



PUBLIC DOLLARS, PRIVATE SCHOOLS:

**Evaluating Access, Affordability, and
Accountability in North Carolina's
Universal Voucher Program**



AUGUST 2025

NCForum.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was authored by Elizabeth Paul, with support from Lauren Fox, Sara Howell, and Jennifer Rifkin. Research was conducted by Elizabeth Paul, Tia Hilber, Celina Ocampo, Sara Howell, and Macie Fitzgerald.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
History of Private School Vouchers in North Carolina	7
Findings + Analysis	11
Policy Recommendations	30
Appendix A: Methodology	33
References	36



INTRODUCTION

As the education privatization movement has spread across the country, school voucher programs have become more common and more expansive in many states. These programs use taxpayer dollars to provide scholarships to families to send their children to nonpublic schools. Like many voucher programs, North Carolina's Opportunity Scholarship Program, which was created by the General Assembly in 2013, was originally reserved for families with limited financial resources. In order to qualify, applicants also had to have been enrolled previously in public schools. Proponents of the program argued that it would provide "choice" for families who felt their local public school was not the right fit for their children but would otherwise not be able to afford private school tuition.

A decade after its creation, North Carolina lawmakers passed dramatic changes to the Opportunity Scholarship Program, allowing any family to qualify regardless of income or whether they had ever enrolled in public school. Under the new "universal" voucher program, the state's wealthiest families are eligible to receive public funds to subsidize their private school tuition. Expanded access has come with a hefty price tag for taxpayers—nearly half a billion dollars was sent to private schools through vouchers in the 2024-25 school year, and **planned appropriations through 2032-33 will total approximately \$7 billion, while local public schools that serve 84% of students in the state are among the lowest-funded in the nation.**

This report addresses several critical questions about school vouchers in North Carolina, using data from the first year since universal expansion: ***Is the program actually providing more choice to parents and students? Who has access to the private schools that receive voucher funding, and who is benefitting most? What information is publicly available to prospective parents about the quality of private schools they may be considering for their children? To what extent are private schools receiving vouchers held accountable to the taxpayers who fund them?*** Based on our research, we offer several policy recommendations regarding the use of public dollars for private school vouchers in North Carolina.

THE HISTORY OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN NORTH CAROLINA

While vouchers in some form have been around since the late 19th century, the modern concept of school vouchers was introduced in the U.S. in the mid-1950s by economist Milton Friedman. Friedman framed vouchers in an economic context, arguing that they would spark competition and improve public school performance.

Although Friedman did not explicitly discuss vouchers in a racial context, his introduction came less than a year after the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling to integrate schools. In response, some southern states, including North Carolina, established vouchers as a way for white families to avoid school desegregation. Two years after *Brown*, the NC General Assembly passed and voters approved the Pearsall Plan, which allowed state funds to be allocated toward private school tuition grants for white families to avoid sending their children to desegregated public schools. Many white families across the South withdrew their children from public schools in response to school desegregation, leading to a surge in enrollment in private schools.¹ Many of these schools, also referred to as “segregation academies,” were explicitly founded to preserve racial separation.²

The most notable example of vouchers being used as a tool for school segregation occurred in Prince Edward County, Virginia in 1959. After two separate courts ordered the school district to integrate, officials in the county chose to shutter all public schools in the district. Instead, the district opened private schools for white children, using Virginia state tuition grants to support their education. Black families, however, were not afforded this opportunity, causing some to miss their education entirely until the Supreme Court outlawed Virginia’s tuition grant program in 1965.³

By 1990, politicians and education reform advocates began to view school vouchers in their more modern form as a way to support school choice for students of color, students with disabilities, and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. In the early 1990s, Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Cleveland, Ohio established the first modern voucher programs still in place today that target low-income students or students in low-performing schools.⁴

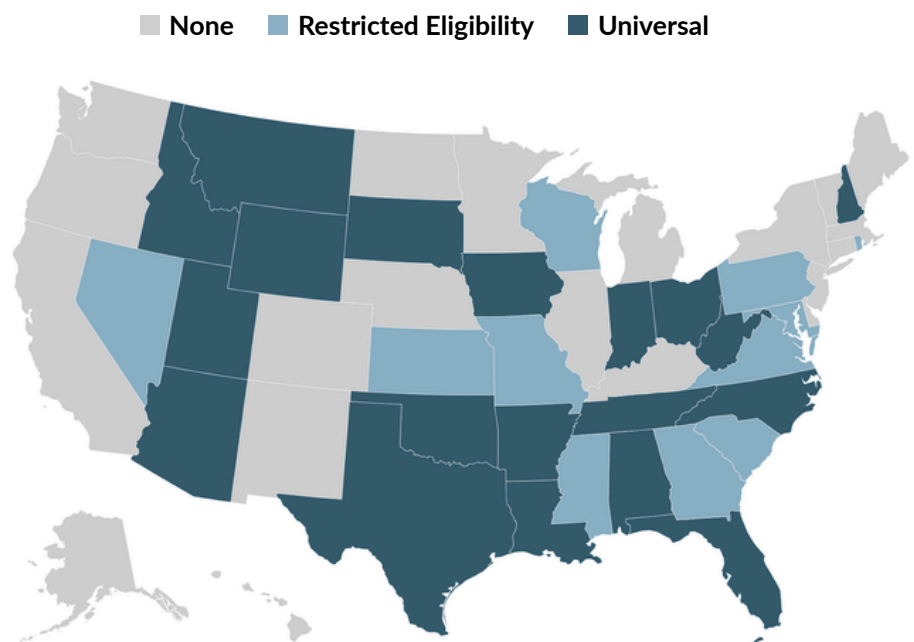
In Ohio, voucher opponents sued the State Superintendent of Public Education, arguing that the program violated the Establishment Clause due to the fact that religious private schools were receiving taxpayer funding. The case, *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, ultimately reached the Supreme Court of the United States, which in 2002 ruled to uphold the program, setting a precedent that religiously-affiliated private schools could receive taxpayer-funded school vouchers.⁵

The *Zelman* case shifted the narrative around school voucher programs. While the case was rooted in the separation of church and state, it framed vouchers as a foundation of parental choice. Proponents of vouchers argued that parents should have the right to choose their child's school, regardless of family income or religious affiliation. This, along with the precedent in the case to allow the participation of religious schools, set the stage for the creation and expansion of voucher programs across the country over the next two decades.

CURRENT TRENDS IN SCHOOL VOUCHERS: UNIVERSAL EXPANSION

Over the past few years, a growing number of states have passed legislation to expand or establish universal private school voucher programs without eligibility requirements for families based on income, prior public school enrollment, or student needs. Arizona became the first state to pass such a program in 2022. By 2025, 18 other states had established at least one universal private school choice program.⁶

Fig. 1: Private School Choice Programs (June 2025)



Data Source: EdWeek. Which States Have Private School Choice June 2025⁷

Momentum around universal school voucher programs grew after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. After many schools around the country shifted to virtual or hybrid instruction in order to keep students and educators safe, some families opted to leave the public school system in favor of homeschooling or private schools that were able to reopen earlier.⁸ In the fall of 2020, traditional public schools lost over 1.1 million students, mostly from elementary schools, with more sustained enrollment declines in districts with longer-lasting mask mandates and school closures.⁹ **Over the first two years of the pandemic, 20 states enacted or expanded taxpayer-funded school choice programs.**¹⁰

While the number of state universal voucher programs continues to grow, the U.S. Congress passed the first federal legislation for a national school voucher program in July 2025.¹¹ The federal voucher program, set to begin in 2027, will operate as a dollar-for-dollar federal tax credit for individuals who donate to Scholarship Granting Organizations (SGOs). In order to qualify for a voucher, families must live in a state that has opted in to the program and must earn at or below 300% of the area median income (AMI). While policymakers have not yet announced exactly how AMI will be defined, some estimates suggest that around 90% of households will be eligible for a federal voucher.¹² Families may use the funds on allowable expenses, such as private or religious school tuition, homeschooling costs, books, and tutoring.

Although there is an individual cap of \$1700 per taxpayer, there is no aggregate cap on the program. The total cost of the program will depend on the number of taxpayers who take the credit, but estimates suggest that the program will cost anywhere from \$4 billion to \$101 billion each year.¹³

THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL VOUCHERS

Academic research on the impact of school voucher programs has been mixed – due in large part to differences in voucher policies across states, marked differences between private schools that participate in voucher programs, and limited data available from participating schools and students. However, recent studies have shown that voucher programs can have large and negative impacts on student achievement. In both Louisiana and Indiana, three separate studies found that academic outcomes were worse for students using vouchers.¹⁴ Another study also found that students in the Milwaukee voucher program saw increased academic achievement when transferring back to public schools.¹⁵ Many other studies find that there are no academic effects for students receiving vouchers.¹⁶

While some studies have found positive impacts of voucher participation on college enrollment and attainment, these outcomes are often driven by the students remaining in private high school for all four years.¹⁷ These findings suggest that other student or family attributes may contribute to the gains, including financial resources, the ability to apply to schools, and social networks.

