

SCHOOL VOUCHERS

A yellow pencil is positioned diagonally across the right side of the image, pointing towards the center. The background is a blurred multiple-choice test paper with blue lines and circular bubbles containing letters A, B, C, and D. The overall lighting is soft and slightly dim, creating a professional and academic atmosphere.

Dr. Josh Cowen

Michigan State University
and Education Law Center

Fall 2024

About Me:

- 2001-02: researcher on Washington, DC voucher evaluation
- 2005-12: lead analyst on Milwaukee voucher evaluation
- 2015-present: Louisiana voucher research teams
- 2017-present: Director of Oversight, USED R&D center on school choice
- 2017-2020: research-practice partnership, State of Michigan
- 2024: *The Privateers: How Billionaires Created a Culture War and Sold School Vouchers*

What's a Voucher?

1.) Does it provide public dollars for private, K-12 tuition?

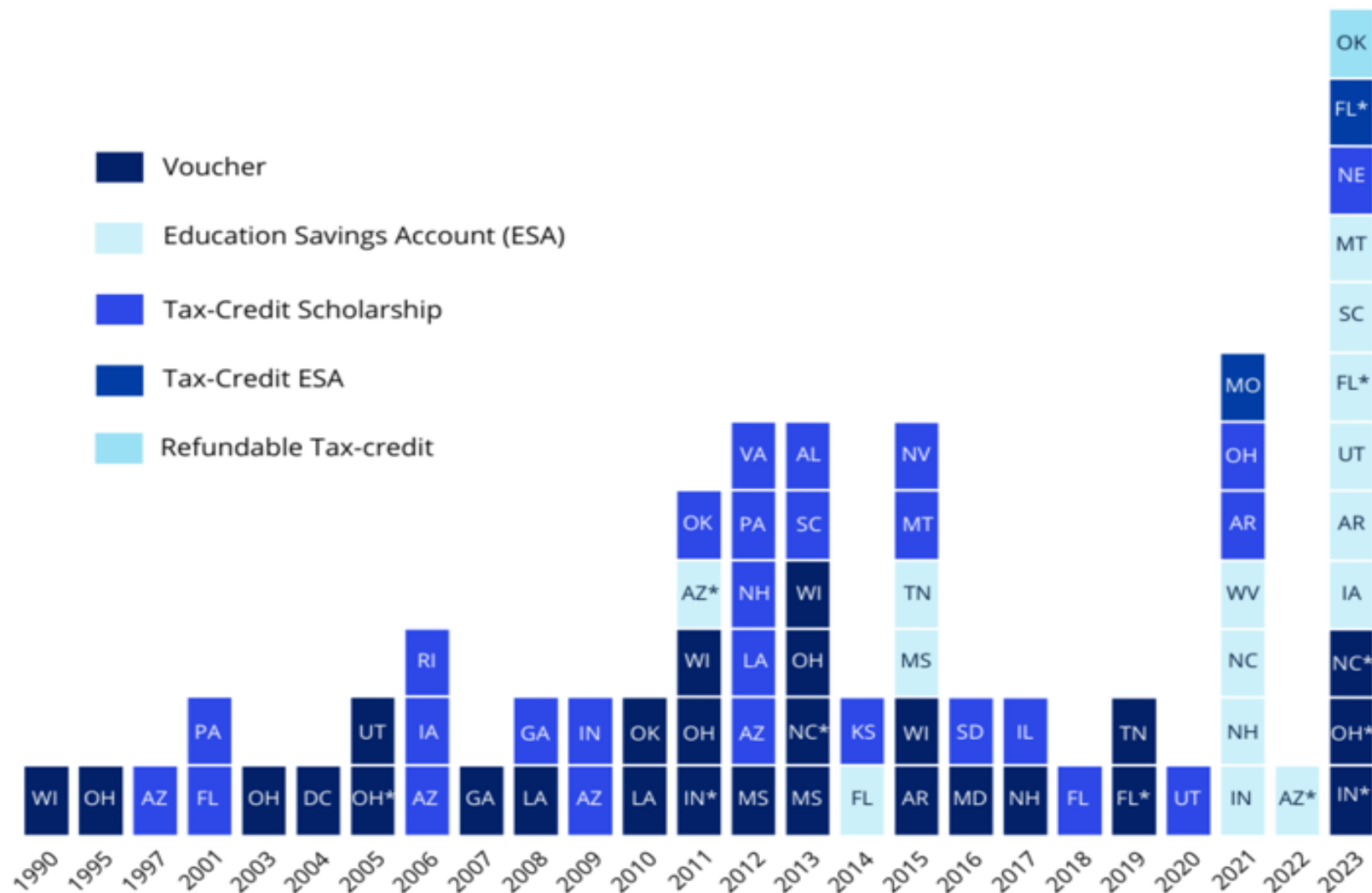
- Direct appropriation?
- Tax expenditure?

