



May 16, 2019

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Recently passed voucher plan may drain nearly \$1 billion from Florida's public schools over the next five years

FEA provides county-by-county breakdown of projected losses to school budgets

TALLAHASSEE — Florida's neighborhood public schools could lose nearly \$1 billion over the next five years as a result of the Legislature's actions in the last session to vastly expand vouchers for private and religious schools, researchers at the Florida Education Association reported today.

"The state legislators who backed vouchers and our governor need to learn some addition. It appears that the only mathematical concepts they understand are subtraction and division," said Fed Ingram, a former Miami-Dade County Teacher of the Year who is president of the Florida Education Association. "Subtracting money from local public school budgets and creating division in communities by failing to support the schools attended by 90 percent of Florida's students does not serve the best interests of this state's families."

The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. We have every expectation that the current cap on the Empowerment voucher will increase through future legislation. For example, one of several currently existing Florida voucher programs, the [Florida Tax Credit](#) voucher program (formerly known as the Corporate Tax Credit voucher program), provides private school vouchers by diverting corporate tax revenue from the state's general revenue fund to a voucher-funding organization. The Legislature initially capped the program at \$50 million in tax credits per state fiscal year, but the cap expanded to \$873 million by 2018-19.

Florida's voucher programs have proven to be a failed experiment, yielding poor results for students and families. More than half of students who participate in Florida's existing tax-credit voucher program stay for two years or less in private schools accepting the state funds, [according to the Urban Institute](#). And test data from the Florida Department of Education indicates that [the performance of students who attended private schools through vouchers lags behind their peers who stayed in public schools](#).

The voucher expansion bill, [SB 7070](#), passed by the Florida Legislature this year, will expand eligibility for Florida's voucher program and for the first time tap the state's general revenue fund for vouchers aimed at the overall school population.

According to an FEA analysis, the expanded use of vouchers will drain \$131 million from Florida's neighborhood public schools in the 2019-2020 school year. Based on the track record of the current Florida voucher program, which has grown by 21 percent each year, the union projects a total loss to public schools of more than \$986 million over the next five years.

Projected Revenue Loss to Florida’s Public Schools 2019-2024

Year	Diversion from Florida Education Finance Program
2019-20	\$131,000,000
2020-21	\$157,986,000
2021-22	\$190,531,116
2022-23	\$229,780,526
2023-24	\$277,115,314
Total lost revenue	\$986,412,956

Source: Florida Education Association

“This misguided and misappropriated legislation means that school buildings will continue to decay, threatening the health of our students and staff,” said Ingram. “Classes will become even more overcrowded, making it harder for students to learn. As a result of this drain on school funds, Florida districts will be forced to cut back on music, art, Advanced Placement courses and other essential programs.”

Rob Kriete, a longtime teacher who now serves as president of the Hillsborough Classroom Teachers Association, concurred. “Right now, we have classrooms without teachers and education professionals leaving the field in record numbers, while more students than ever before are attending public schools in Hillsborough County. How is our district supposed to deal with these issues if the Legislature keeps taking money out of our budget?”

According to FEA projections, Hillsborough County Public Schools will lose \$53.4 million in public funds over the next five years as a result of the financial drain created by the new voucher program. Larger districts will suffer even bigger losses. Miami Dade County Public Schools, for example, will lose \$235.9 million over five years.

Florida already diverts more public funds to private and religious schools than any other state in the nation. “You can’t keep telling Florida public schools they have to do more with less,” added Ingram. “Eventually, they do less with less. That’s not empowerment — it’s abandonment.”

Projected Revenue Loss for Six of Florida’s Largest Counties

County	Total loss to public schools, 2018-2023
Miami-Dade	235,901,936
Orange	96,448,356
Broward	94,708,777
Duval	71,857,794
Hillsborough	53,395,346
Palm Beach	31,600,546

Source: Florida Education Association

A County-by-County Breakdown of Lost Revenue as a Result of SB 7070

Projected losses for each Florida county can be found here: <https://feaactioncenter.org/new-research-finds-voucher-bill-may-drain-nearly-one-billion-dollars-from-floridas-public-schools/>

The *Orlando Sentinel* investigative series [Schools without Rules](#) revealed the lack of oversight and accountability over private schools operating in Florida. Vouchers have failed students in other states as well as in Florida. Below are links to an investigation from the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, NPR and Fox affiliates and The Center for Investigative Reporting released this week:

- [Read the story at NOLA.com](#)
- [Watch the report from Fox 8](#)
- [Hear the story from WWNO](#)

And also this week in Tennessee:

- Voucher bill faces new scrutiny amid [report of FBI probe](#)

May 18 Statewide Education Summit, “Bringing Voices Together” in Orlando to Explore Ways to Counter Attacks on Florida’s Schools

This weekend, advocates for high quality, well-funded, neighborhood public schools, joined by parents and taxpayers concerned about the direction the state’s education system has taken, will be [holding an education summit in Orlando](#). The event, titled “Bringing Voices Together,” is open to the public and is being co-sponsored by the Coalition for Florida’s Public Schools, encompassing organizations such as FEA, the NAACP Florida State Conference, the League of Women Voters and Pastors for Florida Children. The summit is hosted by the World Café and will be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, May 18, at the Hilton Orlando, 6001 Destination Parkway, Orlando. Advance registration is requested. There is no cost to attend. Seats may be reserved at: <https://feasummit2019.eventbrite.com>.

“The goal of the summit is to bring together diverse stakeholders from across Florida to explore ways to build up local schools, not tear them down,” said Ingram. “We encourage parents and all those who care about our children and the future of this state to join us.”

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The Florida Education Association is the state’s largest association of professional employees, with more than 140,000 members. FEA represents pre K-12 teachers, higher education faculty, educational staff professionals, students at our colleges and universities preparing to become teachers and retired education employees.