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Massachusetts Private School Survey: Gauging Capacity and Interest in Vouchers

schoolchoice

BY KATHRYN CIFFOLILLO
& ELENA LLAUDET

PIONEER INSTITUTE for Public Policy Research
Putting ideas into action for Massachusetts

www.pioneerinstitute.org
85 Devonshire St., 8th floor
Boston, MA 02109
617-723-2277 | Tel
617-723-1880 | Fax

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

If a voucher program were launched in Massachusetts, how many private schools would participate in the first year? How many seats would be initially available for eligible students? Would participating schools be located near the students most in need of a new schooling option?

This paper takes up the practical question of whether sufficient private school seats would be available for a voucher initiative to get off the ground in Massachusetts. To collect the necessary data, Pioneer Institute designed and conducted a survey of the 524 private, K-12 non-special education schools in Massachusetts. One hundred ninety-four schools serving a total of 50,435 K-12 students responded to the survey, representing 37 percent of all K-12 non-special education private schools in Massachusetts and approximately 43 percent of the private school student population.

The results of the survey indicate substantial interest in publicly funded vouchers among the Massachusetts private schools that responded as well as ample classroom capacity for a voucher initiative to be successfully launched.

Major Findings

- One hundred thirty-eight schools, 72 percent of the schools that answered the survey, reported that they would consider participating in a publicly funded voucher program if it were offered in Massachusetts.
- Most interested private schools would be willing to educate a voucher-bearing student for less than what the state's public schools now spend on average per child.
- Respondent schools that would consider accepting vouchers reported more than 5,400 vacant seats, about 85 percent of those in grades K-8, and a willingness to add about 2,000 more seats in response to a voucher program.
- The majority of the responding schools that expressed interest in participating have a religious affiliation.

This paper also presents a hypothetical voucher scenario and estimates the number of seats that participating private schools would make available in the program's initial years of operation. The eligible population for the hypothetical voucher program is low-income students attending Massachusetts schools that have not met adequate yearly progress as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act for four or more consecutive years.

Readily available seats were estimated by identifying those private schools that 1) responded to the survey, 2) would consider accepting vouchers, 3) would likely accept students at the hypothetical $6,500 voucher amount, and 4) are located in the same district as or near a school that is underperforming according to the federal guidelines.

Given these parameters, the data indicate that private schools near the 52 underperforming schools would make available a minimum of 2,500 grade-appropriate seats for eligible voucher students. The calculations do not consider the likely possibilities that additional private schools would participate from the beginning or that a voucher program would prompt new private schools to open in subsequent years.

Massachusetts Private School Survey: Gauging Capacity and Interest in Vouchers

By **Kathryn Ciffolillo** and **Elena Llaudet**

INTRODUCTION

If a voucher program were launched in Massachusetts, how many private schools would participate in the first year? How many seats would be initially available for eligible students? Would participating schools be located near the students most in need of a new schooling option? Drawing on the results of a survey, this paper seeks to identify the financial and programmatic conditions under which existing Massachusetts private schools would enroll voucher-bearing students and to estimate how many seats they would make available to voucher students under a particular scenario.

This paper takes up the practical question of whether sufficient private school seats would be available for a voucher initiative to get off the ground in Massachusetts.

Publicly funded school vouchers are among the most hotly debated issues in education policy. School voucher programs typically use public funds to provide poor, urban students with access to private schools, opening up opportunities to children who would not otherwise have them. Advocates contend this is only fair—families with resources have the choice of purchasing homes in preferred school districts or paying private school tuition. According to proponents, voucher programs benefit not only those students who take advantage of them but also the students who remain in the district schools: by generating competition among schools, vouchers promote higher school performance overall. Opponents argue that by shifting public education resources to private schools, vouchers hurt public schools and the students who remain in them. Moreover, many opponents maintain that voucher programs in which religious schools participate violate the separation of church and state. The topic hits a nerve in American politics mainly because school voucher initiatives threaten the longstanding hegemony of the government-run public education system.

While a variety of public school choice programs are in place in the Commonwealth, government policies at the federal, state, and local levels limit students' participation, both intentionally and unintentionally, through caps on enrollment and various aspects of program design. Of the more than 1 million schoolchildren in Massachusetts in 2003-04,

roughly 116,000, or 11 percent, attended a private school, and approximately 950,000 children attended public schools. Only about 35,600, or just over 3 percent of all scho children, participated in public school choice programs. This figure does not include intradistrict choice but does include charter schools, pilot schools, METCO, interdistrict choice, and transfers under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2002-03 and in 200 04. Long waiting lists exist for charter schools and for the METCO program, clear eviden that demand for publicly funde education options far exceeds supply.[1]

Students in Massachusetts public and private schools, 2003-04 school year

	Number of K-12 students	*Percent of all students*
Public schools	**952,373**	**88**
Charter schools	17,948	1.7
Pilot schools	4,720	0.4
METCO[a]	3,307	0.3
Intradistrict choice	*statewide data not available*	
Interdistrict choice	8,829	0.8
NCLB 2002-03 transfers	298	0.03
NCLB 2003-04 transfers	554	0.1
Private schools (non–special education)	**116,501[b]**	**11**
Approved private special education schools	**7,503**	**1**
TOTAL MASSACHUSETTS	**1,076,377**	**100**

Source: Several Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) databases.

