

# Policy Brief: Private School Vouchers and Education Savings Accounts

The Education Trust (EdTrust) firmly believes in equitable access to quality education for all students — particularly for Black, Brown, and students from low-income backgrounds. This commitment underpins our opposition to the diversion of public funds to private schools through vouchers, scholarship tax credits, and education savings accounts (ESAs). These initiatives not only undermine public education but fail to deliver on their promises of improved educational outcomes.

## Issue

EdTrust remains deeply concerned about the increasing legislative efforts in multiple states to redirect public dollars into private education through vouchers and ESAs. We oppose these policies based on several core issues:

- 1. Diversion of Public Funds:** EdTrust advocates against the redirection of essential resources from public schools, which serve the vast majority of American students. There is a significant need to make greater investments in public education and more [equitably allocate resources](#) to provide better educational experiences for all children — publicly funded private school choice programs significantly undermine this goal. This diversion of resources is particularly detrimental to all students, especially those attending schools in underserved areas, where funding has long been inequitable, and additional support and resources are critically needed.
- 2. Lack of Accountability:** EdTrust emphasizes the importance of transparency and accountability in education funding and delivery. Private schools that receive public funds through vouchers are not subjected to the same accountability and transparency requirements as public schools. Furthermore, [reports](#) about luxury, non-education-related purchases under ESA programs raises concerns. This lack of oversight can lead to misallocation and misuse of public funds, discrimination, and questionable educational quality, all of which undermine the principles of fairness and equity in education.
- 3. Discrimination and Exclusion:** EdTrust is committed to promoting equity in education, which is compromised by voucher and ESA programs. These programs often fail to serve the marginalized communities they claim to support and instead benefit students who are [already enrolled in private schools](#). Moreover, private institutions can selectively admit (and expel) students based on criteria that may include income level, test scores, or religious affiliation, potentially reinforcing discriminatory practices and exacerbating educational disparities. Students who attend private

schools are also not protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and private schools that receive vouchers can deny admission to students with disabilities or to students based on disciplinary history impacting students of color and students with disabilities, where research shows that these students are disproportionately disciplined and more harshly punished than their white or able-bodied peers for the same, or lesser, offense.

- 4. Questionable Educational Outcomes:** Contrary to the proponents' claims, EdTrust points to empirical evidence that shows that voucher programs do not conclusively improve student achievement. Studies have [shown](#) that students using vouchers do not receive the educational resources they need to excel, resulting in academic underperformance compared to their peers in public schools. We understand why families whose public schools have been under-resourced and underserving their children for far too long would want something better, yet there is not strong evidence that these vouchers are a good policy solution to educational challenges.
- 5. Undermining Public Education:** EdTrust stands against the privatization of education as promoted by voucher and ESA advocates. The complex nature of education makes it ill-suited for simple market-based solutions. Efforts to privatize often lead to a fragmented education system, where public schools are left underfunded and less equipped to fulfill their educational mission. EdTrust believes that a strong public education system is an essential part of a thriving democratic society, and we support a unified approach that ensures all students have access to high-quality education in public school settings.

## Recommendations

EdTrust firmly believes that the support and enhancement of public education is pivotal to achieving equity and excellence for each and every student. We recommend the following actions to policymakers and stakeholders:

- 1. Resist Expansion of Vouchers and ESAs:** EdTrust urges federal and state policymakers to actively oppose the reallocation of public funds for private school vouchers and education savings accounts. These programs drain critical resources away from public schools, where most students are educated, and lack sufficient accountability. We advocate for legislative measures that prevent the establishment and expansion of such programs, preserving public funds for public education.
- 2. Strengthen Public Schools:** EdTrust calls for a renewed focus on strengthening public schools, which are tasked with educating every child. This includes advocating for increased investment in public education, such as improving facilities and hiring, supporting a strong and diverse workforce, and providing adequate resources for students. Additionally, we support policies that promote evidence-based educational practices and comprehensive support services to address the diverse needs of all students.
- 3. Advocate for Equity:** We recommend that all educational policies be examined through an equity lens to ensure that these policies provide rich and engaging educational opportunities to all students, especially those from underserved communities. EdTrust supports initiatives that address disparities in educational access, such as fair funding formulas and programs that target resources to schools serving Black, Latino, and students from low-income backgrounds.

4. **Increase Transparency and Accountability:** To ensure that public funds are used effectively and that educational outcomes are equitable, EdTrust advocates for enhanced transparency and accountability in all educational funding programs. This includes rigorous oversight of how funds are spent and the performance outcomes of funded programs. For voucher and ESA programs that do exist, stringent public reporting and accountability measures must be implemented to protect students and ensure that educational providers meet high standards.
5. **Promote Public Awareness and Engagement:** EdTrust recommends engaging the public in discussions about the implications of vouchers and ESAs. Through outreach and education, especially in communities that are marginalized or even harmed by education reform, stakeholders can be informed about the potential negative impacts of these programs on public education systems. Engaging parents and other caregivers, teachers, and community leaders in advocacy efforts will strengthen the support for public education and resist efforts that undermine it.

## Conclusion

EdTrust will continue to advocate for policies that support public education systems, advance equity, and provide all students with the opportunity to succeed. We firmly oppose measures that weaken these principles through the diversion of funds to private, unaccountable entities.