



A DCI Deliberation Guide

Public Education & Vouchers:

When should parents be granted vouchers to pay for private schools, if ever?

Format for Deliberation

Before the Deliberation

- I. Read this Deliberation Guide (required)
- II. [School Vouchers—Britannica’s Top 4 Pros and Cons](#) (optional but highly recommended)

During the Deliberation

- I. Setting Expectations (10 min.)
- II. Getting to Know Each Other (10 min.)
- III. The Purpose of Public Education (15 min.)
- IV. Arguments for School Vouchers(25 min.)
- V. *Break (5 mins)*
- VI. Arguments Against School Vouchers (25 min.)
- VII. Solving Problems Together (20 min.)
- VIII. Reflections (10 min.)

Background

Introduction

The debate over school vouchers has heated up as more states have introduced or expanded these programs that provide funds for students to attend private schools. For example, in September 2023, North Carolina became the 10th state in the U.S. to enable not only students from lower-resourced families to make use of its voucher programs but all students, from the very poorest to the very wealthiest, to do so.¹

On one side, proponents of school vouchers argue for the increased choice and personalization in education than public education alone can provide. School vouchers are part of the broader school choice movement and are designed to provide families with more flexibility in choosing

¹ Hui, T. Keung. [“Every North Carolina Family Can Soon Get Vouchers. How Will That Work?”](#) The News & Observer. 2023.

educational institutions. Through this process they can also expand access to private education for students from diverse backgrounds.²

On the other side, public education proponents emphasize the role of public schools as foundational pillars in promoting democracy, equality, and a shared sense of citizenship. They criticize programs that provide school vouchers to all on the grounds that these vouchers help students from the most economically advantaged families and threaten the quality of the public school system.³ This debate encompasses broader themes of equity, access, and the role of government in education.

This Deliberation Guide is intended to provide an overview of the recent debates over the ethical, political, and empirical arguments about public schools and voucher programs for private schools. While space limitations preclude a comprehensive history of public and private education in the United States, the section below provides a brief summary of some of the most relevant developments in this history. The following sections outline some of the key arguments for and against school voucher programs. This information is designed to inform your upcoming deliberations on the topic.

Please Note: *In the context of politicized and potentially polarizing topics like this one, participants in the deliberation may use different language to describe their concerns. For example, some people may use the term ‘racial minority’ while others may prefer the terms ‘racialized’ or ‘minoritized populations.’ There may also be disagreements about whether objective differences between children’s abilities can be measured, or whether our measuring systems are somehow biased. We ask that all participants in this deliberation accept some degree of pluralism about the language and narratives endorsed by different participants. The goal is to better understand one another and learn how to talk to each other across lines of political and social difference. To that end we recommend adopting a pluralistic mindset in these conversations that recognizes well-meaning and reasonable people can disagree about these questions (and even how to talk about them).*

The History of Public Education in the United States

The birth of public education in the United States is usually traced back to the work of the Common Schools Movement, led by Horace Mann in the 1800s. Mann argued that schools were crucial to educating citizens to be active participants in American democracy. The movement sought to universalize values and belief systems to promote a strong republic. These schools were publicly funded and established a common curriculum.⁴

² [“Who Gets a School Choice? Reporting Tips to Unlock the Complexities.”](#) Education Writers Association. 2024.

³ Barnum, Matt and Alicia A. Caldwell. [“Vouchers Helping Families Already in Private School, Early Data Show.”](#) Wall Street Journal. 2023.

Russakoff, Dale. [“Is School Choice Destroying Public Education?”](#) New York Times. 2023.

⁴ Marshall, Joanne. [“Common Schools Movement.”](#) Encyclopedia of Diversity in Education. 2012.

