



## Florida's "corporate scholarships" save the state money, report says

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Florida's corporate-tax scholarship program saved the state nearly \$39 million last year, [according to a new report by the Florida Legislature's research arm.](#)

The program provides tuition vouchers that eligible children from low-income families can use to attend private schools. It is funded by corporations, which pay some of their state taxes into scholarship-funding programs instead.

Though the program cuts into Florida's tax collections, that loss is offset by a bigger reduction in state education spending, according to the report by the Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability. That is because Florida spends less to educate youngsters using the scholarships than those who stay in public school, the report says.

The voucher program -- one of three established under former Gov. Jeb Bush's administration -- has been controversial, in part because some critics have argued it siphons public money away from public schools.

It served about 21,500 students last year.

The release of the report today was quickly met by critical press releases from state Democratic leaders, who said the study was too limited in its scope.

Sen. Al Lawson, D-Tallahassee, the Senate's Democratic leader, called the report "narrow and limited" and said that, while he supports the scholarships, he wanted OPPAGA to conduct a broader evaluation of the voucher program.

Rep. Marty Kiar, D-Parkland, sent a letter to the group saying it should also look at the program's impact on public schools that lose students to the scholarship program.

On the other side, John Kirtley, the Tampa businessman who helped start the program, welcomed the report's findings. But Kirtley, chairman of the Florida School Choice Fund, said the biggest benefit of the program isn't the savings but the new educational opportunities for poor children.