Rather than improving student outcomes, **universal voucher programs strain state and local budgets by diverting public funding from public schools.** Often, these programs are more costly than intended. In Arizona for example, legislators greatly underestimated the cost of a universal program, initially projecting a cost of \$65 million in its first year; however, the cost ultimately was over \$700 million for 2023 alone.¹⁸ In North Carolina's first year of a universal program, legislators passed an additional \$248 million in funding to cover the cost for all applicants.¹⁹ Additionally, a significant portion of the cost for universal voucher programs is a completely new cost to the state. Most students who receive vouchers have never attended public schools and were already enrolled in private schools and paying tuition.²⁰ As a result, they would not have been previously included in any state education funding formulas.





HISTORY OF PRIVATE SCHOOL VOUCHERS IN NORTH CAROLINA

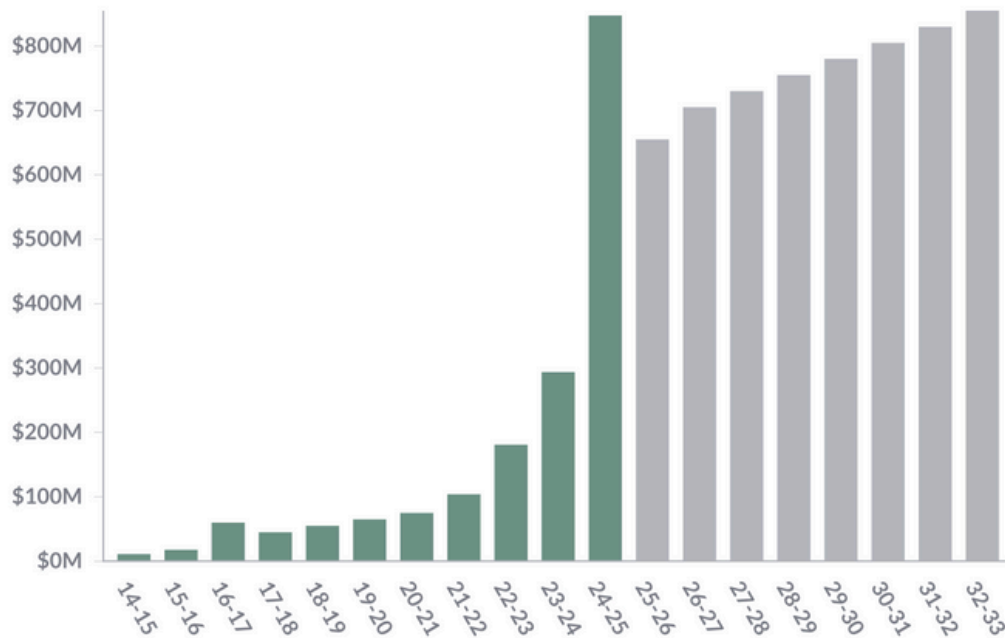
Lawmakers in the North Carolina General Assembly (NCGA) created the state's first modern private school voucher program in 2013 with the introduction of the Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). The program was designed to provide private school tuition assistance to income-eligible families who chose to withdraw their child from public school (see Table 1). The North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA) oversees the program. During its initial year in 2014, the NCGA allotted over \$10 million in recurring funds to the Opportunity Scholarship Program. Each voucher was worth up to \$4,200 per year, and included initial eligibility requirements (such as a family income cap and prior public school enrollment).²¹

At the end of 2013, the North Carolina Association of Educators, the North Carolina School Boards Association, and multiple local school boards sued the State of North Carolina to overturn the voucher program, arguing that it violated the state constitution by using taxpayer dollars for private schools.²² In 2014, North Carolina Superior Court Judge Robert Hobgood ruled the program unconstitutional and prohibited distribution of the funds, declaring that using taxpayer funds for “unaccountable” and “unregulated” private schools does not serve a public purpose.²³ By 2015, however, the North Carolina Supreme Court overturned the ruling and upheld the voucher program as constitutional under the state constitution.²⁴

Since then, lawmakers have continued to rapidly expand the program. Appropriations exploded to nearly \$1.8 billion over its first decade, with **current plans to appropriate \$855 million to the program annually by 2032.**²⁵ Moreover, changes to the program increased both the family income qualification level and the amount that each voucher could be worth. In the 2021 state budget, lawmakers increased the individual amount a student could receive from \$4,200 to up to 90% of the state per-pupil expenditure for public school students across the state (\$6,168 in 2022-23, for example). With the passage of the 2023 state budget, lawmakers removed all income eligibility limits and requirements for previously attending a public school, creating a fully universal taxpayer-funded private school voucher program beginning with the 2024-25 school year. Applications for the program increased by over 100% between 2023-24 and 2024-25.²⁶

As program eligibility and funding for the Opportunity Scholarship Program has expanded, the number of scholarships awarded has increased significantly. In the first year of the program, 1,216 students received scholarships at 244 private schools throughout the state; in 2024-25, over 80,000 students received scholarships at over 640 schools, representing a nearly **6500% increase in scholarship recipients over 10 years with three times as many private schools receiving taxpayer funds.**²⁷

Fig.2: Opportunity Scholarship Program Appropriations History



Data Source: NCGA Budgets + Appropriations Acts 2013-2024. Linked in Table 1 on page 10.

Along with the transition to a fully universal model, lawmakers established a tiered system to determine scholarship amounts and prioritization by family income levels. The tier system includes four tiers and is based on the percentage of reduced-price lunch eligibility.²⁸

The tier system was framed as an effort to prioritize allocated voucher funds for lower-income families; however, the General Assembly passed nearly \$250 million in additional appropriations in 2024 to clear the waitlist of higher-income families and provide vouchers to all families who applied for the 2024-25 school year. In the first year of the universal expansion, North Carolina sent nearly \$432 million to private schools through vouchers, an increase of over 132% from the prior year.²⁹ **Private schools across the state received an average of \$380,000 more in voucher funding after universal expansion**, including 73 that received an increase of more than \$1 million and three that received more than \$3 million in additional funding.³⁰

Fig.3: Opportunity Scholarship Program Tiers (2024-25)

TIER 1 Voucher Amount: \$7,468 Max Income: \$57,720	TIER 2 Voucher Amount: \$6,722 Max Income: \$115,440
TIER 3 Voucher Amount: \$4,480 Max Income: \$259,740	TIER 4 Voucher Amount: \$3,360 Max Income: No Limit

**Income amounts are based on a family of four.*

Data Source: [NCSEAA Opportunity Scholarship Household Income Guides 2024-25](#)

Table 1: Characteristics of the Opportunity Scholarship Program Over Time

Year	Scholarship Amount	Income Eligibility	Total Funding	Annual Marketing Budget
FY2013 Budget	\$4,200	133% of federal FRPL eligibility	\$10,000,000 for the 2014-15 school year	\$0
2015: NC Supreme Court Upholds the Program as Constitutional				
2016 Appropriations Act	\$4,200	150% of federal FRPL eligibility	\$898,400,000 over 10 years in statutory appropriations	\$0
FY2021 Budget	Up to 90% of prior year average per-pupil state K-12 allocation (\$6,168 in 2022-23)	175% of federal FRPL eligibility	\$1,804,540,000 over 10 years in statutory appropriations	\$500,000
2022 Appropriations Act	Up to 90% of prior year average per-pupil state K-12 allocation (\$6,492 in 2023-24)	200% of federal FRPL eligibility	\$2,535,240,000 over 10 years in statutory appropriations	\$500,000
FY2023 Budget	Up to 100% of prior year average per-pupil state K-12 allocation (\$7,468 in 2024-25)	No Income Cap	\$4,632,940,000 over 10 years in statutory appropriations	\$1,000,000
2024 Appropriations Act	Up to 100% of prior year average per-pupil state K-12 allocation	No Income Cap	\$7,716,540,000 over 10 years in statutory appropriations	\$1,000,000



FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The information for our analysis comes from publicly available data found on school websites. In our research, **we aimed to replicate the process a typical family might take when looking for information to consider school options for their child.** We searched for data on tuition costs, the admissions process and criteria, accreditation status, curriculum, student academic performance, and teacher qualifications.

We found that overall, schools that received smaller amounts of voucher funding were less likely to include sufficient information on their website to allow for thorough analysis. We opted therefore to focus our analysis on the 200 voucher-receiving private schools that received the most state taxpayer dollars. **In the 2024-25 school year, these 200 schools received 73% of the total taxpayer funding that NCSEAA sent to private schools.**³¹

It is important to note that data availability varies across schools; thus the percentages we present under each category are conservative estimates – it is quite possible that these numbers are higher in reality. For example, a particular school’s website may not publicly include all admissions requirements or the accreditation status. For each indicator discussed below, schools were only counted if they explicitly stated the information on a publicly available website. For more information on the methodology, please see Appendix A.

