



Indiana School Choice Myths vs. Reality

There are many misconceptions surrounding school choice. Let's clear up some of the most common myths that are used to argue why families should not be given the opportunity to send their students to the school that best meets their learning needs and values.

MYTH: "SCHOOL CHOICE DRAINS MONEY FROM PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND COSTS TAXPAYERS."

Reality: School choice programs across the country, have been proven to save state governments millions – even billions – of dollars. When a student attends a non-public school using a school choice scholarship (voucher), state governments do not have to pay the public school the full cost for providing an education for that student. **For the 2021-2022 school year, the state awarded \$241 million in school vouchers, and the average voucher amount was \$5,439 while state funding for public schools was \$7,968 per student.** Public schools receive local taxes for operations, yet non-public schools do not receive those funds. Public schools also retain their local funding, even if those students transfer to a non-public school. This results in a cost savings for the state and more money to go around for students remaining in public schools.

MYTH: "CHOICE DOES NOT LEAD TO BETTER ACADEMIC OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS."

Reality: Nationally, there have been more than 150 studies on school choice – more than any other education reform policy. Of the 18 gold-standard studies on the academic outcomes of students participating in school choice programs, 14 showed positive academic results for choice participants, two had neutral findings, and only two had negative findings. Across Indiana, students continue to recover from Covid learning losses, and non-public school students dramatically outperformed their public-school peers on the 2022 I-LEARN state assessment. The National Assessment of Education Progress, more commonly known as the Nation's Report Card, shows that nationally, Catholic school students have much higher test scores in reading and math than their public-school peers in grades 4 and 8, the year the NAEP assessment is administered.

School Type	ELA 2022 I-LEARN Pass Rate	Math 2022 I-LEARN Pass Rate
Non-public Grades 3-8	61.1%	56.3%
Traditional Public Grades 3-8	39.4%	38.2%

Source: Indiana Department of Education

School Type	2022 NAEP Reading Score*	2022 NAEP Math Score*
Public School Grade 4	216	235
Catholic School Grade 4	233	246
Public School Grade 8	259	273
Catholic School Grade 8	279	288

Source: The National Assessment of Education Progress

*Scale Score 0-500

MYTH: “CHOICE PROGRAMS DO NOT HAVE THE SAME ACCOUNTABILITY AS PUBLIC SCHOOLS.”

Reality: Non-public schools have been held accountable since their inception. They have always been subject to the ultimate accountability: parents. If parents are unsatisfied with a school for whatever reason, they can take their child and his/her tuition dollars to a different school of their choice. This is still true. In addition, schools participating in the Choice Scholarship Program are subject to additional state accountability such as state testing, school accountability grades, state reports, random visits, and information transparency through the new GPS Dashboard. All of this while maintaining a sense of independence and autonomy, which is assured in state statute. Additionally, non-public schools are accountable to their local parish/church/school board leadership when making financial and staffing decisions.

MYTH: “CHOICE PROGRAMS ALLOW FOR DISCRIMINATION.”

Reality: Nine out of 10 empirical studies show that choice programs lead to less segregation in schools. In Indiana, voucher students are more racially diverse (43% are minority) compared to traditional public-school students (32% are minority). For example, nationwide, Catholic schools are near the top in learning outcomes for students receiving free and reduced-price lunch, demonstrating the system’s commitment to underprivileged students.

MYTH: “SCHOOL CHOICE ONLY BENEFITS NON-PUBLIC SCHOOLS.”

Reality: Indiana recognizes that parents should choose the school that provides the best educational opportunities for their children. In Indiana, the money flows *to the student*, not to the school. Families can choose to send their children to alternative public schools, charter schools, or non-public schools – that is the power of school choice! **School choice benefits students and families.** IDOE’s Fall 2022-2023 Public Corporation Transfer Report showed public to non-public school transfers were only 40% the total of transfers in Indiana. The largest number of transfer students are public-school to public-school transfers. However, only families choosing non-public schools, must provide eligibility through income and other conditions. Families pursuing charter and other public schools do not have to prove eligibility to transfer.

MYTH: “SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS VIOLATE SEPARATION BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE.”

Reality: In 2013, the Indiana Supreme Court ruled unanimously that school choice does not violate Indiana’s Constitution. Indiana tax dollars may be used to finance non-public school tuition under the Choice Scholarship program. Additionally, the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that appropriately designed private school choice programs are fully constitutional and do not violate the U.S. Constitution. **In any choice program, parents and children are the direct beneficiaries, not schools because the money follows the student.**

MYTH: “SCHOOL CHOICE DISPROPORTIONATELY HURTS RURAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS.”

Reality: School choice is important to increasing education options for all students, including those living in rural areas. Families in rural areas may have limited choices in both public and non-public school options, but through Indiana’s Choice Programs, whatever choices that are available are made more financially accessible.

MYTH: “SCHOOL CHOICE PUSHES A RELIGIOUS AGENDA.”

Reality: Across Indiana, families choose the school that’s right for their children and consistent with their values and beliefs. It is important to note, that almost all faith-based schools accept students from other faith traditions. In addition to demonstrating proficiency and meeting the same state benchmarks as public schools, non-public schools are uniquely situated to teach students about good citizenship and character. The Indiana State Code requires that schools provide “Morals Instruction;” non-public schools, whether religious or secular, are equipped to instill good moral character and civic responsibility in their students.

ADDITIONAL FACTS ABOUT SCHOOL CHOICE:

- A voucher student receives, on average \$2,000 less in state money for their education PLUS, voucher students do not receive any local tax dollars.
- 25 of 28 empirical studies on choice programs show a positive financial impact on taxpayers and school districts. Three studies show choice programs are revenue neutral, and no studies show negative effects.
- Nationally, there have been more than 150 studies on school choice – more than any other education reform policy. Students in private school choice programs see academic benefits.
 - Of the 18 gold-standard studies on the academic outcomes of participating students:
 - 14 showed positive academic results for choice participants,
 - 2 had neutral findings, and
 - 2 have negative findings
 - Of the 33 empirical studies on the academic outcomes of the students remaining in public schools:
 - 31 showed positive academic outcomes for students remaining in public schools.
 - 1 had neutral findings, and
 - 1 had negative findings
 - *The Notre Dame Study:*
 - Students entering the voucher program were academically behind their public-school peers
 - Based on ISTEP scores, voucher students were academically behind their public-school peers in years 1 and 2 of attending a private school.
 - By years 3 and 4, voucher students caught-up in math and moved ahead in English/ Language Arts
 - By years 5 and 6 voucher students were expected to surpass their public-school peers academically (the study did not gather data for this many years).
- Voucher accepting non-public schools must give the ILEARN state assessment
- The truest form of accountability is choice. No one is automatically assigned to any non-public school. Parents choose to send their child to these schools, and they can also choose to leave that school if it is not working.
- Voucher students are more racially diverse compared to traditional public-school students.