



Clarifying  
Complex  
Education  
Issues

# Proposition 38: Making vouchers available to all K–12 students

**P**roposition 38 on the November ballot would amend the California Constitution to: 1) Offer a tax-free “scholarship” of at least \$4,000 for private school tuition to all California public and private K–12 students; and 2) Require California to maintain per pupil funding for public school students at the “national average” if the state reaches that level.

The initiative gathered more than enough qualified voter signatures when it was circulated by its primary sponsor, Timothy C. Draper. A northern California venture capitalist and former State Board of Education member, Draper asked for suggestions on the Internet to improve the original draft and vowed to spend whatever it takes to succeed in the election.

Less technically complex than the 1993 voucher initiative (Proposition 174) that California voters soundly rejected, Proposition 38 could nevertheless represent one of the largest education experiments in the nation. Unlike the few voucher programs in other states, this one would provide a payment to any student, including those already in private school, regardless of income or need.

The impact of this proposition cannot be predicted with certainty, but experts agree it could be huge. If Proposition 38 passes, post-election definitions and decisions about implementation would determine its full effect.

Many questions are unanswerable as voters go to the polls. Would large numbers of children leave the public schools in favor of private ones? Would existing or new private schools be able to accommodate public school students who want to transfer? Would the measure be a cost or a savings to the state’s budget? Would the use of taxpayer money in religious schools survive judicial review? Would a voucher system undermine public schools or spur competition to improve education?

The answers, if Proposition 38 becomes part of the California Constitution, would depend on multiple factors. These range from parental decisions to the willingness or capacity of private

schools to accept more students, and from the interpretation of the proposition by state agencies to potential judicial decisions.

This report describes and explores the implications of this proposed form of vouchers for students, the state budget, and the education system in California. The proposition uses the word “scholarship” instead of “voucher.” In this report “voucher” and “scholarship” are used interchangeably.

## Prop 38 addresses both private and public schools

The preamble to the body of Proposition 38 stresses the author’s goals:

- ✓ To empower parents to decide what is best for their children;
- ✓ To replace an “inefficient monopoly” by introducing “competition in the delivery of education services”; and
- ✓ To “maintain per pupil funding at or above the national level” for California students.

The original title of the proposal is “The National Average School Funding Guarantee and Parental Right to Choose Quality Education Amendment.” On the ballot, Proposition 38 is identified by the Attorney General as “School Vouchers. State-funded Private and Religious Education. Public School Funding.”

The initiative asserts that the voucher payments to parents are “grants in aid” that are in no way intended to “establish, support, promote or in any way endorse any religion” or “to promote or disadvantage any particular class of schools.”

## The mechanics of the new program are fairly simple

If approved, Proposition 38 would take effect on July 1, 2001. Within four years every parent of a student in a public or private California school, kindergarten through 12th grade, could request the new scholarship for that child’s education. The voucher could be used at the scholarship-redeeming school of their choice.

To help voters understand Proposition 38, EdSource—a non-profit, nonpartisan education research organization—developed this impartial analysis that outlines the measure’s provisions and summarizes the major arguments pro and con.

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## What Proposition 38 requires and permits

### The Legislature would have to:

- Provide scholarships/vouchers that are the higher of \$4,000 or half California's per pupil funding;
- Continue to fund public schools at the national average annually if that point is reached; and
- Show that new legislation is necessary and not burdensome to private schools.

### The Legislature could:

- By majority vote, provide per pupil funding at or above the national average if it is not there already;
- Establish the regulations for the individual student's excess tuition savings accounts; and
- By majority vote, establish civil and criminal penalties for fraud within scholarship schools.

### The Legislature could not:

- Regulate private schools beyond the laws existing on 1/1/99 except by a three-quarters vote;
- Suspend the new minimum funding guarantee for that budget year except by a three-quarters vote; or
- Apply the provisions of Proposition 98 to K–12 public schools after funding reaches the national average.

### County offices of education would have to:

- Administer the new system, including keeping track of the students.

### A voucher-receiving school would have to:

- Meet the proposition's requirements about admission, employees, accreditation, and information about the school;
- Provide a financial report (revenues, expenditures, debt) to parents upon request;
- Administer the national standardized test to scholarship students, as mandated for public school students;
- Publicly report the test scores of scholarship students by grade level; and
- Notify the county when a student is enrolled or dismissed.

