

## Most Voucher Recipients Are Wealthy Families Who Never Attended Public Schools

Before 2022, many private school voucher programs were sold to the public as an opportunity for low-income students to “escape” public schools. Voucher programs often limited participation to families with low incomes, and also generally required children to previously have attended public schools.

This is no longer the case. Many states now operate universal voucher programs that allow virtually every student in the state—regardless of their family’s income, whether their local public school is high performing, whether they have only attended private school, or any other factor—to get a taxpayer-funded voucher to pay for tuition at private school.

**As a result, most recipients of private school vouchers in universal programs are wealthy families whose children never attended public schools in the first place.**<sup>1</sup> These wealthy families can afford to pay for private school tuition without help from taxpayers in the form of a voucher. Private school vouchers are simply a way for wealthy families to get a taxpayer-funded discount on their private school tuition. And our public schools, which educate 90% of the nation’s students, pay the price.

Vouchers are the reverse Robin Hood of education: they take educational opportunities from the poor and the working class in order to give more advantages to the rich.

Here are several examples:

### Arkansas

- According to the Arkansas Department of Education, 95% of the participants in the state’s universal voucher program had never attended public schools before receiving a voucher.<sup>2</sup>

### Florida

- When Florida expanded its voucher program to all students in 2023, 122,895 new students signed up to get vouchers.<sup>3</sup> Only 13% of those students had ever previously attended public schools. Sixty-nine percent were already attending private schools, and the remaining students were entering private kindergarten.<sup>4</sup> Of the new students, 44% are from households that made \$120,000 or more per year—more than double the

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<sup>1</sup> See Mark Lieberman, [Most Students Getting School Choice Funds Are Not Ditching Public Schools](#), *EdWeek* (Oct. 4, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Ark. Dept. of Educ., [Education Freedom Account Annual Report, 2023-2024 School Year](#), 8 (Oct. 9, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Danielle Prieur, [Florida Policy Institute Asked for School Voucher Data. Here’s What Step Up for Students Provided](#), *WMFE NPR* (Sept. 14, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

median household income in the state.<sup>5</sup> Only 30% are from families that make less than \$55,000 per year.<sup>6</sup>

## Arizona

- Researchers found that the use of vouchers in Arizona is highest in affluent school districts, and lowest in poorer school districts.<sup>7</sup> For example, more than half of voucher students came from the wealthiest quarter of zip codes in the state, with median incomes ranging from \$81,000 to \$178,000.<sup>8</sup> Most of those students have never attended public schools: more than 50% of Arizona's voucher spending for 2024 is made up of newly incurred costs for students who were previously enrolled in private school, homeschooled, or hadn't yet started kindergarten before getting a voucher.<sup>9</sup>

## Indiana

- Most students in Indiana's voucher program come from well-off families. During the 2022-2023 school year, voucher recipients were more likely to come from families that made more than \$100,000 per year than families that made less than \$50,000 per year.<sup>10</sup>

## Ohio

- Since Ohio expanded its voucher program to wealthy families, the percentage of low-income students using vouchers in Cleveland fell from 35% to 7%.<sup>11</sup> Now, most Ohio voucher students did not attend public schools before they took a voucher: the percentage of voucher students statewide who had already attended a private school in the year prior jumped from 7% in 2019 to almost 55% in 2023.<sup>12</sup>

## Iowa

- State-provided data show that roughly two-thirds of students receiving vouchers in Iowa's new statewide program were already attending private schools before getting taxpayer money for tuition. Only about 13% of voucher students had ever previously attended a public school.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census, [Florida: Median Household Income](#) (2021).

<sup>6</sup> Prieur.

<sup>7</sup> Jen Jennings, [Arizona's School Vouchers Are Helping the Wealthy & Are Widening Educational Opportunity Gaps](#), *AZ Mirror* (Jan. 12, 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Garrett Archer, [Analysis: More Than Half of ESA Students Come from High-Income Zip Codes](#), *ABC News 15 Arizona* (Jan. 9, 2024).

<sup>9</sup> [Governor Katie Hobbs Statement on New School Voucher Cost Projections](#), Office of the Ariz. Governor, (July 25, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Casey Smith, [Indiana's School Choice Voucher Program Grew 20% Last Year - With More Growth Coming](#), *The74* (July 9, 2023).

<sup>11</sup> Conor Morris, [School Vouchers Now Going to More Wealthy, Private School Students, Study Says](#), *Ideastream Public Media* (June 5, 2023).

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> Erin Murphy, [Two-Thirds of Iowa Students Receiving New Private School Scholarships Already Attended Private School, State Figures Show](#), *Sioux City Journal* (Jan. 26, 2024).