Our research identifies two major themes. First, **many private schools that receive public funds in North Carolina are not in fact accessible to the public** – families who are awarded vouchers and wish to enroll in a private school can be denied admission or may be unable to attend for a variety of reasons. Second, **voucher schools are not accountable to the taxpayers who fund them**, as they are held to minimal requirements and there is very little information made publicly available about the quality of education that they provide.

VOUCHER-RECEIVING SCHOOLS ARE NOT ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

While supporters of the Opportunity Scholarship Program argue that it provides more school options for families, in practice, private schools remain out of reach for many. Private schools accepting vouchers often exercise substantial discretion in their admissions decisions, raise tuition after receiving voucher funding, and fail to provide adequate information needed for families to make an informed decision. As a result, over its history and especially since universal expansion, North Carolina's voucher program has increasingly benefited white students, those who live in urban and suburban areas, those from higher income households, and those who have never attended public schools.

School Choice or Schools' Choice?

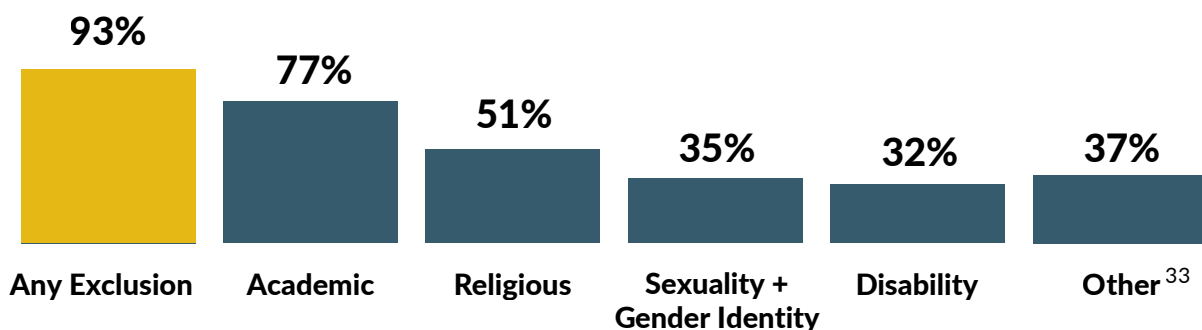
Voucher-Receiving Schools Choose Which Students They Serve

"...reserves the right, within its sole discretion, to refuse admission of an applicant or to discontinue enrollment of a student."

"Attendance is a privilege, not a right."

Unlike public schools, private schools, including those receiving vouchers, can deny entry to students based on a number of individual or family characteristics.³² Out of the 200 voucher schools in North Carolina that received the most taxpayer funding in 2024-25, we found that **at least 93% of schools practiced some form of exclusion in their admissions process or school policies**, including those listed in Figure 4 below.

Fig. 4: Exclusionary Practices in Private School Admission Processes and School Policies



Academic Exclusions

“The school reserves the right to refuse the admission of any student who has deficiencies beyond the capabilities of our curriculum and staff to address profitably.”

“The school reserves the right to refuse acceptance of any new student if testing results are not satisfactory.”

At least 3 out of every 4 voucher schools have some form of academic exclusion as part of their admissions policy.



For voucher-receiving schools, **the most common form of student exclusion in the admissions process is through academic requirements.** While public schools serve all students regardless of academic ability, voucher-receiving private schools are able to select which students to serve based on academic performance, including through entrance testing, standardized test scores, student interviews, and previous school records. Currently, at least 3 out of every 4 voucher schools have some form of academic exclusion as part of their admissions policy.

Aside from excluding certain students, the use of academic requirements in the admissions process has two primary implications for families. First, when schools utilize entrance testing as part of their admissions process, applying families are often subject to an additional non-refundable testing fee on top of the application fee. Some schools charge up to \$200 or more in additional fees for entrance testing.

Additionally, voucher-receiving schools can remove students at any time if the school is not satisfied with a student's academic performance. Some schools that include academic requirements in their admissions process also place all new students on an academic probation period, and schools can remove students at any time for failing to meet certain academic standards.

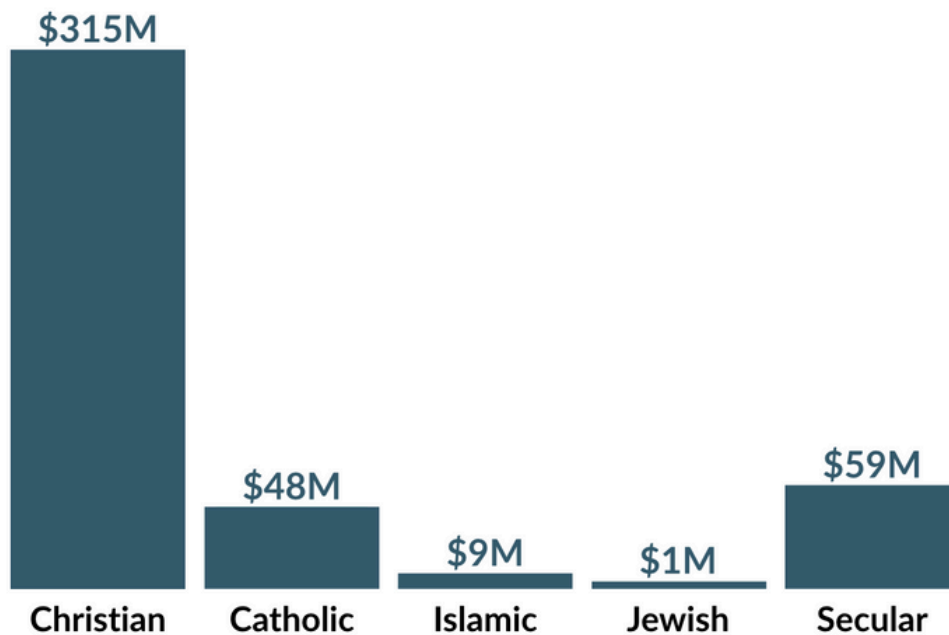
“When a student continues to have academic difficulty, it may become apparent that HLA is unable to serve his or her best interests, and accordingly, he or she may be denied re-enrollment.”

Religious Exclusions

Out of 200 private schools that received the most state-taxpayer funding, 88% are religiously affiliated and 72% require some form of religious curriculum for their students. The curriculum may range from specific classes that students must take each year to a religiously affiliated curriculum company for core subject areas, including science and reading. Out of all voucher-receiving private schools in the 2024-25 school year, 74% were religiously affiliated, including:



Fig. 5: Opportunity Scholarship Funding by Religious Affiliation of Voucher-Receiving Private School



“...will not admit families that belong to or express faith in religions that deny the absolute Deity/Trinity of Jesus Christ as the one and only Savior and path to salvation. We agree that our home life and parents’ living arrangements will follow Biblical guidelines, and that if it is found that parents are engaging in immoral lifestyles, ie. living together outside of wedlock, the family will be withdrawn.”

“The Academy reserves the right, within its sole discretion, to refuse admission of an applicant or to discontinue enrollment of a student if the atmosphere or conduct within a particular home or the activities of the student are counter to or in opposition to the Biblical lifestyle the Academy teaches.”

Over half (51%) of voucher-receiving schools in our analysis include explicit religious requirements or preferences in their admissions criteria. Requirements can range from pastor recommendation letters to weekly church attendance outside of school. Some schools require students and parents to abide by morality policies and sign statements of faith, while others require family life and living arrangements to follow “Biblical guidelines.”

An additional 12% of voucher-receiving schools in our analysis describe more implicit exclusionary policies related to religion, such as requiring families to sign agreements that a child will be taught specific religious or denominational values or that students are expected to exhibit “Christlike qualities.” These schools may be willing to accept students from various faiths, but it is important to note that prospective families from different religious backgrounds may feel unwelcome and therefore may not view these schools as a viable choice option.

At least 63% of voucher schools have explicit or implicit religious exclusion as part of their admissions or school policies.



Sexuality and Gender Identity Exclusions

“NTA retains the right to refuse enrollment to or to require automatic withdrawal of any student who engages in sexual immorality, including any student who professes to be homosexual/bisexual/transgendered or is a practicing homosexual/bisexual/transgendered, as well as any student who condones, supports, or otherwise promotes such practices or is unable to support the moral principles of the school.”

“Accordingly, we do not accept cohabitation of unmarried couples and any attempt to redefine marriage as a union between people of the same sex, as between more than one man and one woman. We believe that the homosexual lifestyle and alternative gender identities are contrary to the Bible.”

“We will not accept or condone any student who is in a same sex relationship or allow students already enrolled to remain in attendance if they are also involved in the same type of union. We will base ALL decisions for attendance and enrollment on the Biblical standard stated in God’s word.”