2.) Are public school students eligible?

If (1) = YES and (2)= NO

☞ ☞ ☞ It's a voucher

Private-School-Choice Programs Enacted, By Year

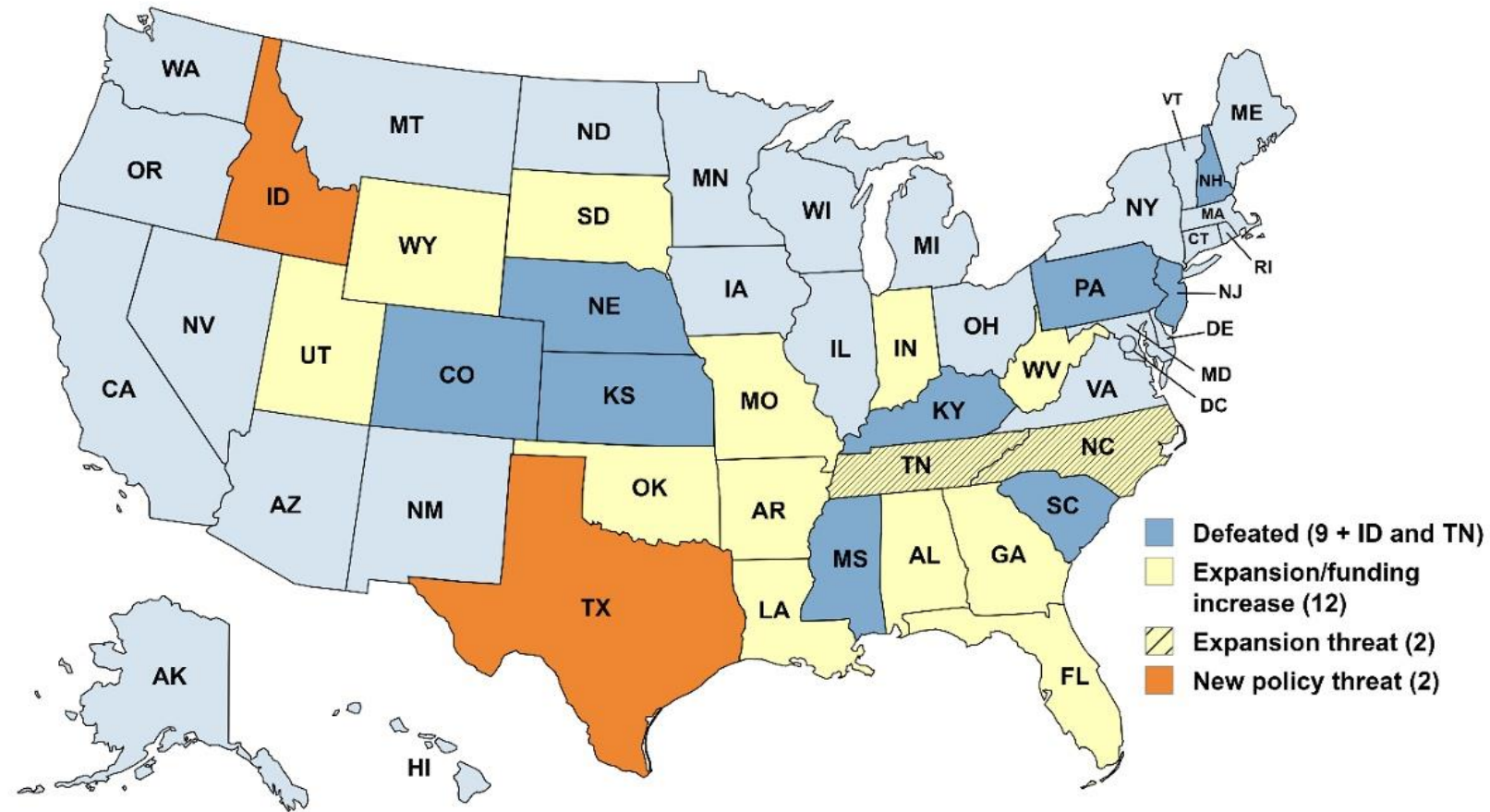


Vermont (1869) and Maine (1873) had "town tuitioning" programs established prior to Milwaukee's 1990 voucher program.

*Indicates an existing program that was later significantly expanded to create a new universal program

Source: EdChoice

2024 School Voucher Policy Movement



Note: North Carolina's funding expansion has been [vetoed](#) by the governor. The general assembly has until the end of the year to override the veto.

Voters Poised to Reject Private School Vouchers in Three States

The results were part of a wave of ballot measure outcomes that teachers' unions had sought. Nevertheless, private-school choice is growing nationwide.

[EDUCATION](#)

School choice

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Voters rejected multiple school choice measures in 2024 election



