

Legislative Push for Georgia's Third Private School Voucher Program

Lawmakers propose to create Georgia's third private school voucher program with [SB 233](#), the Georgia Promise Scholarship Act. If approved, the program would pull public funds out of public schools and send them to private schools that can choose which students to serve and which to reject. Under SB 233, the state would be responsible for covering the cost of private school tuition or other education expenses for students who never attend a public school. Most critically, [high-quality evaluations](#) of voucher programs found voucher students did worse academically than students in public schools.¹ Georgia's two existing voucher programs carry an annual price tag of about \$150 million. Instead of adding to this amount with a new voucher program, lawmakers can use state funds more effectively by investing in:

- Annual funding for school safety
- Increasing the number of school counselors, school psychologists, and school social workers to meet recommended best practices for the number of students each position should serve
- Pupil transportation, where a decades-long shortfall in state funding has contributed to bus driver shortages, learning disruptions, and increased student behavioral problems
- Supplemental funding for low-income students who often require additional support
- Literacy enhancements, including increasing literacy specialists, professional learning for educators, and high-quality curriculum materials

Directing state dollars to these areas would boost educational opportunities for Georgia's 1.7 million public school students and advance the development of a skilled workforce that can attract high-demand, high-paying industries.

SB 233: How It Works

The Georgia Promise Scholarship Act would create [a type of voucher called an education savings account](#), or ESA. ESA voucher funds can be used for a variety of education-related expenses including private school tuition.

Voucher Amount: \$6,000 per student per year.

Student Eligibility: Students who are Georgia residents and U.S. citizens or in the country lawfully and meet either of the following criteria:

- Are in pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade
- Are in grades two thru 12 and attend a public school in Georgia for six weeks immediately prior to receiving a voucher

The six-week enrollment requirement would be waived for students who

- Are assigned to a public school identified as low performing
- Have a documented case of school-based physical violence or student-related verbal abuse

- Were enrolled in a home-school program in the year immediately before receiving a voucher

These criteria are the same eligibility criteria for Georgia’s tax credit voucher program, a program in operation for over a decade that has never been evaluated.

Voucher Use: Voucher funds could be used for an array of items, including:

- Tuition, fees, and textbooks at private schools and online learning programs
- Tutoring services
- Purchase of curriculum including supplemental materials
- Services from a physician or therapist

Voucher funds can also be used for items approved by the Georgia Student Finance Commission, the State Board of Education, or the Parent Review Committee. The commission is tasked with implementing the program.

Parent Review Committee: A committee consisting of eight parents of eligible students would be formed to determine allowable expenditures as well as review appeals from private schools that the commission has denied participation in the program. Educators would have no input into the committee’s decisions.

Program Cost: An official cost estimate—called a fiscal note—has not been prepared for SB 233, so the program’s price tag is unknown. Voucher proponents assert the state’s cost will be minimal as participating students would switch from public to private schools. However, pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first grade students already attending private schools are eligible, and their families could continue to use voucher funds to subsidize this expense until they graduate from high school. Their participation would be a new cost to the state. This has occurred in other states where the majority of voucher students never attended a public school.²

Percent of Voucher Students Already in Private Schools

- Arizona: 80%
- Indiana: 70%
- New Hampshire: 89%
- Wisconsin: 75%

Program Quality: The program does not have a consistent measure of student achievement, making it difficult for state leaders to understand its impact on student learning. Participating students would take one of at least three nationally norm-referenced tests in math and language arts identified by the commission or a state assessment. The lack of a common assessment makes it harder for parents to determine which schools effectively serve students.

¹ Lubienski, C. & Canbolat, Y. (2022). *Evolving Evidence on School Voucher Effects: Policy Brief #22-4*. Center for Evaluation & Education Policy, Indiana University. Retrieved from <https://ceep.indiana.edu/education-policy/policy-briefs/2022/evolving-evidence-on-school-voucher-effects.pdf>

² Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Indiana University. (2023). *Summary of Research on School Vouchers: Policy Brief #23-2*. Retrieved from <https://ceep.indiana.edu/education-policy/policy-briefs/2023/research-on-school-vouchers.pdf>