


The Future of Accountability and What Policymakers Said

Robert Enlow, EdChoice
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A photograph of a woman with dark hair, wearing a white cardigan over a dark top, sitting and reading a book to a young girl with braided hair, also wearing a white cardigan. They are in a classroom or library setting. In the background, there are other children sitting at a table, a globe on a stand, and various educational materials. The entire image has a blue color overlay. In the top right corner, there is a decorative graphic of several overlapping squares in shades of purple and white.

What Is Accountability?

Accountable (adj.):

“subject to the **obligation** to **report, explain**, or **justify** something; responsible; **answerable**.”





What is accountability?

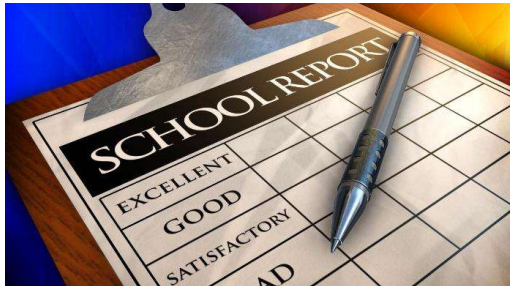
Wordcloud Poll 32 responses 24 participants



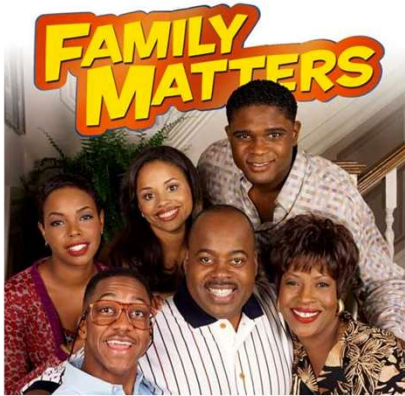
Key Question: Accountability for What and to Whom?



Financial



Academic



THE ACCOUNTABILITY MYTH

Michael Q. McShane, Ph.D.

