



VOUCHER WORKSHEET ON HB2468/SB2787



See the
answers

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The Education Trust — Tennessee believes that public dollars should remain in public schools, where over 90% of Tennessee’s students are educated. Our **analysis and research** on the implementation of voucher programs in other states has informed this position, and is the basis for the questions below. The questions we have assembled on Governor Lee’s The Education Freedom Scholarship Act are ones that all Tennesseans should be posing to their state legislators, especially as they look to establish a program that will drain millions of dollars from public education and send them to private schools. We believe the proposed funding for vouchers could be better spent supporting our students in public schools and ensuring they have what they need to thrive.

Time to do your homework! **Find your legislator** and make plans to ask your legislators these questions as they work to finalize the **parameters of the bill**.

Once bill language is introduced and potential amendments and debate occur in committees, we will update the answers to these questions on our website. Access the answers using the QR Code above.

For our full analysis and recommendations, see The Education Trust — Tennessee’s **Vouchers: The Right Choice for Tennessee?** Memo and **One-Pager**.



The Education Trust—Tennessee

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HB2468/SB2787 Questions

Funding & Fiscal Impact

The expansion to universal vouchers will create a new state budget line for students enrolled in private schools. In Arizona the number of students receiving a voucher has increased by 574%, 70% of which represents students that were never enrolled in public schools. In FY24, Arizona projected universal vouchers to cost \$65 million. That number is now estimated at \$950 million in a single year, 1346% higher than projected. Tennesseans need to know how voucher expansion will be paid for, what limits will be placed on voucher growth.

Will the dollar amount of the voucher award be standard for every student?

What is the source of the funding that will pay for the vouchers? How much is the bill projected to cost over the next 10 years?

Will the source of the funding come from TISA allocations designated for districts?

How much will the state budget annually for TDOE staffing and management systems for the enrollment, compliance monitoring, reimbursements and general oversight of the voucher program? Is that amount included in the budget allocation for the bill?

How much will the "wallet" system that manages the purchases, payments, and reimbursements cost the state each year?

Will there be a family income threshold on the vouchers after the first year?

Will there be a cap on the number of universal vouchers?

Will there be a cap if the voucher costs exceed the budgeted amount in a fiscal year? What is the projected annual voucher cap, if any, for the next ten years?

Will hold-harmless funding exist for districts that experience enrollment drops due to vouchers? If so, how and when will it be phased out?

Student Eligibility & Services Provided

Tennesseans need to know which students will qualify for vouchers, if certain students will be given priority, and if the participating private schools will be able to deny admissions and specific services to students who apply with a voucher.

Will families from particular income thresholds or specific underperforming schools be given priority status? How does this shift over time?

Will participating schools be able to deny students admission based on academic standing, gender, disability, religion, immigration status, home language, or sexual orientation?

Can students who are new to the country, or who are not yet citizens, receive a voucher?

Will participating schools be required to serve students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) in accordance with their plans, or will they be required to waive their rights under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in order to receive a voucher?

Transportation

Transportation will be a critical element of access to private schools. This is especially true for rural students, where 42% of rural counties have zero private schools. The cost and time of transportation to private schools will limit their ability to access vouchers.

Will participating schools be required to provide transportation for students who accept vouchers?

Instruction

Tennessee has a broad range of academic and instructional requirements for K-12 public schools. Instruction is tightly controlled via a set of rigorous state standards, limits on topics, and requirements on retention. Tennesseans need to know if their tax dollars will go towards private schools that do not adhere to the same academic and legal standards set by our state.

Will participating schools be required to utilize a curriculum that aligns with the Tennessee State Standards and provide the same amount of instructional or seat time that is required of public schools?

Will participating schools be held to the same standards and restrictions as public schools on prohibited concepts, anti-bias training, obscenity in books, pronoun use, parent reporting and consent, and age-appropriate materials in schools?

Will participating schools have to retain 3rd and 4th-graders if they are not proficient on their ELA assessments?

School Eligibility & Fiscal Standing

Tennesseans expect public schools to have qualified and certified teachers and leaders, and that they are in good fiscal standing. Public schools must undergo regular accreditation, and submit their budgets for review and examination. Tennesseans need to know if the state will require participating private schools to adhere to similar rules in order to qualify for millions in public subsidies.

Will participating schools be required to employ or contract administrators and teachers who hold baccalaureate or higher degrees, demonstrated teaching experience, or be licensed?

Will schools be required to have current TDOE approval status or be accredited by a relevant school accrediting agency?

Will the participating schools be required to have been open for a minimum period of time prior to accepting vouchers?

How will private schools be eligible to receive the voucher?

