

6 QUESTIONS PARENTS SHOULD ASK

Voucher, education savings account (ESA), and tax incentive programs allow some students to use public money to pay for private school tuition. Every program is different and where you live will determine how the program works for you and your child. When children with disabilities accept money through these programs and enroll in a private school, it can lead to important changes in their education. Here are questions you can ask about how your state's programs might impact your child's education and civil rights.

1. WHAT TYPE OF PROGRAM IS AVAILABLE IN MY STATE?

Some states offer multiple types of programs—standard vouchers, education savings accounts, and tax incentives. Others offer none. It's important to know the programs available and how they operate before making any decisions.

2. WILL THE PROGRAM COVER THE FULL COST OF THE SCHOOL I AM CONSIDERING?

In most states, the amount provided through the voucher, ESA, or tax incentive program is *not* enough to cover the average cost of private school tuition, especially if you are considering a specialized private school, like those serving students with learning disabilities (LD). There also may be additional costs for transportation or related services your child needs. Any costs not covered by the program will be your responsibility. It is important to know how much of the cost will be paid for by the program and how much you will be expected to pay. In addition, if you choose to use a tax incentive program, you will need to pay the education costs up-front and receive a tax credit or tax deduction later.

3. IS MY CHILD ELIGIBLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROGRAM?

Some programs are only available to families who earn less than a certain amount of money each year. Others are available only to students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) from a public school. Knowing the eligibility requirements for each type of program in your state will help you determine which options are available to your child.



4. WILL MY STUDENT'S RIGHTS UNDER IDEA APPLY IN THE PRIVATE SCHOOL I CHOOSE? WHAT KIND OF SPECIAL EDUCATION OR RELATED SERVICES WILL MY CHILD RECEIVE?

Private schools do not follow the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and you may even be required to sign away your IDEA rights when you enroll. Before enrolling in a private school or deciding to use a voucher or ESA program, you should ask what your state's procedures are and whether your child will stop receiving any special education services upon entering the private school.

5. CAN I ENROLL MY CHILD IN ANY PRIVATE SCHOOL IN MY STATE?

Some states have a list of private schools that have been pre-approved or that elect to participate in the voucher, ESA, or tax incentive program. Be sure to know your private school options before enrolling in the program. In addition, private schools are not required to enroll your child, even if you are using a voucher, ESA, or tax incentive program. In fact, private schools can reject any student they choose and can expel a student for disciplinary reasons at any time.

6. WILL THE PRIVATE SCHOOL I AM CONSIDERING BE ABLE TO MEET MY CHILD'S NEEDS WITHOUT ANY SUPPORT FROM THE DISTRICT?

Private schools are not held to the same standards as public schools and there is generally no public reporting of how students are performing in private schools. It's important that parents ask the school how it can show that its students are successful. Private schools often lack the resources that public school districts have to provide a wide range of academic and behavioral supports for students with disabilities. Further, educators at private schools may not have the same credentials or training as those in public schools. Therefore, it's important to know how the private school you are considering will be able to address your child's academic, behavioral, or social/emotional needs, especially if the tuition program you've chosen will not provide enough money to cover the cost of additional services.

These questions can help parents gain more insight when determining whether a voucher, ESA, or tax incentive program is right for their child. No matter where you live or what type of program you are considering, it is important to ask questions and seek information about the rights your child will lose and the cost you may incur upon enrolling in private school.

For more information on these issues, visit nclld.org/vouchers.