's 2021 *Schooling in America* Survey found, support is significantly higher for educational choice policies that are open to all children (76%) than those that are restricted according to financial need (50%).[49]

Opponents of educational choice tend to throw everything they have against such proposals, regardless of their size and scope. Modest proposals are viewed as merely the proverbial "camel's nose under the tent," that must be met with the same forceful opposition as the whole camel. Whether a proposal would be open to nine out of 10 kids or fewer than one in a thousand, opponents of choice engage in the same level of rhetorical intensity, predicting that empowering families to choose from a wide variety of educational options will produce only doom and gloom for the district school system. Fortunately for everyone, their predictions have no basis in reality.

CONCLUSION

Opponents of educational choice recycle the same false prophesies of doom without regard to the evidence or the scope of the proposals. As Part I of this report illustrated, even after a few decades, the choice opponents' predictions of disaster have not materialized. Instead, the average performance of district schools in the states with the most robust educational choice environments is as good or better than when the choice policies were enacted. Indeed, a mountain of evidence points to the choice policies having modest but statistically significant *positive effects* on district school performance. And as Part II illustrated, choice opponents' pessimistic predictions do not vary in intensity based on the size or scope of the proposal.

Every child should have access to the learning environment that best meets his or her individual learning needs. Policies like education savings accounts have the potential to provide that access, so long as state legislators are not cowed by the opponents' faulty forecasting and reckless rhetoric. Policymakers have no reason to believe the fearmongering of the Chicken Littles, nor should they expect that reducing the scope of their proposals will reduce the intensity of opposition. Instead, they should stay the course, be bold, and ensure that every child gets access to the quality education they deserve.

METHODOLOGY

Part II of this paper entailed three steps: 1) gathering statements by policymakers, district school personnel, interest groups, and commentators opposing educational choice legislation that passed in five states in 2021 (along with companion bills and related bills); 2) selecting only those statements that critiqued the choice proposals for their expected impact on the district school system; and 3) assigning a "rhetorical intensity" score to each statement.

The statements gathered in the first step including testimony offered at committee hearings, arguments made during legislative floor debates, quotations reported by the press, op-eds and editorials, and other public statements. We collected the committee hearing testimony and legislative debates by looking for the video or audio recordings made publicly available through each state legislature's website. Where none were available, we contacted the relevant legislative staff to see if any records existed. Transcriptions were made of the relevant portions of audio and video files.

We gathered statements reported by the press, op-eds and editorials, and other public statements via multiple search engines, including Newspapers.com, Google, and DuckDuckGo. We searched for keywords such as "vouchers," "school vouchers," "tax-credit scholarships," "education savings accounts," "school choice," with and without the relevant bill numbers and program names (e.g., "Hope Scholarships" in West Virginia), during the time period when the bills were being considered and voted upon in 2021. When we found statements made by national organizations (or state chapters thereof) in one state, we searched for statements made by those organizations in the other states (e.g., the AFT, the NEA, the ACLU, or Americans United for Separation of Church and State).

Once we had exhausted our search, we sifted through all the statements made against the choice legislation to find those that specifically warned that the choice programs, if enacted, would have negative effects on the functioning of district schools. This meant excluding any arguments that were about constitutionality, the effects of choice programs on participating students, the supposed lack of accountability, and so on. Where opponents opposed the public funding of private schools solely on philosophical grounds, without mentioning potentially negative effects, the statements were excluded.[50] Where individuals or organizations made multiple relevant statements, we included only the statement with the higher rhetorical intensity score, or included and scored the multiple statements as though it were a single statement.

The final step was to score all the relevant statements. Each of us separately assigned a "rhetorical intensity" score using the 11-point scale we had developed. We then compared our scoring and, for those statements we scored differently, we assigned a score worth the average of our two initial scores.

