End the 'Invest in Kids' Act voucher program

Oppose the Use of Public Dollars for Private Schools

Voucher programs like Illinois' tax credit scholarship program divert resources from our under-funded public schools and don't improve academic outcomes for voucher recipients. ILGA passed the Invest in Kids Act in 2017 with the intent for it to sunset after five years.

Why is this important?

- **Vouchers reduce funding for public schools**: The Invest in Kids program diverts up to $75M/year in tax revenue funding vouchers. Meanwhile, 80% of Illinois public schools are not adequately funded. Every dollar diverted to private schools via the Invest in Kids Act is one that could be used to increase state funding of the Evidence-Based Funding Formula, which is still short ~$4B. At the current rate of increasing funding, the state won't reach full funding until 2051.
- **Vouchers allow the use of taxpayer public funds for religious schools:** The vast majority of voucher recipients (~94%) in Illinois are attending religiously-affiliated schools. Using tax credits to pay for religious schools is a violation of one of the fundamental principles the US was founded on—separation of church and state.
- **Vouchers do not improve academic outcomes:** Advocates argue that vouchers provide access to high quality private education for poor children. In fact, decades of studies of voucher programs across the country have not found evidence that voucher students outperform their demographically-matched public school counterparts. More recent long-term studies of programs, including those in DC, IN, LA and OH, have found that students who participate in voucher programs fare substantially *worse* academically (e.g. based on graduation rates and test scores) than students educated in public schools.
- **Vouchers decrease equity:** The ~900,000 low-income students in IL public schools will not be helped by diverting funds to a privatized system that could be used instead to provide funding needed for smaller class sizes, enriched curriculum, better professional development and wraparound services and supports. Vouchers instead concentrate the highest need children in public schools while decreasing resources for those same schools.
- **Vouchers decrease accountability and transparency:** Private schools are not held to the same standards of accountability as public schools. They are not required to disclose how much money they spend on faculty, resources, or materials. Private schools don't have to make their academic standards public or reveal what their curriculum is. To date, there is no public information about the performance of Illinois' voucher students.
- **Vouchers put students at risk of discrimination:** Private schools receiving vouchers in Illinois must follow state and federal anti-discrimination laws, but there is little oversight, and there are no mechanisms for enforcement or compliance. Discrimination on the basis of religion, disability status and sexual orientation in admissions and other school policies is a significant issue in the schools receiving Invest in Kids' vouchers.
- **Vouchers don't have to provide a broad education:** Schools receiving vouchers don't have to comply with the full Illinois School Code, including curriculum requirements designed to educate well-rounded citizens of a multicultural, multiracial democracy.

Ending the Invest in Kids Act is endorsed by the following organizations:

Access Living
ACLU of IL
Action Ridge
Activate Chicago Parents
American Association of University Women Illinois
American Association of University Women Naperville Area
Americans United for the Separation of Church and State
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Chicago
BG Pride
Brighton Park Neighborhood Council
Center for Tax and Budget Accountability
Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
Chicago Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights
Chicago Teachers Union
COFI
ED-RED
Equality Illinois
Families 4 Students and Teachers
50th Ward Working Families
48th Ward Neighbors for Justice
Healing to Action
Illinois Education Association
Illinois Families for Public Schools
Illinois Federation of Teachers
Illinois High School District Organization
Illinois National Organization for Women
Illinois Parent Teacher Association
Indivisible Chicago
Indivisible Evanston
Indivisible Lincoln Square
JCUA
Journey for Justice Alliance
League of Women Voters of Illinois
Learning Disabilities Association of Illinois
Legal Council for Health Justice
LEND
Library Defense
National Association of Social Workers - IL Chapter
Network 49
Network for Public Education
Northside Action for Justice
ONE Northside
PFLAG Council of Northern Illinois
Pilsen Alliance
POWER-PAC
Public Funds Public Schools
Raise Your Hand for Illinois Public Education
SCOPE
Teach Plus
39th Ward Neighbors United
33rd Ward Working Families
Unitarian Universalist Advocacy Network of Illinois
United Northwest Side

References

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- The Highly Negative Impacts of Vouchers. (2018) Center for American Progress.
- 23 Illinois Administrative Code 425: Voluntary Registration And Recognition Of Nonpublic Schools
- Illinois Report Card State Snapshot (2021) IL State Board of Education
- Invest in Kids Annual Report (2022) IL Department of Revenue
- Keeping Informed about School Vouchers: A review of major developments and research (2016) Center on Education Policy