

# Monitoring Private School Voucher Programs: *An Advocate's Guide*

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## Introduction

School vouchers and other programs that provide public funding for private schools are not new but have expanded exponentially over the last few years. As of May 2026, [34 states and Washington D.C.](#) currently have some form of publicly funded private school choice, and a federal program is set to begin in 2027. These programs have traditionally been tailored to provide options for specific groups of students — particularly those from low-income backgrounds and students with disabilities. Yet, in the past five years, many states have amended their programs or adopted new ones that have universal student eligibility. Understanding the impacts of these programs and monitoring their implementation is not only important for the purposes of public transparency, but can also highlight how vouchers often benefit wealthy, white students who are [already in private school](#). **Unfortunately, many programs lack robust transparency requirements for this very reason: to hide the fact that vouchers are not a solution to stagnant student achievement and are not helping students with the highest needs.** However, by monitoring the data that is available — and pushing for more to be collected — advocates can shed a light on the inequities in private school voucher programs and help make the case for their repeal.

This resource provides examples of the types of data that advocates should monitor as voucher programs are implemented. The resource includes suggestions for specific data that advocates should look for and potential red flags in what they find when monitoring implementation.

*A Note on Language: This guide refers to any program that diverts public money into private schools as “vouchers” for the sake of simplicity. This guide can be applied to any type of school privatization effort, including Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) or scholarship tax credits.*

## Why Monitoring Matters

Monitoring implementation data helps advocates, the public, and education leaders understand important information about how a voucher program is operating, including:

- Understanding who is using and [benefiting](#) from voucher programs
- Identifying inequities in how a voucher program is being implemented

- Holding education leaders and schools accountable for program results
- Understanding the extent to which voucher programs are impacting state and local education budgets

Advocates should leverage this data when making the case to legislators for repealing voucher programs and when working to increase opposition to vouchers within communities. *For an example of a report that effectively monitors voucher implementation, see [Save Our Schools Arizona's 2025 voucher report](#).*

## What to Monitor

Effectively monitoring implementation starts with understanding how the program is structured. State leaders should provide clear and plain language explanations about how voucher programs operate and the processes by which they administer funds to ensure that all stakeholders can understand them. This information should be centrally located on a state department of education's website

With a baseline understanding of how the voucher programs work, state advocates can more meaningfully monitor implementation. To do so, advocates should monitor a wide range of data, including program enrollment and retention (disaggregated by scholarship granting organization for ESAs and student characteristics such as race/ethnicity, special education status, socio-economic status, multilingual learner status, and geographic distribution), academic outcomes, teacher qualification requirements, information about student experiences, and tuition rates and fees.

### *Program Enrollment (Disaggregated by Student Characteristics)*

- **Why this matters:** Voucher programs were [originally created](#) as a tool to reinforce segregation after *Brown v. Board of Education*. Existing [data and research](#) shows that most current voucher programs do not serve all students, especially students in [rural communities](#), low-income students, English learners, students with disabilities, and students of color. Specifically, data suggests that there are [barriers that prevent](#) these student groups from enrolling in private schools even after they are approved to receive a voucher.

In addition, [data on state expansion](#) of private school vouchers (from programs targeted toward specific student populations to programs open to all students) reveal that program expansion disproportionately benefits students who were already attending private schools. It's important to monitor data on program enrollment to understand who is attempting to use vouchers and who is ultimately successful in participating in the program.

- **What to look for: Advocates should look for data on:**
  - How many students were expected to enroll in the voucher program (e.g., for budgeting purposes)
  - How many students applied to receive a voucher to attend private schools
  - How many students used a voucher to enroll at a private school
  - The type of schooling that students received prior to participating in the program (e.g., public, private, or homeschool)

Advocates should also look at the demographics of these students to understand whether certain groups of students are disproportionately accessing voucher programs or are being pushed out of the private schools they enrolled in using a voucher.

- **What to watch out for:** Advocates should watch out for patterns in the data that suggest that voucher programs are disproportionately serving select group(s) of families. This includes monitoring whether:
  - Large shares of students, or certain groups of students, are applying for but are not enrolling in private schools, such as students in rural areas (who often [lack access](#) to any private school options nearby), students from low-income families, and students of color
  - High percentages of students from certain areas (e.g., certain school districts, counties, or geographic locales) of the state are using (or not using) the program
  - Large shares of vouchers are going to students who were already attending private schools, which shifts the cost of their education to taxpayers
  - General voucher participation patterns that do not align with the targeted eligibility criteria of the program and overall demographics of the school-age population in the state

