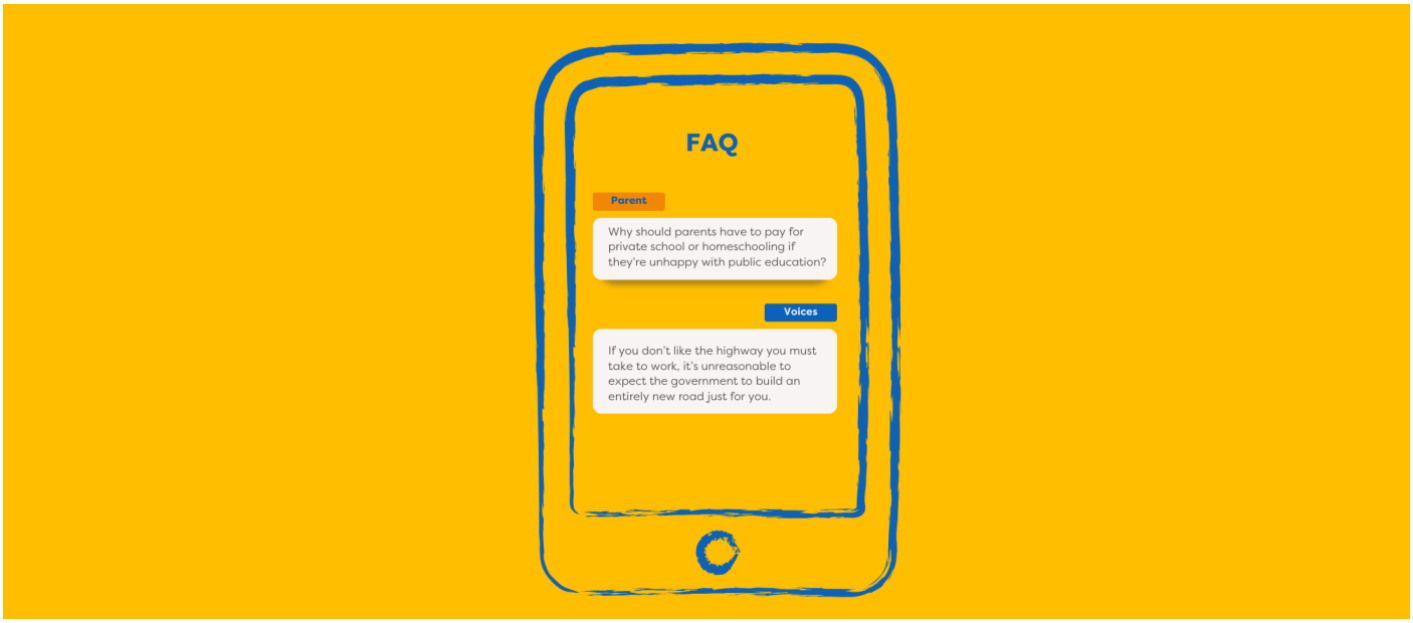
Voucher and School Privatization FAQs

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As part of our Vouchers and School Privatization in Utah Series, we've put together a list of frequently asked questions that may help to address key concerns—like why vouchers are so controversial and what's really at stake.

As parents and caregivers, we all want what's best for our kids. Sometimes, public schools don't meet every child's unique needs. At Voices, we believe parents should have the ability to make the best choices for their children. However, the rhetoric around "school choice" and "parent choice" deserves closer scrutiny.

What do these terms actually mean for children and families? For years, despite voucher supporters' loud arguments, vouchers:

- Do not help low-income kids have access to better schools;
- Do not give more options to families when they don't like their public school;
- Do not cater to kids who have unique and special education needs and/or learning disabilities; and
- Do not make sure everyone has a chance to go to a good private school, even if they aren't rich.

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In practice, vouchers have largely failed to deliver on any of these promises. While a small number of families may find success with vouchers, the broader impact shows that vouchers *do not* provide meaningful solutions for American communities.

So, what's really behind the push for vouchers, and what impact does it have on our education system? We'll explore these questions in the following FAQs.

Vouchers may seem appealing—especially for parents of children with disabilities—but private schools accepting vouchers aren't required to provide accommodations. Unlike public schools, they can deny support or push out students with unmet special education needs.

In Utah, 60% of vouchers go to homeschoolers - and only about 5% of school-aged kids are homeschooled. Homeschooling can be a great option for some families, especially those with children facing bullying or health issues. However, it requires careful consideration: Do you have experience selecting an age-appropriate curriculum? Is your child motivated to learn at home? Without proper planning, their education may suffer.

Voucher activists promise better outcomes, but the reality tells a different story. Private and homeschool education have little oversight, and research shows no clear academic benefit. Instead, vouchers create a market for unproven private schools—like micro-schools—without ensuring quality. Ultimately, voucher programs are a political experiment that deepen educational inequities rather than solving them.

