

Voucher-fueled enrollment boom in Indiana

A new school-voucher program in Indiana is prompting a spike in enrollment among Catholic schools that were once on the verge of closing. Bloomberg Businessweek has the scoop:

Under a law signed in May by Gov. Mitch Daniels, more than 3,200 Indiana students are receiving vouchers to attend private schools. That number is expected to climb significantly in the next two years as awareness of the program increases and limits on the number of applicants are lifted.

The vouchers are government-issued certificates that can be applied to private tuition, essentially allowing parents to channel some of the tax dollars they would normally pay to public schools to other institutions.

Until Indiana started its program, most voucher systems were limited to poor students, those in failing schools or those with special needs. But Indiana's is significantly larger, offering money to students from middle-class homes and solid school districts.

Nearly 70 percent of the vouchers approved statewide are for students opting to attend Catholic schools, according to figures provided to The Associated Press by the five dioceses in Indiana. The majority are in the urban areas of Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, South Bend and Gary, where many public schools have long struggled.

John Elcesser, executive director of the Indiana Non-Public Education Association, said it's not surprising that Catholic schools are receiving so many of the vouchers, even though they make up fewer than half of the 415 schools in the group.

Most Catholic schools already had state accreditation, which some private schools lack. And they are more established and have more space available, he said.

John West, an attorney for a group suing to stop the Indiana program, said during a hearing on the issue that only six of the 240 private schools that have signed up for the voucher program are secular.

Our Lady of Hungary Catholic School in South Bend is among those institutions reaping the benefits of the vouchers. Just two years ago, it was threatened with closure by the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. At the time, the bishop said several other schools were at risk of closing, too.

Now enrollment at Our Lady of Hungary has jumped nearly 60 percent over last year, largely because of an influx of voucher students. The halls are bustling more than they have in years.

"This has exceeded all crazy expectations," Principal Melissa Jay said.

Read more [here](#).