### *Program Persistence (Disaggregated by Student Characteristics)*

- **Why this matters:** It's important to monitor whether students, especially students from [marginalized backgrounds](#), remain enrolled in private schools. [Schools that accept students using a voucher](#) often lack long-term financial viability and therefore have higher closure rates. They are also overwhelmingly religious and may require students to adhere to religious customs to attend. Additionally, these schools disproportionately serve [white](#) students, which can create environments where students of color feel unwelcome and excluded. Finally, given that private schools are not required to provide [specialized services](#) for students with disabilities or English learners and may have harsh discipline policies, students with additional needs and those who are traditionally overdisciplined may be forced out of private schools quickly.
- **What to look for:** Advocates should look for retention data so they can examine what percentage of students using vouchers remain enrolled in private schools year after year and the demographics of those students who stay versus leave the program.
- **What to watch out for:** Advocates should watch out for patterns in the data that suggest that students of color, English learners, or students with disabilities have lower rates of persistence than their peers. This could suggest that public dollars are supporting private schools which push students out by engaging in discriminatory practices or otherwise making students feel unwelcome.

## Student Achievement and Experiences (Disaggregated by Student Characteristics)

- **Why this matters:** Current [research](#) clearly shows that school voucher programs do not improve educational outcomes for students. In addition, [data shows](#) that students of color are denied opportunities to participate in advanced coursework in the schools that offer it, and that students of color are more likely to be subjected to [exclusionary discipline](#) compared to their peers. Advocates must be able to monitor whether these patterns persist in private schools that participate in voucher programs. This data is also crucial for making the case that voucher programs are not worth the substantial investment of taxpayer dollars they require by demonstrating that vouchers do not increase student achievement.
- **What to look for:** Private schools that receive public dollars should be required to report data on:
  - Key indicators of student achievement and experience, such as proficiency and progress on state-required summative assessments in English language arts (ELA) and math, graduation rates, chronic absenteeism rates, exclusionary discipline rates, and participation and success in advanced coursework opportunities — ideally in alignment with state public school reporting requirements
  - Postsecondary enrollment, to demonstrate the importance of college and career readiness for long-term success
  - The results of surveys of participating parents to ensure that, given the importance of parent and family choice inherent to such programs, the specific needs of families, along with the well-being of their children, are being met

To show whether students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, and students with disabilities are being granted fair opportunities, all data should be disaggregated. To enable comparisons with public schools and account for students transferring between schools, the metrics that are reported should be the same as those used for public schools, including statewide standardized assessments.

- **What to watch out for:** Advocates should watch out for data that shows that among students who use a voucher, students from underserved groups have worse outcomes than their peers. In addition, advocates should be wary of attempts to compare assessment data between private and public schools if students were not administered the same standardized assessment. While many state programs report the results of academic assessments for participating students, the majority of these allow entities to choose the assessment, making comparisons between private and public schools impossible. Just four states (Indiana, Iowa, Ohio, and Wisconsin) and Washington, D.C. require participants to use the results of the same assessment required by public school students in the state.

*A Note on Advocacy: Given the demonstrated negative impacts of voucher programs on student outcomes, most new or recently expanded voucher programs require little, if any, data be collected on student achievement. Advocates will likely need to push for increased reporting requirements in their state to be able to monitor this aspect of program implementation. However, as noted above, this data is perhaps some of the most critical in understanding the impact of the program on students.*

## Tuition Rates and Fees

- **Why this matters:** Transparency in costs and admissions policies prevents unexpected financial burdens on families. Private school tuition [often exceeds](#) the amount of funds provided by a voucher. Additionally, [research](#) reveals that when states expand voucher programs, private schools tend to raise tuition. Providing annual information about tuition enables the public to monitor the value of vouchers and tuition growth over time.
- **What to look for:** Advocates should look for data on the average cost of tuition and fees over time, as well as the average size of the voucher (i.e., how much money was awarded per student), to understand how much families are paying beyond what is covered by the voucher.
- **What to watch out for:** Advocates should watch out for data that suggests that tuition prices or fees have increased over time because of the statewide voucher program or data that suggests that vouchers do not cover a substantial portion of tuition and fees that families — especially families with lower incomes — are expected to pay. These patterns suggest that private schools may be exploiting the voucher program, or that vouchers are only useful for more affluent families.

## Staff Qualifications

- **Why this matters:** Private schools have more flexibility for determining how and with whom to staff their schools. For example, teachers in private schools are often not subject to the same licensure and certification requirements as teachers in public schools. Monitoring data on staff qualifications helps advocates know whether private schools employ individuals who are properly trained to create safe and inclusive learning environments and to meet the unique needs of students.
- **What to look for:** Advocates should look for data on the requirements that each private school has for teachers it employs, such as degree, additional training, or certification requirements; as well as information about requirements regarding background checks for all staff. Unfortunately, most states do not require private schools to report important data about their educator workforce, which can make identifying troubling patterns difficult.
- **What to watch out for:** Advocates should watch out for patterns in the data that suggest there are low shares of staff who are subject to background checks (or a lack of transparency about vetting or training staff to ensure child safety) or limited shares of teachers who have education-specific training.