These schools, however, were not all equally funded or accessible. Following the separate but equal doctrine established by *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, students of color in many states, particularly in the South, were segregated into inadequately funded schools that were often inaccessible via public transportation. Resources were handed down from white schools, and Black teachers were paid significantly less than their white counterparts.⁵

The late 19th century also saw the introduction of the Industrial Education Movement, which aligned education systems with the efficient, utility-maximizing models of the Industrial Revolution.⁶ In response, the Progressive Education Movement gained ground in the early 20th century. Leaders like John Dewey sought to reform society by establishing an education system emphasizing critical examination and experiential learning. This student-centered objective encouraged individuals to contribute to their community and the common good.⁷

At the beginning of the Cold War, the American education system saw a shift in narrative towards a rhetoric of equality and educational opportunity, leading to improved achievement and access. Between 1950 and 1979, illiteracy rates declined from 3.2% to 0.6%, while school enrollment rates increased from 75% in 1940 to 93% in 1991.⁸ During this period, the Supreme Court struck down *Plessy v. Ferguson* with its 1954 landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that ruled school segregation to be unconstitutional. Building on the *Brown* ruling, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 sought to provide full education opportunity for all through increased funding and grants.⁹

Despite these efforts, concerns about the quality of education in the US increased in the coming years. In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released its report, *A Nation at Risk*, that argued American education systems were failing.¹⁰ The report stimulated support for the Standards Movement, which sought to raise the bar for what American students should learn. Initially, national standards were developed, but backlash against this top-down approach led to each state setting its own standards. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 introduced more testing in an attempt to increase accountability practices. It focused on student achievement through standardized tests that were linked to incentives and penalties imposed upon teachers based on student performance.¹¹

Several themes are apparent in this brief history of public education that are relevant to the contemporary debate about school vouchers. These themes relate to the purpose of education and can be divided into three central narratives:

⁵ [“The Struggle Against Segregated Education.”](#) National Museum of African American History and Culture. Accessed 2024.

⁶ Cohen, Sol. [“The Industrial Education Movement, 1906-17.”](#) American Quarterly. 1968.

⁷ Ballotpedia. [Progressive Education.](#)

⁸ Snyder, Tom, ed. [“120 Years of American Education,” excerpts.](#) National Assessment of Adult Literacy. 1993.

⁹ [“Every Student Success Act.”](#) U.S. Department of Education. Accessed 2024.

¹⁰ [“A Nation at Risk: the Imperative for Educational Reform.”](#) National Commission on Excellence in Education. 1983.

¹¹ LeFloch, Kerstin Carlson et. al. [“Accountability Under No Child Left Behind: Progress Toward Implementation.”](#) Rand Corporation. 2007.

1. Schools provide a practical role in helping societies fill critical roles and adapt to changing needs (e.g., the greater emphasis on science and math during the space race).
2. Schools reinforce shared beliefs to promote political legitimacy (e.g., democratic governments promoting democratic values among their school children from a young age).
3. Schools intentionally reinforce existing power dynamics in society (e.g., white students attending better-resourced schools than black students under the separate but equal doctrine).¹²

These dynamics are not mutually exclusive; they may coexist. For example, a country that follows a monarchical government structure may use education to both control power and establish its legitimacy.

In recent years, America has seen an increase in school voucher programs, which utilize public money to help students pay for private schools. While some argue vouchers help disadvantaged students access better-performing schools and thus improve their education trajectory, others argue that vouchers take away from the public education system and do not offer meaningful opportunities for disadvantaged students. Indeed, the use of such vouchers is a practice that is widely debated and disputed. The sections below outline some of the arguments for and against the establishment and expansion of school voucher programs.

Arguments for School Vouchers

Arguments for the implementation of school vouchers are rooted in the idea—put forth by Milton Friedman—that an agreement to publicly finance education does not necessitate giving the government authority to decide where each child attends school.¹³ Because parents and guardians contribute their own earnings to promote education in the United States, they should have the ability to choose, by way of vouchers and other mechanisms, where their child attends schools. Vouchers also allow parents to tailor their child’s education to their values and what they take to be in the interest of the educational development of their child. Below are some of the arguments put forth in support of this position.

¹² These narratives relate to some important theories in the education literature, such as functionalist theory and conflict theory. Read more here: Conerly, Tonja R. Kathleen Holmes, and Asha Lal Tamang. [“Introduction to Sociology 3e: Theoretical Perspectives on Education.”](#) OpenStax. 2021.

¹³ [“Milton Friedman on Vouchers.”](#) EdChoice. MSNBC. 2023.

Burke, Lindsay. [“Why Market Forces are Good for Education.”](#) The Atlantic. 2012.

