

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

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Will America's Dystopian Educational Future be Imposed Upon Australia as the American Empire's Acolyte

Members of the American Far Right ***American Renewal Project*** are overjoyed at the prospect of the next Trumpian presidency. Australian public school advocates who have already experienced the erosion of the principle of separation of religion from the State in education. But with the introduction of Trumpianism, strange cult that it is, there is a very predictable authoritarian, and, in the South, a racist ideology.

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President-Elect Donald Trump announced over the weekend of November 13 his plan for public education of America's youth. He said:

- "First, we will respect parents' right to control their children's education.
- "Second, we will empower parents and local school boards to hire and reward great principals and teachers and fire those who perform below par.
- "Third, we will ensure our classrooms are focused not on political indoctrination but on teaching the knowledge and skills needed to succeed - reading, writing, math, science, arithmetic, and other beneficial subjects.
- "Fourth, we will prepare students to love their country and not hate it like they're trained [to do] now.
- "Fifth, we will support bringing back prayer to our schools.

- “Sixth, we will achieve safe, secure, and drug-free schools with immediate expulsion for any student who harms a teacher or another student.
- “Seventh, we will give all parents the right to choose another school for their children: School Choice.
- “Eighth, we will ensure students can access project-based learning experiences to help train them for meaningful work outside the classroom.
- “Ninth, we will strive to give all students access to internships and work experiences that can set them on a path to their first job. They’re going to be very, very successful. I want them to be more successful than Trump; I will [then] be the happiest person in the world.
- “Tenth, another thing I’ll be doing very early in the administration is closing up the Department of Education in Washington, DC, and sending all education back to the states. We’re going to end education coming out of Washington, DC. We’re going to close it up, all those buildings all over the place, and yet, people who, in many cases, hate our children. We’re going to send it all back to the states.

and here is what is happening in North Carolina

Segregation Academies Across the South Are Getting Millions in Taxpayer Dollars

North Carolina offers an especially telling window into what is happening across this once legally segregated region where legislatures are now rapidly expanding and adopting controversial voucher-style programs.

by [Jennifer Berry Hawes](#) and [Mollie Simon](#) Nov. 18, 5 a.m. EST

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Series: Segregation Academies: Decades After Desegregation, Private Schools Still Divide

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Private schools across the South that were established for white children during desegregation are now benefiting from tens of millions in taxpayer dollars flowing from rapidly expanding voucher-style programs, a ProPublica analysis found.

In North Carolina alone, we identified 39 of these likely “segregation academies” that are still operating and that have received voucher money. Of these, 20 schools reported student bodies that were at least 85% white in a 2021-22 federal survey of private schools, the most recent data available.

Those 20 academies, all founded in the 1960s and 1970s, brought in more than \$20 million from the state in the past three years alone. None reflected the demographics of their communities. Few even came close.

Northeast Academy, a small Christian school in rural Northampton County on the Virginia border, is among them. As of the 2021-22 survey, the school’s enrollment was 99% white in a county that runs about 40% white.

Every year since North Carolina launched its state-funded private school voucher program in 2014, the academy has received more and more money. Last school year, it received about \$438,500 from the program, almost half of its total reported tuition. Northeast is on track to beat that total this school year.

Vouchers play a similar role at Lawrence Academy, an hour’s drive south. It has never reported Black enrollment higher than 3% in a county whose population hovers around 60% Black. A small school with less than 300 students, it received \$518,240 in vouchers last school year to help pay for 86 of those students.

Farther south, Pungo Christian Academy has received voucher money every year since 2015 and, as of the last survey, had become slightly more white than when the voucher program began. It last reported a student body that was 98% white in a county that was 65% white.

Segregation academies that remain vastly white continue to play an integral role in perpetuating school segregation — and, as a result, racial separation in the surrounding communities. We found these academies benefiting from public money in Southern states beyond North Carolina. But because North Carolina collects and releases more complete data than many other states, it offers an especially telling window into what is happening across this once legally segregated region where legislatures are rapidly expanding and adopting controversial voucher-style programs.

Called Opportunity Scholarships, North Carolina’s voucher program launched in 2014. At first, it was only for low-income families and had barely more than 1,200 participants. Then last fall, state lawmakers expanded eligibility to students of all income levels and those already attending private school, a move that sparked furious debate over the future of public education.

