

SCHOOL VOUCHERS

POSITION: The League of Women Voters of Nashville believes that a quality public education system is an essential element for maintaining a strong and viable democracy. We support state educational policies that raise levels of student achievement, address the needs of a diverse student population, and preserve students' health and safety.

In a democracy, public education serves many purposes. Regardless of the school setting, a quality education that supports high levels of academic achievement should be the primary objective for public investment of educational dollars. In addition, in our increasingly diverse society, public schools provide an important locus for building community across differences. While parental selection of educational options for their children has value, the League's position is that choice by itself should not be the primary goal for selecting the best ways to invest public dollars in education.

The League opposes the use of public funds for private school vouchers. Should the use of public funds for private school vouchers be considered at some point, the League believes the following criteria should apply:

- Eligibility criteria for students should be limited to those whose need is greatest (e.g., students who are eligible for free and reduced price lunch, students currently enrolled in low-performing schools, students with special needs, or students who are performing poorly)
- The private school must accept the voucher as full payment
- Participation criteria for private schools should include approval by either the state or state-approved accrediting agencies
- Private schools participating in a voucher program should be required to administer the same standardized assessments as those required in public schools; these assessments should be capable of providing data of students' academic growth (value added) from one year to the next
- Private schools participating in a voucher program should comply with non-discrimination policies as provided by law
- In determining whether to expand the voucher program, the program should be evaluated using objective, measurable criteria, such as student achievement gains as measured by a value-added analysis, graduation rates and retention rates.

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