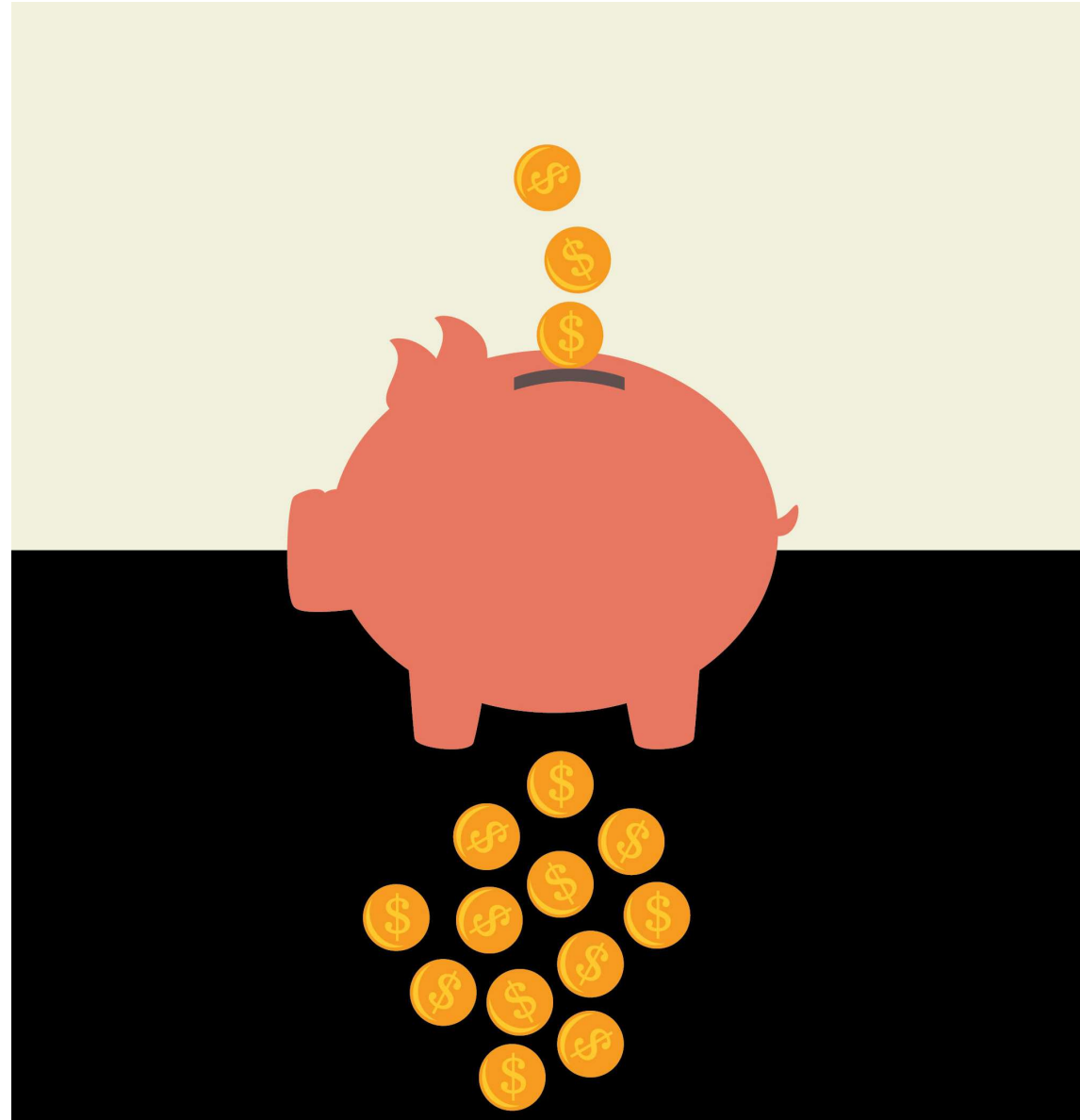


Traditional public school accountability:

The **three ways** that public schools talk
about accountability

Financial Accountability:

Schools should be responsible for how they use the money they are given and should be ready to account for what has been spent and how.



Democratic Accountability:

Since schools are funded by the community writ large, they should be able to account for how they are reflecting the wishes of that community. Are they teaching what the community believes should be taught? Are they organizing schools in ways that the community agrees to? Are they spending the community's money in ways that comport with the community's wishes?



Educational Accountability:

Schools should take responsibility for the quality of the education that the students in their charge receive. They should be able to demonstrate that students are mastering what they are supposed to be learning.