[Kayla Jimenez](#)

USA TODAY

Published 7:06 p.m. ET Nov. 6, 2024



Federal Actions Under a New Trump Term?

- Tax Credit Scholarships:
 - e.g. [The Educational Choice for Children Act](#) (ECCA)
 - Based on state models
 - Donors contribute to funds administered by third-party scholarship orgs.
- [Expanded child tax credits](#) (e.g. ARP)
 - Refunds based on tax filings
- SCOTUS: [mandatory vouchers](#), extending *Espinosa*, *Pierce*, *Yoder*
 - This reasoning has failed in state courts but...

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Vouchers Helping Families Already in Private School, Early Data Show

Critics say program amounts to subsidy for better-off families, while supporters call it parent choice in action

By [Matt Barnum](#) [Follow](#) and [Alicia A. Caldwell](#) [Follow](#)

Dec. 3, 2023 8:30 am ET



THE FIFTY

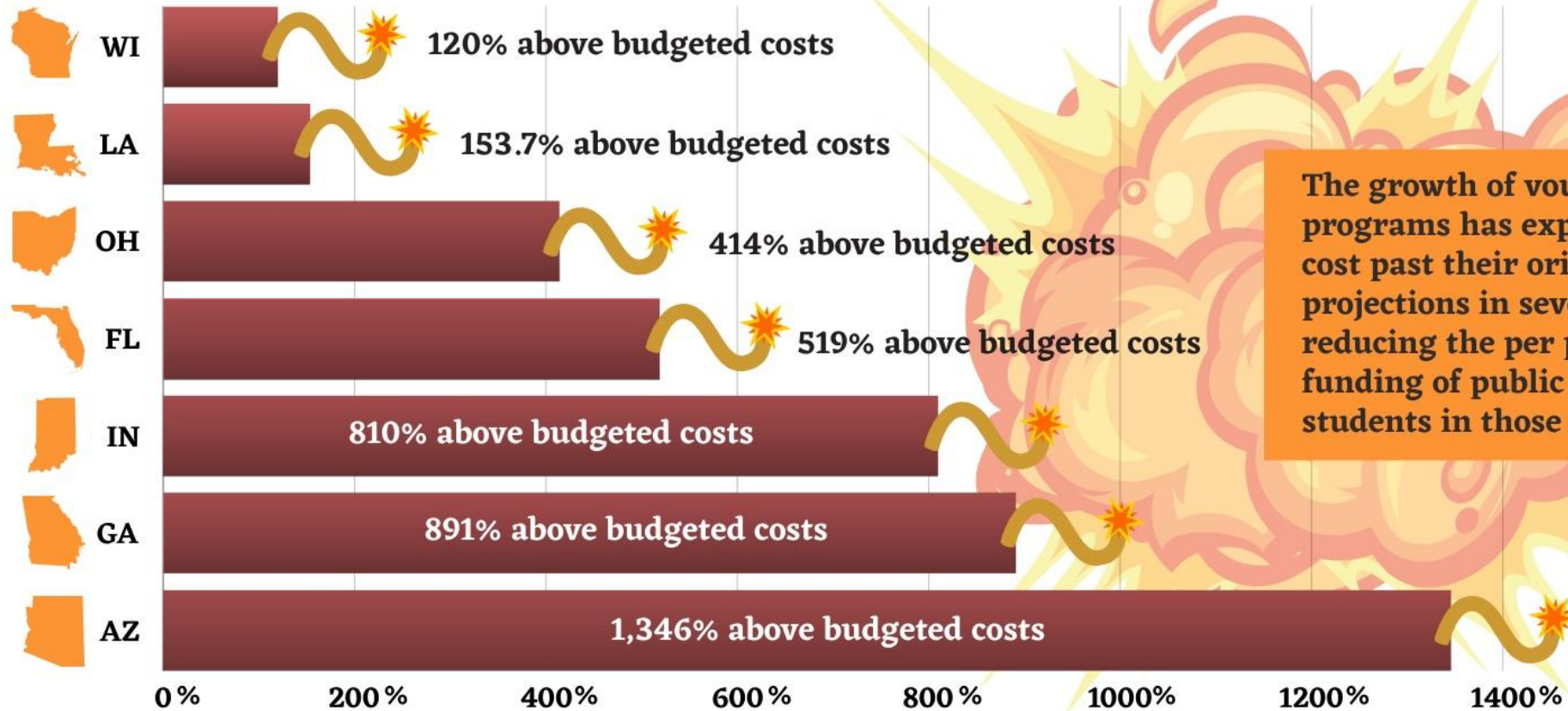
GOP states are embracing vouchers. Wealthy parents are benefitting.