[a] METCO is "a state-funded grant program that promotes racial integration and educational opportunity for approximately 3,300 Boston and Springfield school students as well as thousands of students in the METCO receiving school districts." DOE website, **www.doe.mass.edu/metco.**

[b] Private school enrollments include students who come from out of state to attend school in Massachusetts.

It is likely that demand for private school vouchers in Massachusetts would be signifi cant, particularly among parent whose children attend the most troubled schools. Research by Harvard professor William Howell, published by Pioneer Institute, found that urban parents in Massachusetts whose children attend schools that are "underperforming" according to the provisions of NCLB are interested in alternative schooling options and are most interested in sending their children to private schools.[2]

Unfortunately, no research has been done on the supply side, to determine which, ar under what conditions, Massachusetts private schools would be interested in participatin and would have the ready capacity to accept additional students were a voucher program created. To ensure the viability of a voucher program in Massachusetts, existing private schools must make a significant number of seats available to voucher students immediately. If there are too few seats available at the outset, the initiative will quickly fail. Once the program is underway, however, the availability of vouchers and demand for private school seats will prompt some schools to expand their capacity and new schools to emerge.

Program design, the set of conditions that shape program operation, is equally critical for a voucher initiative to be launched successfully, to fulfill the expectations of parents and policymakers, and to succeed in the long term. The design must provide reasonable incentives for private schools to participate while reinforcing the state's commitment to the prudent use of tax dollars to provide a high-quality education for every child.

[1] Charter schools report to DOE only the number of students on their waiting lists, which totaled 14,700 last year. They are not required to provide any information that would enable duplicates to be taken out of the total. The waiting list for METCO was 16,500, which likely contained some students who were also on one or more charter school waiting lists.

[2] William Howell, "Parents, Choice, and Some Foundations for Education Reform in Massachusetts," Pioneer Institute, Boston, MA, November 2004. The research focuses on parents of public school students in the ten largest Massachusetts districts.

The Purpose of the Paper

Rather than contribute to the voluminous commentary on the larger policy issues surrounding school choice and voucher programs, this paper takes up the practical question of whether sufficient private school seats would be available for a voucher initiative to get off the ground in Massachusetts. To collect the necessary data, Pioneer Institute designed and conducted a survey of the 524 private, K-12 non-special education schools in Massachusetts. One hundred ninety-four schools serving a total of 50,435 K-12 students responded to the survey, representing 37 percent of all K-12 non-special education private schools in Massachusetts and approximately 43 percent of the private school student population. The survey sample does contain some bias. Schools that were more inclined to consider accepting vouchers were undoubtedly more likely to answer the survey. Thus, the research findings cannot be directly extrapolated to the remaining private schools in the Commonwealth, and this paper does not attempt to do so.

The primary goal of the survey was to gauge the level of interest among Massachusetts private schools in a state-funded voucher program.

Part I of this paper reports on the results of the private school survey (see appendix A for the survey instrument and methodology). Part II estimates the private school seats that would be immediately available for low-income students in failing Massachusetts schools, given a particular voucher program.

PART I. SURVEY FINDINGS

> ***FINDINGS:*** *Nearly three-quarters of responding principals indicated their schools would consider accepting students bearing publicly funded vouchers. More than three-quarters of these schools have a religious orientation or purpose. Applicant acceptance rates were the one significant difference between the schools that would consider vouchers and those that responded they did not know or would not consider accepting vouchers.*

The primary goal of the survey was to gauge the level of interest among private schools in a voucher program. We asked principals, If a publicly funded voucher program were offered in Massachusetts, would your school consider accepting them? Of the 194 principals who responded to the survey, 138 or 71 percent reported that they would consider accepting vouchers (Group A), 42 or 22 percent did not know (Group B), and 14 or 7 percent reported that they would not (Group C).

Group A: 138 private schools that would consider accepting vouchers

Group B: 42 private schools that did not know

Group C: 14 private schools that would not consider accepting vouchers

Three-quarters of responding schools have a religious orientation or purpose; an even greater proportion (82 percent) of schools that would consider vouchers (Group A) are religious schools.

The three groups of schools show only small differences in demographic makeup, financial aid provision, and average enrollment.

Not all respondent schools reported demographic information. Student demographic makeup of the 132 Group A schools that provided data was 82 percent white, 5 percent Hispanic, and 7 percent African American. The figures for Group B (N = 40) and Group C schools (N = 12) were 81 and 85 percent white, 6 and 3 percent Hispanic, and 5 and 8 percent African American, respectively.

The average percentage of students receiving some form of financial aid was similar across the groups. The figure was 26 percent for Group A (N = 126), 24 percent for Group B (N = 36), and 23 percent for Group C (N = 13).

Average enrollments were 262 for Group A, 290 for Group B, and 286 for Group C, with all schools providing data.

A clear difference between the groups does appear when acceptance rates are considered. Private schools differ markedly in applicant acceptance rates, that is, the percentage of applicants they typically accept each year. Acceptance rates across private schools commonly range from as low as 20 percent to 100 percent. Respondent schools as a whole had an average applicant acceptance rate of 73 percent, and more than half accepted at least 80 percent of applicants. Not surprisingly, on average, schools that indicated they would consider accepting students with vouchers have historically accepted a higher percentage of applicants than schools that did not know or would not accept vouchers. The average acceptance rate in Group A is 77 percent, and 64 percent of these schools reported acceptance rates of 80 percent or higher. Groups B and C reported average acceptance rates of 69 percent and 56 percent, respectively.