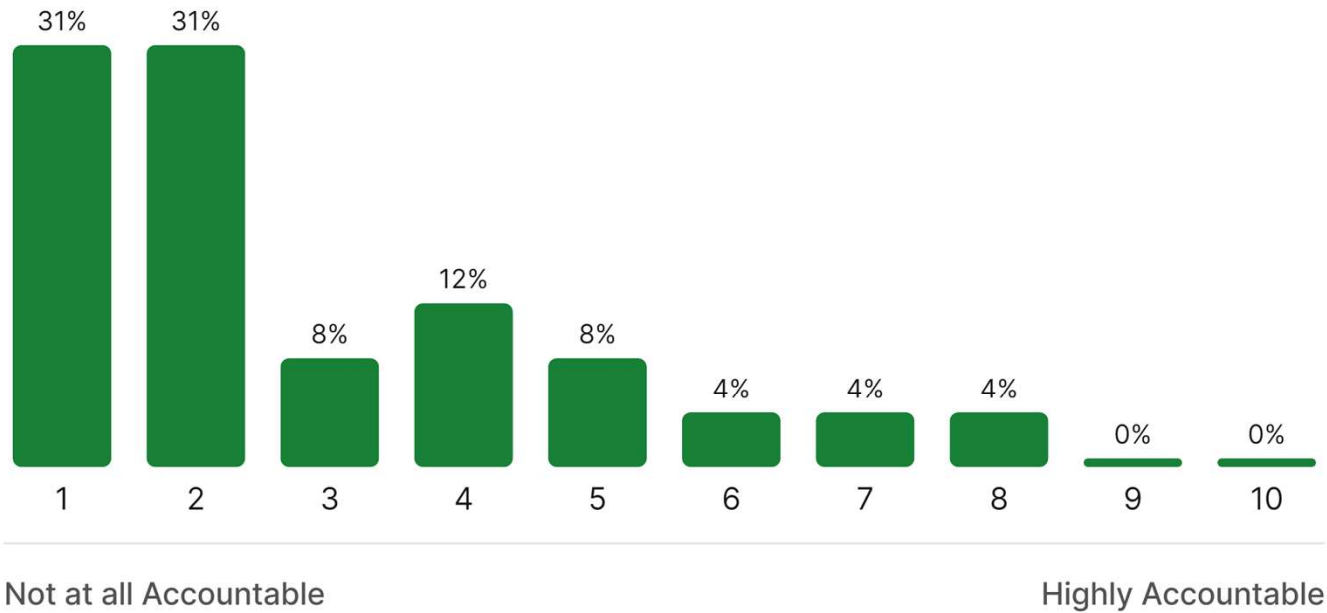




On a scale of 1-10, how accountable do you think traditional public schools are?

Rating Poll 26 votes 26 participants

Score: 2.8



A photograph of a woman sitting on the floor in a classroom, reading a book to a group of children. The scene is dimly lit with a blue tint. In the background, there is a table with a globe and other educational items. The text "How are existing choice programs accountable now?" is overlaid in white on the image. In the top right corner, there is a decorative graphic of purple and white squares.

**How are existing
choice programs
accountable now?**

A photograph of a woman sitting on the floor reading a book to a group of children in a classroom. The scene is overlaid with a blue tint. In the top right corner, there is a decorative graphic consisting of several purple and white squares of varying sizes. The text "What should the future of accountability look like?" is centered over the image in a white, bold, sans-serif font.

**What should the
future of
accountability
look like?**



WHO'S AFRAID OF SCHOOL CHOICE?

Examining the Validity and Intensity of
Predictions by School Choice Opponents

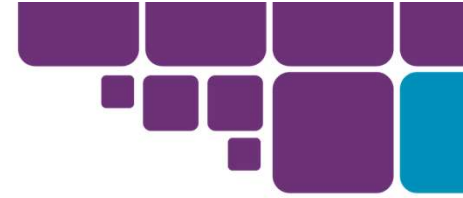
Jason Bedrick
Ed Tarnowski

The logo features the word "ed" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font inside a purple square, followed by the word "CHOICE" in a white, uppercase, sans-serif font.

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Two Parts



Part I

*Assessing Predictions
about Effects
of Educational Choice
Policies*

Part II

*Comparing Anti-Choice
Rhetoric Across Proposals*





Death, Taxes, and Outlandish Predictions about School Choice

- For three decades, state lawmakers have introduced new ESA, voucher, and tax-credit scholarship bills
- Without fail – choice skeptics have responded with some colorful "predictions" on their impact on district schools
- These predictions range from gloomy to downright apocalyptic


In 1999, Arizona State University Professor David Berliner claimed that voucher programs *“could end up resembling the ethnic cleansing occurring in Kosovo...”*





Arizona

“Not only are the tuition tax credits a transparent diversion of public funds to private education, but they further weaken the public school system.” - *Arizona Daily Sun, Editorial (April 1997)*



Florida

“This is the day that will go down in the annals of Florida history as the day we abandoned the public schools and the day that we abandoned, more importantly, our children.”
– *Florida State Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (March 1999)*



Indiana

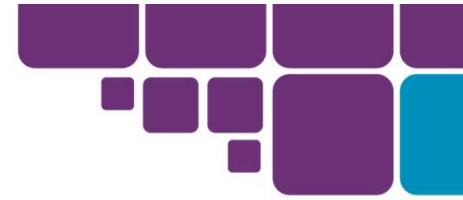
“So what we have is a proposal here that’s going to damage our public schools because it’s going to siphon money away from our schools. And in the end, we’re going to have no improved achievement.”

*- Indiana Rep. Matt Pierce
(March, 2011)*



Ohio

“This [voucher] plan is the greatest threat to the public schools we have ever faced.” – Oliver Ocasek, President, Ohio State Board of Education (October, 1993)



Wisconsin

“I know of no advantage to our corner of the state to supporting the choice program. It will only drain resources from our schools.”
– Jamie Benson, superintendent of the River Valley School District
(September, 2011)



What Actually Happened?