### A voucher-receiving school could:

- Establish a student conduct and discipline code, including provisions for dismissal;
- Restrict admission to a single gender;
- Restrict admission based on other student characteristics, such as academic ability, religion, or income; and
- Challenge any new state or local law or regulation.

### A voucher-receiving school could not:

- Discriminate in admissions according to race, ethnicity, color, or national origin;
- Provide false or misleading information; or
- Hire an employee with a record of certain criminal conduct.

### Any local government would have to:

- Reach a two-thirds vote and get majority voter approval for a new regulation or ordinance about health, safety, or land use that affects private schools; and
- In the case of a challenge, establish the necessity and lack of burden of the new regulation.

The program would be phased in over the four years:

- ✓ Beginning with the 2001–02 school year and continuing indefinitely, all public school students (nearly 6 million)—plus entering kindergartners in public and private schools—could receive scholarships for private schools.
- ✓ Current private school students would be phased in during the next three years. In the second year, private school students in kindergarten through 2nd grade (currently 190,000) could use scholarships if their school accepted them. In the third year, the program would expand to include private school students in grades 3 through 8 (currently 309,000). Private school students in high school (currently 141,000) would be eligible in the fourth year.

County offices of education would administer the new scholarships, which would be the same amount for all K–12 students. The measure states that the payments are not taxable in California. The checks would be paid quarterly, and parents would have to “restrictively endorse” each check to their accounts at the private school.

If the voucher exceeded the cost of a private school's tuition and fees, the unused portion would be kept in a state-held account in the student's name. The student could use the money for future tuition or fees through college or until age 21. At that point any money left over would be returned to the state.

## Some accountability and safeguards for private schools are built in

In order to accept the vouchers, an existing or new private school would have to meet certain new requirements as well as those in existing law prior to Jan. 1, 1999. (See the box on page 3.) For example, the school would have to certify that it does not:

- ✓ Discriminate “on the basis of race, ethnicity, color or national origin” (single-sex admission is explicitly permitted; income, religion, academic or athletic ability, and student disability are not mentioned);
- ✓ Advocate unlawful behavior;
- ✓ Provide false or misleading information about itself; or
- ✓ Employ a person convicted of certain crimes.

In addition, a high school would have to “certify” that its coursework meets college or university admission requirements in “one or more academic subjects” or that it is accredited by a regional agency or one “recognized” by the state.

Upon parental request, the school would have to provide an annual “statement of financial condition that lists [its] revenues, expenses and debts.” The proposition does not require the school to submit these reports to the state. Further, each scholarship student would have to take a

“nationally norm-referenced test” as mandated for public school students, and the school would have to release the grade-by-grade scores of scholarship students to the public.

A private school accepting vouchers could “establish a code of conduct and discipline.” The code would be enforceable with sanctions that could include, for example, dismissal for “serious or habitual misconduct.”

As a balance to those requirements, Proposition 38 tries to protect all private schools from further legislation. The existing regulations could be expanded only by a three-quarters vote of the Legislature with approval by the governor. The state would have to demonstrate that a new law or regulation “does not impose any undue burden.”

A local government would need a two-thirds vote to set new requirements about “health, safety or land use” related to private schools, followed by majority approval of local “qualified electors.” If challenged, the government would have to show that the regulation is essential; does not “unduly burden or impede” private schools or parents; does not “harass, injure or suppress” private schools; and does not “infringe on a parent’s...freedom to make decisions” about a child’s education.

The provisions of Proposition 38 could face a legal challenge. If a court ruled, for example, that religious schools could not participate in the new system on grounds of separation of church and state, the proposition would still apply to all other schools.

## The provisions could change the school finance system significantly

The most complex—and uncertain—section of Proposition 38 concerns how much money California would spend on public and private school students. The financial provisions are potentially a major change to the school finance system.

The individual scholarship in Proposition 38 is a minimum of \$4,000 per student. The initiative ties the amount to California’s “funding” per public school student. The proposition states that the Legislature “may,” but does not have to, raise California’s funding to the national average as defined in the initiative. (See pages 2 and 6.)

Reaching the national average could occur through legislation, or it could happen naturally under the state’s strong economy and the provisions of voter-approved Proposition 98. Once the per pupil funding is at the national average, Proposition 38 would replace Proposition 98. The Legislature would then have to fund public schools at least at the national average every year thereafter—the “national average school funding guarantee.”