Private School Tuition Levels

> ***FINDING:*** *About three-quarters of the respondent private schools that would consider accepting vouchers (Group A) reported average tuition lower than the average regular per-pupil expenditure of the surrounding district.*

The survey asked private school principals for tuition and cost information to permit comparison to per-pupil spending in public schools.

Table I-1: Annual tuition for a day student by grade levels for Group A, B, and C schools, 2003-04 ($)

	Group A [N=138] Would Consider			*Group B [N=42] Don't Know*			*Group C [N=13] Would Not Consider*		
	K-5	*6-8*	*9-12*	*K-5*	*6-8*	*9-12*	*K-5*	*6-8*	*9-12*
MEAN	**4,083**	**4,270**	**10,548**	**5,722**	**8,645**	**15,516**	**4,905**	**9,171**	**16,871**
Median	3,000	2,925	6,900	3,750	3,817	18,250	3,200	3,713	22,000
Maximum	17,300	25,000	26,700	25,200	25,440	27,800	20,000	29,500	29,500
Minimum [a]	0	0	4,200	450	450	1,000	0	0	4,200
Standard deviation	3,208	4,121	7,103	5,379	8,507	9,633	6,142	10,453	10,153
N	115	110	29	30	30	18	9	10	7

[a] Five tuition-free schools responded to the survey.

The average *tuition* (K-12) of each school was compared to the average FY03 regular per-pupil expenditure (PPE) in the public schools in the district where the private school is located.[3] (Regular per-pupil expenditure does not include expenditures for special education, bilingual education, or occupational education.) Seventy-seven percent (106 out of 138) of the schools in Group A reported average tuition *lower* than the average regular PPE of the surrounding district. For schools in Groups B and C, the figures were 55 percent and 54 percent.

[3] PPE for FY04 was not available at the time this analysis was done. The public districts in which the private schools that responded to the survey are located had in FY03 an average regular PPE of $6,991. Cambridge spent the most ($13,170) and Lakeville the least ($4,776).

The average *cost* per (K-12) student reported by each school was also compared to the average FY03 regular PPE in the district where the private school is located.[4] Seventy-three percent (87 out of 119) of the schools in Group A that answered the question had an average per-student cost lower than the average regular PPE of its district. For schools in Groups B and C, the figures were 50 percent and 43 percent.

Program Design

FINDING: *About 80 percent of respondent schools that would consider accepting vouchers (Group A) either estimated a voucher amount or had maximum tuition lower than $6,500 for all the grades they provide.*

We asked principals to estimate the minimum voucher amount that they would be willing to accept as full payment for a student's tuition. Not all respondents provided a figure; the school's maximum tuition rate was used as a proxy when necessary. (Only 35 Group A schools did not provide a figure; 28 schools in Group B did not.) To facilitate interpretation of these figures, we set a hypothetical maximum voucher amount at $6,500.

Of the schools in Group A, 109 or 79 percent either estimated an acceptable voucher amount or had maximum tuition lower than $6,500 for all the grades they provide. Four additional schools either estimated a voucher amount or had tuition lower than $6,500 for some of the grades they serve. Of the 42 schools in Group B, 25 or 60 percent either estimated a voucher amount or had maximum tuition lower than $6,500.[5]

Table I-2: Reported minimum voucher amount that Group A schools would accept as full payment for day student tuition ($)

	K-5	*6-8*	*9-12*
MEAN	**4,090**	**4,071**	**8,880**
Median	3,400	3,300	6,800
Maximum	14,000	16,000	24,400
Minimum	1,700	1,800	2,200
Standard deviation	2,308	2,602	6,180
N=103	85	79	23

FINDING: *Principals of schools that would consider accepting vouchers identified the schools' most significant concerns as follows: 1) a requirement to accept students regardless of behavioral problems and 2) a requirement to accept students regardless of academic aptitude or achievement.*

Numerous federal, state, and local mandates govern public schools, and the receipt of public funds is often conditional on compliance. Private schools, which operate independent of the public system, are exempt from most such mandates. The survey included questions designed to measure the importance principals place on possible legal requirements of a publicly funded voucher program. We asked principals to rate on a scale of 0 to 5 (0 meaning "not concerned at all" and 5 meaning "very concerned") the following possible requirements of a voucher program:

- School accepts voucher students regardless of **academic** aptitude or achievement
- School accepts voucher students regardless of **behavioral** problems
- School accepts voucher students regardless of **religious** background
- Voucher students participate in a mandatory **testing** program
- Specific **curriculum** requirements
- Specific **personnel** requirements, such as teacher certification.

[4] The survey question read as follows: What is the current average per-pupil cost of educating a day student? Please exclude capital expenditures such as buildings and land; evening programs; and recreation expenditures.

[5] A separate analysis was done using the schools' reported per-pupil costs, which tended to be higher than tuition. Results were similar, with 104 schools in Group A estimating a voucher amount or reporting per-pupil costs below the hypothetical voucher amount of $6,500. In Group B, 17 schools either estimated a voucher amount or reported per pupil cost lower than $6,500 for all the grades they provide.

The concern of greatest significance for Group A schools was that participation in a voucher program would require that they accept students regardless of behavioral problems (91 percent rated it > 3), followed by a requirement to accept students regardless of academic aptitude or achievement (65 percent rated it > 3) and by specific curriculum requirements (46 percent rated it > 3).