“We are ensuring that every child has the chance to thrive,” Republican Rep. Tricia Cotham argued. But Democratic Rep. Julie von Haefen pointed to

vouchers’ “legacy of white supremacy” and called the expansion “a gross injustice to the children of North Carolina.”

So many students flocked to the program that the state now has a waitlist of about 54,000 children. Paying for all of them to receive vouchers — at a cost of \$248 million — would more than double the current number of participants in the program. Republicans in the General Assembly, along with three Democrats, passed a bill in September to do just that.

Gov. Roy Cooper, a Democrat, vetoed the measure. But the GOP supermajority is expected to override it before the year’s end, perhaps as early as Nov. 19.

Opportunity Scholarships don’t always live up to their name for Black children. Private schools don’t have to admit all comers. Nor do they have to provide busing or free meals. Due to income disparities, Black parents also are less likely to be able to afford the difference between a voucher that pays at most \$7,468 a year and an annual tuition bill that can top \$10,000 or even \$20,000.

And unlike urban areas that have a range of private schools, including some with diverse student bodies, segregation academies are the only private schools available in some rural counties across the South.

Josh Cowen, a professor of education policy at Michigan State, studies these barriers and sees where vouchers fall short for some: “Eligibility does not mean access.”

Rural roads and cotton fields surround Lawrence Academy in Merry Hill, North Carolina. The school, which opened in majority-Black Bertie County in 1968, has never reported Black enrollment higher than 3%. The area is part of the region’s Black Belt, where rich soils fueled cotton plantations. Credit:Greg Kahn, special to ProPublica

Of the 20 vastly white segregation academies we identified that received voucher money in North Carolina, nine were at least 30 percentage points more white than the counties in which they operate, based on 2021-22 federal survey and census data.

Otis Smallwood, superintendent of the Bertie County Schools in rural northeastern North Carolina, witnesses this kind of gulf in the district he leads. So many white children in the area attend Lawrence Academy and other schools that his district’s enrollment runs roughly 22 percentage points more Black than the county overall.

He said he tries not to be political. But he feels the brunt of an intensifying Republican narrative against public schools, which still educate most of North Carolina's children. "It's been chipping, chipping, chipping, trying to paint this picture that public schools are not performing well," Smallwood said. "It's getting more and more and more extreme."

When a ProPublica reporter told him that Lawrence Academy received \$518,240 last school year in vouchers, he was dismayed: "That's half a million dollars I think could be put to better benefit in public schools."

If lawmakers override the governor's veto to fund the waitlist, Smallwood's district could suffer most. In a recent report, the Office of State Budget and Management projected Bertie County could lose more of its state funding than any other district — 1.6% next year.

Bertie County Schools Superintendent Otis Smallwood worries that vouchers will drain resources from public schools, including the ones he oversees. Credit:Greg Kahn, special to ProPublica

Across the once legally segregated South, the volume of public money flowing through voucher-style programs is set to balloon in coming years. Georgia, Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Florida and South Carolina all have passed new or expanded programs since 2023. (South Carolina's state Supreme Court rejected its tuition grants in September, but GOP lawmakers are expected to try again with a revamped court.)

Voucher critics contend these programs will continue to worsen school segregation by helping wealthier white kids attend private schools; supporters argue they help more Black families afford tuition. But many of the states have made it hard to discern if either is happening by failing to require that the most basic demographic data be shared with the public — or even gathered.

This doesn't surprise Cowen, who wrote the new book "The Privateers: How Billionaires Created a Culture War and Sold School Vouchers." He said Southern legislatures in particular don't want to know what the data would show because the results, framed by a legacy of racism, could generate negative headlines and lawsuit fodder.

States know how to collect vast troves of education data. North Carolina in particular is lauded among global researchers for "the robustness and the richness of the data system for public schools," Cowen said.

North Carolina and Alabama are among the states that have gathered demographic information about voucher recipients but won't tell the public the race of students who use them to attend a given school. In North Carolina, a

spokesperson said doing so could reveal information about specific students, making that data not a public record under the Opportunity Scholarship statute. For its \$120 million tax credit program, Georgia does not collect racial demographic information or per-school spending. ProPublica was able to identify 20 segregation academies that signed up to take part, but it's unclear how many are receiving that money or what the racial breakdown is of the students who use it.

“Why should we not be allowed to know where the money is going? It's a deliberate choice by those who pass these laws,” said Jessica Levin, director of Public Funds Public Schools, a national anti-voucher campaign led by the nonprofit Education Law Center. “There is a lack of transparency and accountability.”