The measure also creates a new method for determining the national average per pupil. Proposition 38 defines

## These regulations affect private schools as of Jan. 1, 1999

### Instruction

Teaching must be in English, with other languages permitted if “educationally advantageous,” and must include the “several branches of study” required in public schools.

### Teachers

Teachers must be “persons capable of teaching;” they need not have a California credential.

### Records

Schools must document attendance to the state. They must also submit to the state an annual report of school name, address, location of records, directors and principal officers, enrollment by grade, number of teachers, gender of students, boarding program, and existence of a summary of employees’ criminal record.

Student transcripts must follow a pupil between public and private schools. Parents must have access to the transcripts. Students have due process rights when grades, diplomas, or transcripts are withheld. Schools must report to the county office of education the withdrawal or admission denial of a disabled student.

### Health

Full immunization is required for all students, plus health screening for K–I students.

### Buildings

Schools are subject to annual fire inspections, with access to all grounds. They must have eye protection devices, a first-aid kit on field trips, and no toxic substances in the school. They must conform to local building requirements and have emergency procedures in case of an earthquake.

### Finances

Public money may not be appropriated for any school “controlled by any religious creed, church, or sectarian denomination.” Schools may borrow audio-visual curriculum materials but not textbooks from county offices of education, and they may receive funds from the state’s Child Nutrition Program. Private schools may acquire tax-exempt status and not pay property or sales taxes.

Source: U.S. Department of Education ([www.ed.gov/pubs/RegPrivSchl/californ.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/RegPrivSchl/californ.html))

the “amount of funding provided for the support of public schools” more broadly than current usage: all sources of revenue from federal, state and local sources; annual debt service on bonds and other indebtedness; and “any other funds” that are used for educational programs, K–12 facilities, and administration.

To determine the national average, each state’s total funding would be divided by its public school enrollment to get its average per pupil funding. Then the average across all the states would be calculated. If the current funding were not available for a given state, the Department of Finance would adjust that state’s most recent figure by the state’s “dollar per pupil growth rate.”

Using the proposition’s definitions, the Office of the Legislative Analyst (LAO) estimates that both California’s average and the national funding average are “somewhat less than \$8,000 per pupil.” Once California reached the national average, the value of the scholarship would become whichever is larger, \$4,000 or half California’s per pupil amount. The LAO predicts that the scholarship would soon rise above \$4,000.

The public schools’ funding guarantee could be suspended in any given budget year by a three-quarters vote of the Legislature. Scholarships would still have to be paid to families requesting them. Proposition 98 also covers funding for community colleges. If 98 were superceded by 38, the initiative states the intent to “fully fund the demand for programs offered by the community colleges.”

## California’s private and public schools live in different worlds

For decades approximately 10% of California’s K–12 students have attended private schools, about 650,000 in 1999–2000. (See Figure 1.) Their choices range from small independent schools to large parochial ones, with great variation in between. Almost two-thirds of private schools are categorized as religious or church-affiliated.

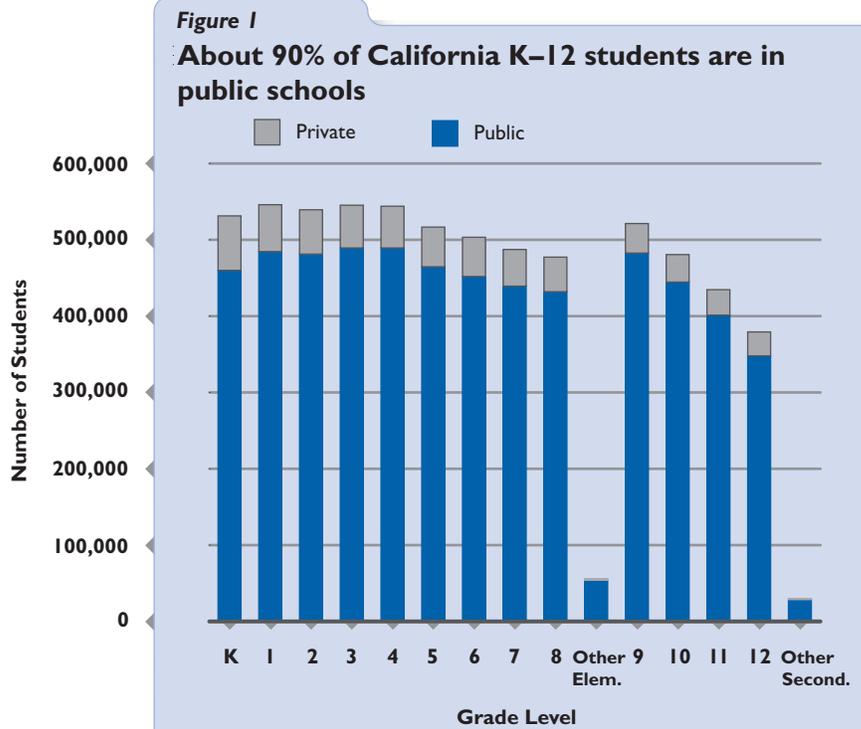
Almost 80% of the private school students are in religious or church-affiliated schools, as Figure 2 shows. The remaining 20% are in nonsectarian schools. Other children, informally estimated by the Office of the Legislative Analyst at 40,000–50,000, go to school at home. By law, the California Department of Education does not report data on schools with fewer than six students.

