

Chair Fowler Arthur, Vice Chair Odioso, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the House Education Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Marcel Mangan. I am a Freshman at the University of Notre Dame and a Loveland High School graduate. I'm here to urge the committee to include the 3rd phase of the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan in the state budget.

For my testimony today, I would like to share with you all an essay that I wrote during my first month at college, which I believe relates quite well to this hearing. Here it is:

“Equity: inherently it remains a very simple word, implying the idea of impartiality and fairness. It remains an ideal statement, suggesting that every person is born with the same inalienable rights, better yet, the same opportunities. But how often does equity become fully realized? As a society we dream of a world that remains just and equitable, one in which chauvinism and prejudice is replaced with mutual respect and understanding. In a simple sense, this remains an inherently good idea. However, often our attempts to achieve equal opportunity remain short lived. Such a distinction can be particularly made as it pertains to voucher programs within private schools.

Inequality is a persistent societal issue, largely driven by a lack of opportunities. Since schools remain an integral part of society, the same forces that lead to sustained inequality are reflected within schools and their outcomes. This is particularly evident in the context of school choice. Often, the concept of “choice” is misunderstood as socio-economic and racial barriers continue to limit opportunities for students from marginalized backgrounds. In order to combat this issue, voucher programs were created with the purpose of eliminating educational inequality across both race and class, particularly by providing funds which parents can use to send their children to higher performing private schools (Dixon, 79). Proponents of vouchers view the program as an innately beneficial idea, mainly as it furthers the fight for civil rights by providing racial minorities and low-income White students the opportunity to attend strong academic K–12 schools (Dixon, 79). However, despite their theoretical benefits, the real-world effects of voucher programs often promote more challenges than solutions, creating unintended negative consequences for those they are intended to help. While voucher programs have fostered competition among public and private schools, research has yet to show any significant improvements in academic achievement (Berends 2017, 3). This raises an important question: are voucher programs truly worth it?

The hope with expanding voucher programs remained that low-income and marginalized students would obtain a broader variety of opportunities as it pertains to school choice, primarily by removing the financial burden attached with private school educations. Nevertheless, recent studies of voucher programs, particularly in Louisiana, Ohio, and Indiana, have shown significant negative effects regarding student achievement for elementary and middle school students (Berends 2021, 110). Moreover, from 2012 to 2013, further analysis in Louisiana showed large negative effects across various subject areas for voucher students:  $-0.41$  standard deviation in

math,  $-0.27$  in science, and  $-0.34$  in social studies (Berends 2021, 110). Overall, these results remained consistent across “income groups, geographic areas, and private school characteristics” (Berends 2021, 110). Although a two-year study appears relatively unrepresentative of the general population, it remains important to recognize that the magnitude of these findings were unprecedented among random assignment evaluations of school voucher programs (Berends 2021, 110). Similarly, such a distinction can be made with the voucher program in Milwaukee, as data shows that voucher students performed no better, and at times worse, than students in the district’s public school as it pertains to state tests (Ravitch, 208). Although state tests and examinations may not serve as the primary determinant of educational success, these findings help show similar negative trends across various states. Future studies on graduation rates, attendance, and various other academic measures would remain beneficial though in understanding the effectiveness and equitability of voucher programs.

Overall, despite numerous studies highlighting the negative impacts of voucher programs on educational attainment, their use has steadily increased over the past decade, particularly due to societal factors like the COVID-19 pandemic. More specifically, throughout America there remained a lingering frustration due to pandemic-era school closures, thus causing a significant push for the use of vouchers, mainly to allow low-income families the ability to receive a proper education despite COVID-19 (Cowan, 2). However, the results proved to be quite detrimental as two separate studies, both of which occurred in Louisiana, found negative academic impacts as high as  $-0.4$  standard deviations for voucher students: to put this in perspective, expected impacts on academic trajectory due to COVID-19 hover around  $-0.25$  standard deviations (Cowan, 3). This brings about an important question: should voucher programs be funded? As aforementioned, the goal of expanding voucher programs was to provide low-income and marginalized students a broader range of educational opportunities, primarily by reducing the burden of private school tuition. However, the push for such programs mainly occurred due to pandemic-era desires to improve the education of disadvantaged students, yet to date research has shown strictly negative results regarding academic achievement with voucher programs. Thus, one must consider whether society would gain more by investing in vouchers or by improving the schools that low-income and marginalized students attend.

The primary purpose of voucher programs remains to reduce the financial burden carried by low-income and marginalized students as it pertains to receiving a private school education. However, evidence shows that existing voucher programs incentivize private schools to raise tuition, treating the influx of funds as “a public subsidy” (Cowan, 2). Furthermore, studies highlight that, in contrast, public schools have historically struggled in diversifying their financial structures, especially when compared to private schools and charter management organizations (CMOs) (Dixson, 78). Consequently, this raises questions about the financial burden placed on both voucher students and public schools, as well as the effectiveness of such programs in achieving their intended goals. More specifically, if vouchers are meant to reduce the cost of tuition for destitute students, yet tuition continues to rise drastically, who really benefits? It seems the only true beneficiaries are the private schools that receive public funding.

