

# Facts on K-12 Vouchers and Savings Accounts

## Evidence does not support vouchers in Virginia

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### What Are Vouchers and Savings Accounts?

Traditional school vouchers and newer versions such as Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) are mechanisms to send public dollars to families who choose to forgo public K-12 education and pursue private school or home schooling. The redirected public school money from vouchers is typically used to partially subsidize private or religious school costs. Money deposited in an ESA can often be used by the family to pay for private school tuition and fees or for other education expenses.

### Evidence Doesn't Support Expanding Vouchers

#### K-12 vouchers do not improve student outcomes

- The [Brookings Institution reviewed voucher studies](#) from four states and found that students who took advantage of these programs to attend private schools performed worse on tests than similar students who do not attend private schools.
- The [National Bureau of Economic Research found](#) "a large proportion of the most rigorous studies suggest that being awarded a voucher has an effect that is statistically indistinguishable from zero."
- A 2018 [University of Virginia study](#) found no benefit for students attending private schools, including for students from low-income families and urban settings.

#### Vouchers divert much-needed resources from public schools

- [Virginia already severely underfunds its public schools](#) — ranking 40th in per-student spending out of all states for pre-K-12. Diverting more funding to private schools will exacerbate financial challenges for public schools.
- [Research](#) has found that Wisconsin's K-12 voucher program shortchanged public schools and has created a significant financial threat.

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## Vouchers increase segregation and discrimination, do not impact satisfaction or safety

- [Virginia experimented with vouchers](#) during Massive Resistance in an effort to reject school integration efforts. Voucher programs in Indiana have tended to [favor higher-income white families](#), and in Louisiana have [led to white families leaving more diverse schools](#).
- Private schools participating in voucher programs are generally free to accept or reject students based on perceived at-risk status, academic ability, religion, sexual orientation or gender-identity. As of a 2016 review, [no voucher program in the country protects LGBTQ+ students](#) against discrimination. This allows private schools to select only the most advantaged students and reject children with the greatest need of support.
- Participating private schools are not required to set tuition at the voucher value. A previous ESA [voucher bill](#) in Virginia would have provided payment of about \$4,500, while [average private school tuition costs](#) in Virginia are over \$11,500 for elementary schools and closer to \$17,000 for middle and high schools. When you factor in additional costs of transportation and uniforms, this effectively excludes the lowest income families from being able to participate.
- On average, parents of students who switch to private schools with vouchers [do not see a change in satisfaction or sense of school safety](#).

## What Works to Improve Student Outcomes

With students and schools still recovering from the setbacks of the pandemic, we can't afford to start shifting investments to unproven voucher programs that have poor track records for improving student outcomes. Research is clear that [investing in public schools improves student outcomes](#), graduation and postsecondary enrollment. Lawmakers should look to invest in research-backed initiatives that our Board of Education and student-advocacy groups in the state have been pointing to for years, like funding the revised Standards of Quality and lifting the support cap which adds to our current support staff shortages.