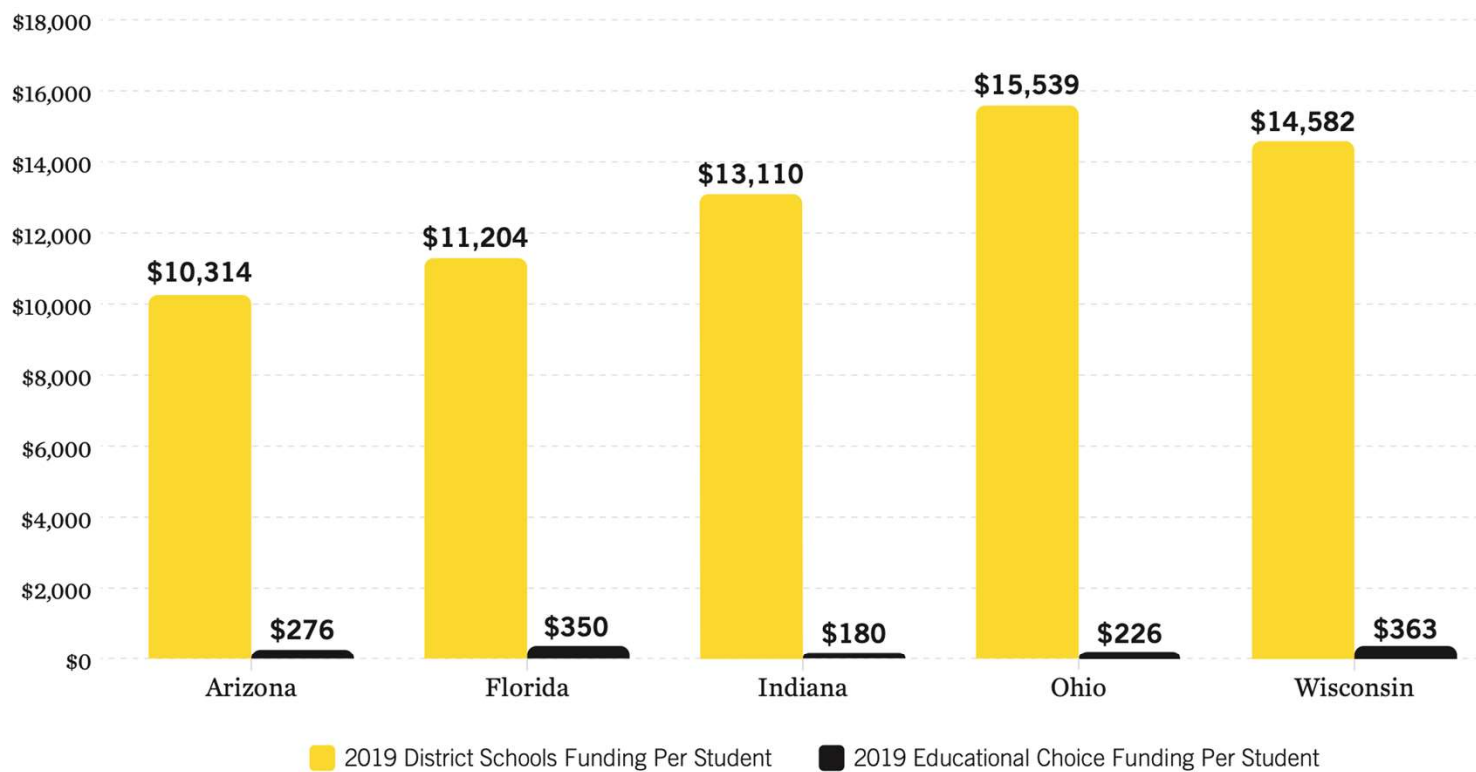
The hypothesis that educational choice policies lead to the defunding of public schools is *false*.