Thirty-five percent of voucher-receiving schools in our analysis explicitly deny students admissions or re-enrollment based on their sexuality, gender identity, or support for those who identify as LGBTQ+. Many schools list homosexuality as a punishable offense in the school handbook that can lead to expulsion from the school. Moreover, many schools extend these guidelines to a student’s parents or guardians.

An additional 8% of schools in our analysis have implicit exclusionary policies around sexuality and gender identity. While these schools may not require students to sign an agreement during the application process, their statements of faith or curriculum include exclusionary language toward homosexual, bisexual, and/or transgender individuals.

At least 43% of voucher schools have explicit or implicit sexuality and gender-identity exclusion as part of their admissions or school policies.



Students with Disabilities Exclusions

“Currently, the school is not able to accept children with emotional and/or learning disabilities since such programs are not yet available at the school and the academy is not able to meet the needs of these children. After accepting a child, if it is determined that he/she has emotional and/or behavioral problems and/or has learning disabilities, the student will be requested to withdraw from the school to a program that is designed to meet his/her learning needs.”

“As a private school, [we] do not offer special education services and/or accommodations outlined on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or 504 Plans. Regardless of IEP or 504, all prospective students must complete the standard admissions process and undergo the same admissions assessments as other applicants.”

While public schools are legally obligated to serve students with disabilities, private schools are not held to the same standards, including those receiving taxpayer-funded vouchers. In fact, many private schools will explicitly deny admissions for any students with a disability or Individualized Education Plan (IEP). In our analysis, 32% of schools include explicit admissions policies that would prevent certain or all students with disabilities from enrolling. An additional 9% of schools in our analysis have implicit exclusion towards these students, such as charging additional tuition and fees, sometimes twice as much as the standard tuition for the school.

At least 41% of voucher schools have explicit or disability exclusion as part of their admissions or school policies.



Other Exclusions

“LCA reserves the right to refuse admission to any family or student who would not fit into the spirit of the institution nor benefit from the education offered.”

“VCA reserves the absolute right in its sole discretion to reject any applicant and to dismiss any enrolled student at any time and for any reason.”

Other voucher schools in our analysis included admissions statements indicating that students and families may be denied entry based on more intangible characteristics, often described as a determination of whether the student or family is the “right fit” for the school. In fact, voucher schools are subject to no oversight over their admissions process, which allows schools significant discretion in choosing their students and families. Often, these decisions are based on student or family interviews with staff. Currently, over half of schools require a student interview, with 43% requiring a family interview.

Other examples of exclusion identified on school websites include balancing the male/female ratio of the student body, student pregnancy, required family donations on top of tuition and fees, and lifestyle choices.

At least 37% of voucher schools have some other exclusion as part of their admissions or school policies, often referred to as “right fit.”



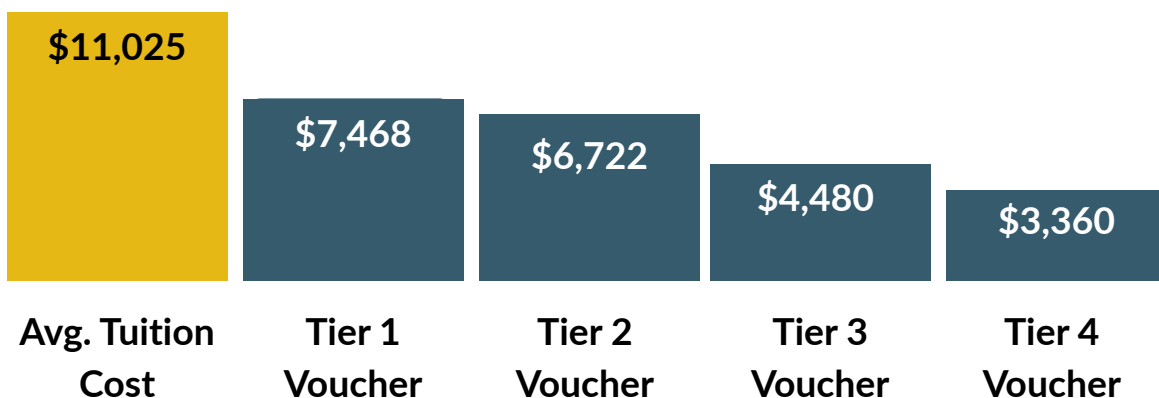
Voucher-Receiving Schools Increased Tuition After Universal Voucher Availability

While vouchers are ostensibly intended to help families afford the cost of tuition and fees for private school education, data show that at least in some cases, **private schools have significantly raised tuition after the implementation of universal voucher expansion.** For example, researchers found that private schools in Iowa increased tuition on average between 21-24% after voucher expansion.³⁴ In Arizona, the Hechinger Report found that nearly half of voucher schools in their analysis hiked tuition by 10%, four percentage points above inflation for that year.³⁵

Similar trends are being observed in North Carolina following the expansion to a universal voucher program. Using South Carolina as a control group due to its state constitution prohibiting school vouchers at the time, Carolina Forward found that **North Carolina voucher-receiving schools implemented larger tuition hikes after universal expansion—**between the 2024-25 and 2025-26 school years, private schools in their analysis increased tuition, on average, by 15.8%, compared to only 5.9% in South Carolina and 4.5% among North Carolina private schools that do not accept school vouchers.³⁶

Importantly, even at the highest amount, an Opportunity Scholarship voucher often does not cover the full cost of tuition and fees for a family. Out of the 200 schools that received the most voucher funding in 2024-25, the average total tuition and fee amount was \$11,025 annually. In the same year, the voucher amount covered only 37% (Tier 4) to 82% (Tier 1) of the average cost to families.

Fig. 6: Average Tuition Costs vs. Voucher Amount (2024-25)



Moreover, tuition and fees often do not cover the entire cost of private school to a family. Private schools in North Carolina, even those receiving state voucher funding, are not required to provide transportation or meals for students in need. These schools may also have additional financial requirements, including purchasing school uniforms, donating a minimum annual amount to the school, or school trips as part of the curriculum. These costs represent additional barriers to families with lower incomes and those in rural communities located far away from the nearest private school.

Voucher-Receiving Schools Do Not Provide Adequate Information for Prospective Families

In the 2024-25 school year, only 61% of all schools receiving voucher funding provided comprehensive public information on tuition and fees, the admissions process, curriculum, and other academic information. Only 15% of the 200 schools receiving the most voucher funding included student test score information on their websites. The lack of information available to the public regarding tuition costs, curriculum information, and test score data makes it difficult for parents to make an informed

school choice for their child. In many cases, parents would at minimum have to call, visit, or even enroll their child in the school before having access to certain information.

39% of voucher schools fail to provide sufficient publicly available information for parents to make an informed school choice.



Making an Informed School Choice: A Guide for Families

ACADEMICS

- Is your school accredited?
- What curriculum do you use?
- What are your core offerings?
- What standardized testing do you use?
- Can you share school testing results?
- How do you measure individual achievement and progress?
- Are teachers required to be certified?

OPERATIONS

- How much is tuition and what does it include/not include?
- Is your school a for-profit or not-for-profit school?
- Who governs the school and sets curriculum and policies?
- Do you offer transportation or lunch services?

After Universal Expansion, Opportunity Scholarship Recipients are Less Diverse

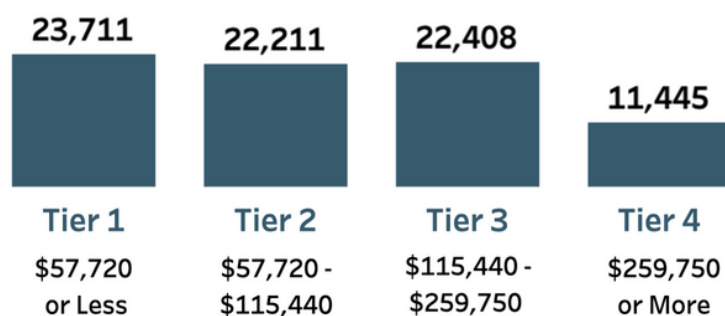
The massive expansion of the Opportunity Scholarship Program has led to significant changes in the population of students in North Carolina that benefit from the program. These changes can be traced across the lifetime of the program in four primary areas: income, race, prior public school enrollment, and rurality.

