

Oppose the RECOVER Act

The Raising Expectations with Child Opportunity Vouchers for Educational Recovery (RECOVER) Act would strip pandemic recovery funds from public schools and instead waste them on private school vouchers. This bill permits states and school districts to redirect American Rescue Plan (ARP) money given to public schools into “child opportunity scholarships”—or vouchers. These “scholarships” (vouchers) could be used for private school tuition and other private educational expenses. There are a number of problems with this legislation:

The bill undermines public schools and their ability to recover from the pandemic.

- Under the ARP, public schools have until September 30, 2024 to spend their pandemic recovery funds. This bill isn’t about finding a way to spend money that public schools can’t find a way to use. The RECOVER Act would strip needed public school resources away nearly two years early, punishing public schools for following the rules and the timeline that Congress promised.
- Public schools serve 90% of American students. Public funds should fund recovery at public schools, not be diverted to fund a few, select students at private schools.
- This bill could pour billions of taxpayer dollars into non-public education, including tuition for students at private, religious schools, as well as homeschooling, and other educational goods and services.

The bill will not solve learning loss from the pandemic. Instead, it will make it worse.

- More private school vouchers are not a serious solution to learning loss attributed to the pandemic. While the pandemic has had devastating impacts on students’ learning, the effect of voucher programs on academic achievement has proven to often be even worse than the pandemic.
- Studies in Ohio¹ and Louisiana² demonstrated that vouchers caused a greater reduction in students’ math scores than the COVID pandemic.
- Other voucher programs in Washington, DC,³ and Indiana⁴ caused slightly less severe but still devastating decreases in math scores. These declines were on par with the impact of Hurricane Katrina on affected students. See chart below for these comparisons.

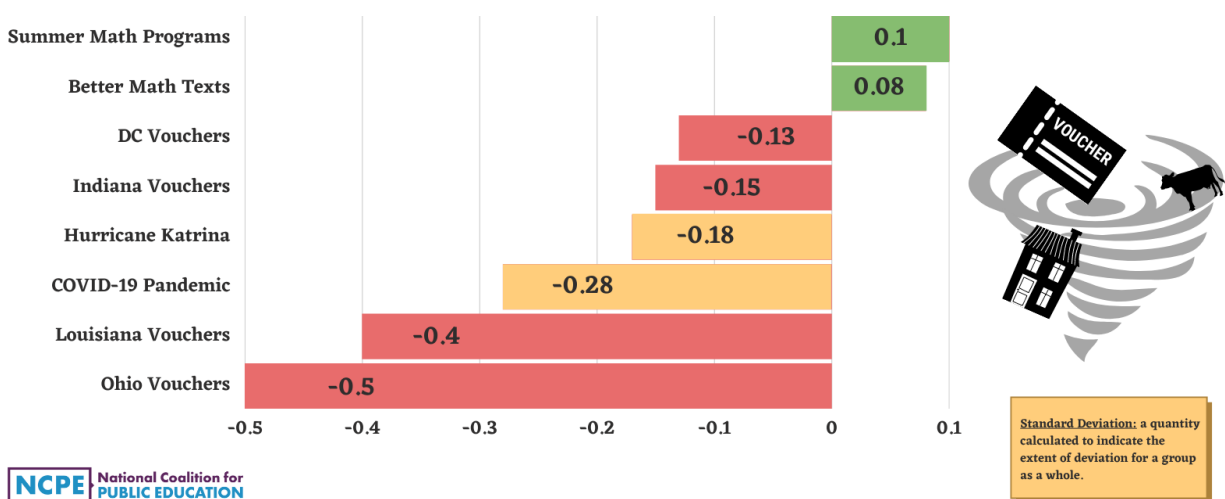
¹ David Figlio & Krzysztof Karbownik, [Evaluation of Ohio’s EdChoice Scholarship Program: Selection, Competition, & Performance Effects](#), *Fordham Inst.* (July 2016).

² Jonathan N. Mills & Patrick J. Wolf, Univ. of Ark., [The Effects of the Louisiana Scholarship Program on Student Achievement After Four Years](#), EDRE Working Paper No. 2019-10 (Apr. 2019).

³ U.S. Dep’t of Educ., [Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts Two Years After Students Applied](#) (June 2018).