Advocacy groups that support widespread voucher use have resisted some rules that foster greater transparency out of concern that they might deter regulation-averse private schools from participating. Mike Long, president of the nonprofit Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina, is among those trying to rally as much private school buy-in for vouchers as possible.

“Their fear is that if they accept it, these are tax dollars, and therefore they would have to submit to government regulation,” Long said. “We've lobbied this legislature, and I think they understand it very well, that you can't tie regulation to this.”

Pungo Christian Academy opened in 1968 in the small town of Belhaven. It last reported a student body that was 98% white in a county that was 65% white. Credit:Greg Kahn, special to ProPublica

The share of Black students who have received vouchers in North Carolina has dropped significantly since the program's launch. In 2014, more than half the recipients were Black. This school year, the figure is 17%.

That share is unlikely to increase if lawmakers fund all 54,000 students on the waiting list. Because lower-income families were prioritized for vouchers, the applicants who remain on the list are mostly in higher income tiers — and those families are more likely to be white.

More Black parents don't apply for vouchers because they don't know about them, said Kwan Graham, who oversees parent liaisons for Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina.

Graham, who is Black, said parents haven't voiced to her concerns that, “I'm Black, they don't want me” at their local private schools. But she's also not naive. Private schools can largely select — and reject — who they want.

The nonprofit Public Schools First NC has tallied admissions policies that private schools receiving vouchers use to reject applicants based on things like sexuality, religion and disability. Many also require in-person interviews or tours. Rather than overtly rejecting students based on race, which the voucher program prohibits, schools might say something like, “Come visit the school and see if you’re the ‘right fit,’” said Heather Koons, the nonprofit’s communications and research director.

Northeast Academy, Lawrence Academy and Pungo Christian all include nondiscrimination statements on their websites.

Back when segregation academies opened, some white leaders proudly declared their goal of preserving segregation. Others shrouded their racist motivations. Some white parents complained about federal government overreach and what they deemed social agendas and indoctrination in public schools. Even as violent backlash against integration erupted across the region, many white parents framed their decisions as quests for quality education, morality and Christian education, newspaper coverage and school advertisements from the time show.

Early on, Southern lawmakers found a way to use taxpayer money to give these academies a boost: They created school voucher programs that went chiefly to white students.

Courts ruled against or restricted the practice in the 1960s. But it didn’t really end.

“If you look at the history of the segregation movement, they wanted vouchers to prop up segregation academies,” said Bryan Mann, a University of Kansas professor who studies school segregation. “And now they’re getting vouchers in some of these areas to prop up these schools.”

More recently, Lawrence and Northeast academies both grew their enrollments while receiving voucher money even as the rural counties where they operate have lost population. Over three decades of responding to the federal private schools survey, both academies have reported enrolling almost no nonwhite children. And Pungo Christian has raised its average tuition by almost 50% over the past three school years. During that time, the small school has received almost \$500,000 in vouchers.

None of the three academies’ headmasters responded to ProPublica’s request to discuss its findings or to lists of questions. And none have ever reported more than 3% Black enrollment despite operating in counties with substantial — even majority — Black populations.

Cotton farming and other agriculture remains an important part of the economy in Northampton County, a rural expanse in northeastern North Carolina that has lost population in recent years. Despite that decline, Northeast Academy has seen its enrollment grow and has received more voucher funding each year. Credit:Greg Kahn, special to ProPublica

One of the Democrats who helped Republicans expand North Carolina’s voucher program was Shelly Willingham, a Black representative whose district includes Bertie County, home of Lawrence Academy. He said he doesn’t love vouchers, but the bills have included funding for issues he does support.

He also said he encourages his constituents to take advantage of the vouchers. If there were any effort to make it more difficult for Black students to attend those schools, “then I would have a big problem,” Willingham said. “I don’t see that.”

Another Democrat who voted with Republicans was state Rep. Michael Wray, a white businessman and former House minority whip — who graduated from Northeast Academy.

Wray, whose voting record on vouchers over the years has been mixed, did not respond to multiple ProPublica requests to discuss his views. In 2013, he voted against the budget bill that established the Opportunity Scholarships. And in a recent Q&A with the local Daily Herald newspaper, when asked if he supports taxpayer money funding private schools, he responded: “I believe that when you siphon funds away from our public school budgets, it undermines the success of our schools overall.”