Table I-3. Respondent schools' concerns, rated 0 to 5

	Academic	*Behavior*	*Religion*	*Testing*	*Curriculum*	*Personnel*
Group A [N=138]						
Mean	3.8	4.6	1.2	2	3	2.3
<3	15%	4%	78%	57%	32%	51%
=3	20%	5%	6%	16%	22%	14%
>3	**65%**	**91%**	**17%**	**28%**	**46%**	**34%**
Group B [N=41]						
Mean	4.3	4.8	1.2	2.9	4.3	3.2
<3	10%	2%	78%	34%	10%	32%
=3	7%	5%	7%	17%	7%	12%
>3	**83%**	**93%**	**15%**	**49%**	**83%**	**56%**
Group C [N=10]						
Mean	3.8	4.1	2.8	3.2	4.3	3.4
<3	20%	10%	40%	30%	10%	30%
=3	10%	20%	10%	10%	10%	10%
>3	**70%**	**70%**	**50%**	**60%**	**80%**	**60%**

Only thirty-four percent expressed significant concern (> 3) about personnel requirements, and 28 percent considered mandatory testing to be of great concern (> 3). Most (83 percent) of Group A private schools already administer a standardized test to assess student progress, although the tests typically used are norm-referenced and quite dissimilar to the MCAS. Terra Nova is the test most often used by these schools, followed by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and Stanford. The requirement to accept voucher students regardless of religious background was least often of significant concern (only 17 percent rated it > 3).

Group A school heads expressed a number of concerns not fully captured in the requirements listed above. Among these are having to provide special education; maintaining religious content in the school's curriculum; governmunt interference in curriculum and hiring; consistency and reliability in voucher payments; and requirements to provide transportation, lunch, or nursing staff.

Principals at schools in Group B were also most concerned about behavioral issues (93 percent rated it > 3) and least concerned about religious background (15 percent rated it > 3), but they were significantly more concerned than Group A principals about academic achievement (83 rated it > 3), curriculum (83 rated it > 3), personnel requirements (56 rated it > 3) and testing (49 rated it > 3). Sixty-nine percent of Group B schools administer a standardized test.

All six issues were of significant concern to principals in Group C (those who would not consider accepting vouchers), with all six rated greater than three by at least half of respondents. Sixty-four percent of Group C schools administer a standardized test.

Additional comments made by Group B and Group C principals indicated concern about the schools' ability to maintain their independence and specifically to define a mission and execute it successfully. It is interesting to note that U.S. Department of Education researchers, looking into possible solutions to overcrowding in urban public schools, concluded in 1998 that private and religious schools nationally were unlikely to participate in any school choice program that required them to relinquish their autonomy and control over curriculum or admissions policies.[6]

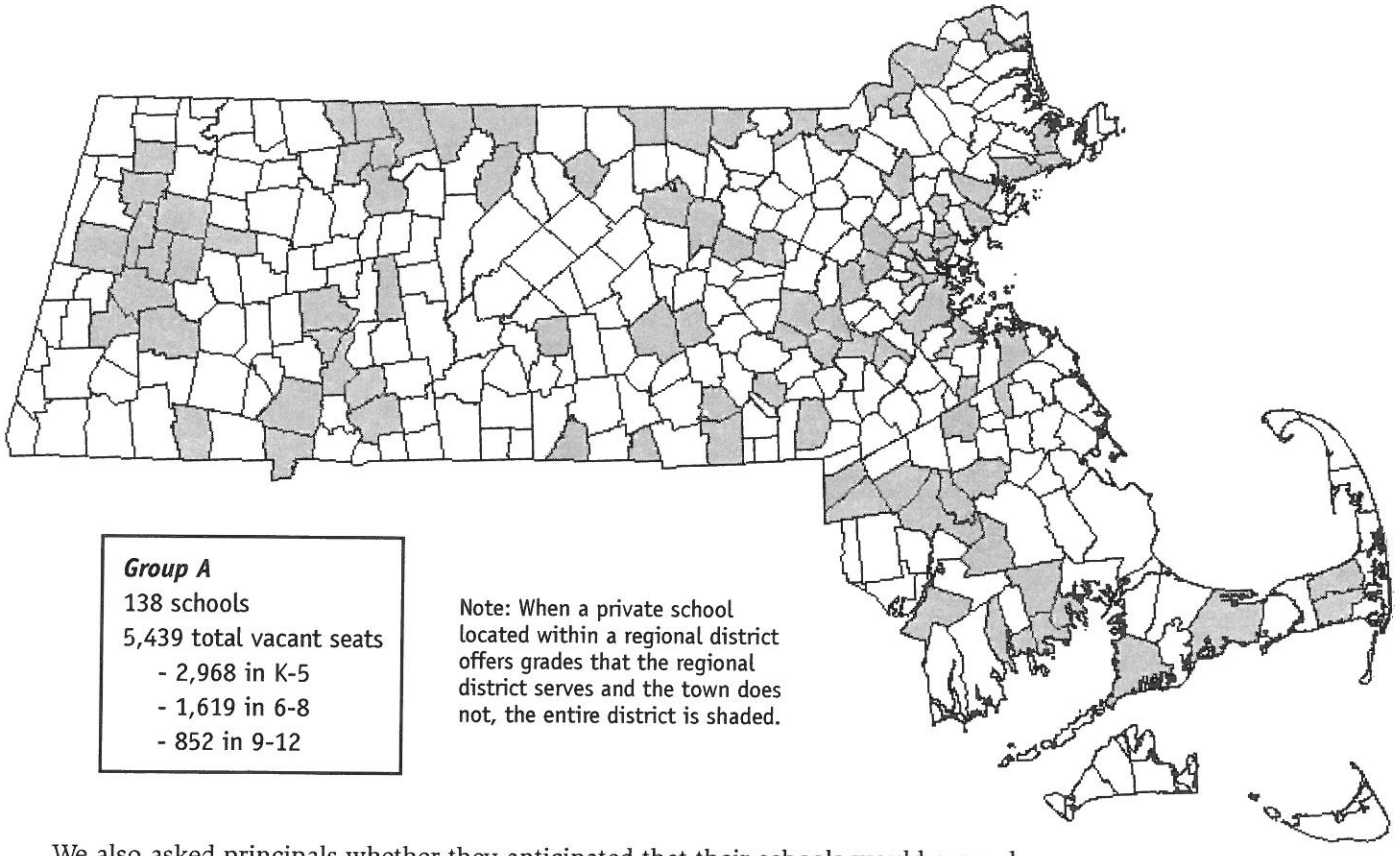
[6] Lana Muraskin, "Barriers, Benefits and Costs of Using Private Schools to Alleviate Overcrowding in Public Schools, Final Report," U.S. Department of Education, 1998.

