Summary of
The National Council on Disability’s
School Choice Series: Choice and Vouchers – Implications for Students with Disabilities
(November 2018)

Key findings:
Private school voucher programs result in “critical and often misunderstood changes in protections for students with disabilities and their families,” under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as well as other federal nondiscrimination laws. Voucher programs may not provide families of children with disabilities meaningful school choice.

Other findings:
Vouchers do not create real choice or better opportunities for students.
- Parents’ “choice” in a voucher program is limited by several factors:
  - Additional transportation necessary to attend a voucher school
  - Additional tuition and fees not covered by the voucher
  - Misinformation or lack of information to prospective families
- “Many families cannot afford to pay the difference between the voucher amount and the private school. . . . Coupled with the need for one parent not to work in order to provide transportation or manage the process, it’s a luxury many cannot afford.”
- A lack of information about voucher programs mean that “parents are making choices while being totally in the dark about the school to which they are sending their child.”
- Parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds make decisions differently from wealthier families, often choosing a voucher school because of its proximity to home or extended hours, rather than for its academic offerings.
- Research on voucher programs shows that they “often benefit wealthier white families, even when they are intended to protect and uplift students of color or students at risk.”

Voucher programs deprive students with disabilities of services.
- Most voucher programs provide limited or no disability-related services. When parents place a child in a voucher program, it is a gamble that they will find better services for their child, if they find any services at all.

Voucher programs deprive students of rights and protections under federal law.
- Students using vouchers to attend a private school give up their rights under IDEA, including the right to an IEP, FAPE, and procedural protections.
  - “Denying IDEA protections in the name of choice is potentially a way for states to skirt accountability for individual access to a free and appropriate education.”
  - “Denying rights under IDEA as a condition of accepting a scholarship counters both the theoretical purpose of vouchers and IDEA’s stated intent, for both vouchers and IDEA assert that their purpose is to ensure that the student’s specific individualized needs are met in a placement that will best serve the educational needs of the child.”