Most of the students in private schools are in elementary grades—71,000 (13.4%) in kindergarten in 1999–2000, for example, contrasted with 31,300 (8.3%) in 12th grade. Comparable enrollments in public schools were about 460,000 in kindergarten and 348,000 in 12th grade.

The number of children in private schools differs considerably among counties. In some, practically all the students are in public schools. In others, private schools are a big draw. In San Francisco County 30% of the students are in private settings, and nearby Marin has nearly 20%. In contrast, Fresno (3.5%) and Madera (2.4%) have a much smaller percentage of students in private schools.

Private school tuition in California ranges from well below \$4,000 in small church-sponsored schools to upwards of \$15,000 in independent high schools. The California Department of Education does not collect financial data or information about tuition from private schools.

The differences between public and private schools—in addition to the role of religion—can be vast. While public schools, with the exception of charters, are regulated by California’s voluminous Education and Government Codes, private schools are comparatively unfettered by official regulations. In contrast to public schools, they are not required to educate every type of student. Public schools find that students with physical or learning disabilities or a need to learn English, for example, are often more expensive to teach.



For many years about 10% of California’s students have gone to private schools. Enrollment is always highest in kindergarten, and it declines slowly. Current public school enrollment fluctuates until high school, when it drops each year.

Data: California Department of Education (1999–2000)

EdSource 9/00

Private school teachers do not need teaching credentials. (By law, they must simply be “persons capable of teaching.”) And the extensive laws about collective bargaining, employment security, and due process rights for hiring and terminating employees do not apply to them. A private school has nearly full control over which students to admit and dismiss, and it does not have to meet the state’s restrictive Building, Health and Safety Codes, for example, for earthquake safety.

Whether or not their students are tested, and the results reported, is up to each school. Except for college admissions, it is difficult to determine how well private school students are doing compared to public school students.

Private schools do not have to report their income or expenses to the state. They control their own budgets and set their own tuition. Funding for schools with religious affiliations is often subsidized by the sponsoring church, which helps to keep tuition low. An unexpected loss of enrollment or mismanagement can cause financial difficulties that, in the most serious cases, require a school to close.

The budgets of public school districts—which have revenues that are mostly state-controlled—are available on the Internet. Their finances are closely monitored, with numerous reports to the state during the year as well as professional audits. Despite these fiscal and bureaucratic controls, a small number of public school districts have been in severe financial straits. In the most serious cases, the state provided emergency funding and took control of the district until its financial condition improved.

## Proposition 38 could create a new “hybrid” school system

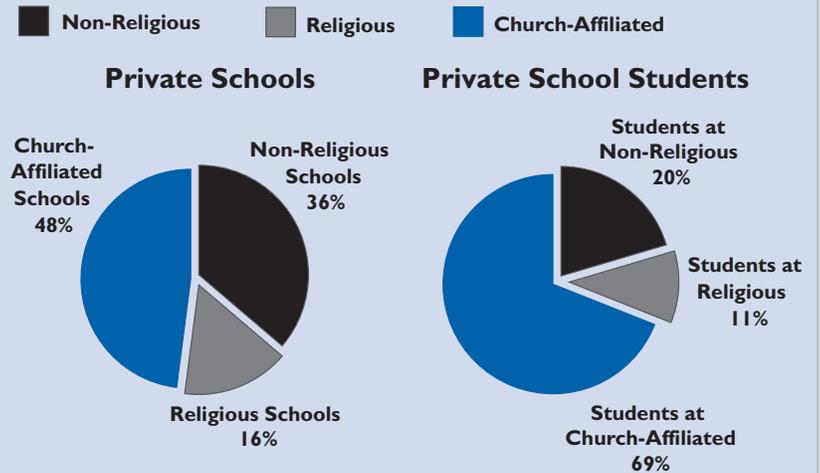
If voters decide to approve the provisions of Proposition 38, California’s school system would have public schools, charter schools, private schools that accept the new scholarships, and private schools that do not. To implement the full program, legislators would have to define some important terms. Further, classrooms in private schools would have to be available for public school students who want to transfer. The impact on how schools are financed and run could be considerable—both positive and negative.