Similarly, in regards to public funds, a common predicament that occurs lies in what public mandates should be enforced within a private school. Often, the only significant factor that distinguishes a private school from a public school is the public funds that they receive, and

consequently the governmental mandates that are enforced within them. For example, within public schools, English language learners (ELLs) receive federal funds to pay for English language courses, however, since private schools do not receive federal funds they are not legally required to provide such courses (Dixson, 80). Thus, if an ELL student receives a voucher, the quality of the voucher could be diminished significantly due to the lack of additional support. Similarly, students with exceptionalities, whether they be academic, social, mental, or physical, run into similar issues (Dixson, 80). Because private schools are under no direct federal regulations, they are not required to make accommodations for certain students, thus leading to underwhelming results among certain voucher students (Dixson, 80). Often, this causes vouchers to be characterized as a form of neoliberalism that promotes the idea of “institutionalizing racialized educational inequity” (Dixson, 80).

Another pressing issue is the significant increase in the number of students utilizing vouchers. Specifically, school choice programs, including vouchers, have drained public schools of students, resulting in a considerable decline in the quantity of public funds provided to public institutions (Ravitch, 208). As a result, the overall academic performance of public schools has tended to decline over time due to diminished government investments. As a response to this argument, many proponents of vouchers contest that so few students take advantage of such programs, implying that public schools remain relatively unaffected. However, although only 1 million of the country’s 50 million students use school choice programs to attend private schools, it remains important to recognize that this number has jumped significantly from year to year (Lieberman, 2). Specifically, with the advent of new pathways for students to qualify for vouchers, the access to such programs increased drastically, leading voucher enrollment to double in one year (Turner, 7). In fact, Indiana taxpayers had to pay over \$439 million in 2023-2024 for the state-funded voucher program: for context, this marked a 40% increase from the previous year where taxpayers had to pay \$311 million (Smith). Overall, this emphasizes the rapid growth of voucher programs throughout the country and the potential for them to become an unsustainable financial burden if not managed properly.

Finally, one of the most controversial issues of voucher programs is the ability for private schools to pick and choose students. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 mandated that schools could not legally discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. However, while private schools remain limited as it pertains to race-based discrimination, they reserve the right to discriminate in other dimensions, such as gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, income, and disability status (Harris, 4). This creates a perplexing issue, as the purpose of vouchers is to provide low-income, marginalized youth the opportunity to attend higher performing private schools, yet the circumstances that qualified them for such a program can also be the limiting factor as it pertains to whether or not they can actually attend a private school- just a bit ironic.

Overall, when assessing the effectiveness of school choice programs, one must consider the difference between theory and practice. While vouchers appear promising in theory, they often fall short of expectations. As Berends highlights in his article “Five Provisions for Success of a DeVos-Trump Voucher Policy,” there must be an underlying expectation for accountability among schools (Berends 2017, 1). However, with persistent issues regarding selective admissions and a lack of accommodations for students with exceptionalities, one must consider whether voucher programs truly serve the best interests of all students. Despite their well-intended goals, vouchers have

proven to be ineffective, possessing a vast amount of unintended negative consequences. The fight against inequality remains multifaceted and fraught with challenges that limit the opportunities of marginalized groups. Thus, it is imperative that as a society we aim to provide solutions which remain generally beneficial and equitable for all. In the case of vouchers, it becomes evident that they fail to address the priorities of low-income students, highlighting the need for alternative solutions to the growing issue of educational inequity.”

I presented this essay that I wrote with you today for 2 reasons:

1. Firstly, to help show that voucher programs are inherently fruitless. Although they remain well-intended in their efforts, vouchers programs have yet to provide any significant improvements in academic performance. **THIS HAS HAPPENED IN 3 DIFFERENT STATES!** With this knowledge, why should we push for the continued funding of voucher programs and charter schools?
2. Secondly, to highlight the fact that I did not go to any fancy private school. I did not receive any tutoring as a kid, nor did I have any sort of academic assistance. Still, though, I was able to write this with only a public school education. The only assistance that I was ever provided was from Loveland High School – a school which, despite having a severe lack of funding, has continued to produce high quality students. Politicians like to argue that public schools are underperforming and ‘unsustainable,’ but I wonder if they have ever even been inside any of these schools; if they have even taken the time to understand the struggles that they have had to face (primarily due to the government and its warped funding). When I look at Loveland High School and the other public schools within my district, I do not see them as underperforming. I see them as schools that have persevered despite having the government pull the carpet from underneath their feet (metaphorically of course).

I ask you to consider my testimony and choose to support the 90% of Ohio students who attend public schools. Please include the 3rd phase of the bipartisan Fair School Funding Plan in the state budget. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

If you would like any of my sources or have any questions for me, please feel free to contact me at [marcel.mangan@gmail.com](mailto:marcel.mangan@gmail.com)!