

Don't follow Arizona's example. End universal vouchers now | Opinion

Arizona has shown the nation what universal vouchers do to public schools. It's time to put our money toward all students and that's in public school.

Mark Kelly For The Republic

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I'm a product of great public schools. I believe in the American Dream because I lived it, and I know it starts with a good education. Every child, in every zip code, deserves a fair shot. That's not a policy position—it's an American value. But in Arizona, and increasingly across the country, [universal school voucher programs](#) are threatening that promise for millions of families.

Arizona's experiment with universal school vouchers should be a cautionary tale for my Republican colleagues. It is [busting our state budget](#) and [threatens to close public schools](#) and make it harder for working class kids to get a good education. We should not take Arizona's failed experiment national, but that is exactly what most Congressional Republicans and the Trump Administration did in the [One Big Beautiful Bill Act](#).

Since 2022, our state's universal voucher program has diverted and drained money from public schools; last year alone cost Arizona taxpayers nearly \$1 billion. Instead of investing in classrooms, special education services, or school safety, lawmakers pushed massive tax giveaways and created a parallel education system that lacks transparency and accountability.

Who benefits the most from Arizona's school voucher program?

Here's the truth: most working families aren't benefiting and the program is a magnet for [waste, fraud and abuse](#). The majority of voucher recipients in Arizona were already in private school before the program expanded. That means [taxpayers are now footing the bill](#)—thousands of dollars per student—for families who were already paying private school tuition. And the [wealthiest neighborhoods](#) use the most vouchers.

Taxpayers are essentially cutting blank checks for things they have no business paying for. In March, the Arizona Attorney General's Office released [new data from an audit](#) that examined a random sample of purchases from December 2024 through October 2025. That data showed that [over 20% of purchases](#) were identified as "unallowed." Meanwhile, investigative reporters found [18,000 parents spent over \\$10 million](#) from the voucher program on things like diamond necklaces, cell phones, jet ski rentals, gaming consoles, a designer purse, Air Jordan sneakers and hotel rooms.

Families of students with disabilities have been hit especially hard. Public schools are legally required to provide special education services under the [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA). Private schools aren't. That means parents who depend on those protections are often left out entirely.

How can the federal voucher program affect public schools?

Instead of addressing these problems, the Trump Administration is doubling down. Trump's signature bill included a massive,

deficit-increasing, \$26 billion national private school voucher program.

We have an opportunity to fix this by passing the [Keep Public Funds in Public Schools Act](#), which I introduced April 15. This bill, endorsed by more than 160 education and disability rights organizations, would repeal the federal tax credit voucher program, halting one of the major wrecking balls the Trump Administration has taken to public education.

America's public schools helped build the strongest middle class the world has ever seen. If we want to keep that dream alive and keep improving education, we must keep public funds in public schools that serve all kids. That's how we build our children's future and honor the American promise that hard work, not privilege, determines your path in life. It did for me, and I want to make sure it does for every kid. Let's strengthen, not abandon, our public schools.

Our kids and our country deserve it.

Mark Kelly, a Democrat, is a U.S. Senator from Arizona.