Most of the beneficiaries are incoming kindergarteners or students already enrolled in private schools.



POLITICO illustration/Photo by iStock

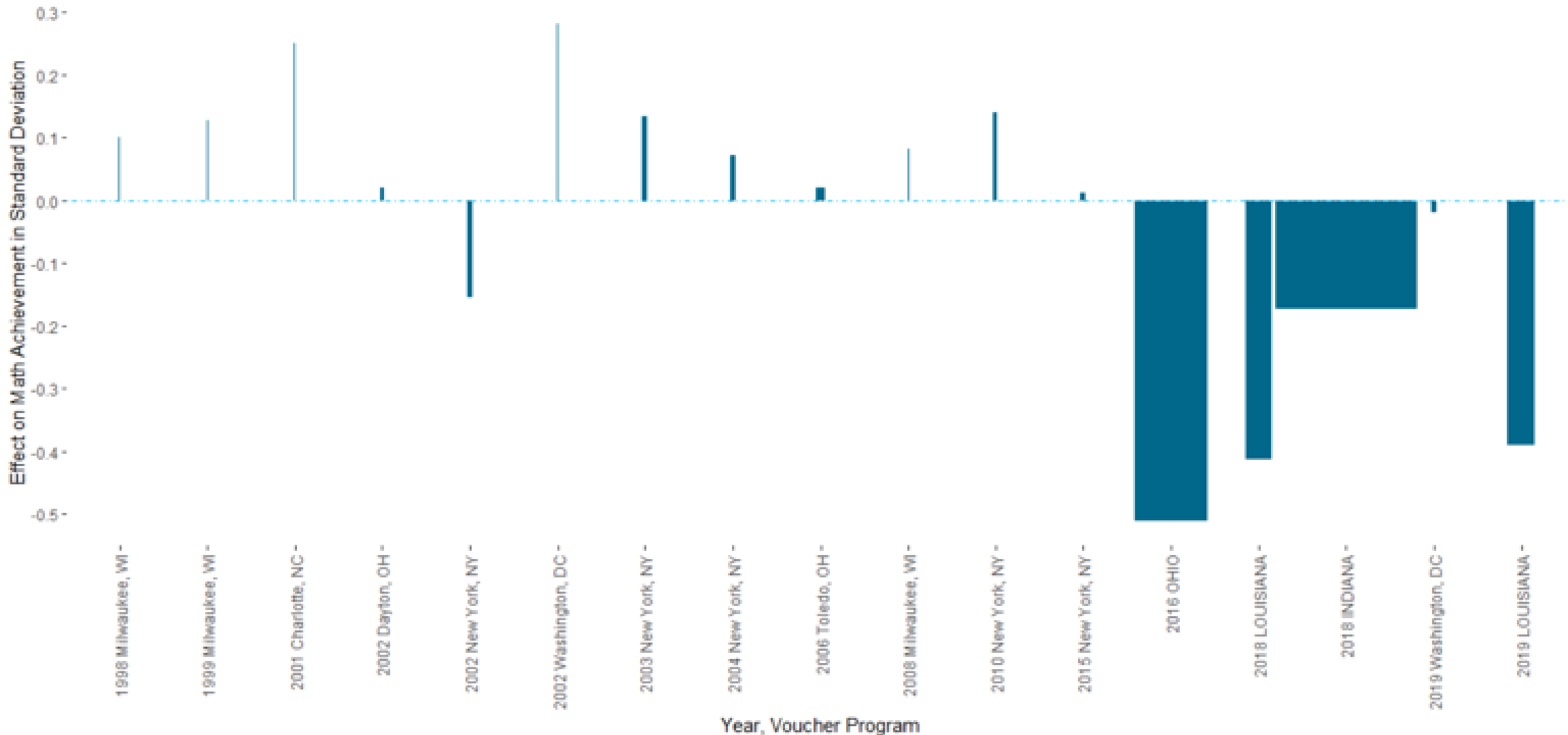
The Exploding Costs of Voucher Programs



The growth of voucher programs has exploded in cost past their original projections in several states, reducing the