

Hope Scholarship Sends Public Taxpayer Dollars Out of State and to Unaccredited Schools

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Overview

West Virginia lawmakers passed the Hope Scholarship, at the time one of the broadest school voucher programs in the nation, in 2021. Voucher programs like the Hope Scholarship, referred to as Education Savings Accounts, divert taxpayer funding from the public education system to unaccountable, sometimes unaccredited, private schools and education service providers. With no public reporting required, there has been little information publicly available beyond the number of students approved in each of the first two years. New data obtained through a public records request raises serious concerns about the private schools and providers receiving taxpayer funds after just one full year of the program in effect. Later this fall, the WVCPB will release a more in-depth report on the Hope Scholarship, highlighting its potential impacts on public education and the state budget.

Taxpayer Dollars Flowing Out-of-State

In the 2022-23 school year, 2,333 students received the Hope Scholarship, at a total estimated cost of just over \$10 million. Nearly \$6 million of that went to non-public schools, with the rest going to education service providers, which offer services ranging from tutoring and test prep to film classes and martial arts training.¹ Of the nearly \$6 million that went to nonpublic schools during the first year of the program, over \$311,000 went to schools located outside West Virginia, flowing to Kentucky, Ohio, Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania.² One private school in Kentucky has an entire page on its website dedicated to West Virginia's Hope Scholarship.³

Non-public Schools Outside of West Virginia Receiving Hope Scholarship Funds in the 2022-23 School Year

Ohio Valley Christian School	Gallia	OH	\$42,800.00
Tri-State Christian Academy	Washington	PA	\$42,436.73
Jefferson County Christian School	Jefferson	OH	\$41,879.40
St. Maria Goretti High School	Washington	MD	\$34,388.80
Mountain View Christian Academy	Frederick	VA	\$30,090.20
GVCS Broadfording	Washington	MD	\$25,791.60
Calvary Christian Academy	Allegany	MD	\$24,723.41
Grace Academy INC	Washington	MD	\$15,260.03
Keystone Christian Academy	Clarke	VA	\$8,597.20
Lighthouse Baptist Academy	Frederick	VA	\$8,597.20
Powhatan School	Clarke	VA	\$8,597.20
Saint James School	Washington	MD	\$8,589.96
The Millard Academy	Lawrence	KY	\$5,280.00
St. Mary Catholic	Washington	MD	\$4,646.48
St. Thomas More Academy	Frederick	MD	\$4,298.60
East Richland Christian School	Belmont	OH	\$4,298.60

¹ Hope Scholarship Participating Schools and Education Service Providers list as of June 14, 2023.

² Data provided to the WVCPB through a Freedom of Information Act request from the West Virginia State Treasurer's Office, received August 15, 2023.

³ The Millard School website. <https://www.millardschool.org/>. Accessed on August 23, 2023.

Veritas Classical Academy	Washington	MD	\$1,577.00
TOTAL			\$311,852.41

Source: West Virginia State Treasurer’s Office

While data is not yet available on expenditures to education service providers, 57 percent of Hope Scholarship-participating service providers are out-of-state companies or organizations, which likely means far more taxpayer dollars flowed out-of-state in the first year in addition to those accounted for above.⁴

Nonaccredited Schools Receiving Public Funds

According to state law, a participating school for the purposes of the Hope Scholarship is “any private school that provides education to elementary and/or secondary students and has notified the board of its intention to participate in the program and comply with the program’s requirements”.⁵ When applying to become a participating provider, an organization or school must sign a contract agreeing to a list of responsibilities, though none of them require that the school be accredited by any entity, that its teachers meet any certification standards, or that students meet any particular educational or achievement benchmarks.⁶

In the first year of the Hope Scholarship alone, over \$1.7 million in state taxpayer funds went to unaccredited private schools. The West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) recognizes private schools that are accredited by recognized third-party agencies and meet rigorous standards of instruction, curriculum, school environment, financial stability, and student achievement. Per the WVDE, in non-accredited schools, personnel are not required to have any type of professional licensure or credentials, and there are no student achievement benchmarks or requirements for graduation beyond “providing a curriculum which will enable students to become literate citizens and provid[ing] standardized testing scores at or above the fortieth percentile”.⁷