### Defining terms is the crucial first step

The first step in setting up the new system would be to define terms and establish ground rules for matters that are ambiguous or not covered in the measure.

Figure 2

### Religious schools dominate the private school system



Of the private schools with six or more students, nearly two-thirds have a religious connection, either with a particular belief (such as Islamic) or as a direct affiliation with a church (such as Catholic). About 80% of California’s private school students attend these schools.

Data: California Department of Education (1999–2000)

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The most complex task would be identifying what data to use in determining the national average per pupil funding. For example, the proposition includes capital outlay and debt in its definition of school funding, but no current data source has that complete an index. Further, comparable national data is often more than two years old. Which data source would be selected? Would the State Department of Finance have to create its own national database?

The subject of making comparisons among states is already contentious. One question is whether “funding” refers to revenues or expenditures. The two numbers are different, and the proposition appears to use both.

Further, Proposition 38 presents a new definition of national average. The one that is widely used now is national spending divided by national enrollment, which gives an average per student. Under Proposition 38, each state’s average per student would be calculated first, and then the 50 states would be averaged. That means California would be 1/50th of the result instead of 1/8th, based on student count, and the resulting number could be quite different from what is currently considered the national average. The actual impact would depend on state-level interpretations as well as data collections in other states. In the words of the LAO, “Over time, the national average guarantee could require the state to spend either more or less per pupil than under Proposi-

## The financial impact of Proposition 38

The financial impact of Proposition 38 depends on many unknowns. California’s Office of the Legislative Analyst (LAO) cites the following:

- ✓ How many families request the new scholarships, how many private schools accept them, and how many new private schools are formed to accommodate additional students;
- ✓ Legislative action in response to the proposition; and
- ✓ Action by school districts to maintain enrollment (such as forming more charter schools).

The LAO makes the following projections based on current information, interpretations of Proposition 38, and assumptions about inflation and economic growth:

A voucher of at least \$4,000 for existing private school students would be a direct, ongoing expense in the state’s budget. This would be offset by the savings for each public school student who transferred to a private school that accepts vouchers, because the voucher student would cost roughly half as much as a public school student.

In the short term, the state budget would have net expenses for existing private school students if their schools accepted the vouchers. The LAO calculates that the net costs “are likely to average as high as \$1.1 billion annually for the first several years” (if all private school students get scholarships and if few pupils leave the public schools) to “essentially no costs” (if many pupils immediately transfer out of public schools).

In the longer term, the LAO assumes that the system would stabilize within five to 10 years. The impact on the state’s budget at that point could range from an annual cost of \$2 billion to a savings of \$3.4 billion, depending on how many public school students transfer to private schools. The projection includes the assumptions that most private school students request scholarships and that per pupil funding—and therefore the scholarship amount—will increase with inflation and economic growth.

Shift from public to private	Number of public pupils	Savings from public transfer	Est. cost of existing private pupils	Impact on the state’s budget
5%	300,000	\$1.3 billion	\$3.3 billion	Cost of \$2 billion
15%	900,000	4.0 billion	3.3 billion	Savings of \$700 million
25%	1,500,000	6.7 billion	3.3 billion	Savings of \$3.4 billion

Not included in these calculations are a drop in capital outlay costs (fewer public school students, less need for new classrooms or schools), equipment, and some loss of federal funds for public schools.

The LAO did not estimate Proposition 38’s impact on state funding for community colleges, adult education, and child care or the cost of administering the scholarships.

Source: Office of the Legislative Analyst ([www.lao.ca.gov/initiatives/2000/38\\_11\\_2000.html](http://www.lao.ca.gov/initiatives/2000/38_11_2000.html))

tion 98, depending generally on how California’s economy performs relative to the other states.”