per pupil funding of public school students in those states.

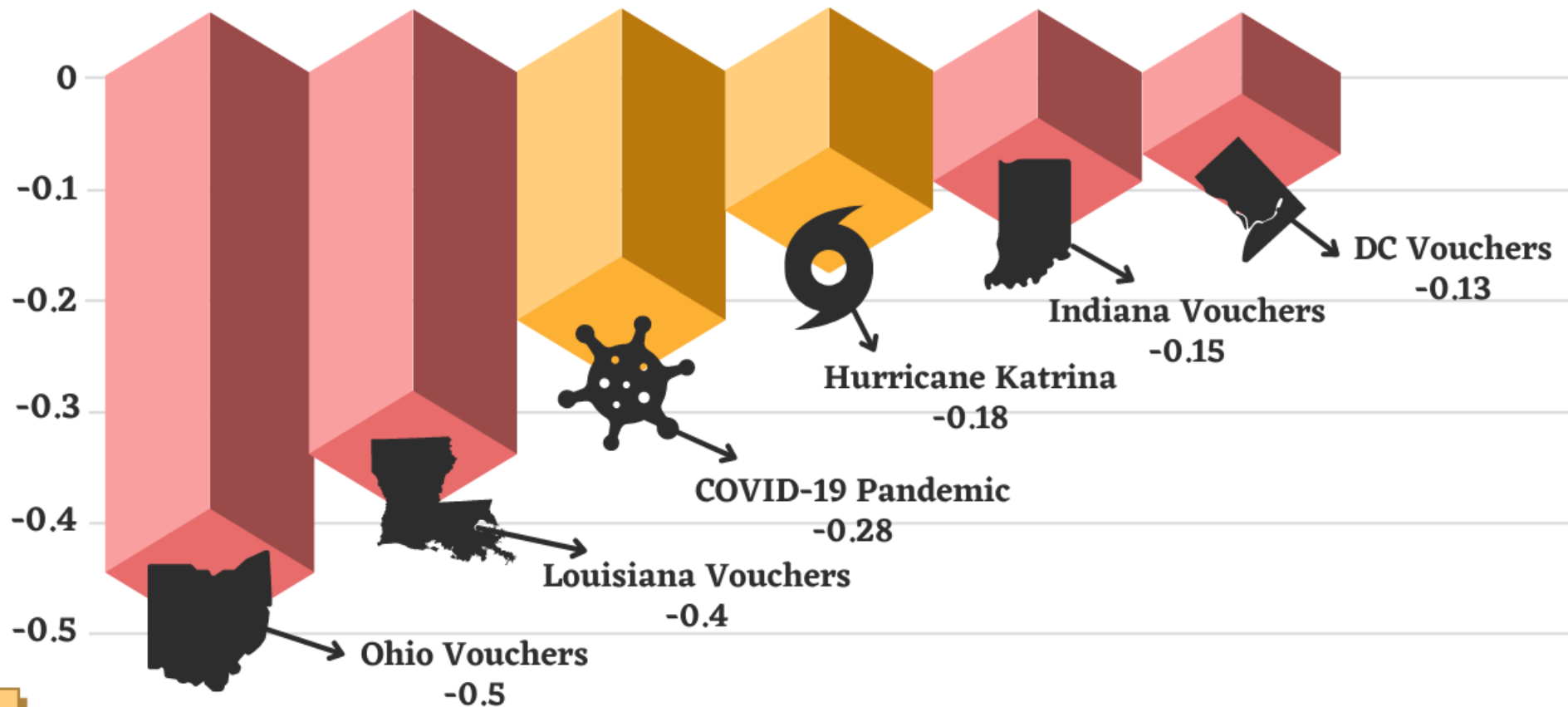
Sources: https://pfps.org/assets/uploads/SPLC_ELC_PPFS_2023Report_Final.pdf
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/582f7c19f7e0ab3a3c7fb141/t/656f86da76eb367e4f1723a8/1701795546233/NCPE+toolkit+addendum+v2+digital+with+links.pdf>