APPENDIX

This appendix includes all the statements that were scored for rhetorical intensity in Part II of this paper. For each state, the statements are divided into the four categories of speakers that we identified: policymakers, district school personnel, interest groups, and commentators. Within each category, the statements are listed in descending order of rhetorical intensity, along with their assigned score.

Arkansas

Policymakers

Rep. Gary Deffenbaugh: "This is the beginning of the demise of public education."[51]
RATING: 11 - APOCALYPTIC.

Rep. Jim Wootten Beebe: "I'm telling you this bill is the final nail that'll be driven into education, public education as we know it in this state. What we're seeing today is a progression. They get a little bit here, they get a little bit there, and a little bit over here. And the next thing you know, public education is gone." [52]
RATING: 11 - APOCALYPTIC.

Rep. David Tollett: "Research shows in every state that has passed similar legislation to this, that educational outcomes have decreased. You just heard that. Research is conclusive on this. Educational outcomes for that state when this is implemented, and it takes 10 to 12 years to fully show. That all educational outcomes for the public schools have decreased because of voucher type programs. [...] I've watched this state privatize public education every piece of the way. This bill represents the last aspect of public education that has not been sold out to private interests. [...] I'm asking you to [...] vote this bill down. If not, vote yes and put us out of our misery, put the final nail in the coffin of public education." [53]
RATING: 11 - APOCALYPTIC.

Sen. Joyce Elliott: "[There's] this notion that we don't have a responsibility to work together to create a system for all kids to be successful. And the chances of doing all these things are becoming less and less as we continue to siphon money from the public school funds. [...] It's not as if I'm against anybody having a choice but, obviously, I care very much about whether or not we are encroaching on the school public funds so much that it becomes compromised." [54]
RATING: 5 - MODERATE CONCERN.

District School Personnel

Carol Fleming, President, Arkansas Education Association: "When we divert public tax dollars to private schools, we lose our ability to ensure that those students are receiving the supports and educational opportunities that they deserve."
RATING: 8 - SEVERE CONCERN.

Interest Groups

Laverne Sims, Concerned Citizens of Marvell, Arkansas: "Private school vouchers leave our public schools that serve the vast majority of Arkansas students without the resources they need. [...] Having to play catch up because schools were underfunded is why most of our children are left behind."
RATING: 8 - SEVERE CONCERN.

Bill Kopsky, executive director, Arkansas Public Policy Panel: "They suck up all this oxygen and resources away from the things that we should be focusing on, that would improve the quality of education for everybody." [55]
RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN.

Commentators

Max Brantley, commentator**, Arkansas Times:** "[The school choice bill is] a blow to real public schools, but with a little financial sweetener built in to diminish past opposition from public school leaders. [...] The sales pitch is that all parents should get school money and take it where they want. The final cost is the end of America's great egalitarian school system, an end to accountability in education and further segregation of schools by class and race." [56]
RATING: 11 - APOCALYPTIC.

Kentucky

Policymakers

Governor Andrew Beshear: "I believe [the ESA bill] would be the beginning of the end to public education."[57]
RATING: 11 - APOCALYPTIC.

Sen. Reginald Thomas: "But what this bill will do today, make no mistake about it, is that it's going to continue to dwindle and siphon off and strip it away money that's going go to a public education, so that private schools can benefit from that. [...] I will tell you that this bill is the beginning of the end of public education here in Kentucky. [...] We once again see public education with its neck inside a guillotine, getting ready to have his head cut off. Let's make no mistake about it. What House Bill 563 does that takes $25 million away from public education and gives that to private schools" [58]
RATING: 11 - APOCALYPTIC.

Rep. Mary Lou Marzian: "May I remind you that we've lost 48,000 public school teachers. This is just another slap in the face to our teachers, whom we ask so much of. Watch for mental health, watch for kids that have been beaten, abused." [59]
RATING: 10.5 - CATASTROPHIC.

Jason Glass, Kentucky Education Commissioner: "The bill, as it currently stands now, pits one underfunded Kentucky school against another." [60]
RATING: 7 – STRONG CONCERN.

