

Lesson Plan: The Tricky Politics of School Choice

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Featured resources

[KQED's The Lowdown: The Tricky Politics of School "Choice"](#)

[NPR's Let's Talk: School Vouchers](#) (2:45)

[The California Report: How Could Trump Impact California Schools? A Cheat Sheet](#) (6:21)



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Opening quick write prompt:

If you or your family is not satisfied with the quality of education in of your local public school, should you be able to use public funding to help pay your tuition at a private school? What about a private religious (parochial) school? Why or why not?

A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.

Objective

- Students will analyze the issue of private school vouchers as an aspect of school choice.
- Students will evaluate and write arguments in support or opposition to school vouchers.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

Should state money be used to send students to private schools, including religious schools?

School vouchers—state money given to families to send their children to private schools—is a key element of the “school choice” movement, which the Trump administration has strongly supported. Proponents insist that vouchers can help close the achievement gap by giving low-income students in underperforming schools access to high quality private schools. But opponents say vouchers rob public schools of much-needed funds and only benefit a select few. They also point to research showing that students who use vouchers do not consistently or significantly outperform their counterparts.

Some special education advocates also worry that voucher programs exclude students with special needs. 14 states and the District of Columbia currently have some form of school voucher program, though interest is appears to be on the rise.

Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the activity, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
Attain (v.)	To accomplish or achieve
Divert (v.)	To change the direction or use of something
Legitimize (v.)	To make acceptable or official
Parochial school (n.)	A private school run by a religious organization
Recipient (n.)	A person who receives something

Direct instruction and guided practice

- Discuss the quick-write prompt to gauge student opinions on the issue of school vouchers.
- Explain that the debate over whether public funding (through state departments of education) should contribute to private school tuition, including religious schools, has been going on for decades. Some states (14 plus Washington, D.C.) already have a school voucher program. In all other states, vouchers are not allowed, largely because their constitutions forbid the use of public money for private religious schools.
- As a class or in small groups, students watch [the NPR video](#) to provide an overview of school vouchers. (Note: Use a platform like [EdPuzzle](#) or [PlayPosIt](#) to insert questions directly into the video. Find strategies for how to make classroom videos interactive [HERE](#).)
 - **At 0:26** stop the video and ask: Describe a traditional voucher program in your own words.
 - **Stop at 1:04** and ask: Are voucher programs legal or illegal in most states? Why or why not?
 - **Stop at 1:40** and ask: What types of students do most voucher programs serve?
 - **Stop at 2:00** and ask: What are the arguments in favor of school vouchers? What are the arguments against?
 - **Stop at the end:** Do school voucher programs help students succeed in school? Explain.
- **Transition to independent practice:** According to the video, school voucher programs are controversial. Who do you predict would be in favor of school vouchers? Why might they be in

favor? Who would be against school vouchers? Why might this group be against school vouchers?

Independent practice

- In small groups or individually, students read [The Lowdown post](#), which includes quotations from high school students about their opinions on school voucher program. [The California Report segment](#) includes these student voices starting at minute 2:20.
- After reading, students should write a response to the question: What is your opinion of school voucher programs? Should they be legal, banned in all states or something in between? Explain your answer using evidence.
 - **Model:** *I think school voucher programs should be _____ because _____. I think this because _____ (Students include at least two examples from the text or video to support their opinion.)*

Assessment/Reflection

- As a class or in small groups, students share and discuss their opinions on school voucher programs. Be sure students cite specific examples to support their position along with relevant personal examples or other evidence. *(To learn more about discussing controversial topics in the classroom, check out [this post](#) from the New York Times Learning Network.)*

Circle chats, small-group discussions and *think-pair-share* provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.

Extension/Homework

Write/speak locally: Students turn their views on school voucher programs into a letter, short speech or presentation, then research ways to make their voice heard in their community. (Example: Speaking during the public comment section of a city council meeting, posting on an online forum, etc.) For a list of how to contact local officials in your area, check out [KQED Learning's Local Election Toolkit](#).

Common Core standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.1	Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.