Vouchers Promote Equality and Improve Access to Opportunities

Arbitrary factors can have a significant impact on the life of a child. Specifically, the likelihood of a child having access to a high-quality education is often dependent on their family's ability to purchase a home in a wealthy neighborhood, given tax structures that fund public schools.¹⁴ Providing vouchers to low-income students and those who cannot afford a relatively expensive home can help break the arbitrary link and increase their access to high-quality education.¹⁵ Furthermore, an expansive voucher program helps families part ways with failing public schools.¹⁶ Given that educational conditions and quality vary significantly across the nation, providing choice through vouchers helps root out ineffective school systems.

Vouchers Provide an Opportunity for Personalized Schooling

Vouchers also provide students with the ability to personalize their education experience. Students with specific needs can seek out schools that can meet their needs, increasing their capacity to grow under the education system.¹⁷ Further, school choice provides accountability for parents, as schools that do not meet their expectations must either work towards innovating ways to improve or close due to low demand. Parents who have the power to choose are also incentivized to maximize their money allocated for education, as the voucher is directly allocated for their disposal.¹⁸

Increased Graduation Rates

Advocates for voucher programs argue they help raise graduation rates as well. A study of Milwaukee's voucher program determined that using vouchers increased the chances of a student graduating from high school and attending college.¹⁹ Preliminary data show that the graduation rate for 9th graders attending private schools using vouchers choice schools in Milwaukee was 64%, while it was only 37% for 9th graders attending public schools.²⁰ Washington D.C. presents a similar case study. After the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program that began in 2004 provided vouchers to the public, it was found that students who used vouchers had a 91% graduation rate. By contrast, the overall graduation rate in D.C. public schools was approximately 60%.²¹

¹⁴ Bedrick, Jason and Lindsey M. Burke. "[Breaking the Link Between Home Prices and School Quality.](#)" Politico. 2015.

¹⁵ Schwalbach, Jude and James Selvey. "[Here are 10 Reasons School Choice is Winning.](#)" Heritage Foundation. 2019.

¹⁶ Santos, Fernanda and Motoko Rich. "[With Vouchers, Schools Shift Aid for Schools to Families.](#)" New York Times. 2013.

¹⁷ Burke, Lindsay. "[Why Market Forces are Good for Education.](#)" The Atlantic. 2012.

¹⁸ Schwalbach, Jude and James Selvey. "[Here are 10 Reasons School Choice is Winning.](#)" Heritage Foundation. 2019.

¹⁹ Hendrie, Caroline. "[Vouchers Linked to Graduation in Milwaukee.](#)" EdWeek. 2004.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Burke, Lindsay. "[Why Market Forces are Good for Education.](#)" The Atlantic. 2012.

Graduation rates are considered not just an important measure of school success, but also an important predictor of an individual child's future success. Children who graduate from high school are more likely to have higher earnings, lower incarceration rates, and increased marital stability as compared to their counterparts who do not graduate.²² Voucher proponents cite data that indicates school vouchers improve not only school performance but also individual outcomes. Data also suggests vouchers greatly help African American students from low-income backgrounds. For example, African American students who switched from public to private school through the use of a voucher program were found to score 6.3 percentage points higher on reading and math standardized tests than students with similar backgrounds who remained in public school.²³

Increased Competition has Positive Downstream Effects on All

Some proponents of school vouchers argue that the increased competition they create has significant positive downstream effects. Given the complex bureaucratic systems within the public system, vouchers and private institutions often deliver better education quality with lower overall expenses.²⁴ For example, one study determined that the voucher program in Washington D.C. mentioned above, the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program, generated a \$2.62 return for every dollar spent on the voucher program due to the economic benefits of increased educational attainment of participants receiving vouchers.²⁵

Even for those who remain in the public school system, the influence of competitive forces can mean increased achievement for students. One study found that improvement in public education occurs when a voucher program becomes available but before any students begin using vouchers, suggesting that the mere threat of competition improves educational outcomes and public school performance.²⁶ This effect was found in both Florida public schools and Milwaukee public schools, suggesting that it is not isolated to the particularities of one school system.²⁷ Therefore, supporters of vouchers argue that these programs not only help the students in private schools, but also help all students in the local school system. According to this argument, school vouchers do not support some students to the detriment of others, but support all students by, perhaps paradoxically, increasing the quality of public education by enabling some students to receive a private education.

²² Ibid.

²³ Campbell, E. David, Patrick J. Wolf, Paul E. Peterson, William G. Howell. ["New Study Shows that School Vouchers Boost the Achievement of Low-Income African Americans."](#) Brookings Institution. 2000.

