

Just the **FACTS:** An NEA-NH Factsheet

Do charter schools and school vouchers “hurt” public schools?

Yes. Charter schools, vouchers, and other “choice” options redirect public money to privately operated education enterprises, which often operate for profit. That harms our public schools by siphoning off students, resources, and funding, and reducing the ability of public schools to serve the full range of student needs and interests.

This is why.

The idea that “the money should follow the child” (called portability) when students leave a public school for other options is a bad financial decision. **It leaves the public schools underfunded.**

Schools have “stranded costs.” When a public school loses a percentage of students to charter schools or a voucher program, the school can’t reduce costs by an equivalent percent.

The school still must pay the same utility, maintenance, transportation, and food services costs. The school must still carry the salary and benefit costs of administrative staff, custodial services, and cafeteria workers.

The school may not be able to reduce teaching staff because the attrition will occur randomly across various grade levels, leaving class sizes only marginally reduced.

Students aren’t a “one-off” expense. The cost to educate each individual student varies a lot. Students with disabilities or who don’t speak English as their first language often cost significantly more to educate. So as a school loses students, it often finds itself left with a larger percentage of its highest cost students to educate with less money.

When schools lose students, they have to cut services. Because schools can’t reduce expenses incrementally, they cut support staff – such as a reading specialist or librarian – and courses – such as art and music – that engage the diverse needs and interests of students.

High needs schools will be most at-risk for depleted funding.

What Privitizers Believe	What We Believe
Money should follow the child, portability.	Children should not have a price tag.
Portability does not hurt public schools.	Portability costs public school students services and programs.
School governance should be private and corporate.	Schools receiving public funds should be governed by the community and elected school boards.

Bottom Line

In any policy discussion of education, the goal should be to provide the best possible system for all children, given the resources available. While alternatives to public schools may provide better options for some children, on the whole charter and voucher schools perform no better than the public school system, and often worse. At the same time, they have a negative fiscal impact on existing public schools and are creating a parallel school system that duplicates services and costs. The idea that funds should follow the child (portability) will seriously reduce public school services.

Let’s stop draining our public schools and work together to strengthen them.