Rep. Patti Minter: "[My constituents] believe in public schools, they believe that we need to fund them better, not create mechanisms that take away from them. [...] We need more resources, not fewer. This takes away from them." [61]
RATING: 4 – MODERATE CONCERN.

District School Personnel

The Kentucky Association of School Superintendents: "[The KASS opposes the ESA bill, which is] the privatization of public funds for education through tax credits for educational opportunity accounts." [62]
RATING: 9 – SEVERE / CATASTROPHIC.

Eddie Campbell, president**, the Kentucky Education Association:** "KEA opposes this bill. Despite its presentation, it's going to be detrimental to our public schools. [...] These pseudo vouchers and tax bill are nothing more than attempt to subsidize the private schools at the expense of public schools and other critical services. [...] This bill is dangerous. This bill is bad education policy, it's bad fiscal policy, and it's bad public policy." [63]
RATING: 8 – SEVERE CONCERN.

Mike Borchers, Ludlow Independent Superintendent: "The issue is the underfunding of public schools." [64]
RATING: 8 – SEVERE CONCERN.

Josh Shoulta, communications director, **Kentucky School Boards Association:** "We don't want to do anything that potentially siphons money away from a general fund, particularly in a time when we know that the budget is potentially going to be tightened." [65]
RATING: 6 – STRONG CONCERN.

Dr. Marty Pollio, JCPS Superintendent: Told WAVE 3 News the bill "would end up hurting public schools by further stripping them of much-needed funding." [66]
RATING: 6 – STRONG CONCERN.

Jay Matheney, district school teacher, "Our state tax dollars are being redirected to benefit maybe 4,000 families, especially ones that make over $100,000 a year, and leaving a whole lot of students out in the cold."[67]
RATING: 6 – STRONG CONCERN.

Interest Groups

Gabriella Staykova, team member, **Kentucky Student Voice:** "[The school choice policy will likely] creat[e] pockets of wealth and privilege in certain district with other districts that are falling behind, underserved and underfunded." [68]
RATING: 8 – SEVERE CONCERN.

Nema Brewer, co-founder, **Kentucky 120 United:** "The majority of that money will go to Catholic schools in Fayette, Jefferson and Kenton, and our mountain counties will continue to send their taxpaying dollars to Frankfort only to be distributed to the big urban areas, and they will continue to dwindle on the vine." [69]
RATING: 8 – SEVERE CONCERN.

American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky: "House Bill 563 will take public school dollars and give them to private schools. This will reduce funding by $25M annually, harm Kentucky students, and reduce transparency around how your tax dollars are spent." [70]
RATING: 8 – SEVERE CONCERN

Lucy Waterbury, vice president of legislative response, **Save Our Schools Kentucky:** "But I implore you to understand that every dollar that is taken, whether it is through a tax credit, whether it is through the defunding of SEEK, whether it is taken from bus transportation, reimbursements, whether it is taken from textbooks or professional development, is a dollar less to educate public school children." [71]
RATING: 6 – STRONG CONCERN.

Commentators

Linda Blackford, columnist, *Herald-Leader*: "[The tax-credit ESA bill] hurts teachers and rural school districts [and] weakens public education." [72]
RATING: 8 – SEVERE CONCERN.

Drs. Amanda Potterson, Joseph Waddington, and Sarah E. LaCour, University of Kentucky: "We are concerned with any diversion of funds away from public schools for private purposes. There is no provision stated that ensures unchanged levels of state funding for public schools. Most likely to be negatively impacted are Kentucky's rural public schools, whose students are also unlikely to have access to as many private school alternatives. These students would instead be harmed by decreased public school funding levels." [73]
RATING: 6 – STRONG CONCERN.

Missouri

Policymakers

Sen. John Rizzo, Senate Minority Floor Leader: "This bill will drain $75 million away from public schools each year so certain families can get paid to homeschool their kids or get a kickback for sending them to private schools." [74]
RATING: 8 - SEVERE CONCERN.