²⁴ Burke, Lindsay. ["Why Market Forces are Good for Education."](#) The Atlantic. 2012.

²⁵ Schwalbach, Jude and James Selvey. ["Here are 10 Reasons School Choice is Winning."](#) Heritage Foundation. 2019.

²⁶ Burkey, Lindsey. ["The Value of Parental Choice: A Look at the Research."](#) Heritage Foundation. 2014.

²⁷ Ibid.

Wolf, Patrick J. ["The Comprehensive Longitudinal Evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program: Summary of Final Reports."](#) SCDP Milwaukee Education. 2012.

Accountability and Transparency

Proponents of school vouchers argue that, although the same state accountability systems that apply to public schools may not always apply to private schools, this does not mean that there are no effective transparency or accountability systems in place. After all, private schools are accountable to the parents who decided to send their child to the school, and are subject to stakeholder scrutiny because parents can choose to remove their child from the school.²⁸ Accountability is thus provided by market pressures, and increased competition will naturally result in quality education at private schools.²⁹ Furthermore, states have the power to impose accountability measures and do use these measures to keep track of how well private schools are doing.

For example, voucher schools in Wisconsin must be accredited and comply with civil rights laws, while schools in Florida that participate in a special education voucher program must hire teachers with particular qualifications, provide education-related documentation, and comply with a range of relevant regulations. While the level of regulation varies by state, this view suggests we should not dismiss voucher programs on the assumption that there are no existing state measures to evaluate school and student performance in private schools.³⁰

Proponents of voucher programs also argue that state accountability measures are not necessarily the only or the right accountability measures, and that we should have a more pluralistic approach to holding schools accountable.³¹ Such an approach would not try to make all schools the same nor destroy what makes each school unique, but allow schools to focus on the goals that its stakeholders identify as important.³² Still other critics of the public school system and state accountability measures argue that these do not work as intended in the first place. They point to statistics indicating that less than half of public school students in grades 3-8 in the state of North Carolina are proficient in math or reading.³³ Having accountability standards in place does not mean those standards will be met. If this is the case, as the lack of proficient math and reading performance of North Carolina public school students suggests, then these critics argue that there is no reason they should be applied to private schools.

Against School Vouchers

School Vouchers Unfairly Support Some Students to the Detriment of Others

Some opponents of school vouchers argue that voucher programs are inherently unfair regarding which students they support. Even if vouchers are available to any student who is

²⁸ [“How Are Private Schools of Choice Held Accountable?”](#) EdChoice. 2024.

²⁹ Walkenhorst, Emily. [“GOP’s School Voucher Plan Stokes Debate Over Private School Accountability.”](#) WRAL News. Accessed 2024.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ [“How Are Private Schools of Choice Held Accountable?”](#) EdChoice. 2024.

³² Ibid.

³³ Luebke, Robert. [“Yes, Governor Cooper, Private Schools are Accountable.”](#) John Locke Foundation. 2023.

accepted into a private institution, private schools have control over which students they admit.³⁴ Students can be accepted based on a variety of factors including their academic achievement and disciplinary record, potentially excluding lower-achieving students and students with a disciplinary record from being admitted into private schools and receiving the benefit of voucher programs.³⁵ Additionally, many private schools do not have the necessary accommodations for special needs students and exclude them from admission.^{36,37}

Relatedly, vouchers may only benefit families who are close to being able to afford the price of admission. The average cost of private education in the United States is around \$12,000 per year, though it varies widely by state from an average cost of \$4,000 in Wisconsin to \$24,000 in Connecticut.³⁸ Most voucher programs do not cover the full cost of private tuition, leaving it up to families to foot the rest of the bill.³⁹ Families that are lower income may not be able to afford the discrepancy between the price of tuition and what the voucher covers, resulting in them not being able to access the benefit of the voucher. On the other hand, voucher programs can be the final push for middle-class families who are able to afford part of tuition but not the full cost to be able to send their children to private school.

Opponents also argue that vouchers have historically most helped students who are already attending private school rather than helping students in public school make the switch.⁴⁰ Students already in private school likely come from families that can afford the price of tuition without the help of a voucher. These students would be in private school regardless of their participation in a voucher program. This supports higher income families for which a voucher is helpful but not a necessity. Therefore, this perspective argues that voucher programs would result in private schools being filled with students from upper- and middle-class families and academically bright students, providing them with the opportunity to have a better education while leaving students from lower income families behind.