Effect of School Vouchers on Math Achievement Over Years and Program Size



Source: Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, Indiana University Bloomington

Voucher Impacts on Student Outcomes As Harmful as Natural Disasters (Measured in Standard Deviation)



Standard Deviation: a quantity calculated to indicate the extent of deviation for a group as a whole.

CHALKBEAT

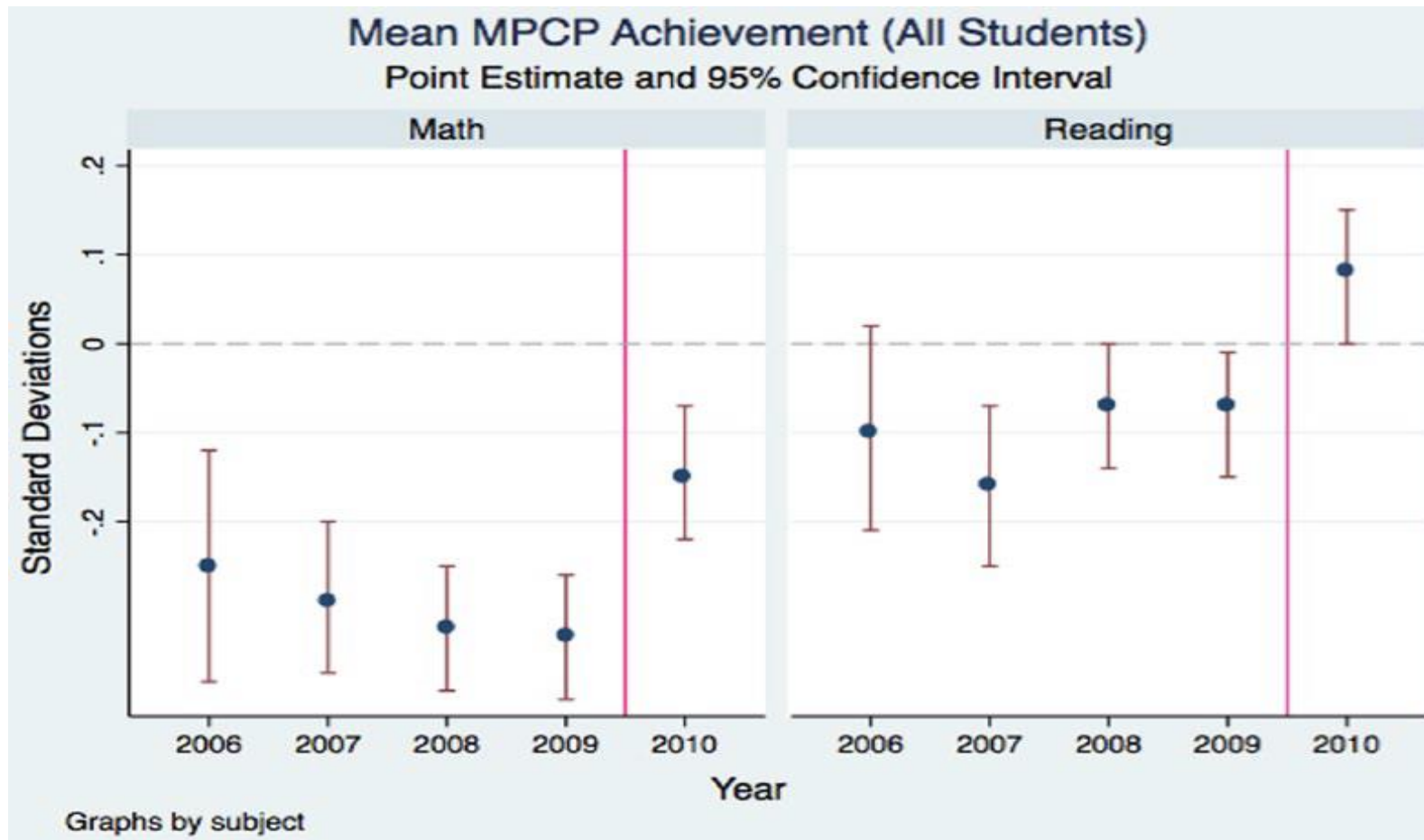
CHARTERS & CHOICE VOUCHERS

Do voucher students' scores bounce back after initial declines? New research says no

By Matt Barnum | Apr 23, 2019, 12:01am EST

Requiring Vouchers to Follow Public Rules HELPS!

(source: Witte, et al 2014)



The Revolving Door of Voucher Programs

For most students, private school voucher programs are not a meaningful educational option. In states like Indiana, Louisiana and Wisconsin, **roughly 20% of students leave voucher programs** each year, either because they give up the payment or because schools push them out. In Florida, where vouchers just expanded, that number is even higher: **around 30% per year in pre-expansion data.**



CHALKBEAT

CHARTERS & CHOICE

Betsy DeVos's explanation for negative voucher results: Program was 'not very well conceived'

By Matt Barnum | May 6, 2019, 3:05pm EST

FLYPAPER

School failure in Milwaukee's school voucher program

41% private schools receiving school vouchers in Wisconsin have failed/closed since the program began

Pop-up schools **last less than 4 years after opening** to receive taxpayer \$\$



RELIGION

Vouchers ease start-up stress for churches seeing demand for more Christian schools



THE WEST