Measuring Capacity

FINDING: *Respondent schools that would consider accepting vouchers (Group A) reported more than 5,400 vacant seats, about 85 percent of them in grades K-8. Sixty-five of these schools expressed their willingness to add seats in response to a voucher program. The 46 schools that provided an estimate for new seats would together add more than 2,100 seats in response to a voucher program.*

To gauge the initial magnitude of a statewide voucher program, we asked principals to provide the number of vacant seats in their schools by grade level. Schools in Group A reported 2,968 vacant seats in grades K-5, 1,619 in grades 6-8, and 852 in grades 9-12, for a total of 5,439 vacant seats. The average Group A school operates at 84 percent of enrollment capacity. Group B reported 972 total vacant seats, with only 76 in the high school grades. The average Group B school operates at 89 percent of enrollment capacity.

Map I-1: Public districts in which Group A private schools are located



We also asked principals whether they anticipated that their schools would expand beyond current capacity in response to a voucher program. Sixty-five schools in Group A indicated they would increase their capacity. The total increase for the 46 schools that estimated the number of seats they would add was 2,128. The expansions would take a minimum of six months and a maximum of five years to accomplish.

Seven schools in Group B would increase capacity; combined these schools could be expected to add at least 210 seats over a minimum of two and a half years and a maximum of four years.

PART II. ENVISIONING VOUCHERS IN MASSACHUSETTS

To gain a practical understanding of the survey findings, we designed a hypothetica voucher program and utilized a set of conservative assumptions to estimate the numbe seats that participating private schools would make available for voucher students in th program's initial years of operation.

Eligible student population. The parameters of voucher programs around the cou vary somewhat, but programs typically target low-income students and/or students in failing schools (for a brief summary of existing voucher programs, see appendix B). We defined the population eligible for vouchers as the low-income students who are curren attending one of the 52 public schools in Massachusetts that have not met adequate ye progress (AYP) as defined by the federal No Child Left Behind Act for four or more consecu years. (Currently, the law provides for a series of escalating interventions to turn failing schools around and provide educational alternatives to their students; providing vouche to attend private schools is not included as of yet.)