The OSP Increasingly Benefits Students from Higher-Income Households

Despite the program's original stated intention to serve low-income families, the expansion of the program to a fully universal model with no family income cap has altered the demographic makeup of scholarship recipients, with **55% of the 72,000 first-time applicants for 2024-25 (the first year with universal eligibility) coming from families making over \$115,000 annually.**³⁷ If the original income cap of 133% of the federal reduced lunch line were still in effect, the maximum income for a family of four to be eligible for the Opportunity Scholarship program would have been \$73,815 for the 2024 application cycle.³⁸

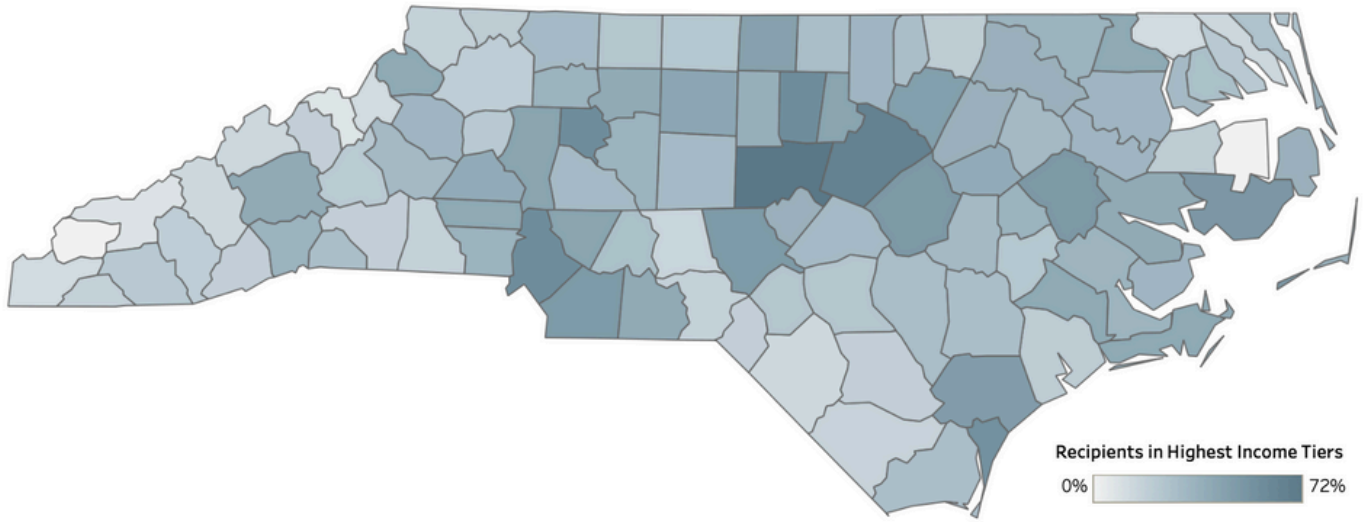
Out of the 80,000 total students who received a voucher in the 2024-25 school year (including both new and returning recipients), 42% came from families in Tiers 3 and 4.³⁹ In some counties, the percentage of recipients from higher income tiers were much greater, including 72% in Chatham and 66% in Wake.⁴⁰

Fig. 7: Opportunity Scholarship Recipients by Income Tiers (2024-25)



Data Source: NCGA Fiscal Research Division

Fig. 8: Percentage of Scholarship Recipients in Highest Income Tiers (2024-25)



Data Source: NCGA Fiscal Research Division

Table 2: Top 5 Counties with Highest Percentage of Higher Income Recipients (2024-25)

County	Total Recipients	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Highest Income Tiers (3 +4)
Chatham	635	10%	18%	42%	30%	72%
Wake	10,507	15%	19%	39%	27%	66%
Mecklenburg	7,808	24%	18%	30%	28%	58%
Orange	616	19%	23%	32%	26%	58%
Davie	215	16%	26%	37%	21%	58%

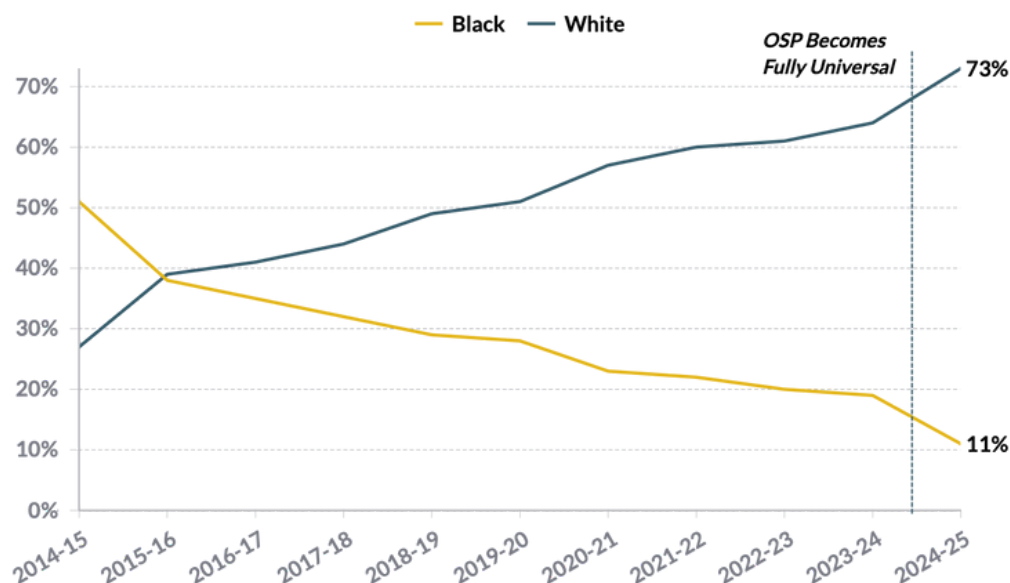
The OSP Increasingly Benefits White Students

The racial demographics of scholarship recipients has also changed throughout the history of the program. In the first year of the program, 51% of scholarship recipients were black and 27% were white. In the 2024-25 school year, 11% of scholarship recipients were black and 74% were white. **While the share of white voucher recipients has increased over time, it jumped by 10 percentage points (64% to 74%) after the program became universal.**

The widening racial gap among voucher recipients suggests that the Opportunity Scholarship Program continues to help sustain a dual education system that echoes pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* inequalities—one in which private schools disproportionately enroll white students, while under-resourced public schools disproportionately serve students of color.⁴¹

In North Carolina, many of the former “segregation academies,” founded in response to school desegregation efforts, remain in operation and are significant recipients of public funds through the state’s Opportunity Scholarship program. For example, Northeast Academy, a small Christian school in Northampton County, has an enrollment that is 99% white in a county that is only 40% white.⁴² In 2023, the school received \$438,500 in state-funded vouchers, which more than doubled to \$927,520 in 2024 after universal expansion.⁴³

Fig. 9: Share of Black and White Opportunity Scholarship Recipients Over Time

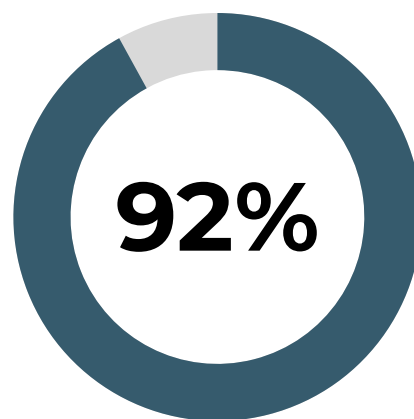


Data Source: NCSEAA

The OSP Increasingly Benefits Students Who Were Already Enrolled in Private Schools

Before universal expansion in the 2024-25 school year, students must have attended public school prior to being eligible for a school voucher. However, after universal expansion that removed this requirement, **only 8.4% of all voucher recipients attended a public school in the prior year.**⁴⁴ While some of these students renewed their vouchers from the prior year, the data suggests that over 85% of new scholarship recipients in the 2024-25 school year were already enrolled in a private school in at least the previous year or were students new to the K-12 system.⁴⁵ Importantly, new voucher recipients who were not previously enrolled in public schools or receiving a voucher represent a new cost to North Carolina taxpayers.

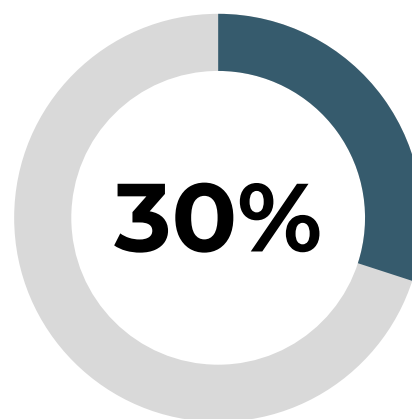
Fig. 10: Percentage of Voucher Recipients Not Enrolled in Public School in Prior Year (2024-25)