Arizona gave families public money for private schools. Then private schools raised tuition

Critics worry that the state's new universal school choice program is a subsidy for the affluent

by NEAL MORTON November 27, 2023





PROPUBLICA

Investigative Journalism in the Public Interest

Education

In an Unprecedented Move, Ohio Is Funding the Construction of Private Religious Schools

The state is giving millions in taxpayer dollars directly to private schools to help them renovate and expand their campuses. It may be the next frontier in the push to increase the use of school vouchers, proponents say.



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Private School Choice: Federal Actions Needed to Ensure Parents Are Notified About Changes in Rights for Students with Disabilities

GAO-18-94

Published: Nov 16, 2017. Publicly Released: Nov 30, 2017.

Choice for most: In nation's largest voucher program, \$16 million went to schools with anti-LGBT policies

By Julia Donheiser | Aug 10, 2017, 6:30am EST



EDUCATION

False choice: Wisconsin taxpayers support schools that can discriminate

Dozens of voucher schools have policies that allow them to exclude LGBTQ+ students or those with disabilities. In many cases, it's legal.

by Phoebe Petrovic / Wisconsin Watch



JOSH COWEN

THE PRIVATEERS

HOW BILLIONAIRES CREATED
A CULTURE WAR AND SOLD
SCHOOL VOUCHERS



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Notes:

- See <https://ceep.indiana.edu/education-policy/policy-briefs/2022/evolving-evidence-on-school-voucher-effects.pdf>
- Thanks to the National Council for Public Education and the Center for Budget Policy Priorities for graphics; citations in the pictures.