

Questions Every Legislator Should Ask About School Vouchers

School vouchers and other programs that provide public funding for private schools, such as education savings accounts (ESAs), can significantly impact students and communities. Understanding the implications of these programs is crucial for both advocates and legislators. Below is a list of questions to help you better understand what school vouchers would mean for your community.

A note on language: The following questions refer to school vouchers but can be applied to any type of school privatization effort, including ESAs or scholarship tax credits.

Questions on Funding & Fiscal Implications

1. What are the funding sources for this voucher program? Which section of the state's budget will be used?
2. What are the projected costs of the program for the first year, five years, and 10 years?
3. Will there be limits on the amount of money or number of vouchers distributed each year? Will these limits change over time?
4. What happens if more or fewer people apply for vouchers than expected?
5. Will there be hold-harmless funding (funding which guarantees districts get the same amount of money they did the previous year to ensure they don't face steep budget cuts over short periods of time) for districts that lose students to vouchers? If so, how will it be phased out?
6. Will a voucher cover the full cost of private school tuition? If not, how will students – particularly those from low-income families -- afford private school?
7. Will there be restrictions on what voucher funds can be spent on?

Questions on Student Eligibility & Prioritization

1. Are there eligibility requirements based on income, disability status, or ZIP code? Will these requirements change over time?
2. Will students from low-income families or those with disabilities get priority access to the voucher program?
3. Will the amount of funding provided through a voucher vary based on students' needs?

Questions on Quality of Schools Accepting Vouchers

1. What are the eligibility requirements for private schools that accept vouchers? Must they prove they can effectively educate students before accepting public funds?
2. Will private schools accepting vouchers need to:
 - Hold up-to-date accreditation from the state board of education?
 - Ensure all teachers have valid teaching licenses?
 - Ensure all personnel pass background checks?
3. How will the state ensure private schools are fiscally sound before accepting vouchers? How will the state continue to monitor these schools' finances once they begin accepting vouchers?

Questions on School Accountability Measures

1. Will private schools accepting vouchers be required to administer statewide standardized tests and publicly report scores, disaggregated by demographics and voucher status?
2. How will the state hold private schools accountable for student performance? Will the state rate private schools using the same federally mandated rating system it uses for public schools?
3. Which curriculum standards will private schools accepting vouchers need to follow?

Questions on Program Transparency

1. Will private schools accepting vouchers be included in federally mandated data collection efforts like the Civil Rights Data Collection, which monitors equitable access to educational opportunities?
2. How will the state ensure that private schools are transparent about the academic standards and general curricula they follow?
3. Will the state release annual and easily accessible data on the voucher program, including:
 - The number of students using vouchers, disaggregated by demographics?
 - Voucher student enrollment numbers at each private school and the type of school these students attended prior to using a voucher?
 - The cost of the voucher program to date?
 - The academic performance of voucher students, disaggregated by demographics?
4. Will private schools accepting vouchers be required to publicly report the racial and demographic composition of their staff and students?
5. How will the state ensure private schools accepting vouchers are transparent about tuition rates, fees, and admissions policies?
6. How will the state monitor and limit tuition growth for private schools accepting vouchers?

Questions on Student Support Services

1. How will the state prevent private schools from discriminating against students, particularly students with disabilities and those from communities that have been historically shut out of educational opportunity? Will the same anti-discrimination protections be enforced at religious schools?
2. Which rights and protections will students with disabilities lose if they accept a voucher? Which protections and support services, if any, will the state continue to provide for these students?
3. Will private schools be required to uphold all rights provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)? What enforcement and accountability mechanisms will the state use to ensure these rights are maintained?
4. Given the lack of private schools in rural areas, how will students in these communities be able to participate in a voucher program?
5. How will the state ensure multilingual students are screened and receive high-quality English learning services if they choose to use a voucher?

Implementation Questions

1. How does the state plan to educate the public about the new voucher program? Specifically, how does it plan to inform marginalized communities?
2. How will the state ensure that all parents are informed of the rights they retain and lose when accepting a voucher?
3. How will the state provide accessible information on:
 - The average voucher amount?
 - The average cost of private school tuition in the state?
 - Eligibility requirements for vouchers?
4. How will the state make school quality data for private schools that accept vouchers accessible to parents?