Rep. Barbara Phifer: "I feel that this is a terrible failure on the part of all of us. And we should think deeply about why we want to defund public education and give it to private entities because we are unwilling to do our job." [75]
RATING: 8 - SEVERE CONCERN.

Rep. Ian Mackey: "The problem is there will be kids left behind as well. And when those kids are left behind and the resources are drained, then what? That's the problem I'm trying to solve." [76]
RATING: 8 - SEVERE CONCERN.

Sen. Lauren Arthur: "I do think that this is going to threaten eventually our ability to fully and adequately fund public schools." [77]
RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN.

Rep. Allen Andrews, House Majority Whip: "Students will be left in an educational system where funding has trickled away when the money follows a child. [...] Any attempt to chip away at the financial infrastructure of our public school system will have a negative effect on our ability to provide every young Missourian equal access to a good education. [...] For children left behind, for the least of these children, I stand today as their voice, asking we stop back-and-forth rhetoric and begin to build legislation of substance for all children in this state – not only those with the ability to choose. [...] Any attempt to chip away at the financial infrastructure of our public school system will have a negative effect on our ability to provide every young Missourian equal access to a good education." [78]

RATING: 7 - STRONG / SEVERE CONCERN.

District School Personnel

Kelly Wachel, spokeswoman, **Kansas City Public Schools:** "This bill begins a significant degradation of public education in Missouri." [79]

RATING: 10 - CATASTROPHIC.

*Y*aw **Oben,** superintendent, **Hickman Mills School District:** "This is a direct attack on public education. It is a direct attack on our student enrollment and the funding that we receive from the state. And that reduces our ability to provide some of our special programs." [80]

RATING: 10 - CATASTROPHIC.

Patrick Lane, Missouri School Boards Association: "The mission of the School Board Association is to ensure that all students in this state receive a quality education. Our democracy depends on it. This bill is trying to divert educational funds and privatize education without any guarantee to the Missouri taxpayers that the students will receive a quality education. And when they do not, they come back to the public schools or into the workforce far behind their peers. This is a bad policy and we ask you not to support it." [81]

RATING: 10 - CATASTROPHIC.

Melissa Randol, executive director, **Missouri School Boards Association:** "[The proposal] further erodes opportunities to fund needed investments. [...] Missouri is 49th in the country in average starting teachers' salaries – we need to invest in Missouri's high-quality teachers, rather than funnel money to institutions that have no accountability to taxpayers for how they spend taxpayers' dollars or how they educate our children." [82]

RATING: 8 - SEVERE CONCERN.

Bruce Moe, director, **Missouri State Teachers Association:** "We are disappointed that the General Assembly abandoned Missouri public schools when they needed them the most. Facing disruption and learning loss due to a historic pandemic, the legislature decided to pick winners and losers with a new $50 million voucher program that will take public money to pay for private education without any oversight or accountability to Missouri students, taxpayers, or communities." [83]

RATING: 8 - SEVERE CONCERN.

Scott Kimble, Missouri Association of School Administrators: "If this bill were to pass, it would create a $50 million tax credit program that would grow due to inflation over a 10-year period, that would siphon $500 million away from general revenue, which could have been used for the foundation formula, or could have been used for school transportation, or public safety, or higher ed." [84]

RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN

Mike Wood, Missouri State Teachers Association: "I would worry about kids that are still left behind in those struggling schools, if they left and took a scholarship." [85]

RATING: 4 – MODERATE CONCERN.

Interest Groups

Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, St. Louis Chapter: "Vouchers will not strengthen public education. Instead of funneling public money to private schools to pay for the education of a few, select students, we would better serve all Missouri children by using public funds to help public schools during this difficult time. [...] We will continue to update you on possible actions for you to take to let your legislators know how you feel about this legislation, which would undermine our public schools." [86]
RATING: 8 – SEVERE CONCERN.

