

What we *don't* know about Illinois' Invest in Kids voucher program

Lack of transparency and oversight for how public dollars are being spent is a fundamental flaw of school voucher programs. The Illinois Invest in Kids program is halfway through its sixth school year, and there is still a lot we don't know about schools and students receiving vouchers. Public access to that data from state agencies is limited.

Education policy researchers have found that the national trend is away from providing information on school privatization programs in all states and that, because data is often held by multiple state agencies with no coordination, it makes it especially difficult to gain access to it.

If we had more information about the Invest in Kids voucher program, such as the number of students who were never enrolled in a public school prior to receiving a voucher, the general public and policymakers would be able to see more clearly that this program does not “rescue children from failing public schools”—a key talking point of groups promoting voucher expansion.

Do we know...	YES	NO
How much money in total voucher dollars each school receives?		✗
How the racial and ethnic demographics of voucher students compare to the set of students enrolled in public schools?		✗
How many students with disabilities and English-language learners are voucher recipients?		✗
What services and supports students with disabilities and English-language learners enrolled in voucher schools are receiving?		✗
How voucher students' standardized test scores compare with public school students?		✗
How many voucher students previously attended public school?		✗

Total voucher dollars received per school: The annual report released by the IL Department of Revenue (IDOR) only provides information sufficient to calculate the *minimum* a school receives because it only reports dollars per school by ‘priority group,’ which are certain categories of voucher students, e.g. whether a student’s sibling receives a voucher, if family income is below 185%, etc. Priority groups aren’t mutually exclusive categories, and so, if a student falls into more than one category, their voucher payment is included in totals for each.

Demographics of voucher recipients compared to public school students: The annual report from IDOR uses a different categorization of race and ethnicity than [the one used by both the IL State Board of Education \(ISBE\) and the US Department of Education \(USED\)](#). ISBE and USED use seven mutually-exclusive categories; the eight IDOR categories are not mutually exclusive.

Number of students with disabilities and English-language learners receiving vouchers: Under the Invest in Kids Act ([35 ILCS 40/40](#)) schools receive a larger dollar amount for each voucher recipients who have been “determined eligible to receive services under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act” or “are English learners, as defined in subsection (d) of Section 14C-2 of the School Code” However, IDOR’s annual report does not list how many students qualify for those prorated amounts in total for the state nor which schools are enrolling those students. We do know only about 13% of schools receiving voucher students reported enrolling *any* special education students at all in 2022-2023 according to [ISBE’s registered schools data](#).

Services and supports for SWDs and ELLs provided by voucher schools: There is no publicly available information on whether or how schools are supporting and educating the students for whom they are receiving larger prorated vouchers, including what services are being provided or how such services are being paid for.

Standardized test scores of voucher recipients: The Invest in Kids Act ([35 ILCS 40/45](#)) requires voucher recipients to participate in the annually-administered state standardized tests required of students in public school. Annual testing was administered in 2021, 2022 and 2023, but ISBE has released no reports. Research on voucher programs nationally has shown that voucher students’ scores are not higher and in many cases are significantly lower than similar students in public schools.

Number of voucher recipients who previously attended a public school: Although the scholarship granting organizations (SGOs) and the voucher schools that recipients enroll in have this information, it is not released to the public, and it is not clear whether the IDOR collects it. [Based on other states where such data exists](#), about eight in ten students receiving vouchers have never attended public school.