Democrat Rodney Pierce, a public middle school teacher, recently won a seat in the North Carolina House of Representatives. Credit:Greg Kahn, special to ProPublica

Rodney Pierce, a Black 46-year-old father and public school teacher, saw the voucher expansion in the state budget bill Wray voted for and felt history haunt him. Pierce had only one white student in his classes last year at Gaston STEM Leadership Academy. But about 30 miles across the rural county, white children filled Northeast Academy.

Pierce taught history, with a deep interest in civil rights. He’d studied the voucher programs that white supremacists crafted to help white families flee to segregation academies.

“This stuff was in the works back in the 1960s,” Pierce said.

He was so outraged that he challenged Wray, a 10-term incumbent, for his state House seat. Pierce won the Democratic primary earlier this year by just 34

votes. He faced no opponent in November, so come next year he will cut the House’s support of vouchers by one vote.

“Particularly in the Black community, we care about our public schools,” he said.

Segregation Academies Still Operate Across the South. One Town Grapples With Its Divided Schools.

Many Black families also have little to no relationship with their local private schools, especially those that opened specifically for white children and are still filled with them. The only times Pierce had set foot on Northeast Academy’s campus was when he covered a few sporting events there for the local newspaper.

People there were nice to him, he said, but he felt anxious: “You’re in an academy you know was started by people who didn’t want their children to go to school with Black children.”

His own three kids attend public schools. Even with vouchers, he said, he wouldn’t send them to a school founded as a segregation academy, much less one that still fosters segregation. He finds it insulting to force taxpayers, including the Black residents he will soon represent — about half of the people in his district — to pay to send other people’s children to these schools.

How We Analyzed Whether Segregation Academies Were Getting Public Money

We set out to determine whether states adopting voucher-like programs have provided funds to private schools founded to avoid integration. ProPublica previously developed a list of about 300 schools in the South that likely opened as segregation academies between 1954 and 1976 and that continue to operate. This original list was developed with data from the National Center for Education Statistics’ Private School Universe Survey, which includes schools’ student racial demographics. This survey is voluntary, and some known segregation academies — like an estimated quarter of all private schools — did not complete the survey or have reported different opening years over time. We did not include those institutions in our data. We examined only schools that responded to the most recent published survey in 2021-2022, as it included their racial demographics. This means our findings likely represent an undercount of schools.

Over time, many schools that opened as segregation academies have come to look more like their communities. Among the likely segregation academies we identified, we wanted to specifically examine those that remain vastly white and unrepresentative of their communities. To find these, we narrowed our list to those that were at least 85% white as of the most recent private school survey and were whiter than the county where they are located, based on census data. We compared both the total population and the population under 18 to make this determination. We included three schools with a total enrollment of 843 students that were 85% white when rounded to the nearest percentage point.

To assess which of those remaining schools may have benefitted from taxpayer money, ProPublica requested and gathered (where publicly available) per-school funding amounts from 10 southern states' programs that support private schools. These included vouchers, individual education savings accounts and tax credits for scholarships or donations. The programs have existed for different numbers of years, and in some cases have expanded in eligibility and financial impact over time. In eight states, we received at least one year of per-school funding or recipient information. In two of these, we also got school-level demographics, with some limits to protect student privacy.

We then compared the names of schools from those eight states to the original list of likely segregation academies that remain vastly white and identified 64 schools that have benefitted from some form of taxpayer dollars, ranging from a total of \$2,700 to over \$4 million for a single school across multiple years. An additional 26 schools in Georgia and Florida have opted to accept state vouchers or scholarship participants, but we do not know whether they have actually enrolled student recipients.

Among the 64 schools that had benefited from a documented amount of state money, only a handful were in Virginia, Tennessee, Louisiana and Arkansas. In South Carolina, we identified 12 segregation academies getting vouchers, but only from a program focused on special needs students, and we were only able to get data up to the 2022-2023 school year. We focused our reporting on North Carolina, Mississippi and Alabama because each of these states had at least five years of available data and had sent millions of dollars to segregation academies through their state programs.

ProPublica is building a network of educators, students, parents and other experts to help guide our reporting about education. Take a few minutes to join our source network and share what you know.

See: https://www.propublica.org/article/segregation-academies-school-voucher-money-north-carolina?utm_source=flipboard&utm_content=ProPublica/magazine/Education

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