Map II-1: Districts in which underperforming public schools are located

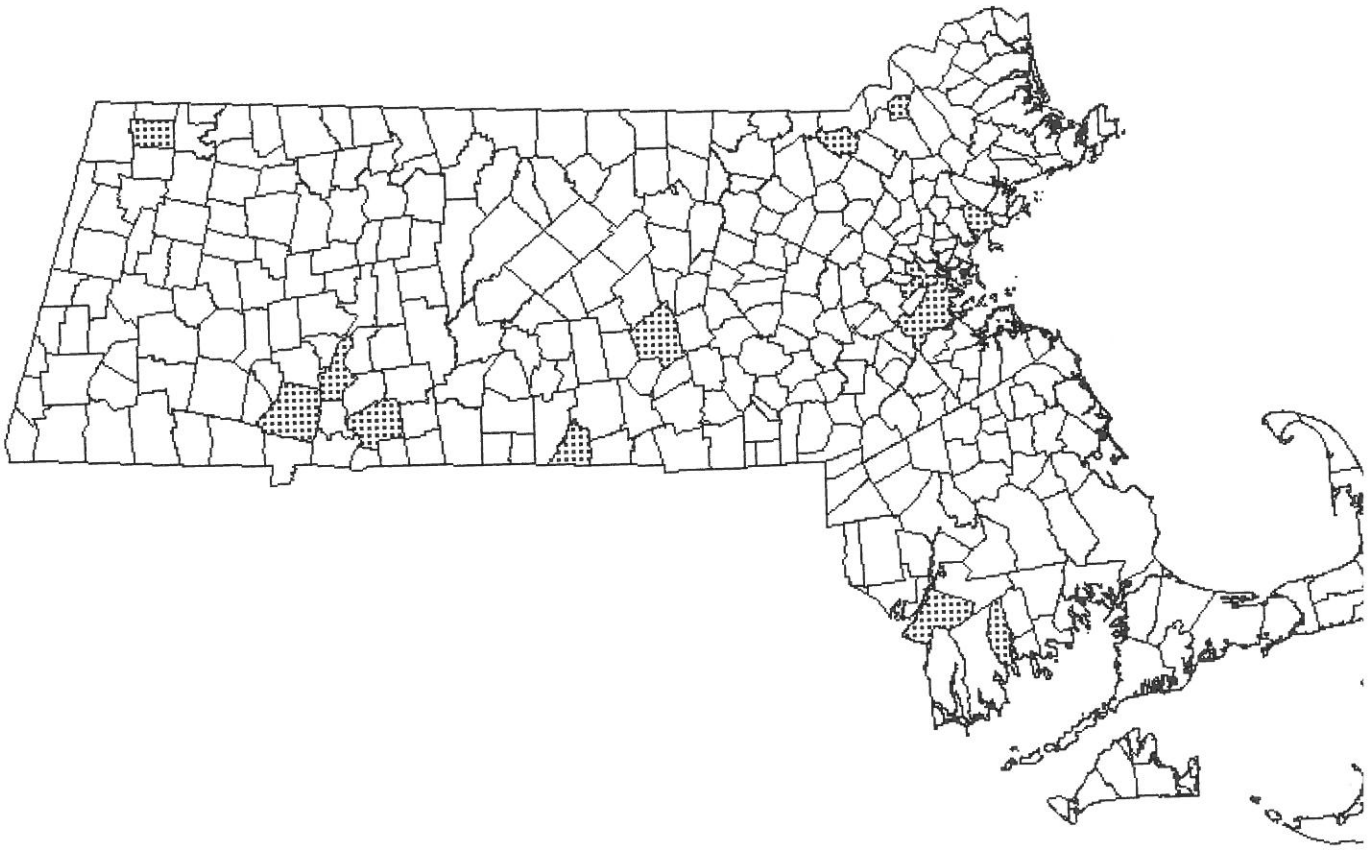


Table II-1 lists the 13 districts in which the 52 schools identified under NCLB for restructuring or corrective action are located, along with low-income enrollment figures. Sixty-three percent of the students attending these schools are African American or Hispanic. Thirty-five percent of students do not consider English their first language, and 13 percent are considered Limited English Proficient (LEP). Seventy-five percent

of students attending these schools come from low-income families. A total of 21,495 low-income students would be eligible for our hypothetical school voucher program.

Voucher amount. We set the maximum voucher amount at $6,500. This figure is about 75 percent of the average total FY03 per-pupil expenditure in the 52 schools that our hypothetical voucher program includes, weighted by the number of low-income students in each school ($8,655).

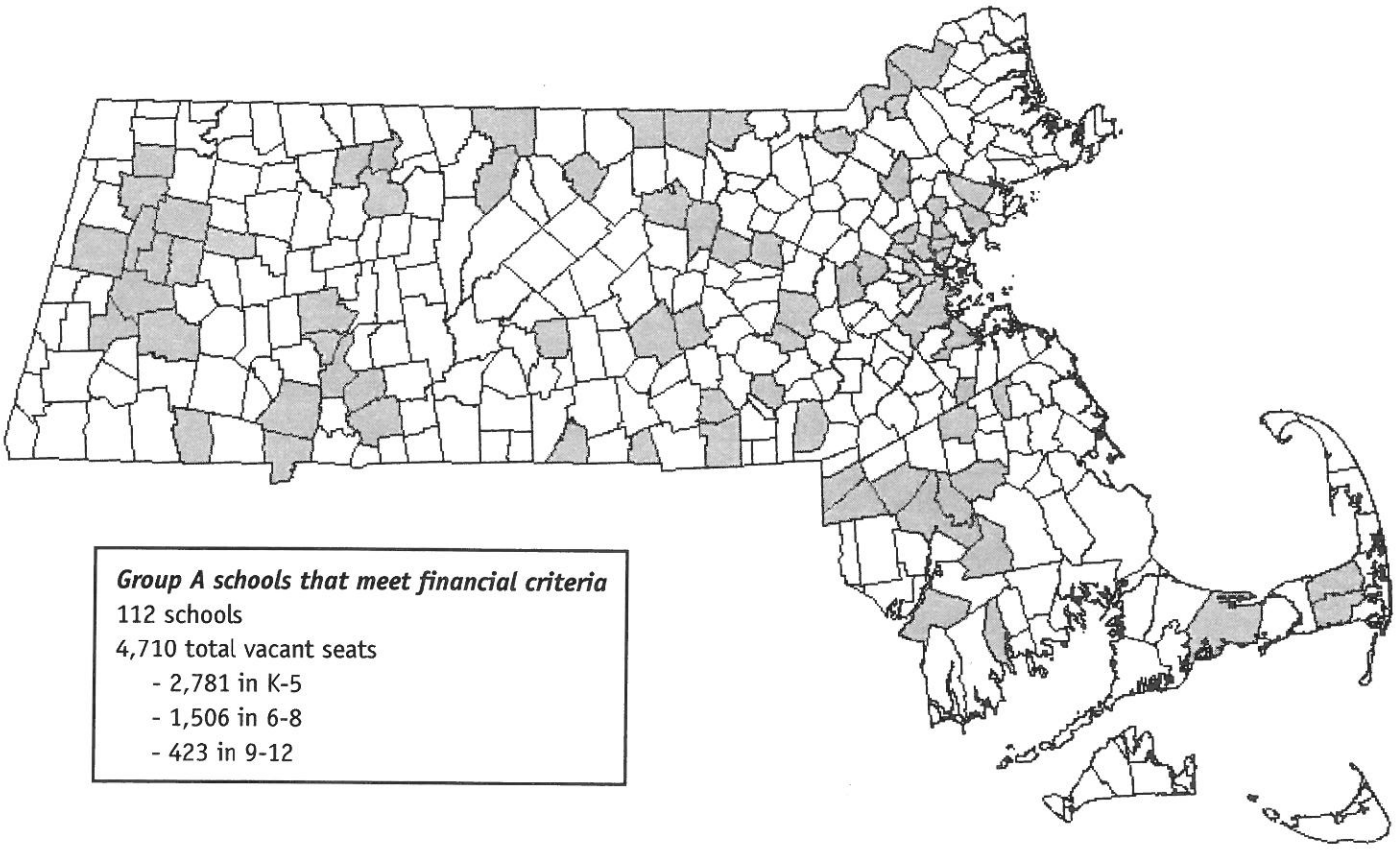
Participating schools. In order to make our estimates as conservative as possible, we drew the population of participating private schools only from Group A. We did not include any schools that indicated they did not know (Group B) or would not be interested (Group C), nor did we include any of the 330 non-respondent schools. We also did not attempt to estimate the number of new schools that might open in response to a voucher program.

