

# Fiction

## ESA's are More Expensive than Traditional Public Schools

"Arizona school vouchers cost taxpayers more per student, but Republicans say they don't." [vi]

### Key Facts

- **\$14,857 vs. \$7,311:** All in, the per-pupil funding for a traditional public school student in Arizona is \$14,857 as of 2023, versus the \$9,523 per-pupil funding for the average ESA recipient – including students with disabilities – and \$7,311 per-pupil for those enrolled in the universal program. [vii] Even ignoring federal funding, a public-school student costs Arizona taxpayers about \$13,000.
- **4.6%:** Total ESA enrollment accounts for 6.3% of Arizona's student population, but consumes just 4.6% of all K-12 funding in the state. [viii]
- **Opponents often exclude local funding from the comparison of public and ESA funding, but this is misleading.** K-12 funding levels are largely determined by an equalization formula, and any funding that cannot be raised through local property taxes is covered by the State (and General Fund). Because State General Fund is the "payor of last resort" for all education funding in Arizona, on the margin, any student from a state-aid district – which includes about 93% of K-12 students [ix] – is approximately fully State-funded. [x]
- **According to JLBC, two-thirds of all public school funding is tied to (per-pupil) formulas** – so-called "fixed costs" are less than a third of all funding.
- **The State considers total and projected enrollment growth when allocating funding for new schools and other non-formula lines** – fewer kids is likely to lead to lower State-level non-formula "fixed" costs, too.
- **Districts are not required to tie capital funding requests to specific enrollment projections, and this can lead to overbuilding even as enrollment declines** [xi] – but it is a problem with how the state allocates capital funding generally.

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## ESA's are More Expensive than Traditional Public Schools

### Key Facts Continued

#### Differences in Per-Pupil Funding

District school students receive over \$2,000 more than Charter students. ESAs receive 90% of Charter school per pupil Equalization formula funding and forego all other funding sources.

■ State Funding ■ Local & Other Funding ■ Federal Funding



Source: JLBC Funding Variation (2023), CSI estimates • Most but not all "State Funding" comes from the General Fund. Note that while this is true for the average student, it may not be true on the margin - typically, the State General Fund is the "payor of last resort".

### B O T T O M L I N E

**No matter how the funding is sliced, Arizona taxpayers fund traditional District school students at a much higher amount than other students.** This is true regardless of gimmicks – federal funds, fixed costs, etc. And on the margin, its mostly true for the General Fund too.