

The Delray Democrat

Are We Headed Toward Privatizing Florida's Public Education?¹

June Sandra Neal

Given Governor DeSantis' elimination of income restrictions for school voucher applicants, this just may be Florida's trajectory. Now, even wealthy families can get the state to pay for all or part of their children's private schooling. What was once a strategy to help poor children exit failing public schools is now a dark Republican scheme designed to destroy public education while supporting private, religious and home schools (PRH)—on the taxpayers' dime.

As of July 1, 2023, vouchers, officially titled the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program, will siphon off thousands more students and hundreds of thousands of tax dollars needed for our public schools. As one of the voucher agency reps told the *Delray Democrat*, "We're swamped with applicants."

The [Education Law Center](#) warns: "Already underfunded public school districts will be financially gutted. The potential for harm to local public-school districts, which serve most Florida students, is extreme."

Some families are responsive to PRH education because it evokes an image of an upscale milieu, or a student body minus the hoi-polloi. But Eton they ain't.

Instead, here's what we get: mostly Christian-based curricula, much of which is anti-science, anti-LGBTQ+, racially-biased and almost completely [unregulated](#). The opposite of what good public schools stand for.

DeSantis has already cratered our public schools with his racist, homophobic fiats. So PRH education is a great way to indoctrinate even more students with his Straight, White and Christian ethos. And it's easy. After all, these private schools are pre-baked. "For the 2023 school year, there are 1,445 religiously affiliated private schools serving 294,835 students in Florida (57% of all [schools](#))."¹ As the *Orlando Sentinel* reported over several articles:

- "The books are rife with religious and political opinions on...abortion, gay rights. They disparage religions other than Protestant Christianity and cultures other than those descended from white Europeans. Yet, about 60 percent of scholarship students are black or Hispanic. As of February 2023, the breakdown by [race](#) is 38.9% Hispanic, 28% African American, 27.2% White and 6.0% Other. And 81.4% of the schools are officially religious." [Private schools' curriculum downplays slavery, says humans and dinosaurs lived together](#)
- In 2020, "14 percent of Florida's nearly 147,000 scholarship students attended private schools where homosexuality was condemned or, at a minimum, unwelcome." [Anti-LGBT Florida schools getting school vouchers](#)

¹ [The Delray Democrat](#), August 2023, page 1.

- Several Florida private schools that received millions of dollars in vouchers promoted conversion therapy for LGBTQ students.
- One “school” was merely a row of cubicles where the kids sat for hours with workbooks—and no teacher. Nothing else: no gym, arts, lunchroom, anything.

Nonetheless, DeSantis believes these SW&C schools are his ticket to the White House. And Florida taxpayers are picking up the tab.

“Next year, [the cost] could reach 30%, or [\\$4 billion](#).” And what are taxpayers getting for that money?

- [Lack of accountability](#) in *unregulated* schools. “Private elementary and secondary schools in Florida are not licensed, approved, accredited, or regulated by the Florida Department of Education.” (Charter schools are the exception.)
- Increased comingling of church and state, buttressed by recent Supreme Court decisions, such as DeSantis’ teachers’ “civics training...that’s infused with contemporary Christian and conservative ideology. See [Supreme Court rulings, DeSantis antics threaten the separation of church and state](#)
- Exclusion of LGBTQ+ children.
- Thousands of students brainwashed with anti-science, anti-history, and anti-fact curricula.
- A concomitant loss of students’ civil rights, See [“Vouchers Undermine Civil Rights.”](#)

Vouchers have a shameful past. In the 1950s and 60s, Southern states used them to skirt the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Supreme Court decision which declared school segregation unlawful.” [“The Racist Origins of Private School Vouchers.”](#) Black parents quickly learned that vouchers were nothing more than Jim Crow in a new suit.

Today, many independent watchdog organizations have sounded similar alarms. The Southern Poverty Law Center [found](#) in 2021: “No state comes close to Florida in the allocation of public funds to private schools... *decreasing* per pupil funding by 12% from \$9,799 to \$8,628 while the rest of the country’s schools *increased* their spending by 9.6%.” Florida ranks “... *7th from the bottom* of all states in per pupil funding at \$9,346.”

A growing number of voucher students means an increased demand for P&R schools—and many entrepreneurs are eager to provide and manage them.

We must not allow that to happen. It is government that’s best suited to administer programs that serve the public. Businesses exist to make profits. In standards-free schools, educational success will be measured by the profit line.

Public education is integral to our democracy. It’s the singular institution structured to create a unified society by cohering diverse people into Americans. Whatever problems exist should be fixed by the tax dollars we are now diverting to PRH schools that are operating on principles most Americans have fought so hard to eradicate.

Author’s note: This analysis does not go to the separate universe of the growing number of super rich,

Wall Street folks moving to Florida and demanding the same top-quality (and top price) private school education their kids had up north.