To identify the schools most likely to be participants in our hypothetical voucher program, we applied two filters to the Group A schools in sequence: financial criteria and location. Of the 138 Group A schools, 112 would accept students at or below the hypothetical voucher amount of $6,500.

Table II-1. Low-income students in 52 public schools identified for restructuring or corrective action under NCLB, by grade level

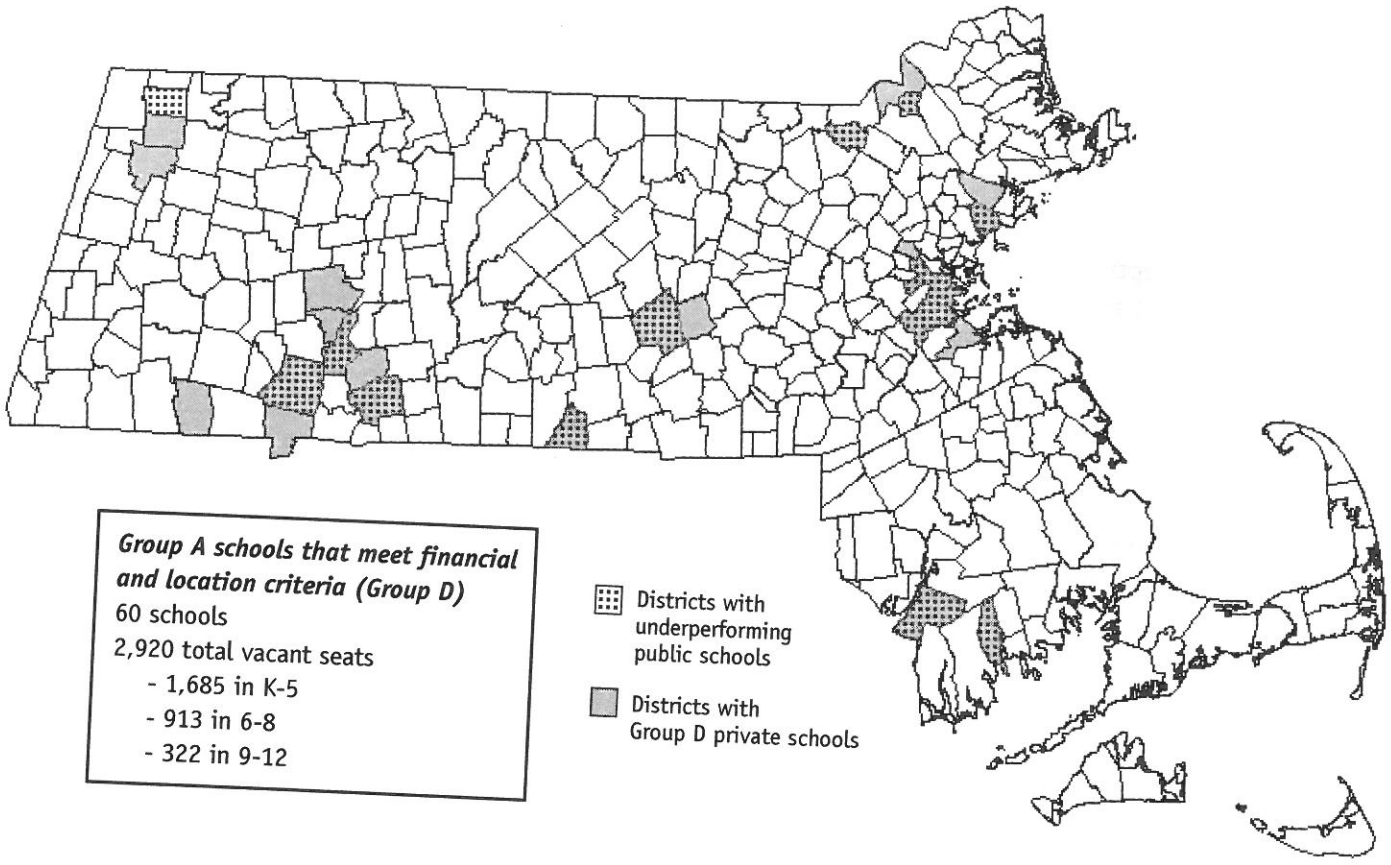
	Number of schools	*Estimated distribution of low-income students among grade levels*		
		K-5	*6-8*	*9-12*
Boston	14	3,815	1,637	-
Cambridge	2	319	149	-
Fall River	5	743	912	-
Holyoke	2	357	684	-
Lawrence	4	1,299	1,167	-
Lowell	1	97	335	-
Lynn	1	132	-	-
New Bedford	2	-	1,348	-
North Adams	2	190	270	-
Southbridge	1	-	338	-
Springfield	12	2,299	2,075	207
Westfield	1	81	-	-
Worcester	5	360	2,544	134
TOTAL	**52**	**9,693**	**11,461**	**341**

