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TEXAS' VOUCHER PROGRAM: MORE OPTIONS ON PAPER THAN IN PRACTICE

An Initial Review of 59 Voucher-Approved Private Schools — May 2026

The Texas Center for Voucher Transparency completed an initial review of **59 voucher-approved private schools** located within four Texas House Public Education Committee member districts.

This review **examined school types, admissions models, selective enrollment criteria, tuition structures, and levels of public transparency** to better understand the structural factors shaping access, affordability, and admissions practices across the private education landscape in these four districts.

TX House District & County	# Voucher-Approved Private Schools	# Voucher-Approved Private Schools that Enroll PK-K Only
HD-054 Bell County	13	6
HD-123 Bexar County	33	15
HD-009 6 ETX Counties	6	1
HD-114 Dallas County	7	2
Totals	59	24

Source: Our Schools Our Democracy School Locator Map as of 4-13-26

Key findings:

- Access to private education remains **conditional and unequal** for many families.
- **Tuition costs, selective admissions criteria, and institutional expectations** can limit access.
- Religious, financial, academic, and informational **barriers compound each other.**
- Families must often invest significant time **before learning if they qualify.**
- True access **requires alignment** across belief, finances, and admissions criteria simultaneously.

! Families with a voucher may gain more options on paper than in practice.

Religion is the Dominant Gatekeeper

Religious affiliation is the single most common structural factor influencing access across the entire dataset — functioning not only as a school culture but as a formal admissions filter.

63%
Religious Institutions
37 of 59 private schools are explicitly religious

36%
Apply Faith Filters
21 of 59 use religious preference in admissions

Where Faith Affects Access

- Admission priority
- Tuition pricing (parish vs non-parish rates)
- Continued enrollment eligibility

Common Faith Requirements

- Statements of faith
- Church attendance or parish membership
- Chapel or worship participation
- Behavior aligned with doctrinal expectations

⚠ Religious identity is not simply about school culture. It frequently functions as a **formal admissions filter.**

The Texas Center for Voucher Transparency is an initiative of Our Schools Our Democracy, an independent, nonpartisan 501(c)(3) nonprofit established to protect the fundamental rights of all Texans to a free, public education.

Layered Admissions Systems Are the Norm

Most schools do not rely on a single application step. Instead, admissions are structured as multi-stage pipelines — best described as a **filtering system**, not a single-entry enrollment process.

⚠ Many schools explicitly **gate the admissions process**. A tour is often required before families can access the application, an interview is often required before final consideration, and acceptance is contingent on a subjective "fit" review.

Cost is a Universal Filter

Published tuition across the 59 reviewed schools spans a wide range - from $4,800 to $30,400 annually. But the **sticker price rarely tells the full story.**

Additional costs can include:

- Registration & application fees
- Technology & supply fees
- Uniform & activity fees
- Athletic & extra-curricular fees
- Late pick-up and payment penalties
- Mandatory fundraising or service requirements

⚠ Published tuition **often understates actual family cost** once required fees are included.

Special Education Services Are Not Guaranteed

Despite the voucher program prioritizing awards for students who require special education services, many private schools in this review explicitly state that they do not provide these services and that **admission may be denied if the school determines the student is not a "good fit" based on their special education needs.** Some schools in this review ask invasive questions to make this determination, including:

- Asking about a child's medical history including diagnoses, name of psychologist, and copies of any psychological evaluations
- Requiring additional diagnostic and psychological testing that families must pay for
- Reserving the right to ask students to leave if they exhibit learning differences

⚠ A voucher award **does not guarantee admission** into a private school.

Transparency is Inconsistent – and Often Limited

Public access to information varies widely across schools. Families often must enter the admissions process before fully knowing cost or eligibility requirements, making it difficult to compare information. **Common transparency limitations include:**

Tuition on Request Only
Pricing available only upon direct inquiry to the school.

Hidden Handbooks
Password-protected admissions documents.

Post-Application Disclosure
Fee structures revealed only after completing application steps.

Minimal Web Presence
Incomplete websites with no clear admissions criteria.

Who Can Best Navigate a Voucher-Approved Private School Market?

The data paints a clear picture: **the Texas voucher-approved private school marketplace reviewed here is not a universally accessible alternative system.** It rewards families who already possess significant advantages, including:

Time & Availability
Multi-step applications, required tours, and interviews demand significant parental time investment - a barrier for working families with inflexible schedules.

Financial Resources
Even "lower cost" schools can carry hidden fees. Families often must budget beyond published tuition for uniforms, technology, activities, and registration fees.

Transportation Access
Private schools rarely provide transportation. Lack of busing creates access gaps for families without reliable vehicles or flexible schedules.

Admissions Familiarity
Navigating selective, process-heavy admissions requires knowledge of how private schools work that families may not have - and limited transparency can add another barrier.

Bottom Line: More Options on Paper Than in Practice

Across these 59 reviewed private schools, the landscape is characterized by:

- **Religious Concentration.** Many schools use faith-based admissions preferences or requirements that affect student eligibility and enrollment priority.
- **Selective Admissions.** Multi-step admissions processes - including interviews, evaluations, and subjective "fit" determinations - can create barriers for families.
- **Variable Transparency.** Many schools provide limited public information about admissions standards, costs, or eligibility requirements, making it difficult for families to make informed decisions early in the process.
- **Cost Exceeds Voucher Amounts.** Tuition and additional fees often exceed the value of a voucher, leaving many families responsible for out-of-pocket costs.

! The private education landscape across these 59 schools is **multi-layered and conditional** on alignment across multiple factors - religious, financial, informational, and philosophical. **Expanding options on paper does not guarantee access in practice.**

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