³⁴ ["School Vouchers: The Wrong Choice for Public Education."](#) In Social Policy: Essential Primary Sources, edited by K. Lee Lerner, Brenda Wilmoth Lerner, and Adrienne Wilmoth Lerner, 476-480. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2006. Gale In Context: Opposing Viewpoints (accessed January 11, 2024).

³⁵ Cooper, Roy. ["Public Education Crisis."](#) North Carolina Office of the Governor. Raleigh, NC (accessed January 15, 2024).

³⁶ Egan, Marcus. ["Tuition Vouchers Are Not a Good Alternative to Current Public Education."](#) In Keeping Public Education Public: Why Vouchers Are a Bad Idea. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association, 2003. Quoted in Education, edited by David Haugen and Susan Musser. Opposing Viewpoints. Detroit, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2009. Gale In Context: Opposing Viewpoints (accessed January 11, 2024).

³⁷ "School Vouchers—Top 4 Pros and Cons." ProCon.org. 2023 (accessed January 15, 2024).

<https://www.procon.org/headlines/school-vouchers-top-4-pros-and-cons/>

³⁸ Scott, Katherine. "How Much Does Private School Cost?" U.S. News & World Report, 2021 (accessed January 29, 2024). <https://www.usnews.com/education/k12/articles/how-much-does-private-school-cost>

³⁹ ["School Vouchers: The Wrong Choice for Public Education."](#) In Social Policy: Essential Primary Sources, edited by K. Lee Lerner, Brenda Wilmoth Lerner, and Adrienne Wilmoth Lerner, 476-480. Detroit, MI: Gale, 2006. Gale In Context: Opposing Viewpoints (accessed January 11, 2024).

⁴⁰ Egan, Marcus. ["Tuition Vouchers Are Not a Good Alternative to Current Public Education."](#) In Keeping Public Education Public: Why Vouchers Are a Bad Idea. Alexandria, VA: National School Boards Association, 2003. Quoted in Education, edited by David Haugen and Susan Musser. Opposing Viewpoints. Detroit, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2009. Gale In Context: Opposing Viewpoints (accessed January 11, 2024).

School Vouchers Undermine Public Education

Other opponents of school vouchers argue that voucher programs send the message that the government is “giving up” on public education.⁴¹ Public education is funded largely by income and property taxes—voucher programs would pull these tax dollars away from public education, leaving the already under-funded system with less financial support.⁴² For example, the Milwaukee voucher program will cost state taxpayers an estimated \$65.6 million, and 45% of that will be diverted from Milwaukee public schools.⁴³ According to this logic, voucher programs harm public education by draining money away from public schools, leaving them with less resources to serve their remaining students. This gives the impression that the government believes that public education is a system already doomed to fail. In this view, vouchers draw public attention and energy away from public education and reduce the commitment of taxpayers and policymakers to maintain and improve public schools.⁴⁴

School vouchers thus support the students whose education they fund but condemn students who remain in public schools. In line with the argument that private schools unfairly support students from higher income families and academically bright students, this means that less money would be allocated to educate students from lower income families, decreasing the quality of their education to the benefit of students from higher income families.⁴⁵ This perspective argues that the funding spent on voucher programs could instead be used to address challenges in public education, including teacher recruitment and training, building and modernizing infrastructure, and reducing class sizes. Roughly 90 percent of students are in public schools—educational improvement should thus first be focused there.⁴⁶

School Vouchers Harm Democracy

Some opponents of school vouchers argue that voucher programs conflict with the ideals upon which the country was founded, namely, the United States’ long tradition of democratic education that brings children together from all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.⁴⁷ Some data suggest that private schools have historically been significantly less diverse than public schools due to the disparity in income along racial lines, and this perspective argues that voucher programs contribute to a concentration of students from higher income families in private schools and a concentration of students from lower income families in public

⁴¹ “School Vouchers: The Wrong Choice.”

⁴² Cooper, “Public Education Crisis.”

⁴³ Egan, “Tuition Vouchers.”

⁴⁴ Conniff, Ruth. [“Voucher Lawsuit Takes on Privatization of Wisconsin Schools.”](#) Wisconsin Examiner. 2023.