The OSP Increasingly Benefits Students in Urban Counties

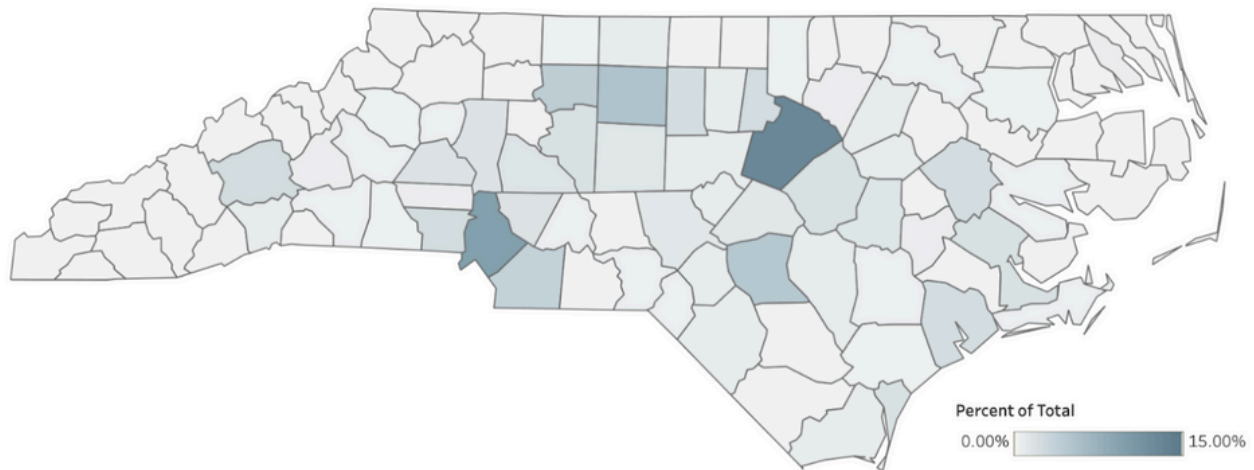
In the 2024-25 school year, 70% of voucher recipients lived in urban or suburban areas, compared to **only 30% of recipients coming from rural counties.**⁴⁶ More than one in five (23%) of voucher recipients are from Wake and Mecklenburg counties alone. Funding towards Opportunity Scholarships at rural non-public schools increased less (95.7%) after the recent expansion compared to suburban and urban non-public schools, which saw an increase of 117.3% and 201.9% respectively between 2023-24 and 2024-25.⁴⁷

Fig. 11: Percentage of Voucher Recipients From Rural Counties (2024-25)



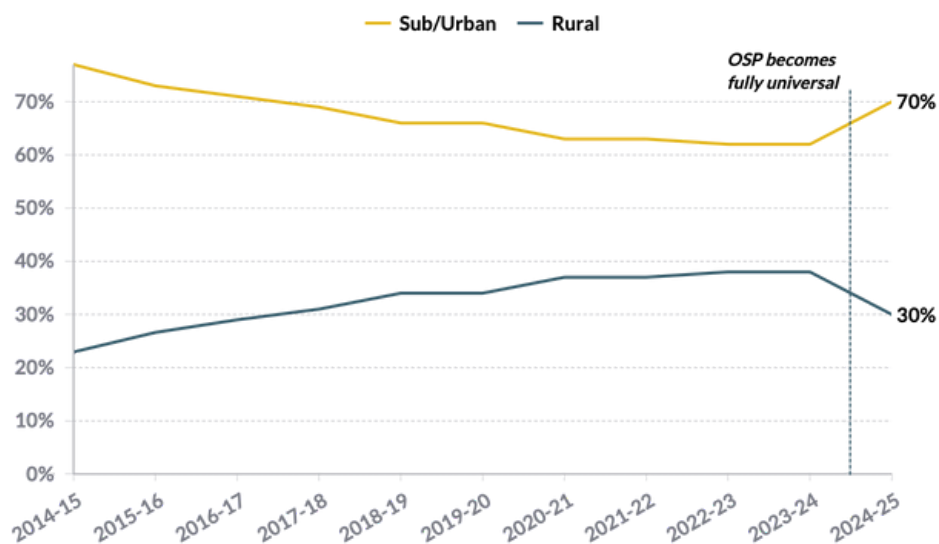
The concentration of voucher recipients in urban areas is due in part to the location of private schools across the state. In the 2024-25 school year, there were 930 operating private schools throughout North Carolina with 21% in Wake and Mecklenburg Counties. Moreover, there were 11 counties with no operating private schools, all of which are designated rural counties. In total, only 35% of operating private schools in North Carolina are in rural counties.⁴⁸

Fig. 12: Share of Opportunity Scholarship Recipients by County 2024-25



Data Source: NCGA Fiscal Research

Fig. 13: Share of Opportunity Scholarship Recipients by Rurality Over Time



Data Source: NCSEAA

VOUCHER-RECEIVING SCHOOLS ARE NOT ACCOUNTABLE TO THE PUBLIC

Throughout the history of the Opportunity Scholarship program, **very few regulations or accountability measures for voucher-receiving private schools have been enacted**, making it very difficult for policymakers, parents, and taxpayers to evaluate their performance.

North Carolina does not require participating non-public schools to be accredited, nor to have state approval of any kind. North Carolina also has no requirements around curriculum, teacher preparation or certification, state testing programs, or instructional hours. Currently, the program has minimal requirements for participating schools, as listed below.⁴⁹ Importantly, while reports on these requirements must be made to the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority (NCSEAA), no public reporting is required for any measure.

- Schools must submit a **tuition and fee schedule annually**.
- Schools must annually **administer nationally standardized tests to all students receiving vouchers in the grades and areas listed below**. However, only schools with at least 25 voucher-receiving students in the 11th grade are required to submit aggregate results to the NCSEAA. This is due to the fact that the 11th grade is the only grade with a required common test (the ACT) allowing for aggregate reporting. In the 2024-25 school year, this requirement applied only to the 11th grade because it was the only grade with a required common test (the ACT) allowing for aggregate reporting. **Only 41 schools, or just 6% of voucher schools, had 25 or more Opportunity Scholarship recipients enrolled in the 11th grade and were therefore required to submit testing data to NCSEAA.**
 - For grades three through eight: English, grammar, reading, spelling, and mathematics. For 3rd and 8th graders, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has been charged with recommending and designating the nationally standardized test to be used, but these have not yet been selected. Therefore, schools may choose a nationally normed test in the meantime.
 - For grades nine, ten and 12: must measure either (i) achievement in the areas of English grammar, reading, spelling, and mathematics or (ii) competencies in the verbal and quantitative areas.
 - Students in grade 11 are required to take the ACT.
- Schools that enroll seventy or more students must contract with a Certified Public Accountant (CPA) to **perform an annual financial review**, consistent with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). In the 2024-25 school year, **only 50% of schools were subjected to this accountability measure**.
- Schools must **submit graduation data** for all high school seniors who received vouchers to the NCSEAA.

North Carolina stands out among other states with school voucher programs due to its lack of accountability and reporting requirements for schools receiving voucher funding. While the specific structure and format of these universal private school voucher programs vary, it is common for them to incorporate meaningful measures to address accountability and reporting. In comparing accountability measures with other states that have universal voucher programs, it is noteworthy that **North Carolina is one of only two states that does not require background checks for all school staff interacting with children**, has among the weakest financial requirements, and is the only state that does not require accreditation or state approval for participating schools. In the 2024-25 school year, **only 56% of the 200 schools that received the most voucher funding were accredited**.

Table 3: Voucher Program Accountability Comparisons by State

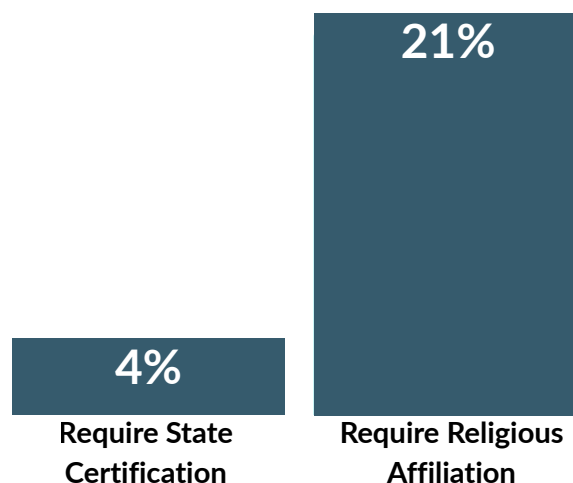
	Testing and Performance		School and Teacher Requirements			
State	Testing Requirement	Public Reporting Requirement	Accreditation or State Approval	Financial Audit	Teacher Certification or Education Requirement	Background Checks Required
Arkansas	Yes	No	Yes	All schools	Yes	All staff
Florida	Yes	Yes	Yes	All schools	Yes	All staff
Indiana	Yes	No	Yes	All schools	No	All staff
Iowa	Yes	Yes	Yes	Some schools	No	All staff
Ohio	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	All staff
Utah	No	No	Yes	All schools	No	Some staff
West Virginia	Yes	No	Yes	All schools	No	All staff
Louisiana	Yes	Yes	Yes	Some schools	No	All staff
Tennessee	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	All staff
Texas	Yes	No	Yes	All schools	No	All staff
North Carolina	Yes	No	No	Some schools	No	Minimal staff

Voucher-Receiving Schools Have Few Teacher Certification Requirements

While North Carolina public schools have strict requirements for teachers, including state teaching certification, background checks, and continuing education requirements, **private schools in the state, including those receiving public taxpayer funding through vouchers, do not have to abide by these conditions of employment.**

Only 4% of the 200 schools receiving the most voucher funding noted on their website that they require teachers to be certified by the state of North Carolina, compared to 21% of schools that have some form of religious requirements for teachers. Religious requirements for employment range from agreeing to statements of faith to speaking in tongues.

