

Grandparents know vouchers don't work

Wisconsin is marching inexorably down a path toward two separate publicly-funded education systems for our k-12 students. One is our traditional public schools; the other, private voucher schools largely funded by taxpayer dollars.



The school voucher program began in 1990 under Governor Tommy Thompson with a modest investment in Milwaukee. 337 students, all low-income, used vouchers valued at \$734,000 (\$2,178/voucher) to attend seven private, nonsectarian schools. Since then, the voucher program has grown exponentially. Funding last year equaled \$158M and provided vouchers worth \$6,442 to 24,000 students who attended private/parochial schools in Racine and Milwaukee.

In the next two years, the program expansion, if approved by the State legislature, will spread to at least nine more school districts, including Madison. 29,000 students will participate. Funding will increase to \$209M – an almost 300-fold increase since inception. Public school funding, over that time span, has increased only three-fold.

Vouchers will be available to a family of four with an income of almost \$78,000/year. In addition, these students may always have been private school students. Once students secure a voucher, they have that voucher in subsequent years no matter how high the family income. This policy generates a separate system, subsidizing private education at taxpayer expense with no accountability to, nor approval from, that taxpayer.

Are vouchers worth the price? No! Studies show that academic performance among voucher students is no better than that of students in public schools. In a 2011 study, the independent Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau determined that 75% of students who entered Milwaukee voucher schools as 9th graders left that school before graduation. We call that a 75% DROP-OUT rate!

What will vouchers cost local property tax payers? Beginning in 2014-15, a voucher for an elementary student will cost \$7,050; for a high school student \$7,856. The local school district pays 38.4% of that cost. A district's voucher costs are the first draw on education funding. That money comes off the top before a penny is spent for public school students.

Make no mistake, the intent of voucher supporters is to make vouchers available to every Wisconsin student, rural or urban or suburban. School Choice Wisconsin VP,

Terry Brown said: "A voucher in every backpack!" However, some years ago, when asked about statewide expansion, former Governor Thompson responded: "We can't afford two systems of education." No, we cannot!

Another challenge in the State Budget – the "State Charter Authorizing Board." As a group of political appointees, this Board can authorize non-profits, local governments, etc., to create **PRIVATE CHARTER SHOOOLS** funded by state dollars as first draw on spending. Local school boards have no authority over these schools, but, once again, they can levy a property tax to make up lost revenue. Taxpayers, beware!!

We are GRUMPS, GRandparents United for Madison Public Schools. Many of us have grandchildren in public schools; we believe public schools are an important community asset.

Our local schools are the glue that holds diverse neighborhoods together - in schools children come together to learn from, and about, each other in a common setting.

Fragmenting our schools threatens community unity. We are stronger together than we are as separate groups. We are more likely to move our children, and Madison, forward if we do it together. We should not tolerate, nor can we afford, separate systems.

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