

Your Question:

A governor's policy staff member asked for information on state private school choice policies.

Our Response:

State policymakers take three primary approaches to private school choice — vouchers, tax credit scholarships and education savings accounts (ESAs). While these programs utilize different funding mechanisms, each provides state funding for eligible students to attend private schools. Typically, these programs target specific student groups, such as students from low-income households or students with disabilities. The following response includes an overview of each program type and state examples highlighting recent trends in private school choice legislation.

Private School Choice Programs

Below we provide a brief overview of how each program operates.

Vouchers

[School vouchers](#) are state-funded programs — often called scholarship programs — that allow students to use public monies to attend a private school. The state provides a set amount of money, typically based on the state's per-pupil amount, for private school tuition.

Education Savings Accounts (ESAs)

[ESAs](#) are private savings accounts funded by a deposit from the state government and managed by a parent. The deposit amount varies from state-to-state and is typically based on the state's per-pupil amount. To use an ESA, parents withdraw their child from the public school system and use their ESA funds to purchase specified educational services, like tutoring, online courses or private school tuition.

Scholarship Tax Credits

[Scholarship tax credit](#) programs provide a tax credit to businesses and individual taxpayers for donating funds to scholarship granting organizations. Nonprofit organizations manage and distribute donated funds in the form of private school tuition scholarships to eligible students.

State Examples

Private school choice programs have seen a significant expansion over the last two legislative sessions. Education Commission of the States' [50-state comparison](#) of private school choice policies provides a comprehensive review of state statute governing these programs. As of writing, the 50-state comparison was last updated in March 2021. EdChoice, an organization that advocates for the expansion of private school choice programs, does have an up-to-date [policy map](#) including all types of private school choice programs. They also have information on participation rates. Finally, our legislative tracking [database](#) includes all enacted legislation on the topic.

Some of the trends in private school choice legislation that we identified in a [2021 blog](#) have persisted, namely the expansion of existing programs or the establishment of new [education savings account programs](#). It is also important to note that some state programs — [Kentucky](#) and [Tennessee](#) — faced significant legal [challenges](#) that [delayed](#) program implementation. Other states have considered programs that would provide education savings accounts to

parents for purposes other than private school tuition. This allows parents to keep their student enrolled in public schools, while receiving additional funding for educational purposes. The **Idaho** Legislature enacted [S.B. 1255](#) (2022), establishing the [Empowering Parents Program](#), which awards families \$1,000 per child to purchase computers, tutoring or other educational materials.

The following state examples highlight recent trends in private school choice legislation.

Arizona

The [Empowerment Scholarship Account](#) program (an ESA program) awards eligible students 90% of the state's per pupil funding amount, which will amount to [roughly \\$7,000](#) in the 2022-23 school year. Following the passage of [H.B. 2853](#), all K-12 students in the state are eligible for an ESA. Previously, program participation was limited to students with disabilities, students enrolled in schools receiving a D or F assessment grade, and students living within an American Indian reservation, among others. These ESA funds may be used for a variety of purposes, including private school tuition, textbooks, educational therapies, tutoring services, curriculum materials, online learning programs and other services. This program is considered the most expansive in the country.

Florida

In 2021, the state legislature [consolidated](#) multiple private school choice programs into one — the [Family Empowerment Scholarship](#) program. Under the consolidated program, students with disabilities are eligible for an ESA and students living in a household with income below 375% of the federal poverty level are eligible for a scholarship worth 95% of the per pupil amount. The voucher amounted to [\\$7,300](#) in 2021. The state also offers a [scholarship tax credit program](#) for income-qualified students and students in foster care, and a separate scholarship tax credit program for students who have been [bullied](#) in a public school setting.

Indiana

The [Choice Scholarship](#) program awards scholarships to students living in a household with income below 300% of the federal poverty level. Vouchers may be up to 90% of state tuition support, which amounted to an average of [\\$4,781](#) in 2020-21. Previously, vouchers were awarded to students with a household income up to 200% of the federal poverty level and voucher amounts were determined by specific student characteristics. The [legislation](#) that updated the program (H.B. 1001) also established the [Education Scholarship Account](#) program, which is an ESA program designed for students with disabilities. Finally, the state operates a [scholarship tax credit](#) program for income-qualified individuals.

West Virginia

In 2021, the state legislature enacted [S.B. 2013](#), establishing what was previously considered the most expansive private school choice program in the country. Under the [Hope Scholarship](#) program, all public school students in the state are eligible for an account worth the previous year's state aid per pupil — \$4,600 in 2020-21. The account may be used on a variety of education-related expenses, including tutoring and nonpublic school tuition. A recent injunction has paused implementation of this program.