Fig. 14: Employment Requirements for Teachers at Opportunity Scholarship Private Schools (2024-25)



Voucher-Receiving Schools Have No Curriculum Requirements

Private schools receiving taxpayer funding have **no curricular requirements**. The most common curriculum companies among the 200 schools receiving the most voucher funding are Aebka and Bob Jones University Press, both of which are affiliated with Christianity and teach core subjects using a Biblical worldview. These curriculum companies also teach the history of the United States through a racially biased lens, including referring to enslaved people as a “better investment” than indentured servants.⁵⁰

In 2006, the Association of Christian Schools International sued the University of California for “viewpoint discrimination” after the university system rejected five courses as college preparatory instruction, including history, government, and sciences courses. These courses were taught using Abeka and Bob Jones University Press curriculum, and the University required students coming from schools utilizing these curricula, which were determined to be inadequate preparation for college, to take additional remedial courses in the relevant subject areas.

In 2008, a U.S. judge ruled in favor of the university system, arguing that the curriculum in question “didn't encourage critical thinking skills and failed to cover 'major topics, themes and components' of U.S. history.”⁵¹ In the decision, the judge cited the Bob Jones University Press Biology for Christian Schools as evidence, including the following quotes from the first page:

1. *"Whatever the Bible says is so; whatever man says may or may not be so,' is the only [position] a Christian can take. . ."*
2. *"If [scientific] conclusions contradict the Word of God, the conclusions are wrong, no matter how many scientific facts may appear to back them."*
3. *"Christians must disregard [scientific hypotheses or theories] that contradict the Bible."*

Unlike private schools, North Carolina's public schools are required to teach the Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS). The NCSCOS, which is reviewed every five to seven years, defines learning standards for all students to help ensure that North Carolina's public school students are prepared for postsecondary opportunities.⁵²

It is Impossible to Make Reliable Comparisons Between Public Schools and Schools Receiving Voucher Funds

All private schools receiving voucher funds must administer a nationally-normed standardized test to students in grades three or higher enrolled in the program. However, private schools are currently permitted to select their own test, making it impossible to compare performance across voucher-receiving private schools. While this is set to change once DPI selects a nationally-normed test for all scholarship recipients to take, comparisons to public schools will remain difficult unless scholarship recipients are required to take the same North Carolina standardized end of grade testing as public school students. Moreover, schools are not required to report data by grade, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or sex, nor do they have to report whether individual students are making progress over time. Consequently, it is impossible to make reliable comparisons of test score outcomes between public and private schools.

Additionally, the NCSEAA is required by law to issue an annual report documenting the learning gains or losses of voucher students, comparisons with public school students, and the impact of the voucher program on public school performance.⁵³ However, this cannot currently be done due to the lack of data reporting by the individual schools. Previously, NCSEAA submitted a report to the NCGA stating that this analysis was “not currently achievable” due to the fact that they do not have comparable data necessary to complete the report.⁵⁴



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The data presented in this report highlight a number of concerns about the Opportunity Scholarship Program in North Carolina, particularly in light of the recent universal expansion. In the 2024-25 school year alone, North Carolina sent nearly half a billion dollars in taxpayer funding directly to private schools that are not accessible to all and operate with very little oversight, all while our local public schools that serve the vast majority of children in the state are some of the least well-funded in the country.

Public dollars are meant to fund programs and services that are open to and benefit all North Carolinians. And, institutions that are funded by public dollars should operate with transparency and accountability to the taxpayers who fund them.

The Public School Forum recommends the following policy actions:

Fully Fund Public Schools Before Allocating Taxpayer Dollars to Private Schools

Public taxpayer dollars should first and foremost support the public schools that are open to all. North Carolina currently ranks 48th in the nation for per-pupil spending on K-12, falling nearly \$5000 below the national average⁵⁵ and 43rd in the nation for teacher pay, falling nearly \$14,000 below the national average.⁵⁶

The North Carolina Supreme Court has affirmed (1997, 2004, 2022) that North Carolina has a **constitutional obligation** to ensure all children have access to a sound basic education – including competent and well-trained teachers and principals and equitable access to sufficient resources. Yet, the state continues to fall short of its obligation and instead has redirected public dollars to private schools that are inaccessible to many students.

Recommended Action: Fully fund public schools to ensure that all children have access to a sound basic education. Until this constitutional obligation is met, no new scholarships should be awarded, and no new funds should be allocated toward private schools through the Opportunity Scholarship program. Planned appropriations should be reduced and reallocated to public schools.

End Private School Discrimination

Private schools accepting Opportunity Scholarships exercise control over which students and families they choose to admit – and many have admissions policies that deny access based on characteristics such as test scores, religion, disability, lifestyle, sexuality, and family values. North Carolina’s public schools, on the other hand, serve all students, regardless of disability, religion, sexuality, or academic performance.

Recommended Action: Require all schools receiving taxpayer funds to practice non-discriminatory admissions policies.

Increase Accountability and Reporting Requirements for Participating Private Schools

Public schools must adhere to many requirements to ensure they are held responsible for meeting students' academic needs. The same should be true of private schools that receive public dollars. Additionally, if the stated goal of voucher programs is to provide more “choice” to families, prospective parents must have easy access to accurate and reliable information about student outcomes, curriculum, teacher qualifications, and other school characteristics that they can use to make decisions.

Recommended Action: Participating schools that receive Opportunity Scholarship funding should be required to adhere to transparency and accountability requirements established by the State Board of Education, including for example:

- Reporting aggregate test scores to NCSEAA, which should be accessible to the public
- Having accreditation from an approved list of accrediting agencies
- Aligning curriculum with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study
- Requiring employees to meet baseline requirements (e.g. background checks, certifications for teachers and other personnel, etc.)

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The information on private schools receiving voucher funds presented in this report was gathered from publicly available data found on websites. In our research, we aimed to replicate the process a typical family might take when looking for information to consider school options for their child. For each school that received Opportunity Scholarship funding in both the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years, we conducted an internet search for publicly available information provided by the school, including on school websites, social media, or student and family handbooks. We collected data on the following indicators:

- **Tuition and Fees:** Tuition costs included the average cost of tuition across grade levels, excluding any Pre-K tuition costs, as Pre-K students are not eligible for Opportunity Scholarships. Fees included the maximum amount a family would be expected to pay in addition to tuition, including for curriculum or text books, technology, and continuing or first time enrollment.
- **Religious Affiliation:** Schools that are religiously affiliated were categorized using the most common self-professed name of their religion, including Christianity, Catholicism, Islam, and Judaism. Denominations within these religions were often not explicitly stated, and we therefore did not categorize by denominations. Schools that did not have a religious affiliation were categorized as secular.
- **Number of Students:** Total number of K-12 students enrolled in a school.
- **Student Characteristics:** Any demographic information provided on enrolled students, including racial demographics, economic status, or immigration status.
- **Accreditation:** Schools that explicitly mentioned having accreditation or were found as having accreditation on an accreditation website were included. Schools that were members of an organization but not fully accredited were not counted as having accreditation.
- **Application and Testing Fees:** Any additional costs outside of standard tuition and fees that were due to the school as part of the application process. In rare circumstances, schools noted that fees incurred as part of the application process were fully refundable if a child was not accepted for enrollment; these fees were not included in our analysis.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

- **Required Student Interview:** As part of the application process, students must undergo an interview with a member of the current school community, including a teacher, principal, or other staff.
- **Required Family Interview:** As part of the application process, a member of the student's family must undergo an interview with a member of the current school community, including a teacher, principal, or other staff.
- **Required Campus Visit:** As part of the application process, a student must visit the campus, including for a campus tour, a school interview, or a classroom observation.
- **Academic Exclusion:** As part of the application process, a student must take or submit results on standardized tests, meet a minimum GPA requirement, or undergo other academic screenings. Schools may also require certain academic standards for students to remain enrolled.
- **Religious Exclusions:** In schools with explicit religious exclusions, students and/or families must sign Statements of Faith, attend church, live by certain religious standards, or otherwise prove religious affiliation in order to be considered for admission. Schools offering priority admission to students associated with a specific religion, church, or denomination were also categorized as practicing religious exclusion. Implicit religious exclusions include using policies or curriculum focused on instilling religious beliefs and values within students or requiring behaviors aligned with particular religious values.
- **Disability Exclusions:** Schools with explicit admissions exclusions for students with disabilities fail to provide accommodations or explicitly state that the school does not accept or accommodate Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Those categorized as having implicit exclusions charge higher tuition for students with disabilities that may price a student out from attending.
- **Sexuality and Gender Exclusions:** Schools categorized as having explicit exclusions around sexuality and gender identity prohibit enrollment of students or families based on sexuality, gender identity, or support for those who identify as LGBTQ+ and/or have explicit policies that exclude LGBTQ+ students or families from use of facilities or activities or may revoke enrollment from students or families who engage in or condone behavior outside of a school's stated morality or sexuality/marriage beliefs. Those categorized as practicing implicit exclusion include the presence of language in a school's statement of faith that is exclusionary to those who identify as LGBTQ+, although signing the statement of faith is not part of the enrollment process.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