Walkenhort, Emily. [“Analysis: Expanded Public School Voucher Program Would Cut Public School Funding by More than \\$200 Million.”](#) WRAL News. Accessed 2024.

⁴⁵ “School Vouchers: The Wrong Choice.”

⁴⁶ Egan, “Tuition Vouchers.”

⁴⁷ Fossey, Richard. [“Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Vouchers?”](#) UCEA Review (Winter 2006): 12-13. Quoted in “Tuition Vouchers Are a Good Alternative to Failing Public Education.” Education, edited by David Haugen and Susan Musser. Opposing Viewpoints. Detroit, MI: Greenhaven Press, 2009. Gale In Context: Opposing Viewpoints (accessed January 11, 2024).

schools.⁴⁸ Voucher programs thus perpetuate the separation of students in educational institutions along the lines of income and race, conflicting with the ideal of bringing diverse students together in an educational setting.

Additionally, some opponents of school vouchers argue that voucher programs conflict with the separation of church and state as well as the constitutional idea that no government program may be designed to advance religious institutions over non-religious institutions.⁴⁹ Nearly 70% of private schools in the United States are religiously affiliated, and allowing state-funded vouchers to be used at these schools means that citizens' tax dollars would go towards religious education.⁵⁰ This perspective argues that state funding should not be put towards education that is based on a religious perspective that not everyone believes in, and that tax dollars are intended for the secular education of all children.⁵¹ Moreover, there may not be a private non-religiously affiliated school option in some communities, forcing families to choose between the under-funded public education system or religious education that they may not agree with.

Lack of Transparency and Accountability

Critics of voucher programs also argue that private schools are not subject to the same standards as public schools, and therefore there is a lack of both transparency into how well these schools are doing and a resulting lack of accountability for educators and administrators within private schools. This is not only an important issue for the students in the schools, but it is also an issue of the public's trust; taxpayers want assurances that their money is being used responsibly and effectively.⁵² This lack of transparency and accountability could be addressed by requiring school accreditation by approved accrediting organizations, requiring private schools to conform to state standards, requiring employees at private schools to undergo the same tests or background checks as employees at public schools, and so on.⁵³ It is an open question how these measures should be funded.

Critics of voucher programs also argue that accountability measures may be needed because programs like Washington D.C.'s Opportunity Scholarship Program (a voucher program) were found to have no statistically significant impact on student outcomes for students who used school vouchers.⁵⁴ Since accreditation is not required for private schools in any state and private schools in most states are not subject to any curricular mandates, critics argue that

⁴⁸ Ee, Jongyeon, Gary Orfield, and Jennifer Teitell. ["Private Schools in American Education: A Small Sector Still Lagging in Diversity."](#) The Civil Rights Project. 2028; Buchanan, Alexis. ["The Racial Makeup of Private Schools—Often Nonprofit—Is Very White."](#) Non-Profit Quarterly. 2016.

⁴⁹ "School Vouchers: The Wrong Choice."

⁵⁰ ["Statistics About Nonpublic Education in the United States."](#) U.S. Department of Education, 2016 (accessed January 29, 2024).

⁵¹ "School Vouchers—Top 4 Pros and Cons."

⁵² ["Editorial: Transform NC's Private School Vouchers from Boondoggle to Responsible, Transparent, Accountable."](#) WRAL News. Accessed 2024.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ ["The Facts on School Vouchers."](#) Public Schools First NC. 2023.

accountability does not exist in these systems and that public funds should therefore not be used to send students to these schools.⁵⁵

Overview of Arguments for and Against School Vouchers:

Pros of School Vouchers	Cons of School Vouchers
<p>Equality and Improved Access: Vouchers break the link between a child's education quality and their family's ability to afford a home in a wealthy area or to afford extra tutoring, increasing access to high-quality education for all.</p>	<p>Potential for Unfair Support: Vouchers may not be equally accessible to all students, with private schools able to select students based on various criteria, potentially excluding lower-achieving students or those with special needs.</p>
<p>Personalized Schooling: Vouchers allow for a more personalized education, catering to the specific needs and preferences of students and their parents. They also respect the interests of private citizens in tailoring the education of their children.</p>	<p>Undermining Success of Public Education: Voucher programs can divert funds from public schools, weakening a system that serves the majority of students and potentially reducing the quality of education for those who remain in public schools.</p>
<p>Increased Graduation Rates: Some evidence suggests that voucher programs can lead to higher graduation rates, indicating improved educational outcomes for students using vouchers.</p>	<p>Harm to Democracy: Voucher programs might lead to increased segregation in education, undermining the democratic ideals of a common education that brings diverse groups together.</p>
<p>Positive Impacts of Competition: Vouchers increase competition for students between schools, which can lead to improvements in both public and private schools, benefiting all students.</p>	<p>Conflicts with Separation of Church and State: With many private schools being religiously affiliated, voucher programs could inadvertently use public funds to support religious education, raising constitutional concerns.</p>
<p>Accountability and Transparency: While different from public schools, private schools still face accountability to parents and can be regulated by states to ensure quality education.</p>	<p>Lack of Transparency and Accountability: Private schools are not subject to the same standards and accountability measures as public schools, raising concerns about the quality and effectiveness of the education they provide with public funds.</p>

⁵⁵ <https://manhattan.institute/article/accountability-and-private-school-choice>

Setting Expectations (10 min)

In this section, we will review the “Expected Outcomes,” Deliberative Dispositions,” and “Conversation Agreements” below.

Expected Outcomes of the Conversation

The purpose of this deliberation is to deepen our understanding of the problems associated with public schooling, the potential for vouchers to solve some of those problems, and the arguments against a voucher system. Over the course of the deliberation, we will have the opportunity to listen to the perspectives of our fellow deliberators as well as share our own thoughts about the topic. Finally, we will have reflected on our conversation, our areas of agreement and disagreement, and what we have learned from our time together.

Deliberative Dispositions

The DCI has identified several “deliberative dispositions” as critical to the success of deliberative enterprises. When participants adopt these dispositions, they are much more likely to feel their deliberations are meaningful, respectful, and productive. Several of the Conversation Agreements recommended below directly reflect and reinforce these dispositions, which include a commitment to egalitarianism, open mindedness, empathy, charity, attentiveness, and anticipation, among others. A full list and description of these dispositions is available at <https://deliberativecitizenship.org/deliberative-dispositions/>.

Conversation Agreements

In entering into this discussion, to the best of our ability, we each agree to:

1. Be authentic and respectful
2. Be an attentive and active listener
3. Be a purposeful and concise speaker
4. Approach fellow deliberators’ stories, experiences, and arguments with curiosity, not hostility
5. Assume the best - and not the worst - about the intentions and values of others, and avoid snap judgements
6. Demonstrate intellectual humility, recognizing that no one has all the answers, by asking questions and making space for others to do the same
7. Critique the idea we disagree with, not the person expressing it, and remember to practice empathy
8. Note areas of both agreement and disagreement
9. Respect the confidentiality of the discussion
10. Avoid speaking in absolutes (e.g., “All people think this,” or “No educated people hold that view”)

As mentioned above, participants may prefer different terminologies, explanations, and narratives as they engage in this conversation. Please respect their choices with openmindedness and curiosity, as our goal here today is to understand and share rather than convince and persuade. This will allow people with varying viewpoints to express themselves in the discussion and learn from one another.

Getting to Know Each Other (10 min.)

In this section, we will take less than a minute to share our names and 2-3 aspects of our identities that are important to us. These could be our gender pronouns, our occupation, our family status (e.g., husband, mother, etc.), our hometown, our favorite hobby, etc. Please also explain briefly why these aspects of your identity are important to you.

If you are online, while there is no pressure to do so, everyone is welcome to type in any, all, or none of these aspects of your identity into your Zoom nameplate after your name (just right-click on your own image and click “Rename”).

The Purpose of Public Education (15 min.)

In this section, we will each take 1-2 minutes to answer the questions below, without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered these questions, the group is welcome to take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions and responses. Continue exploring the topic as time allows.

- **What do you take to be the central purpose of public education, if you had to pick one?**
- **How important do you find this purpose? Why?**
- **Do you believe that private schools can meet that purpose? Why or why not?**
- **If they can't, do you still think there is a place for private education and if so, what is it?**

Arguments for School Vouchers (25 min.)

We will now address the potential benefits of school vouchers for students and school systems. We will each briefly answer the questions below (one at a time), and then together we'll explore our areas of agreement and disagreement.