⁴ R. Joseph Waddington & Mark Berends, [Impact of the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program: Achievement Effects for Students in Upper Elementary & Middle School](#), *37 J. of Policy Analysis & Mgmt.* 4, 738-808 (Aug. 2018).

Voucher Impacts on Student Outcomes As Harmful as Natural Disasters (Measured in Standard Deviation)



NCPE National Coalition for PUBLIC EDUCATION

Sources: <https://fordhaminstitute.org/ohio/research/evaluation-ohio-ed-choice-scholarship-program-selection-competition-and-performance/>
<https://www.answrblog.com/articles/9410-10-1227/app-20160624>
<https://www.bookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2022/03/03/the-pandemic-has-had-devastating-impacts-on-learning-what-will-it-take-to-help-students-catch-up/>
https://online.library.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pam.22086?casa_token=hWIMiwAu9pRAAAAAN3AKiaFnsCRKPFyIH-IDQV7r3qABFtGHHpLVWU6WCNzK4_2Rjy-1-4MzGNY_K2KCAp5f6mVL_yR9E
<https://ics.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20084023/participation.asp>
<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/highly-negative-impacts-vouchers/>
<https://www.nber.org/papers/w24428>
<https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/replicating-successful-charter-schools-boston>

The bill provides no accountability to the taxpayers.

- This bill includes practically zero requirements for the oversight and accountability of federal taxpayer funds spent on vouchers.
- It does not require schools or service providers receiving taxpayer funds to be accredited, adhere to any standards for curriculum, teacher qualifications, or school quality. Nor does it require them to report any set of state or federal academic accountability metrics, such as how students are performing in reading or math.
- It allows taxpayer funds to be spent by parents on any educational materials or services without restriction. Similar voucher programs in states like Arizona and Oklahoma have resulted in over \$1.2 million lost to fraud and abuse.⁵ Instead of purchasing educational goods and services, parents bought beauty supplies, sports apparel, Christmas trees, grills, and more.
- In contrast, public schools must use ARP funds for evidence-based interventions. They must consult with parents directly to ensure their childrens’ specific needs and priorities are addressed. They must provide detailed reporting to the government as to how funds are spent and how students are benefitting. These rules ensure that taxpayer funds are not being wasted.

The bill enables taxpayer-funded discrimination and strips students of rights.

- Students using vouchers to attend private schools lose rights such as those in Title VI, Title IX, IDEA, Title II of the ADA, and the Every Student Succeeds Act. And, they

⁵ Rob O’Dell & Yvonne Wingett Sanchez, [Oversight of Arizona ESA School-Voucher Program ‘Almost a Sham,’](#) *The Republic* (June 22, 2017); Jennifer Palmer, Reese Gorman, & Clifton Adcock, [Stitt Gave Families \\$8 Million for School Supplies in the Pandemic; They Bought Christmas Trees, Gaming Consoles, and Hundreds of TVs,](#) *Okla. Watch* (May 2, 2022).

are stripped of the First Amendment, due process, and other constitutional and statutory rights offered to them in public schools.

- Under this bill, a student can apply to attend a private school using these federal voucher funds and be rejected from attending the school for many reasons including academic ability, disability status, religion, sexual orientation or gender identity.
- This bill also violates a central tenet of religious freedom that no taxpayer money should fund religious education.

Private schools and wealthy families have already received billions in pandemic funds.

- Private schools have already received billions of dollars in pandemic recovery funds including over \$5 billion⁶ of Paycheck Protection Program forgivable loans that public schools were not eligible to receive, and an additional \$2.75 billion in direct funding under other recovery packages.
- Vouchers often serve wealthier families who could afford tuition without government subsidies, rather than struggling families who need help the most. This is because the cost of tuition and fees at schools that accept vouchers generally exceeds the amount of the voucher, making voucher schools unaffordable for the lowest income families. We should not be funneling recovery funds intended to help students most impacted by the pandemic—low-income kids, kids who are experiencing homelessness, foster kids, kids with disabilities, and others—to wealthier families instead.

⁶ Melissa Chang, COVID Stimulus Watch, [Private and Charter Schools Receive Approximately \\$5.7 Billion in PPP Loans. Raising Questions About Equity in Education](#) (Aug. 27. 2020).