

Voucher Costs Are Out of Control

When lawmakers consider expanding or creating private school voucher programs, their projections often drastically underestimate the actual costs. They sell a false promise that vouchers will save money, do not budget adequate funds, and then wind up with million dollar shortfalls, necessitating cuts from public education and even tax increases.

Some voucher advocates incorrectly claim that if the amount of the voucher is less than the average expenditure spent to educate a student in public school, the state will save money. Existing voucher programs prove this false.

First, it costs less than the average expenditure to educate some students, and much more to educate others who need additional support and services—like those with disabilities, English language learners, and low-income students. The students who are most expensive to educate, however, tend to remain in public schools because they cannot find a private voucher school willing to accept them. Yet, because of the voucher program, the public schools are left with fewer resources. Furthermore, in a voucher program, the state now pays tuition for private school students who never attended public schools, which is an altogether new cost for taxpayers. **This all adds up to more, not less, spending.**

Here are several examples of the skyrocketing costs of voucher programs:

- **The Arizona voucher is costing 1,346% more than projected, contributing to a \$400 million budget deficit.** The fiscal note attached to Arizona’s universal voucher program projected the program would cost the state about \$65 million in 2024 and \$125 million in 2025.¹ But once students’ applications started to come in, state leaders realized these estimates were woefully inadequate. The Arizona Governor’s Office now estimates that the price tag is more than 1,346% higher at a cost of \$940 million per year.² This is one of the main causes of a \$400 million budget shortfall in the state’s general fund, which funds the state’s public schools, transportation, fire, police, and prisons.³
- **The Florida voucher is already more than \$2 billion over budget in year one.** The Florida Senate projected that its voucher expansion would cost \$646 million.⁴ But independent researchers estimated that the program would actually cost almost \$4

¹ [Fiscal Note](#), Ariz. House Bill 2853 (2023).

² Paola Rodriguez, [Hobbs: “The Universal School Voucher Program is Unsustainable as New Cost Projections Come In,”](#) AZPM (July 26, 2023).

³ Howard Fisher, [Ariz. Faces \\$400M Deficit as Tax Cuts Kick in, Voucher Demand Grows,](#) *Ariz. Daily Star* (Jan. 2, 2024).

⁴ Lynn Hatter, [Florida Expands Its Voucher Program to Every Student, Regardless of Income,](#) *NPR* (Mar. 24, 2023).

billion,⁵ and actual costs are already approaching that amount—\$3.35 billion in the first year.⁶ In just one county, Duval, school officials report a \$17 million budget shortage due to funds lost to the vouchers.⁷

- **West Virginia’s voucher drains more than \$20 million from public schools per year.** During the 2024 - 2025 school year, the West Virginia voucher program is expected to funnel \$21.6 million away from the state’s public schools—enough to pay the salaries for 301 professional teachers and 63 school service workers.⁸ As a result of the voucher and other declines in enrollment, multiple school districts are already warning residents that they need to impose property tax increases in order to continue to pay current teachers’ salaries.⁹

⁵ Norin Dollard & Mary McKillip, [The Cost of Universal Vouchers: Three Factors to Consider in Analyzing Fiscal Impacts of CS/HB 1](#), *Florida Policy Institute* (Mar. 2, 2023).

⁶ Talia Blake, [The Florida Policy Institute Says More Vouchers Are Being Used This School Year](#), *WFSU Tallahassee Public Media* (Aug. 17, 2023).

⁷ [Florida Voucher Program Leaves a \\$17 Million Gap in School Funding](#), *ABC First Coast News* (Aug. 15, 2023).

⁸ Kelly Allen & Sean O’Leary, *W. Va. Ctr. on Budget & Policy*, [Hope Scholarship Reduces Resources for Public Schools. Lacks Necessary Oversight](#) (Dec. 2023).

⁹ *Id.* at 5.