

Educate Nevada Now Explains

Vouchers vs. NV Opportunity Scholarship *What is the difference?*

Background on Vouchers: In 2016, the Nevada Supreme Court struck down Nevada's voucher program as unconstitutional because it siphoned public dollars away from funds meant for public education. Soon after, the 2017 Nevada legislature struck down a renewed effort to implement and fund a universal voucher program (SB 506). If implemented, \$60 million in public state dollars would have paid for private school tuition. The bill did not pass - due in large part to enormous efforts from legislators and progressive advocacy groups who oppose using public money to fund private schools. Importantly, the bill did nothing to stop private schools from taking public dollars and discriminating against students on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity or ability. The proposed voucher program also brought up concerns about the lack of accessibility and affordability of private schools for low-income and rural communities. The 2017 legislature did approve a one-time allocation of \$20 million in tax credits for an Opportunity Scholarship which is funded with private donations.

Opportunity Scholarships are not universal vouchers. Universal vouchers take public funds directly from the state budget and transfers that money for use at private schools. Opportunity Scholarships are paid for directly with private dollars, and the State of Nevada uses public dollars to give tax credits to companies who fund the scholarships

What is the Opportunity Scholarship Program: During the 2015 session, the Nevada Legislatures created the Opportunity Scholarship Program (AB 165). This program allows private companies to receive tax credits from the State of Nevada for making donations to "scholarship organizations." These scholarship organizations then grant students scholarships to attend private school. A student's household income must be less than 300% of the federal poverty line to participate in the program with priority based on lowest income and lowest zoned school rating. Students must also take norm referenced tests that are closely aligned with national standard and core academics. It is important to note that Opportunity Scholarships in other states have faced issues, such as instances of misuse and abuse when not appropriately regulated or monitored. So like any program, it's important to continue to track the program's usage and effectiveness.

What Happened with the Opportunity Scholarship Program in the 2017 Session? Nevada Legislators approved an additional \$20 million in tax credits over the biennium to companies participating in the scholarship program. This is a **one-time** allocation.