Non-Accredited Schools Receiving Hope Scholarship Funds During 2022-23 School Year

Mercer Christian Academy	Mercer	WV	\$150,451.00
Covenant School	Cabell	WV	\$149,018.13
Heritage Christian Primary and Prep	Logan	WV	\$145,587.93
Trinity Christian School	Monongalia	WV	\$125,545.33
Buckhannon Christian Academy	Upshur	WV	\$120,676.88
Covenant Christian School	Monongalia	WV	\$107,465.00
Greenbrier Community School	Greenbrier	WV	\$77,374.80
Charleston Montessori School	Kanawha	WV	\$74,413.54
Beth Haven Christian School	Logan	WV	\$72,088.13
Pipestem Christian Academy	Summers	WV	\$61,512.76
West Logan Christian Academy	Logan	WV	\$56,600.00
Little Kanawha Valley Christian School	Calhoun	WV	\$49,200.00
Mountain View Christian School	Fayette	WV	\$46,021.94
Parkersburg Christian School	Wood	WV	\$40,217.00
Morgantown Christian Academy	Monongalia	WV	\$36,988.31
Laurel Academy	Preston	WV	\$34,256.86

⁴ WVCBP analysis of Hope Scholarship Participating Schools and Education Service Providers list as of June 14, 2023.

⁵ West Virginia Code §18-31-2.

⁶ The Hope Scholarship Education Service Provider Handbook 2022-2023 School Year.

https://hopescholarshipwv.com/Portals/HopeScholarship/content/Documents/Forms/ESP/WV%20Hope%20Service%20Providers%20Handbook.pdf?ver=xtqDYN_LpBJqDSkcuxKqtW%3d%3d. Retrieved August 23, 2023.

⁷ West Virginia Department of Education. “Accreditation vs. Registration.” <https://wvde.us/nonpublic-school-information/accreditation-vs-registration/>. Retrieved August 23, 2023.

Montgomery Prep Academy	Fayette	WV	\$33,763.69
Emmanuel Christian School	Harrison	WV	\$32,611.40
Elkins Christian Academy	Randolph	WV	\$31,138.36
Mountaineer Montessori School	Kanawha	WV	\$30,817.69
Martinsburg Christian Academy	Berkeley	WV	\$26,182.06
Lighthouse of Learning Education	Kanawha	WV	\$25,791.60
Wee Disciples Christian Academy	Jefferson	WV	\$25,791.60
Indian Creek Christian School	Tyler	WV	\$21,493.00
Faith Christian Academy	Roane	WV	\$21,421.46
Cornerstone Christian Academy	Brooke	WV	\$20,694.40
Heritage Christian Academy	Jackson	WV	\$17,194.40
IAWV Elementary School	Kanawha	WV	\$12,895.80
Morgan Academy	Jefferson	WV	\$11,175.26
Feed My Sheep Christian School	Barbour	WV	\$10,510.10
Danese Christian School	Fayette	WV	\$10,136.10
Mountain State Christian School	Cabell	WV	\$9,800.00
Morgantown Learning Academy	Monongalia	WV	\$8,597.21
Clarksburg Children's House Montessori	Harrison	WV	\$8,597.20
Grace Baptist Church School	Jefferson	WV	\$6,600.00
The Golden Rule	Mercer	WV	\$5,044.20
Warehouse Academy	Wood	WV	\$4,298.60
Christian Faith Academy	Boone	WV	\$4,200.00
Sophia Christian Academy	Raleigh	WV	\$3,340.00
Sikora Montessori School	Ohio	WV	\$3,275.00
Lewis County Christian School	Lewis	WV	\$3,168.70
BMF Christian School	Grant	WV	\$2,700.00
Ballard Christian School	Monroe	WV	\$1,915.00
Tygart Valley Christian Academy	Randolph	WV	\$1,510.00
Total			\$1,742,080.44

Source: West Virginia State Treasurer's Office

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