- **To what extent are you hopeful that school vouchers will on balance create a positive impact on students? On school systems? (Your answer may be different for each case.) Why?**
- **Proponents have made a range of arguments in support of school vouchers (increased access to high quality education, opportunity for personalization, better educational outcomes, benefits of competition, additional forms of accountability, etc.). Which of these arguments do you find most and least persuasive?**

Once we have all had a chance to address this question, discuss our answers together, and note where we agree and disagree, please move on to the next section.

Break (5 mins)

Arguments Against School Vouchers (25 min.)

We will now address some concerns about school vouchers. We will each address each of the questions below individually before moving on to an open discussion.

- **Critics of school vouchers likewise cite a range of arguments against school vouchers (they are not fair the less well-off, they undermine public education and democracy, they provide funding to unaccountable private schools, etc.). Which of these arguments do you find most and least persuasive?**
- **Imagine for a moment that public schools and private schools perform equally well in all states, and that we have data for this idea that is considered compelling by people of multiple political affiliations (i.e., concerns about transparency and accountability were resolved).**
 - **If this were the case, would you have any remaining concerns over whether a voucher program should be implemented in your home state?**
 - **If so, what are these concerns?**
 - **In other words, to what extent does your position in this debate depend on differences in public/private school performance?**

Solving Problems Together (20 min.)

Together we will now take stock of the variety of benefits and concerns that have been raised about both public education and school vouchers and address the following question:

- **We may never find a point of consensus around this topic. In the spirit of learning to navigate our disagreements, what do you take to be the most just way of balancing concerns about public schools and school vouchers? In your answer, consider the concerns others have raised in the discussion so far and challenge yourself to provide some potential ways to mitigate those concerns.**

Reflections (10 min)

While today's conversation is an important step in the journey, effectively managing the difficulties presented by our educational system is necessarily an ongoing effort. Please reflect on the insights from your discussion with your fellow participants today, and then answer one of the questions below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group is welcome to continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

1. What was most meaningful or valuable to you during this deliberation?
2. Where are the areas of both agreement and disagreement in your group?
3. Have any new ways to think about this issue occurred to you as we have talked today? Any new ideas that might transcend our current way of conceiving of the problems and potential solutions?
4. Was there anything that was said or left out from the discussion that you think should be addressed with the group? Are there any perspectives missing from this conversation that you feel would be important to hear?
5. What did you hear that gives you hope for the future of conversations about public education and school vouchers?
6. Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the deliberation you just had?

About This Guide

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The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative

The Deliberative Citizenship Initiative (DCI) is dedicated to the creation of opportunities for Davidson students, faculty, staff, alumni, and members of the wider community to productively engage with one another on difficult and contentious issues facing our community and society. The DCI regularly hosts facilitated deliberations on a wide range of topics and organizes training workshops for deliberation facilitators. To learn more about these opportunities, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org.

DCI Deliberation Guides

The DCI has launched this series of Deliberation Guides as a foundation for such conversations. They provide both important background information on the topics in question and a specific framework for engaging with these topics. The Guides are designed to be informative without being overwhelming and structured without being inflexible. They cover a range of topics and come in a variety of formats but share several common elements, including opportunities to commit to a shared set of Conversation Agreements, learn about diverse perspectives, and reflect together on the conversation and its yield. The DCI encourages conversations based on these guides to be moderated by a trained facilitator. After each conversation, the DCI also suggests that its associated Pathways Guide be distributed to the conversation's participants.

DCI Pathways Guides

For every Deliberation Guide, the DCI has also developed an associated Pathways Guide, which outlines opportunities for action that participants can consider that are related to the covered topic. These Pathways Guides reinforce the DCI's commitment to an action orientation, a key deliberative disposition. While dialogue and deliberation are themselves important contributors to a healthy democracy, they become even more valuable when they lead to individual or collective action on the key issues facing society. Such action can come in a range of forms and should be broadly understood. It might involve developing a better understanding of a topic, connecting with relevant local or national organizations, generating new approaches to an issue, or deciding to support a particular policy.

If you make use of this guide in a deliberation, please provide attribution to the Deliberative Citizenship Initiative and email dc@deliberativecitizenship.org to tell us about your event. To access more of our growing library of Deliberation Guides, Pathways Guides and other resources, visit www.deliberativecitizenship.org/readings-and-resources.