

POLICY ISSUE BRIEF:

PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS

Issue at a Glance

In the ongoing effort to improve education for all U.S. students, some policymakers have proposed shifting government funding from public schools so that parents can send their children to a private school. The most common proposed model is a direct voucher, which has recently taken on more subtle forms such as tax credits and tax-sheltered education savings plans. Approximately 10% of students attend private schools and less than 1% of students receive a voucher in the 20 states (plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico) that have voucher programs. Supporters claim that vouchers provide all families—especially low-income families—broader opportunities and greater control over their children’s education. Proponents further perceive vouchers as a form of “tax justice,” which offsets a family’s tax burden for public school services they do not use.

With many states recently expanding their private school voucher programs in recent years and the first-ever national school voucher program being created in 2025 by Congress and the Trump administration, more and more data is being collected and the results are becoming increasingly clear: Voucher programs fail to improve students’ academic achievement. In fact, they often cause students to perform worse than their peers who aren’t in the voucher program. Large-scale studies of the Louisiana, Indiana, Ohio, and District of Columbia programs show that voucher students experienced significant declines in their academic performance. The impact of accepting a voucher on academic achievement in these programs is on par with or worse than the learning loss caused by Hurricane Katrina and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Private school vouchers also divert much-needed funding from public schools. With fewer resources, public schools that are already struggling may be hard-pressed to sustain their infrastructure, let alone advance reform efforts designed to boost student achievement. Private schools are also not required to meet state-determined accountability requirements under ESSA. They frequently do not have to meet any baseline standards for teacher qualification, student testing, financial accountability, or even safe facilities. Further, multiple examples demonstrate that the lack of oversight requirements results in waste, fraud, and abuse. Private schools can also select the students they accept by income, test scores, gender, or religion. Private schools can even consider whether a student has special needs in their enrollment decisions. Students with special needs who do enroll in private schools completely abdicate their federal protections under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in all but four states.

Public schools, on the other hand, embrace the mandate to provide all students with access to rigorous coursework that prepares them for success in college and the workforce, regardless of their background and special needs status. Public school services are transparent and held to higher standards of accountability, while also complying with the requirements of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), IDEA, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

National Principals Association Position

- Private school vouchers steer money away from public schools; have been shown to result in decreased student achievement; reduce accountability in the education system; and ultimately harm public schools, which 90% of students attend.
- School choice is appropriate within the public school system as long as equal opportunity and access are ensured without discrimination on the basis of race, gender, socioeconomic status, or disability; accountability requirements are consistently applied; and autonomy is accompanied by complete transparency to allow all schools to learn lessons from the chosen school's practice.
- Vouchers are recurrently opposed by many states and constituents. When placed on ballot measures, voters have repeatedly rejected measures to allow or expand vouchers.
- National Principals Association has separate policy issue briefs on [Charter Schools](#) and [Private Instructional Services](#) with additional recommendations on related issues.

Recommendations for Federal and State Policymakers

- Federal policymakers should reject further attempts to provide federal funds for private school vouchers and their variants, including tuition tax credits for private schools.
- State policymakers should reject attempts to expand private school voucher programs and consider rolling back existing programs as mounting research points to the failure of these programs to improve student achievement while simultaneously decimating funding for public schools.
- Federal and state policymakers should focus on sustained school improvement efforts coupled with support mechanisms to help all students achieve higher academic levels and close achievement gaps.
- As the administration launches the rules and regulations governing the implementation of the first national private school voucher program created in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) of 2025, changes must be made to address significant concerns for states and schools, including:
 - Allowing public schools and their students to access funding.
 - Enacting protections to ensure that funds are targeted to public school students from low-income backgrounds.
 - Allowing states to regulate Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs) to enable accurate enrollment counts which impact funding.
 - Protecting states from being forced to make up shortfalls in lean donation years.
 - Enacting protections to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse of public funds and allowing states to put these protections in place.
 - Allowing states to enact protections against for-profit, low-quality, and unvetted educational products, services, schools and programs funded via SGOs.
 - Allowing states to collect enrollment and use data, including disaggregation by student characteristics.
 - Requiring that students who use OBBBA vouchers for non-public school education programs participate in the annual statewide summative assessment and report their performance and allow states to require it.

- Enacting requirements for states and SGOs to collect, publish, and disseminate data on student achievement, outcomes, and access to learning resources for federal voucher recipients.
- Holding SGOs and private schools that accept federal voucher funds accountable for improving the academic outcomes of the students served.