## The capacity of private schools to expand is unknown

Another key issue is the capacity of the private system to accommodate additional students. Each private school would have to decide whether to accept the vouchers. Would many or most private schools opt in to the new system? What is their capacity or ability to expand? Would a multitude of schools spring up despite the difficulty and expense of creating a new school? Where does home schooling fit in?

The answers to these questions—which depend on many individual decisions by schools, educators, and families—would determine how different California’s school system would start to look and, ultimately, the cost or savings to the state.

## Supporters and critics raise key issues

People support or oppose vouchers for reasons that can be more emotional than empirical. The central question for some is whether it is constitutional for public tax dollars to support tuition at private and religious schools. For others the most important issue is the right of a parent to choose a child’s school, within a variety of options that may or may not strengthen the public school system.

## Free-market principles underlie voucher concepts

As a matter of principle, voucher supporters say that vouchers can strengthen education all-around. Rather than weakening public schools by skimming off students who are easier and less expensive to educate, vouchers would foster competition that would force public schools to improve or close, they say.

Further, supporters say, Proposition 38 includes accountability for all scholarship school students via mandatory testing, which is consonant with state requirements. As for the issue of public tax dollars to private schools, proponents say that scholarships enable parents to select a school for their children—similar to the federal G.I. Bill for higher education—which is not the same as direct support to church schools.

But many critics fear that granting vouchers is a big step toward breaking down the long-standing separation of church and state. In addition, making private schools more accessible by providing

vouchers would, they say, inevitably weaken public education as schools lose students and the money and motivated parents that go with them. They argue that, according to research, the classic pro-voucher arguments such as competition stimulating across-the-board improvement have not been validated.

Opponents laud California's successful development of curriculum standards and the strides toward student and school accountability. Proposition 38 would, they say, undercut progress being made in the public system.

### Equity issues are a point of contention

On the issue of equity, proponents of Proposition 38 assert that too many schools are still failing to prepare students, especially in big cities. They say their proposal gives low-income families the same ability to make educational choices as other families have. A campaign slogan is "A real choice for parents, a fair chance for kids."

But critics say that \$4,000 is not enough to pay tuition at many private schools, especially high schools. Neither is it enough, they say, to enable a new school to pay competitive salaries and offer good facilities—let alone provide special services to the students who most need them.

An additional argument of some critics is that low-income families should have preferential treatment, as is the case in the other states with voucher programs. Proposition 38, they say, benefits most the families who need it least. Further, the admission process in a scholarship school could discriminate on ability to pay, invalidating the argument about empowering low-income families.

These opponents also say that a voucher program could drain good teachers from troubled public schools, especially in urban areas that already have problems attracting credentialed teachers.

### The proposition raises many questions

Proposition 38 raises logistical and educational questions, according to critics. In addition to the difficulty for all families to become informed about choices, private schools do not necessarily have excess capacity and may not be able to expand even though the building requirements are less burdensome on them. Transportation is unlikely to be available.

But, supporters say, children in many public schools walk or depend on car pools or public buses because school districts are not required to provide transportation.

Although scholarship-redeeming schools would have to test students, opponents note that they would not have to test against California curriculum standards or administer a high school exit exam. Further, the scores of private and public school students would no longer be comparable when California shifts to a test based on state standards.

### The players solidify their positions

The Yes on Proposition 38 organization is holding rallies to gain supporters around the state, recruiting volunteers online, and polling Californians by phone. Their TV ads began in mid-July. The proponents' ballot argument and rebuttal are signed by Carmela Garnica, teacher at Escuela de la Raza Unida; Tim Draper, parent; John McCain, U.S. senator from Arizona; John Norquist, mayor of Milwaukee, Wis.; Alexandria Coronado, Anaheim School Board member; and Virginia Hall, retired public school teacher.

Among the early opponents were all the major education organizations, led by the California Teachers Association. They were joined by California's American Association of University Women, League of Women Voters, and State PTA. Both the State Board of Education and Governor Gray Davis oppose Proposition 38. After keeping a low profile on the 1993 voucher initiative, the California Business Roundtable announced its opposition to this one, as did California Business for Education Excellence (CBEE).