Will participating schools be required to undergo a financial review in order to participate, and to demonstrate fiscal soundness?

Will participating schools be required to inform the state if they are in fiscal jeopardy or facing imminent closure? How will the process work?

School Tuition and Fees

In states across the country where universal vouchers exist, private schools expect students to apply for and use vouchers, and they often raise tuition once vouchers are in play. It's important that families understand what the voucher covers in private school costs, and what remaining tuition and fees they must pay out of pocket.

Will schools be required to have transparent and published tuition rates, fees, and admissions policies?

Will the state monitor or set limits on increases in tuition and fees for participating schools once they accept vouchers?

Will the voucher be considered payment in full to the private school? If not, how will Tennessee ensure that students from low-income backgrounds can afford to attend a private school given the average private school tuition is \$11,341?

Fiscal, Staff, and Enrollment Recordkeeping

Public schools in Tennessee are required to conduct regular background checks on staff and volunteers, and to regularly report a set of data on student enrollment. Recordkeeping is essential for the management of public schools and Tennesseans should expect private schools to conduct the same background checks, safety protocols and recordkeeping once they receive government subsidies.

Will parents who have been found guilty of abuse or neglect be allowed to receive a voucher for homeschooling? How will Tennessee coordinate with relevant agencies to monitor for future instances of abuse or neglect?

Will staff at participating schools undergo background checks? Will this information be reported to the state?

Will families that accept a voucher to homeschool be required to register their child with the state and notify the state if the child enrolls in public school?

Will participating private schools be required to accurately gather and report data on student enrollment and any mid-year changes to school enrollment (including transfers, early graduation, second semester starts, and school closure) in accordance with public school reporting protocols?

Will participating schools be required to send student data and files to districts when students transfer to their public schools?

Will schools be required to have sufficient recordkeeping that is accessible to the state, and which may be assessed by the Tennessee Department of Education?

Fraud Prevention

States with universal vouchers have had to combat fraud at multiple levels. Verification, approval and compliance of schools, vendors and parent purchases has not only cost states millions in staffing and time, but also uncovered millions of dollars in fraudulent activities. Tennesseans should understand how the state plans to prevent and manage fraud if they expect to allow millions of dollars to flow to private entities.

Will participating schools be required to abide by nondiscrimination, health, ADA, ventilation, fire and safety codes?

How will vendors who may receive vouchers be subject to a transparent and rigorous approval process?

How will the State prevent and monitor fraudulent purchases by parents transparently and efficiently? Or to monitor fraudulent behavior by vendors? What will be the penalties for fraud?

Will there be an independent evaluation of the costs and effectiveness of vouchers? How will the return on the investment be defined beyond parent satisfaction? Will it include academic achievement of students who receive a voucher?

Assessments, Accountability, Public Reporting & Transparency

Perhaps the most important element of the expansion to universal vouchers is the way in which the state will assess its success and impact. How will the state define and measure success of the program, and how will Tennesseans know if it is working as designed, and is a good use of public tax dollars? It will be important to know how well students are performing academically in comparison to their public school peers, and how the funding is being distributed. Public schools are rated annually now with A-F letter grades, and their demographics and academic performance on metrics are posted annually. This public reporting is essential, and Tennesseans should expect the same type of information for schools that accept public funds.

Will students who accept vouchers be required to take the TCAP, as students in the current pilot program do?

Will test scores of students receiving vouchers be reported to the state, and compared to public and non-scholarship receiving students?

Will there be public reporting on the academic performance, chronic absenteeism, college readiness and graduation rates of students who use a voucher?

Will test scores be published and compared with student performance in public schools?

Will private schools be required to report voucher student data by grade, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or sex, or whether individual students are making progress over time?

Will there be A-F letter grades assigned to schools accepting public dollars? Or ratings of any kind?

Assessments, Accountability, Public Reporting & Transparency Continued

Will there be information on the state website with accessible public information on all aspects of the voucher program, as well as a dashboard on the performance and status of private schools accepting vouchers, in order to facilitate parent awareness?

Will there be public reporting on the categories and types of expenditures made by families with vouchers?

Will there be public reporting on the denials of schools, purchases or vendors?

Will there be public reporting on fraud, waste, or abuse of the voucher program?

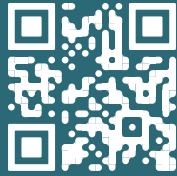
Will there be public reporting on the closure of private schools who accept vouchers?

Will there be public reporting on which private schools accept vouchers?

Will there be public reporting on how much money each school receives via vouchers?

Will there be public reporting on the percentage and number of students in each school who have accepted a voucher?

Will there be public reporting by county or district on the number of vouchers awarded each year?



See the
answers



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