State	2019 Per-Pupil Funding	Percent Increase In Real Per-Pupil Funding Since 2002
Arizona	\$10,314	1.2%
Florida	\$11,204	6.3%
Indiana	\$13,110	1.5%
Ohio	\$15,539	12.7%
Wisconsin	\$14,582	5.1%

Sources: Smith, Aaron Garth., Schwalbach, Jude., Barnard, Christian., & Campbell, Jordan. (2021, September 30). *K-12 Education Spending Spotlight: An in-depth look at school finance data and trends*. Reason Foundation. <https://reason.org/commentary/k-12-education-spending-spotlight/>

FIGURE 1


Funding Per Student 2019



Source: Smith, Aaron Garth., & Campbell, J., (2021, September 30), *Benefit costs, not school choice programs, are the real drain on public education spending*, Reason Foundation, <https://reason.org/commentary/benefit-costs-not-school-choice-programs-are-the-real-drain-on-public-education-spending/>

Performance Catastrophe Nowhere to be Found

State	4th Grade Math	8th Grade Math	4th Grade Reading	8th Grade Reading	NAEP Math Percent Advanced	AP high scores (3 or above)
U.S. Average	+6.1	+4.9	+3.0	+0.7	+4.8	+25.6
Arizona	+8.7	+8.8	+7.0	+4.2	+6.1	+16.7
Florida	+12.2	+7.2	+6.7	+6.1	+4.4	+35.3
Indiana	+6.9	+4.4	+1.4	+1.1	+5.1	+21.6
Ohio	+3.4	+4.1	+0.1	+0.5	+6.3	+22.3
Wisconsin	+4.9	+4.7	-1.1	+0.9	+6.0	+27.1

 Outperforming the national average gains

Sources: EdWeek Research Center, (2021b, September 1), State Grades on K-12 Achievement: 2021 Map and Rankings, *Education Week*, <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/state-grades-on-k-12-achievement-2021-map-and-rankings/2021/09>



	Total Number of Studies	Any Positive Effect	No Visible Effect	Any Negative Effect
Public School Students' Test Scores	29	26	1	2

These studies examined nine voucher programs, one tax-credit scholarship program, and one privately funded scholarship program across eight states and Washington, D.C.

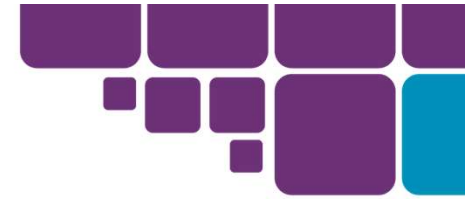




Part II

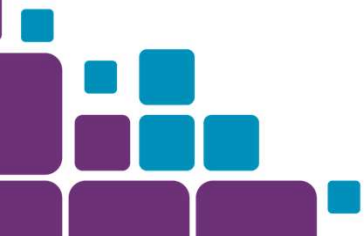
The relationship between the intensity of choice opponents' rhetoric and the size and scope of the choice proposal on which they are commenting

Programs in Our Study



State	Eligibility (Percent of Total K–12 Enrollment)	Maximum Participation (Percent of Total K–12 Enrollment)
West Virginia	93%	93%
New Hampshire	31%	31%
Kentucky	49%	0.6%
Missouri	51%	0.3%
Arkansas	38%	<0.1%

Sources: Bedrick, Jason & Tarnowski, Edward J., (2021, August 19), How Big Was the Year of Educational Choice? *Education Next*, <https://www.educationnext.org/how-big-was-the-year-of-educational-choice/>



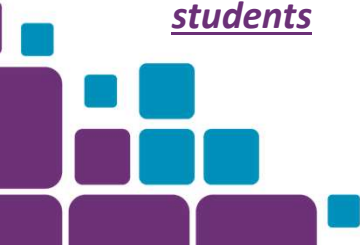


“I believe [this ESA bill] would be the beginning of the end to public education.”

- Kentucky Governor Andrew Beshear on a program available to no more than 0.6 percent of Kentucky students

“The sales pitch [for the school choice bill] is that all parents should get school money and take it where they want. The final cost is the end of America’s great egalitarian school system.”

- Max Brantley, Arkansas political commentator on a program that will serve fewer than 0.1 percent of Arkansas students



Scale of Anti-Choice Rhetorical Intensity

(2) Mild: Concerns about potential negative effects that should be monitored, but do not rise to the level that the policy should be opposed.

