



School voucher initiatives: What you need to know

Overview

Six voucher initiatives (and counting!) by Restore Washington, a conservative political group that seeks to repeal legislative progress in Olympia via the initiative process.

Each version creates a **“family empowerment scholarship” (voucher)** for families sending students to private schools or home schooling. Depending on the version, vouchers could cost \$10,000-\$12,000 per student and the number would be capped at 50,000-200,000 vouchers per year. This program would be administered by the Student Achievement Council.

Scholarships would be awarded on a first-come-first served basis, based on applications submitted by parents with admission preference to families who chose to auto-renew. Vouchers could be used for home school and secular or religious private schools.

It’s not yet clear which version our opponents will attempt to qualify. However, if passed, this voucher program would cost BILLIONS of dollars per year and up to **15%** of the state’s K-12 education budget.

The highest version would cost **\$2.4 BILLION** per year and **\$4.8 BILLION** per biennium.

To qualify for the November ballot, sponsors of an “Initiative to the People” must submit 324,516 valid signatures prior to July 5.

It is likely voucher proponents will start collecting signatures in late February.

Impact

- If passed, this measure would undo all of the McCleary progress.
- This program is based on the voucher model in Arizona, which has devastated public education in their state.
- In many states, 75-90% of students accepting vouchers were already enrolled in private schools.
- Vouchers take funds from already-underfunded public schools to pay for private-school students’ tuition, further exacerbating existing funding inequities.
- Vouchers are tax subsidies for existing private-school families, and a tax bailout for underperforming private schools.

Voucher initiative versions and cost implications

Initiative #	\$ each	# students	Annual cost	Biennial cost
2017	\$12,000	100,000	\$1.2 billion	\$2.4 billion
2018	\$12,000	50,000	\$600 million	\$1.2 billion
2019	\$12,000	75,000	\$900 million	\$1.8 billion
2027	\$12,000	200,000	\$2.4 billion	\$4.8 billion
Version 4	\$12,000	150,000	\$1.8 billion	\$3.6 billion
Version 6	\$10,000	100,000	\$1 billion	\$2 billion

- Despite being called the “Equity in Education” initiative, it would make our public schools LESS equitable.
- Declining enrollment would force more schools to close, which disproportionately tends to affect Black and Hispanic students.
- As written, the program has NO provision for helping low-income families take advantage of the program and prevents adding such additional requirements.
- Unlike public schools, private and home schools have no state oversight or control, regardless of voucher money.
- Parents who enroll their children in this program would waive federal civil-rights laws and protections for their children.
- Private schools are not held to the same standards as public schools and can set their own discriminatory admission standards against students with disabilities, LGBTQ+ students, students who do not follow the school’s religion and students of color.
- Private schools often do not adequately serve special-education students, often failing to provide them with the same quality and quantity of services available to students in public schools.
- Students who leave the public schools forfeit many of the rights and protections provided to them under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- A 2017 survey of voucher schools across the country found that at least 14% had policies discriminating against LGBTQ+ students and staff. In Florida, a voucher-funded school made national news when it outright banned LGBTQ children.
- Voucher programs in some states have resulted in multimillion-dollar deficits and tax increases. Vouchers decrease the amount of money public schools can spend even though they still end up serving roughly the same number of students..
- Taxpayers should not fund two different education systems — one public and one private — without expecting tax increases.
- Vouchers do not improve academic achievement. In many states, vouchers, have led to declines in academic achievement that rival or even exceed those caused by natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Vouchers hurt rural communities by draining money from public-school districts in rural areas and sending it to private schools elsewhere.

We can’t let this happen in Washington.

Ballot Title: Initiative Measure No. 2017 concerns scholarships for home-based and private elementary and secondary education This measure would require the State to provide 100,000* scholarships of \$12,000 each on a first-come, first-served basis for elementary and secondary home-schooling or private-school expenses and specify permissible uses and eligibility criteria. Should this measure be enacted into law? Yes No

Ballot Measure Summary: This measure would establish and specify terms of the “family empowerment scholarship program,” administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council. Parents receiving awards on behalf of students agree to home-school the student pursuant to statutory home-based instruction requirements or enroll the student in private school and use funds for specified purposes. The measure would require the annual award of 100,000* scholarships of \$12,000 each on a first-come, first-served basis, with priority for renewed scholarship agreements.

**The ballot language is the same for each measure except for the cap number and voucher amount, which vary from measure to measure.*