

# Vote **NO** on School Vouchers for Illinois!

Public funds must be for *public* schools that serve all kids. But federal school vouchers would divert public dollars to *private* schools.

About 10% of Illinois voters will have an advisory referendum on their March 17th Primary Election ballot, asking if Illinois should participate in the new federal voucher school program. This program is structured as a **tax credit scholarship voucher program**, which means public tax dollars are diverted through third-party scholarship granting organizations (SGOs) to pay primarily for tuition costs at private, religious schools.

The wording of the non-binding ballot question varies somewhat by district, but most have this phrasing:

*"Should Illinois opt into a federal program that would provide Public K-12, private school, and homeschool students with privately-donated funds for academic needs, such as tutoring and test preparation, educational therapies for students with disabilities, tuition, books, exam fees or for other specified academic needs?"*

## Here's key information that's *missing* from these ballot questions:

- **These are 100% public dollars**, *not* private donations. When a taxpayer contributes to an SGO, they get all their money back through 100% tax credits of up to \$1700.
- **Equitable access for public schools is unlikely**. While in theory some of this money could go to public school students, to access the benefits, public school communities in less affluent areas would need to (1) set up 501c3 organizations and (2) solicit donations from higher-income individuals who pay enough in taxes to be able to use a (non-refundable) tax credit. It is unclear whether public schools would then be responsible for administering programs.
- **This program, like all voucher programs, hurts public school funding**. If students leave public schools, schools are left with the same fixed costs, but lower per-pupil funding from the state and federal government.
- **In Illinois public schools serve 9 out of 10 children** but are **underfunded by billions** of dollars. Our federal tax dollars should go toward restoring the federal funding that has been cut, not dispersed to private schools—funding discrimination and hurting education equity.
- **Private schools pick their students**. Students receiving these publicly funded vouchers to pay for private school tuition will not be protected from **discrimination on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, religion, language needs, or disability**—as they are protected in public schools. When families accept a voucher for private school, they must waive their child's rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- **Even wealthy families would be eligible for vouchers**. Parents can earn up to 300% of the area median gross income, which is just under \$360,000 for a family of four in the Chicago metro area.
- **Regulations have not yet been issued**, so it is not clear how much control, if any, states would have to determine **accountability** and **transparency** for the private schools and service providers receiving this public funding, including **accreditation** or assessments of **education quality**. However, regulators have already said that states will have minimal ability to restrict which SGOs could operate in their state.
- **Waste, fraud, and abuse alert!** The SGOs can keep 10% of contributions for overhead and lobbying to expand their programs. Research shows vouchers do *not* improve student achievement compared with public schools, and long-term studies of programs, including those in DC, IN, LA and OH, have found that voucher students fare substantially worse academically.

Questions? INFO@ILFPS.ORG

**Vote NO on Vouchers for Illinois is endorsed by the following organizations:**

Illinois Families for Public Schools • League of Women Voters of Illinois • American Association of University Women Illinois • Chicago National Organization for Women • Citizen Action Illinois • Illinois Education Association • Illinois Federation of Teachers • Illinois Moms for Change • Illinois National Organization for Women • National Council of Jewish Women - Chicago North Shore • National Council of Jewish Women - South Cook Section

