

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT VOUCHERS

MYTH 1: Private voucher schools have to meet the same requirements as Utah public schools.

- **FACT:** Neither of the voucher bills provides significant oversight of private schools accepting scholarship students. These unaccountable private voucher schools could hire teachers who do not have a college degree and/or teachers who are unlicensed.¹ In addition, these unaccountable voucher schools would not have to meet the state coursework or attendance standards that public schools are required to meet.²
- There is limited financial accountability for the tax dollars going to these unaccountable schools, and no safeguards against waste, fraud and abuse. Anyone meeting the law's flimsy conditions may open a school, creating the opportunity for fraud.
- Under Utah's law private schools will have almost no accountability to taxpayers or parents. Unaccountable voucher schools do not have to meet the following accountability requirements:
 - ✓ Not subject to any performance audit requirements.
 - ✓ Not subject to financial reporting requirements.
 - ✓ Do not have to meet state core curriculum requirements.
 - ✓ Do not have to meet school accreditation requirements.
 - ✓ Do not have to adhere to teacher training or licensing requirements.

MYTH 2: Vouchers will help Utah families afford tuition at private schools.

- **FACT:** Even with a voucher, most Utah families will not be able to afford expensive private school tuition, which averages \$8,000 per child per year.³ For a family with four children, the \$24,000 in additional tuition makes private school unaffordable.⁴
- More than half of Utah's counties have NO private schools.⁵ Therefore, many Utah families have little or no access to private schools. (I'm not sure that MOST would be accurate since the schools are in populated areas...)
- Less than 1% of "eligible" public school students could receive voucher scholarships in 2008. Utah lawmakers provided \$9.3 million in funding for vouchers in 2008.⁶ With a projected enrollment of 553,428⁷ that means less than 1% of students would receive an average voucher due to limited funding.

¹ Salt Lake Tribune, 02.23.06.

² <http://www.rules.utah.gov/publicat/code/r277/r277-604.htm>

³ Utah State University study - "Estimating Demand and Supply Response to Tuition Tax Credits for Private School Tuition in Utah."

⁴ Washington Times, 03.12.07

⁵ Utah State University study - "Estimating Demand and Supply Response to Tuition Tax Credits for Private School Tuition in Utah."

⁶ Salt Lake Tribune, 04.16.07.

⁷ http://www.schools.utah.gov/finance/other/AnnualReport/06ar/Statistics/STUDENTS/State_Enrollment_Projections.xls

MYTH 3: We don't need to spend more money on Utah's public schools.

- **FACT:** Ninety six percent (96%) of Utah's children attend public school.⁸ Our state ranks last in the nation in spending per student and has the most overcrowded class sizes in the country.⁹ We should invest the nearly half a billion dollars estimated for the voucher programs on reducing class size, buying up-to-date textbooks and supplies, and improving teachers salaries to make our public schools better.
- Public schools would see a significant drop in funding after five years of the voucher program.¹⁰ Then, they would lose all funds associated with voucher students.
- Utah's Office of Fiscal Analyst projects vouchers will cost the state \$429 million over the next 13 years.¹¹ That is money that will NOT be available to assist the 96% of Utah students who attend public schools.

MYTH 4: Vouchers will save taxpayers money.

- **FACT:** Vouchers will not save money. In fact, a report cited in making that claim was erroneous and misleading, according to the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice. http://greatlakescenter.org/docs/Think_Twice/TT_Baker_Voucher.pdf
- No state that has implemented a voucher program has saved money. In Florida, the McKay scholarship program for special needs students cost taxpayers more than \$107 MILLION for the 2005-06 school year.¹²
- The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction reported in February, 2007 that the limited Milwaukee voucher program would cost taxpayers \$110,517,000 for an estimated 17,000 students.¹³ As the voucher program has grown, more money has been diverted from public schools to private schools. To compensate, the school district had to raise its property taxes to offset the loss of funds.¹⁴

MYTH 5: Private school students perform better academically than their public school peers.

- **FACT:** A 2006 U.S. Department of Education study of Washington, D.C.'s voucher program¹⁵ and a 2001 U.S. General Accounting Office study of Cleveland and Milwaukee's voucher schools¹⁶ found no significant differences between private school and public school students in terms of academic achievement. Studies of voucher programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland also found no real differences in academic performance between private and public school students.
- The state of Utah Office of Education does not require private schools to report on the achievement of their students, nor does it require a performance audit to determine effectiveness.

⁸ <http://www.utea.org/noexcuses/index.htm>

⁹ http://www.utahpriorities.net/briefs/rb13_education_2.html

¹⁰ http://www.i2i.org/main/page.php?page_id=138

¹¹ The Salt Lake Tribune report on the Fiscal Analyst's projection placed the figure at \$429 million over the next 13 years.

¹² http://www.floridaschoolchoice.org/Information/McKay/files/Fast_Facts_McKay.pdf

¹³ <http://dpi.wi.gov/sms/doc/mpc06fnf.doc>

¹⁴ Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, 12.19.06.

¹⁵ <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20074009/>

¹⁶ <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d01914.pdf>

MYTH 6: As the demand for private schools increase, so will the supply.

- **FACT:** An April 16, 2007 Salt Lake Tribune article, “Tuition Still Unaffordable for Poorest,” found that “more than a third of Utah’s private schools are too small to be eligible to participate” in the program and many others will not accept vouchers.¹⁷
- Of the four Utah school districts with the highest percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch - San Juan, Tintic, Piute, and Ogden¹⁸ - only Ogden has private schools.¹⁹
- Only 75 of Utah’s private schools enroll enough students to meet the voucher program’s eligibility requirements.²⁰
- In addition, many schools have expressed hesitation about accepting voucher students due to concerns about government regulation.²¹
- Many of Utah’s private schools have waiting lists for admission and have not expanded to handle increased demand.²²

MYTH 7: Vouchers are the same as G.I. Bill and Pell Grant

- **FACT:** Public schools provide students with education from kindergarten through 12th grade. The G.I. Bill and the Pell Grant were designed to help high school graduates gain access to higher education at colleges and universities, which do not provide a free education. In addition, the G.I. Bill was designed to repay members of the armed services for their service to our country.
- All higher education institutions (public and private) accepting Pell Grants must be accredited to participate in the program. Private voucher schools do not need to be accredited.

MYTH 8: Vouchers will lower class size in public schools.

- **FACT:** Class size is actually determined by a formula that figures the ratio of teachers to students in the school building at the beginning of the year. Teachers are hired based on those numbers. If many students leave with a voucher, the school will simply lose teachers. If only a few students from the school leave resulting in the loss of a teacher, some class sizes could actually increase.
- If students leave for a private school and decide mid-year to return to the public school, class sizes could actually increase.

¹⁷ http://www.sltrib.com/education/ci_5301412

¹⁸ http://www.cppa.utah.edu/Perspectives/i2_eth_dem_1.pdf

¹⁹ <http://utah.schooltree.org/Weber-County-Schools.html>

²⁰ Salt Lake Tribune, 04.16.07.

²¹ Salt Lake Tribune, 04.16.07.

²² http://www.sltrib.com/education/ci_5301412