Commentators

Kansas City Star editorial**:** "This latest legislative move in Missouri has been sold as one that will benefit low-income families, but public school leaders fear it's a step toward the dismantling of public school districts and the privatization of public education." [87]
RATING: 11 - APOCALYPTIC.

Diane Ravitch, education blogger: "The GOP is determined to siphon public dollars away from public schools and send them to religious schools." [88]
RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN.

Ted House, former Missouri state senator: "[School choice proponents] advocate for something that would devastate the ideal of public education. That destructive initiative is vouchers — the concept that would allow taxpayer money to follow children to private schools." [89]
RATING: 11 - APOCALYPTIC.

New Hampshire

Policymakers

Sen. Lou D'Allesandro: "All of this legislation is carving public education apart." [90]
RATING: 11 - APOCALYPTIC.

Sen. Tom Sherman: "[Public school students] will be significantly hurt by this undercutting of our fiscal support for their education." [91]
RATING: 8 - SEVERE CONCERN.

Sen. Jay Kahn: "The competition for funding is going to be intense. [...] The state can't afford an education freedom account bill." [92]
RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN.

Rep. David Luneau: "Well, if you're looking for out of control government spending, this is it. The proposal in HB2 for education savings accounts exposes the state to more than $70 million a year in new costs, mostly going to kids who already go to private schools. [...] That's $70 million from the Education Trust Fund not going to public schools, $70 million not going to help underfunded school districts, $70 million not going to property tax relief. [...] It's financially irresponsible." [93]
RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN.

District School Personnel

Deb Howes, president, **American Federation for Teachers of New Hampshire:** "And yet, the budget makes matters even worse. It takes a lot of gall to propose spending $100 million less than two years ago in public education funding to cities and towns and also include in the budget a voucher measure that would transfer millions of public education dollars to virtually unaccountable privately run schools. This is a hard slap in the face to all who believe that strong public schools are the bedrock of our communities and democracy and must be funded adequately so that Granite State students can thrive, progress and move on to their next level of education with confidence." [94]
RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN.

Barrett Christina, executive director, **New Hampshire School Board Association:** "[The Education Freedom Accounts bill is] bad public policy because it takes money away from public schools, there's a lack of accountability and transparency with how the money is going to be spent, and there's no evidence to show that these [freedom accounts] increase educational outcomes for children." [95]
RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN.

Dean Cascadden, Bow-Dunbarton Superintendent: Told the Concord Monitor he is "'very, very' concerned about the impact of the school voucher program on public school districts like his own." [96]
RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN.

Interest Groups

Christina Pretorius, policy director, **Reaching Higher:** "Why are lawmakers pursuing this privatization effort, which has not been shown to benefit student outcomes, and has actually been shown to hurt them — when our public schools are facing a budgetary collapse?" [97]
RATING: 10 - CATASTROPHIC.

Mary Wilke, Kent Street Coalition: "The budget turns its back on the 90% of our students who attend public schools, and it worsens the inequities that make zip codes a determinant of educational opportunity in New Hampshire. [...] Republican leaders want to bury in the budget an unpopular and deeply flawed school voucher bill that would withdraw millions more in state support from public schools, sending the money instead to private and home schools that are not accountable to public taxpayers. In this budget, Republican "tax cutters" show their true colors; they are downshifting tens of millions of dollars in education costs to our already overburdened local property taxpayers, while leaving public school students with ever-diminishing opportunity." [98]
RATING: 8 - SEVERE CONCERN.

Commentators

Diane Ravitch, education blogger: "Commissioner Edelblut's goal is to wipe out public schools. The people of New Hampshire will have to stop him. He is not a conservative. He is an anarchist." [99]
RATING: 11 - APOCALYPTIC.