Most voucher recipients (70–90%) were never in public schools to begin with. Instead of helping families in need, vouchers divert public funds to private schools, further underfunding the public education system. While a few families may benefit, the larger goal is to weaken public schools—leaving poor kids, kids of color, disabled kids, and LGBTQ kids with fewer opportunities.

Think of it this way: If you don't like the highway you take to work, should the government build a brand-new road just for you? Even if it's inconvenient, that road serves many people in your community. Similarly, tax dollars fund public goods—like

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roads, colleges, and even prisons—not just for individual benefit but for the common good. Public schools are no different.

Families already have choices—public charter schools, schools in other districts, private schools, homeschooling, and other learning options. **But those who choose alternatives must fund them themselves.**

Vouchers, like the Utah Fits All program, use taxpayer dollars that could otherwise improve public schools, which serve 92% of Utah's families. While some may benefit individually, the broader community suffers as public schools lose critical funding—harming the very system meant to serve all children.



No, taking one or two children out of public school does not help public school teachers. In Utah, public school teachers oppose school vouchers because the program draws funding away from public schools, undermine confidence in public schools, and do nothing to alleviate the real challenges schools face. The focus should be on improving public education, not on diverting resources.

For the past five years, legislative leaders have cut income taxes. Income tax funds are required to be used for education and certain social services. These cuts have resulted in a $1.2 billion loss for these vital areas, leaving public school teachers with less funding and support.

No, removing a few students doesn't meaningfully impact class sizes. Utah's public schools serve over 670,000 children, and the Utah Fits All voucher program has issued about 10,000 vouchers. Even if every voucher recipient WAS leaving public school (we know 70-90% of voucher recipients weren't in public school, to begin with), it would only reduce the student population by 1.5%.

So what does happen to class sizes when enrollment in a school drops?

When enrollment declines, schools may have to consolidate classes or reassign teachers. For example, small classes may be combined across grades. Sometimes, fewer students can even lead to school closures, forcing redistribution across the district. In this case, the children of other families may be forced to change other schools, even if they don't want to.

School funding is determined by a formula based on the number of children enrolled, meaning that

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decreased enrollment leads to less funding. While enrollment may decrease, the cost of most overhead does not. Schools have fixed costs that don't decrease when a few students leave, like teacher and staff salaries, facilities, and maintenance.

Vouchers don’t address the real issues in public education. Instead of creating a separate private system funded by taxpayers, we need to focus on improving our public schools. Vouchers don’t save states money, they don’t help students, and they don’t build strong communities.

When a student leaves public school using a voucher, the school loses the Weighted Pupil Unit (WPU) funding it would have received for that student. For the 2024-25 school year, the WPU is $4,443 per student. Instead of keeping that funding within public schools, the state gives each voucher recipient an $8,000 payment—nearly double the per-student funding a public school would have received.

But school funding is more than just the WPU. Utah spends an average of $9,552 per public school student—the lowest in the nation. This funding covers not just classroom instruction but also teacher salaries, transportation, building maintenance, counselors, nurses, extracurricular activities, and more. Because these costs are spread across all students, public education funding is far more efficient than an $8,000 voucher, which must stretch to cover everything for just one student. Based on what can be observed in other states, we know that the math is not as simple as “voucher amount” compared to “per pupil spending in public schools.”

States do not save money with voucher programs. In states like Arizona, Georgia, and Indiana, vouchers have exceeded budgeted costs by 810% to 1,346%. Expanding these programs drains money from public schools while creating massive, uncontrolled spending at the state level.

At its core, vouchers aren’t about expanding opportunity—they’re about controlling it. The wealthy elites funding these programs have no interest in strengthening education for all children. Most families don’t want their tax dollars funding private schools with little accountability; they want well-funded public schools that serve every child, regardless of background. The fight for vouchers isn’t about parental choice—it’s about power, privilege, and who gets to decide which kids deserve a quality education.

While we can’t say for certain why specific legislators push for school vouchers, we can look at patterns across the country to understand the forces at play.

For decades, ultra-conservative billionaires like Betsy DeVos and Charles Koch have aggressively promoted school vouchers. They fund think tanks that produce biased “research” designed to sell vouchers, rather than evaluate them honestly. These billionaires also funnel money into political campaigns, rewarding lawmakers who advance their voucher agenda.

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Beyond financial backing, they connect compliant politicians to wealthy donors and higher profile political opportunities. Supporting vouchers can also boost a legislator's standing with powerful far-right groups like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), which rewards lawmakers who push privatization efforts. Legislators may also support vouchers to gain favor with influential colleagues, especially those in leadership.

