

School Vouchers Destabilize and Defund Public Education

At Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC, we work to promote educational equity for the nation's diverse Asian American communities and to protect the civil and human rights of all students and families. Strong, fully funded public schools play a vital role in promoting equity for children and equipping them to grow into future leaders.

Recently, there has been a resurgence of school voucher legislation at the state and federal levels.¹ This directly impacts 2.8 million Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander children currently attending U.S. public schools.²

Here is what you need to know:

¹ School Voucher Legislation Tracker, Public Funds Public Schools. Accessed November 29, 2024. <https://pfps.org/billtracker/>

² Public School Enrollment, National Center for Education Statistics. Accessed November 29, 2024. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cga/public-school-enrollment>

What are school vouchers?

School vouchers and K-12 education scholarship accounts (ESAs) are funded by public tax dollars from federal, state, and local taxes that families can use to pay for private, charter, religious, and homeschool education programs.

Vouchers defund public education

Normally, public schools receive an allocation of dollars based on the number of students enrolled. **When a school voucher is used, the child's allocation of public dollars is taken away from the public education system** and put towards charters, private schools and homeschool programs, instead of contributing to their assigned public school. Because of this, it is critical to protect public schools from being defunded—where 50,000,000 (or 90%) of children in the U.S. receive their education.³

Vouchers do not meet the needs of students in low-performing schools

Although vouchers are pitched as “school choice” for students in a low-performing school to attend a higher-performing school, **data show that vouchers do not meet the needs of these students.**⁴ In some cases, students moving from a low-performing public school to a charter or private school experience worse academic outcomes.⁵ Moreover, **private school tuition costs often exceed the amount of a school voucher**, limiting use of vouchers to wealthy students whose families are able to cover the difference in cost.⁶

³ Report on the Condition of Education 2024, National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2024/2024144.pdf>

⁴ “Madison County school board votes to close three elementary schools,” Tallahassee Democrat, July 18, 2024. <https://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/communities/2024/07/18/madison-county-school-board-votes-to-close-three-elementary-schools/74430316007/>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “Students in Rural Public Schools: By the Numbers,” National School Board Association. November 6, 2023.

<https://www.nsba.org/ASBJ/2023/december/research>

Vouchers destabilize the public education system, leading to negative outcomes including:

Deprioritizing offering advanced coursework such as AP classes.

In 2023, over 350,000 AANHPI students took one or more AP exams, reflecting the demand and need for schools to offer AP classes. However, it can cost a school anywhere from \$1,900.00 to \$11,650.00 to offer a single class, straining an already reduced budget.⁷

Insufficient funding for English learners and students with disabilities. 1.5 million AANHPI students have disabilities and learning needs, making up 20% of all U.S. students with disabilities and represent 6.8% (360,400 students) of the total English learner (EL) student population. Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, Hmong, and Urdu are among the top 10 most frequently spoken home languages of ELs. Sufficient funding is needed to hire qualified special education and ESOL certified staff, and interpreters.⁸

Closure of Rural Schools. Over 215,000 AANHPI children attend public schools in rural areas. Schools that have lower enrollment and fewer local tax dollars will face budget cuts due to vouchers. While vouchers can be used at private schools, they are less accessible in rural areas and do not guarantee transportation. Public schools are often the only option available for children in rural districts.⁹

Additionally, education programs receiving vouchers are not subject to federal requirements regarding civil rights or resources for students with special needs. Therefore, **vouchers allow public dollars to be spent in programs that foster discrimination** against students in poverty, with disabilities, students of color, LGBTQ+ students, and English learners. **These programs have historically served as de-facto racial “segregation academies.”**¹¹

7 AP Participation 2013-2023. College Board. Accessed November 29, 2024. [ap-participation-2013-2023.xlsx](https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/apc/2023-2024/xlsx)

8 English Learners in Public School. National Center for Education Statistics. Accessed November 30, 2024.

https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/data/ipeds_indicators/ipeds_indicators.asp?x=1&y=1&table=100

9 “Madison County school board votes to close three elementary schools,” Tallahassee Democrat, July 18, 2024. <https://www.tallahassee.com/story/news/communities/2024/07/18/madison-county-school-board-votes-to-close-three-elementary-schools/74430316007/>

10 Students in Rural Public Schools: By the Numbers.” National School Board Association. November 6, 2023. <https://www.nsbao.org/ASBJ/2023/december/research>

11 “The ‘Catastrophic Failure’ of School Vouchers,” National Education Association. September 20, 2024. <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news/articles/school-vouchers-catastrophic-failure>

What you can do about it

AANHPI advocates can be most effective by working in solidarity with other communities to ensure public schools are strong, fully funded and able to provide all children with a quality education. Take action by:

- **MONITORING** related legislation in your state [here](#).
- **INVITING** your community to get involved in public school advocacy campaigns like [Public School Strong](#).
- **URGING** school boards to pass resolutions opposing school vouchers and draining public school funding. (See templates in “Resources” below).
- **CONTACTING** [elected officials](#) to share information on the critical need for fully funded public schools. Refer to toolkits from EdTrust and NCPE below for more information.

Resources for Learning More

Policy Advocacy	Asian Americans Advancing Justice AAJC	Legislation tracker of bills on education funding
Background	Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA)	Stop Vouchers resources
	Truth in Education Funding by Partnership for the Future of Learning	Guide on vouchers and public education
	Public Funds Public Schools campaign by Education Law Center	Campaign website
	Stanford's Education Opportunity Project	The Segregation Explorer
For School Districts	National Educators Association (NEA)	School Board Resolution Template
For Advocates & Community Members	EdTrust	Advocacy Toolkit to Fight School Voucher Programs
	National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE)	Toolkit for State Legislators and Advocates
	Public School Strong by HEAL Together: campaign for parents, educators, and students	Campaign website