*A Note on Additional Student Supports: Little is known about what, if any, services private schools provide to students with additional needs. Most private schools are not required to offer specialized services for students with disabilities, such as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or 504 plans, although there are a select number of private schools dedicated to serving only such students. Furthermore, private schools are not required to provide english language learning services for multilingual students. It is unknown how many private schools choose to provide these services, but their substantial cost is likely to dissuade many from doing so. No state currently requires comprehensive reporting on whether private schools serve multilingual learners or students with disabilities, although some states do have smaller data sets for students enrolled in specific programs. The federal government similarly collects no such data. This represents a significant gap in advocates' ability to understand how these student groups may, or may not, be served in private schools. Were advocates to push for such data to be collected; they would be on the forefront of ongoing debates regarding transparency in school voucher programs.*

## Where to Look

Monitoring voucher program implementation is not possible without publicly accessible, transparent data about the voucher program and each private school that receives public dollars from it. Advocates' ability to monitor voucher program implementation will vary greatly depending on what and how much information states make publicly available. Notably, to enable meaningful implementation monitoring, state education agencies must collect and publish uniform program data.

### *The Standard*

Ideally, state education agencies would develop a public "one-stop shop" resource that includes information about the state's voucher program, as well as individual data about each school participating in the program. This resource should be developed in consultation with a range of stakeholders across the state, including public and private school educators and leaders, parents, and advocates. The data should be collected in a timely manner and disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, geographic location, socioeconomic status, multilingual learner status, and disability status. It should also be easily digestible for the public using charts, databases, maps, or other interactive features that clearly indicate trends and the results of high-level analyses. Such a resource should include all data in the "What to Look For" sections previously outlined, including information on student outcomes, staff qualifications, and program persistence. While not an answer to the lack of accountability in voucher programs, such resources can increase transparency regarding how public dollars are spent through the program.

### *The Reality*

Unfortunately, states are far from meeting even this standard. Instead, advocates seeking data on voucher programs in their states must search for resources through a patchwork of incomplete resources. Below, we highlight examples of existing resources that may support voucher implementation monitoring in specific states. Where advocates are unable to find public information about the voucher programs in their state, advocates can consider submitting a data request to the state, pursuant to that state's freedom of information law (see state-specific sample letters from the [National Freedom of Information Coalition](#)). Advocates can also push for legislative amendments to their state's program which mandate the collection and publication of such data.

**North Carolina:** The North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority maintains a [data dashboard](#) that lists the amount of funding each participating school in the state's Opportunity Scholarships program receives and maps the total enrollment and voucher amounts received by the county in which schools are located. It also provides summary information about overall voucher participation by prior-year program participation, race and ethnicity, and grade; however, these breakdowns are not provided on a countywide or school-by-school basis.

**Florida:** The Florida Department of Education publishes [financial reports](#) that include data on the amount of funding diverted from each public school district by one of the state's voucher programs. In addition, the Florida Policy Institute used that information to create a [data dashboard](#) that shares the total number of students using vouchers over time, as well as several data points related to how much state funding is used to provide vouchers for students who reside in each district's enrollment boundary.

**Tennessee:** The Tennessee Department of Education published an [annual report](#) on the state's education savings account (ESA) program, which includes information about student participation, withdrawals from the program, and assessment results (for ESA students and all students) for each participating district and the state.

**National:** The U.S. Department of Education collects and publishes basic information about private schools in the country through the biennial [Private School Universe survey](#). The dataset includes disaggregated data on student enrollment by race/ethnicity; however, it does not include any of the other information noted above as being important to monitor voucher implementation.

## Conclusion

Private school voucher programs do not produce better outcomes for participating students, and they drain public education budgets. Given enhanced political will ([despite the lack of public approval](#)) to expand private school voucher programs, advocates must push for additional data and transparency to highlight the ways in which vouchers harm the public education system. While voucher proponents argue that family choice, as measured through aggregate enrollment and program participation alone, is sufficient for program accountability, without clear disaggregated data on student access and outcomes, families cannot make informed choices about whether such programs are providing meaningful and equitable opportunities for students. This guide presents suggestions for the types of information that can increase transparency and enable more meaningful monitoring of voucher programs. Ultimately, this data can support advocacy efforts to repeal or contract existing voucher programs in states and eliminate the inequitable outcomes they perpetuate.