Pamela Kirby, letter to the editor, ***Concord Monitor*:** "New Hampshire struggles with inequity in our current public school funding formula, so decreasing the amount of funding for our public schools to fund these 'Freedom Accounts' will divert desperately needed resources... Should children in public schools have their education diminished to fund private school placements for others?" [100]
RATING: 8 - SEVERE CONCERN.

Jeanne Dietsch, political commentator and former legislator: "Opponents of the bill point out that the marginal cost per student, that is, the money that is saved when one student leaves or enters a classroom, is far less than the average cost per student. This is because average costs include the cost of school buildings, sports facilities, bussing, administration, and other expenses. These costs do not change when a single student leaves, yet the money allocated for that student would leave the district. Unless the school lowers its budget, local taxpayers would have to make up the difference." [101]
RATING: 4 - MODERATE CONCERN.

West Virginia

Policymakers

Del. Ed Evans: "You're going to potentially remove enough funds from a local education agency to seriously cripple their ability to provide a thorough and efficient education, as described by the [state] constitution." [102]
RATING: 10 - CATASTROPHIC.

Sen. Michael Romano: "Here we are again. Deja vu. The voucher bill. They got a new name for it – Hope Scholarship. What's clear is, this is a long line of bills that do nothing but defund public education. [...] We're going to continue to suck money out of the public school education till it falls flat on its face... Whether it be charter schools, or now ESAs, we will continue to drain the public education system." [103]
RATING: 10 - CATASTROPHIC.

Del. Jim Barach: "[The Hope Scholarship bill would create] a two-tiered system of education where the have-somes and the have-mores get to go to private schools. And everyone else goes to underfunded public schools. And we're going to end up with a lot of people ending up on the short end of the stick." [104]
RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN.

Del. Cody Thompson: "We have several small schools in my district. I'm very concerned that this bill, using our public funds and taking them out of our public schools, will result in mass consolidation." [105]
RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN

Sen. William Ihlenfeld: "[The Hope Scholarship bill amounts to] financial recklessness." [106]
RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN.

District School Personnel

Fred Albert, president, **American Federation of Teachers (West Virginia):** "How does privatization drive what one expert calls 'a slow death spiral' for public schools? Simple [...] it siphons away funding—while not really changing overhead costs like heating/cooling, cafeterias, transportation, technology and labor. Moreover, it denigrates the entire system. [107]
RATING: 11 – APOCALYPTIC.

Dale Lee, president, **West Virginia Education Association:** "Gutting Public School Funding? The ESA bill, HB 2013, will ultimately take $100 million from public schools in favor of private and home schools. [...] The price tag: $100 million straight out of the public school budgets." [108] Elsewhere, he described the bill as an "attempt to destroy public education."[109]
RATING: 11 – APOCALYPTIC.

Interest Groups

Kelly Allen, executive director, **West Virginia Center for Budget and Policy:** "If signed into law, the program would divert hundreds of millions of dollars of education funding to families who already have made the choice to send their children to private school or homeschool — and away from our public schools, where the vast majority of our state's students will learn with fewer resources." [110]
RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN.

ACLU of West Virginia: "This bill creates a Hope Scholarship Program. In reality this program is Education Savings Accounts by another name. The ACLU opposes ESAs because they take money from public education and can result in public money being used for religious education." [111]
RATING: 4 - MODERATE CONCERN.

Commentators

Diane Ravitch, education blogger: "Voucher zealots are thrilled. West Virginia is hurtling rapidly backward into the nineteenth century." [112]
RATING: 11 - APOCALYPTIC

Susan Johnson, *West Virginia Gazette*: "With West Virginia continuing its lurch toward more charter schools and broader vouchers, prepare for a further weakening of public schools and common curricula. Get ready for cuts in teacher positions, salaries and benefits." [113]
RATING: 8 - SEVERE CONCERN.

Erin Beck, *Mountain State Spotlight:* "Even so, the bills create options that aren't realistic for many children with disabilities, and risk funneling money away from the public schools where they would remain." [114]
RATING: 6 - STRONG CONCERN.

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