An unexpected ally to the opponents of Proposition 38 turned up when the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association, normally a supporter of vouchers, declared its opposition for fear of new taxes. Strong disagreement with Proposition 38 was registered in an op ed news article by the authors of several previous voucher proposals, Professors John Coons and Stephen Sugarman. The arguments and rebuttal on the ballot are signed by Lavonne McBroom, California State PTA; Lois Wellington, Congress of California Seniors; Wayne Johnson, California Teachers Association; Mark Doland, Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association; Joseph Bartosch, Sacramento Preparatory Academy; and Craig Garbe, Cornerstone Christian Schools.

Critics note that private schools do not have to hire credentialed teachers. But the supporters of Proposition 38 respond that thousands of public school teachers are not currently credentialed, and those teachers are disproportionately in schools with low-income or minority students.

Supporters further note that the initiative was hammered out in an open process to reach a healthy balance of public accountability and requirements that are a minimal burden on private schools. They say it is demeaning to imply that a certain set of families is incapable of obtaining information to make wise choices among schools.

This measure, they say, has the potential for empowering parents with options that will have a catalytic effect on the improvement of all schools, attract new teachers, and energize the statewide system. Without the more restrictive codes governing the public school system, private school capacity will increase and everyone will benefit.

## Finances are especially hard to predict

The controversial financial component would require considerable interpretation if Proposition 38 is approved. A unique aspect of this voucher proposal is its attempt to capture more money for public schools by setting the national funding average as a target that, once met, would have to continue indefinitely. Whether that would be higher or lower than the Proposition 98 guarantee is unpredictable.

Although opponents claim that the new proposition would cause a tax increase or cuts in programs supported by the state, the LAO says the measure's effect on the budget could be either positive or negative. (See page 6.)

The critics of Proposition 38 find the LAO long-term projection unlikely even if the arithmetic is correct. The estimated savings would not accrue until nearly 900,000 public school students transferred to private schools. Opponents say this is unlikely because some private schools would decide not to accept vouchers, and there simply would not be enough space to accommodate so many more students. In addition, \$4,000 is too little to permit low-income families to enroll in the more expensive independent schools.

Supporters respond that \$4,000 is indeed sufficient to pay tuition and fees at many private schools. These vouchers could free up traditional private school scholarship funds for more low-income students. The new vouchers would, they say, give purchasing power to all families.

Opponents are also concerned about additional unfunded administrative costs implicit in this ballot measure. Further, they point out that the link to the national average is fraught with problems because of the difficulty of acquiring comparable data from each state on all the components listed in the proposition. These are examples, they say, of too many loopholes and open questions in Proposition 38.

## California is on its own

Sometimes the experience in other states can inform decisions in California. In the case of school vouchers, however, this state is on its own because Proposition 38 would create a system unlike any other in the country.

Currently only five states (Florida, Maine, Oklahoma, Vermont, and Wisconsin) have publicly funded voucher programs, but none has a scope comparable to Proposition 38. This voucher system is unique because it applies to all students, regardless of family income and whether the school is high or low performing.

Differences aside, the research about existing voucher programs provides limited information about their impact. The results comparing student achievement among schools vary from study to study and year to year. Parent surveys of voucher participants generally indicate higher satisfaction with private than with public schools. Only limited conclusions can be drawn from the research. (See To Learn More below.) And even those conclusions are not necessarily applicable to California's huge and complex educational system.

*Education Week* writer Lynn Olson spots a trend toward a "new, consumer-oriented model that could change the very definition of 'public' schools," when a public school would be "any school that is open to the public, receives public dollars, and is accountable to public authorities for results."

Would Proposition 38 be a step toward a better, more responsive school system? Or would it be a step away from a public education system altogether?

What California voters decide on Nov. 7 could chart the course for public education in California—and reverberate nationally.

### To Learn More

To view proponents' arguments, see [www.localchoice2000.com](http://www.localchoice2000.com); they are at 400 Seaport Court, Suite 102, Redwood City 94063 (800/653-9926). The opponents are at [www.novouchers2000.com](http://www.novouchers2000.com), and their mailing address is 1510 J St., Suite 210, Sacramento 95814 (916/442-4406).

Summaries by the Secretary of State and analyses from the Office of the Legislative Analyst are also on the web [www.ss.ca.gov](http://www.ss.ca.gov) and [www.lao.ca.gov](http://www.lao.ca.gov).

See [www.wested.org](http://www.wested.org) for a summary of research about vouchers and school choice, plus links to other sites. National data is at [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov).



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