(4) Moderate: Temperately stated concerns about likely negative effects, particularly on funding streams.

(6) Strong: Strongly worded concerns about likely negative effects, particularly on funding streams. (e.g., siphon, divert, etc.)

(8) Severe: Strongly worded concerns that the policy will significantly disrupt district school operations. (e.g., drain, harm, weaken, diminish, erode, undercut, etc.)

(10) Catastrophic: Alarmist claims that the policy will fundamentally undermine the ability of district schools to function. (e.g., degrade, cripple, hobble, deplete, attack, privatize, etc.)

(11) Apocalyptic: Alarmist claims that the policy will lead to the destruction of public education. (e.g. destroy, dismantle, eliminate, end of public education, etc.)

ARKANSAS (8 - Severe Concern)

“Private school vouchers **leave our public schools** that serve the vast majority of Arkansas students **without the resources they need**. [...] Having to play catch up because schools were **underfunded** is why most of our children are left behind.”

– Laverne Sims, Concerned Citizens of Marvell, Arkansas³⁹

KENTUCKY (8 - Severe Concern)

“[The Kentucky Education Association] opposes this bill. Despite its presentation, it’s going to be **detrimental to our public schools**. [...] These pseudo vouchers and tax bill are nothing more than attempt to subsidize the private schools at the expense of public schools and other critical services. [...] This bill is **dangerous**. This bill is bad education policy, it’s bad fiscal policy, and it’s bad public policy.”

– Eddie Campbell, president, the Kentucky Education Association⁴⁰

MISSOURI (8 - Severe Concern)

“I feel that this is a terrible failure on the part of all of us. And we should think deeply about why we want to **defund public education** and give it to private entities because we are unwilling to do our job.”

– State Rep. Barbara Phifer⁴¹

NEW HAMPSHIRE (8 - Severe Concern)

“[Public school students] will be **significantly hurt** by this **undercutting of our fiscal support** for their education.”

– State Sen. Tom Sherman⁴²

WEST VIRGINIA (8 - Severe Concern)

“With West Virginia continuing its lurch toward more charter schools and broader vouchers, prepare for a **further weakening of public schools** and common curricula. Get ready for cuts in teacher positions, salaries and benefits.”

– Susan Johnson, *West Virginia Gazette*⁴³



ARKANSAS (11 - Apocalyptic)

“I’ve watched this state privatize public education every piece of the way. This bill represents **the last aspect of public education that has not been sold out to private interests.** I’m asking you to [...] vote this bill down. If not, vote yes and put us out of our misery, **put the final nail in the coffin of public education.**”

– State Rep. David Tollett⁴⁴

KENTUCKY (11 - Apocalyptic)

“We once again see **public education with its neck inside a guillotine, getting ready to have his head cut off.**”

– State Sen. Reginald Thomas⁴⁵

MISSOURI (11 - Apocalyptic)

“This latest legislative move in Missouri has been sold as one that will benefit low-income families, but public school leaders fear it’s **a step toward the dismantling of public school districts** and the privatization of public education.”

– *Kansas City Star* editorial⁴⁶

NEW HAMPSHIRE (11 - Apocalyptic)

“All of this legislation is **carving public education apart.**”

– State Sen. Lou D’Allesandro⁴⁷

WEST VIRGINIA (11 - Apocalyptic)

“Voucher zealots are thrilled. **West Virginia is hurtling rapidly backward into the nineteenth century.**”

– Diane Ravitch, education blogger⁴⁸





Same level of heated, recycled rhetoric regardless of program size

	State (Percent Max. Participation)					Average
	Arkansas (<0.1%)	Kentucky (0.6%)	Missouri (0.3%)	New Hampshire (31%)	West Virginia (93%)	
Policy makers	9.5	8.5	7.8	7.8	7.8	8.3
District School	7.0	7.0	8.0	6.0	11.0	7.8
Interest Groups	7.0	7.5	8.0	9.0	5.0	7.3
Commentators	11.0	7.0	9.3	7.7	8.3	8.5
Aggregate (categories)	8.6	7.5	8.3	7.6	8.0	8.0
Aggregate (total)	8.8	7.6	8.2	7.5	8.0	8.0