Some elected officials genuinely believe the misleading talking points pushed by billionaire-funded organizations like the Heritage Foundation. Others may openly oppose the idea of free, universal public education, believing that only certain groups—wealthy, white, and a particular type of Christian—deserve access to quality schooling and pathways to success.

The Utah State Board of Education (USBE) oversees the voucher program but is required by the Legislature to hire a private company, Alliance For Choice in Education, to run the voucher program. This company operates with no public oversight, meaning there's no transparency on how it works, its effectiveness, or its spending.

USBE hires this private company to manage the program, but the legislature has given them very little power to monitor what the company is doing. Public entities like USBE do not have any control over:

1. What voucher students are taught,
2. Whether voucher students are tested,
3. Which students are rejected by private voucher schools, or
4. What families can spend voucher money on. (The legislature can put limits on voucher expenses, but the private company gets to make all the other decisions about which expenses are okay and which are not).

Alliance For Choice in Education, founded by pro-voucher billionaires, already manages voucher programs in other states like Arizona, Florida, and Indiana, and is looking to expand further. *Vouchers 101: The Basics of Utah's New School Privatization Program.*

Even if we never personally face criminal justice issues or become victims of crime, we all pay taxes that fund public safety, and in return, we all benefit from living in a safer community. The same applies to education. Even if you don't have children, investing in a strong public education system benefits everyone by fostering a more educated, informed, and productive society. When all children have access to quality education, we all thrive.

Responses to Common Statements

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This comment suggests that 9 out 10 students in Utah, enrolled in public schools, are not able to learn any values from their families, simply due to attending public school. Hundreds of thousands of children in Utah each year are taught important values by their families while attending public school.

There is a lot of false information about what children are taught in public school. Politicians and pro-voucher activists have used very inflammatory language to downplay the important knowledge children gain through public school and misrepresent how and what teachers are teaching. Parents may find it helpful to spend a few days observing their child at school before making such a major decision about their education.

Even outside of public school, parents can’t fully control the values children adopt as they grow. Children in private religious schools or homeschooling can still develop different viewpoints as they become adults. Ultimately, children will form their own beliefs, shaped by their own experiences.

While teaching religious traditions is important for many families, public funding is not meant to support specific religious viewpoints. Parents can choose to homeschool or enroll their children in private religious schools, but they must fund these choices themselves. Public schools are required to teach based on widely accepted facts, not the beliefs of specific religions.

Many families of all socioeconomic backgrounds travel to visit family, for fun, or to gain a broader view of the world. They’ve been doing this for decades without the need for a publicly-funded school voucher. Families already have a great deal of decision-making power when it comes to their child's education. If a family does not wish to participate in formal public schooling, there are many alternatives: private schools, homeschooling, or charter schools with different approaches to education. Public school students can also take trips, but excessive absenteeism may have academic consequences.

Public money is for the common good, not for the individual benefit of different people. Taxpayers and the general public deserve to know how their tax dollars are being spent. Voucher programs present themselves as catering to parents' educational preferences, while offering very little transparency or accountability about how those parents are spending taxpayer money.

Homeschooling can be a good option for some families, offering flexibility and personalized learning. However, unlike public and private schools, it often operates with less oversight and standardized accountability. Vouchers for homeschooling redirect public funds without ensuring educational quality or transparency. Since not all families have the resources to homeschool effectively, these vouchers tend to benefit those who are already well-positioned to do so. Public education funding should be transparent and accountable, but homeschooling vouchers make it very hard to track how taxpayer money is used.

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Yes, voucher students can return to public school. Their parents must complete a withdrawal form, and cancel any services being paid for with their voucher money. They will also have to contact the public school they wish their child to attend, to ensure that it is possible to do so. Their student may require special assistance and/or extra work to catch up academically to their peers. When students exit the voucher program and return to public school, the voucher program management company will take back whatever money is left in their account. There is no repayment required for funds already spent.

Have more questions that aren't covered in this blog? You may find the answers in our *Voucher and School Privatization Series*.

Part 1: The Basics of Utah's New School Privatization Program



The first part of this series explains how Utah's school voucher program, titled Utah Fits All Scholarship, is meant to work and how it is managed.

Read Part 1

Part 2: A Timeline of the School Voucher Steamroller in Utah



Part two discusses the steady steamrolling of school vouchers in Utah—a state where only 3% of students attend private schools, 5% are homeschooled, and the vast majority of families report high satisfaction with their local public schools.

READ PART 2

Part 3: Utahns Like Their Public Schools, So Who Exactly *Does* Want Vouchers?



The third part of this series discusses public opinion on vouchers and how Utah's voucher push is part of a nationwide, billionaire-funded agenda to privatize education.

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READ PART 3

Part 4: Vouchers. Don't. Work.

The fourth part of this series discusses the research on voucher efficacy. Overwhelming data shows vouchers don't work.

READ PART 4

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