

# Trump's school choice order unclear for Ohio, which was ranked 10th best in school choice

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COLUMBUS, Ohio - President Donald Trump's new executive order may not deliver sweeping changes to Ohio's already robust school voucher program and charter schools, but it could bring financial benefits for the state and families, proponents of school choice said.

Trump on Wednesday signed [an executive order](#) giving the U.S. secretary of education 60 days to issue guidance on how states can use federal funds to support K-12 educational choice. Trump nominated Linda McMahon, the World Wrestling Entertainment founder as education secretary, [although no hearings have been scheduled](#) yet in the Senate for her confirmation.

In 90 days, the secretary of labor must submit a plan to Trump on how the U.S. Department of Education can use relevant discretionary grant programs "to expand education freedom for American families and teachers," the order states.

The health and human services secretary also gets 90 days to provide guidance on whether and how states that receive Child Care and Development Block Grants – Ohio is one of them – can use the child care money on alternatives to governmental entities, including private and faith-based options.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth also must review in 90 days available mechanisms under which military families can use U.S. Department of Defense funds to attend private, faith-based and charter schools.

Critics of the order said it ignores the reality that most Ohio and American children attend public schools, and any new policies would likely benefit the wealthy.

Since the administration secretaries have months to work on the details, Ohio school choice proponents couldn't exactly say that the changes would look like.

"If it means more grants and so forth, great," said state Sen. Andrew Brenner, a Delaware County Republican who chairs the Ohio Senate's Education Committee. "I

think what this means is you will have the ability of maybe the states to be a little more flexible with how they're handling their dollars for their school choice, whether it's an EdChoice scholarship or community schools."

"Ohio has a very rich school choice environment with private school choice, public charter schools and the school district," said Aaron Churchill, the Ohio research director for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a think tank and charter school sponsor that supports school choice. "If there's any money associated with it, that would need to be an issue that Congress would take up. It could just be the administration just saying, 'Look we support school choice, we'd like to see choice in states that haven't had it.'"

EdChoice-expansion is one of Ohio's five private school voucher programs. In 2023, the General Assembly expanded that scholarship's eligibility to include all families, regardless of household income. Wealthier families only receive a portion of the scholarship, which has a full value of \$6,167 for grades K-8 and \$8,407 for grades 9-12.

This caused state [spending on vouchers to surge](#) from \$595 million in the 2022-2023 school year to \$970.7 million last school year. Costs are expected to continue to climb toward \$1 billion.

The number of students attending charter schools in Ohio also continues to tick upward, with nearly 116,980 students enrolled in 336 schools during the 2023-2024 school year, according to the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce.

The General Assembly passed legislation allowing charter schools, which are known as "community schools" in state law, 26 years ago. Charter schools are run by private organizations but receive state tax dollars to educate children. Most are independent of local school districts.

As with laws regulating private school scholarships, over time the charter laws allowed the schools to expand from only being allowed to open in certain urban areas with low-performing school districts to a full statewide rollout.

In fact, Ohio's education choice policies landed the state 10th best in education freedom in a report last week by the American Legislative Exchange Council.

ALEC is a free-enterprise organization whose advisory council is made up of executives of some of America's most powerful business interests, including tobacco giant Altria, formerly known as Phillip Morris, the Koch Companies, and the

Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America. ALEC drafts model legislation for state lawmakers, usually Republican, to sponsor policies that generally reduce government oversight of businesses, limit labor union protections, and promote school choice.

Ohio received a B-plus [in the ALEC report](#). The report noted Ohio's five scholarship programs, low regulatory environment for homeschooling, and charter school and virtual school programs.

Andrew Handel, author of the report, noted Ohio climbed 13 spots in this year's report.

"This leap is thanks to the legislature's expansion of the EdChoice scholarship program, now available to every student in the state. Coupled with a robust charter school environment, Ohio secures its place among the top ten states for education freedom this year," he said in a statement.

Florida, Arizona and Arkansas came in the top three in educational freedom in the report.

For Ohioans who support a strong public school system, Trump's executive order is not welcome.

Christina Collins, executive director of Honesty for Ohio Education, an organization made up of teachers unions, students, social workers, early childhood researchers and university professors, criticized the executive order's language. Trump called public education "government-run K-12 school."

"He completely disregards research that tells us Americans and Ohioans overwhelmingly support funding public schools," Collins said. "Although voters in state after state have voted against using tax dollars to pay for private school education (vouchers), Trump's order shows his support for vouchers and advancing the Project 2025 agenda that favors the wealthy. Ultimately, plans that push more tax dollars to private education whether at the state or federal level cause increased taxed burdens on communities."

Ohio Education Association President Scott DiMauro noted that in the executive order, Trump accused public schools of failing students, based on Wednesday's results of the Nation's Report Card, which private schools don't participate in. In Ohio, private schools have dozens of alternative standardized tests they can take

instead of Ohio's State Tests, which traditional public and charter school students must take.

DiMauro also noted that along with the large increase in the number of students on vouchers last school year, [many Ohio private schools raised tuition rates](#) so that parents weren't saving much money, even with the check from the state.

"They're stirring up fear, resentment, and division around culture war issues, and then using that as a way to justify privatizing the education system," he said. "In the end it's all about money."