- Other Form of Exclusion: Other forms of exclusions include admissions statements indicating that students and families may be denied entry based on more intangible characteristics, often described as a determination of whether the student or family is the “right fit” for the school. Examples include balancing the male/female ratio of the student body, student pregnancy, required family donations on top of tuition and fees, and lifestyle choices.
- Teacher Qualifications: Requirements for educator employment at the school, including whether they were required to hold a North Carolina teaching license or if they were required to meet religious standards (i.e. signing a statement of faith or attending church on a regular basis).
- Curriculum: Any information provided on the standards taught within the school at various grade levels, including course descriptions, requirements for advancement, or requirements for continued enrollment.
- Curriculum Company: The curriculum company associated with the school's curriculum. Common companies include Bob Jones University Press, Abeka, and Accelerated Christian Education (ACE).
- Student Outcomes: Any information provided on school-wide student performance for standardized testing, including End-of-Grade (EOG) testing or the ACT/SAT. Graduation rates were not included in our analysis due to the fact that private schools in North Carolina have the ability to remove students who are underperforming or would otherwise not graduate.

It is important to note that data availability varies across schools; thus the percentages we present under each category are conservative estimates – it is quite possible that these numbers are higher in reality. For example, a particular school's website may not publicly include all admissions requirements or the accreditation status. **For each indicator, schools were only counted if they explicitly stated the information on a publicly available website.** In many cases, there was little or no information available online about the school, the admissions process, or any policies. In some cases, phone numbers or emails were provided for current or prospective families to learn more information.

END NOTES

1. Suitts, S. (2024). Separate and Unequal Schools: The Past Is Future. Southern Spaces.
2. Hawes, J. & Simone, M. (2024). Segregation Academies Across the South Are Getting Millions in Taxpayer Dollars. Pro Publica.
3. Virginia Museum of History and Culture. Civil Rights Movement in Virginia: The Closing of Prince Edward County Schools.
4. United States General Accounting Office. (2001). School Vouchers: Publicly Funded Programs in Cleveland and Milwaukee.
5. Institute for Injustice. Cleveland, Ohio, School Choice (Federal Case).
6. Lieberman, M., Stanford, L., & Ifatusin, V. A. (2024). Which states have private school choice? Education Week.
7. Lieberman, M., Stanford, L., & Ifatusin, V. A. (2024). Which states have private school choice? Education Week.
8. Reilly, K. (2020). Public Schools Will Struggle Even More as Parents Move Kids to Private Ones During the Pandemic. Time.
9. Mahnken, K. (2025). Five Years Later: How COVID Triggered a School Choice Renaissance. The 74.
10. Shah, N. (2022). School choice had a big moment in the pandemic. But is it what parents want for the long run?. The Hechinger Report.
11. Young, E. (2025). What The Federal Voucher Program Means for Students in Your State. EdTrust.
12. Blagg, K. & Macklin, M. (2025). Analyzing the Distribution of Benefits under the Educational Choice for Children Act. Urban Institute.
13. Davis, C. (2025). Megabill Takes Cap Off Unprecedented Private School Voucher Tax Credit, Potentially Raising Cost by Tens of Billions Relative to Earlier Version. ITEP.
14. Cowen, J. (2023). Research on school vouchers suggests concerns ahead for education savings accounts. Brookings.
15. Carlson, D., Cowen, J. M., & Fleming, D. J. (2013). Life after vouchers: What happens to students who leave private schools for the traditional public sector? Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 35(2), 179–199.

END NOTES

16. Ladd, H. (2002). School Vouchers: A Critical View. Journal of Economic Perspective.
17. Cowen, J. (2023). Research on school vouchers suggests concerns ahead for education savings accounts. Brookings.
18. Wething, H. (2024). How vouchers harm public schools: Calculating the cost of voucher programs to public school districts. Economic Policy Institute.
19. Thomas, P. (2024). N.C. Senate approves more school voucher funding, House to vote Wednesday. Spectrum News 1.
20. Liberman, M. (2023). Most Students Getting New School Choice Funds Aren't Ditching Public Schools. Education Week.
21. North Carolina General Assembly. (2013). An act to make base budget appropriations for current operations of state departments, institutions, and agencies, and for other purposes, S. 402, Sess. Law 2013-360.
22. Burnes, M. & Leslie, L. (2014). Judge rules NC school voucher program unconstitutional. WRAL News.
23. Burnes, M. & Leslie, L. (2014). Judge rules NC school voucher program unconstitutional. WRAL News.
24. Prothero, A. (2015). North Carolina Supreme Court Upholds State's School Voucher Program. Education Week
25. North Carolina General Assembly. (2023). An act to require compliance with immigration detainers and administrative warrants; to require certain reports from local law enforcement; and to make various changes in the budget operations of the state, H. 10, Sess. Law 2024-55.
26. Office of State Budget and Management. (2024). Opportunity Scholarship Impact Analysis.
27. Calculated based on data provided by NCSEAA.
28. North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. Opportunity Scholarship Household Income Guidelines 2024-2025.
29. Calculated based on NCSEAA Data. Source: North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. (2025). Summary Data.

END NOTES

30. Calculated based on NCSEAA Data. Source: North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. (2025). Summary Data.
31. Data Source: North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. (2025). Summary Data.
32. For detailed information on admissions discrimination by school, see Public Schools First NC's July 2025 report, NC School Vouchers: Using Tax Dollars to Discriminate Against Students & Families.
33. Other exclusions include, but are not limited to, "right fit" qualifications based on family or student interviews, required financial donations to the school outside of tuition and fee payments, and lifestyle requirements for students outside of the school building. For more information on our methodology, please see Appendix A.
34. Schrad, E. (2024). Princeton Study: Private school tuitions rise after state voucher rollout. KCRG.
35. Morton, N. (2023). Arizona gave families public money for private schools; then private schools raised tuition. The Hechinger Report.
36. Weber, C. (2025). Vouchers fuel private school tuition hikes. Carolina Forward.
37. Rash, M. (2024). Applications for Opportunity Scholarships are in. What are the numbers? EdNC. Income limits are based on a family of four.
38. This number was calculated by finding 133% of the maximum income to be eligible for Free or Reduced Price Lunch based on the 2023 income eligibility guidelines. Source: National Archives. (2023). Child Nutrition Programs: Income Eligibility Guidelines. Federal Register.
39. North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. (2025). 2024-25 School Year Opportunity Scholarship Award Recipients (New and Returning).
40. North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. (2025). 2024-25 School Year Opportunity Scholarship Award Recipients (New and Returning).
41. North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. (2025). 2024-25 School Year Opportunity Scholarship Award Recipients (New and Returning).
42. Hawes, J. & Simone, M. (2024). Segregation Academies Across the South Are Getting Millions in Taxpayer Dollars. Pro Publica.

END NOTES

43. North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. (2025). Summary Data.
44. North Carolina State Board of Education. (2025). Report to the North Carolina General Assembly: Opportunity Scholarships.
45. 6,710 voucher recipients attended a public school in the prior year and did not have a voucher in the previous school year. There were 47,921 more scholarships in the 2024-25 school year than in the 2023-24 school year, suggesting that around 14% (6,710/47,921) of new scholarship recipients were enrolled in public school in the previous year. The Public School Forum calculated this number based on the information made available by NCSEAA and DPI, which did not include the accurate number of new scholarship recipients, or how many of those students were previously enrolled in private school.
46. North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. (2025). 2024-25 School Year Opportunity Scholarship Award Recipients (New and Returning).
47. Calculated based on NCSEAA Opportunity Scholarship Summary Data. Source: North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. (2025). Summary Data.
48. NC Department of Administration Non-Public Education. North Carolina Statistical Summary for Private Schools 2024-2025.
49. North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. (2024). Rules Governing the Opportunity Scholarship Program.
50. Klein, R. (2021). The rightwing US textbooks that teach slavery as 'black immigration'. The Guardian.
51. National Center for Science Education. (2009). ACSI et al. v. Stearns et al.
52. North Carolina Department of Instruction. Standard Course of Study.
53. North Carolina General Assembly. (2023). North Carolina General Statutes § 115C-562.7 (Reporting requirements).
54. State Education Assistance Authority. (2020). Opportunity Scholarship Program Learning Gains or Losses Report.
55. Education Law Center. (2024). Making the Grade.
56. National Education Association. (2025). Rankings and Estimates Report.