

One Wisconsin Now: State payments per pupil for private school vouchers set to exceed public schools

Posted on Thursday, Mar 23, 2017

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

MADISON, Wis. – Under Gov. Scott Walker and the Republican-led legislature, less accountable private voucher schools have reaped a financial windfall both in the amount of state tax dollars they receive and the number of students for which they are paid state tax dollars. [As reported in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#), all across Wisconsin public schools are now feeling financial pressure as the voucher program drains resources from them, and new data shows per pupil state revenue payments for vouchers are on average poised to exceed those for public schools.

“Once again we see how Gov. Walker and his Republican allies have tipped the scales in favor of private school vouchers, and how the rest of us are paying for it,” commented Scot Ross, One Wisconsin Now Executive Director.

[A memo released this week](#) from the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau finds Gov. Walker’s 2017-19 state budget would hike state general purpose revenue supported payments to private voucher schools to between \$7,757 and \$8,403 by 2018. By comparison, the memo reports state revenue support per pupil support for public schools would be \$6,703 under Walker’s budget plan.

The statewide expansion of the voucher program and funding changes passed by Walker and the Republican controlled state legislature mean that resources are now taken directly away from public schools to subsidize private school vouchers.

According to data from the Department of Public Instruction and as reported in the media, the majority of students participating in the expanded statewide voucher

program were attending private school before getting a publicly funded voucher.

While private schools are able to collect public tax dollars through the voucher program they are not held to the same standards as public schools. Research in Wisconsin and nationally has also found that less accountable private voucher schools produce no better and in some cases worse student achievement.

The growth of the private school voucher industry in Wisconsin has been fueled by campaign donations and spending on behalf of state politicians by voucher backers. Among the prominent backers of pro-voucher Wisconsin politicians is Donald Trump's Education Secretary, Michigan billionaire Betsy DeVos. She and her family are among the individuals who, as of last year, larded Gov. Walker with \$2 million in direct contributions. Overall, pro-school privatization individuals have made \$4 million in direct contributions to Wisconsin political candidates from 2008-2016. DeVos's American Federation for Children (AFC), a pro-voucher special interest group, has also spent over \$5 million to help its favored politicians in Wisconsin.

In addition, One Wisconsin Now's research found that the Bradley Foundation, until recently overseen by Gov. Walker's gubernatorial and presidential campaign chair, has underwritten a massive pro-voucher propaganda campaign. Between 2005 and 2014 the Milwaukee based right wing foundation poured \$108 million into groups supporting vouchers.

Ross concluded, "Private school vouchers are a financial albatross on state taxpayers and public schools. We see again how the only people they're paying off for are the private schools taking vouchers and the Republican politicians that keep taking our money and spending it on the program support by their donors."