Map II-2: Districts with Group A private schools that would accept the hypothetical voucher amount



Clearly, widespread use of vouchers will require not only that private schools be willing to participate but also that they be located near eligible students' homes. Of the 112 private schools in Map II-2, 44 are located within one of the 13 districts in which the 52 targeted public schools are located, and 16 are in a neighboring district, for a total of 60 private schools that meet both financial and location criteria (Group D).

Map II-3: Location of Group D private schools and underperforming public schools



Estimating readily available seats. The next step was to determine the availability of seats in Group D schools. Table II-2 indicates, by grade level, vacant seats in the private schools located in or near one of the 13 districts. For example, the Group D school *in* Cambridge reported 40 vacant seats in grades 9-12. The Group D school *near* Cambridge reported 58 vacant seats in grades K-5 and four vacant seats in grades 6-8. (We excluded vacant seats in the grade levels for which a school would not accept students at the $6,500 voucher amount.)

Table II-3 compares the eligible students by grade level to the available seats in nearby Group D schools. For example, in Lawrence, the 76 vacant seats in grades 6-8 would accommodate 6.5 percent of eligible students in those grades.

If we aggregate the figures, we find a total of 2,527 grade-appropriate vacant seats in Group D schools, space to accommodate about 12 percent of the eligible students. We also find 393 vacant seats available in grades for which there are no eligible students in the surrounding area. Were 36 schools to expand as indicated in the survey results, an additional 1,187 seats would become available. Together, these seats could accommodate 17.3 percent of eligible students. Clearly, this figure is highly dependent on our assumptions; a less conservative set of assumptions would yield a higher percentage.

Table II-2. Vacant seats by grade in Group D schools

	Number of Group D schools (in/near)	*Vacant seats by grade range Total (in/near)*		
		K-5	*6-8*	*9-12*
Boston	21 (18/3)	482 (390/92)	348 (280/68)	
Cambridge	2 (1/1)	58 (0/58)	4 (0/4)	40 (40/0)
Fall River	7 (7/0)	196 (196/0)	61 (61/0)	134 (134/0)
Holyoke	3 (1/2)	173 (98/75)	87 (39/48)	
Lawrence	5 (3/2)	110 (89/21)	76 (62/14)	22 (0/22)
Lowell	1(1/0)	73 (73/0)	18 (18/0)	
Lynn	2 (1/1)	16 (0/16)	7 (6/1)	4 (4/0)
New Bedford	2 (2/0)	123 (123/0)	90 (90/0)	
North Adams	1 (0/1)	26 (0/26)	25 (0/25)	
Southbridge	1 (1/0)	18 (18/0)	8 (8/0)	
Springfield	7 (4/3)	339 (170/169)	129 (26/103)	
Westfield	3 (2/1)	35 (35/0)	22 (22/0)	23 (23/0)
Worcester	5 (3/2)	36 (28/8)	38 (30/8)	99 (99/0)
TOTAL	**60 (44/16)**	**1,685 (1,220/465)**	**913 (642/271)**	**322 (300/22)**

Table II-3. Eligible students and vacant seats in Group D schools

	Eligible students			*Vacant seats (percentage of eligible students)*			*Possible additional seats created as a result of a voucher program*
	K-5	*6-8*	*9-12*	*K-5*	*6-8*	*9-12*	*K-12*
Boston	3,815	1,637	-	482 (12.6)	348 (21.3)		355
Cambridge	319	149	-	58 (18.2)	4 (2.7)	*40*	50
Fall River	743	912	-	196 (26.4)	61 (6.7)	*134*	226
Holyoke	357	684	-	173 (48.4)	87 (12.7)		
Lawrence	1,299	1,167	-	110 (8.5)	76 (6.5)	*22*	136
Lowell	97	335	-	73 (75)	18 (5.4)		70
Lynn	132	-	-	16 (12.1)	*7*	*4*	140
New Bedford	-	1,348	-	*123*	90 (6.7)		25
North Adams	190	270	-	26 (13.7)	25 (9.3)		25
Southbridge	-	338	-	*18*	8 (2.4)		
Springfield	2,299	2,075	207	339 (14.7)	129 (6.2)		140
Westfield	81	-	-	35 (43.0)	*22*	*23*	20
Worcester	360	2,544	134	36 (10)	38 (1.5)	99 (73.6)	
TOTAL	**9,693**	**11,461**	**341**	**1,544 (15.9)** *Plus 141 extra seats*	**884 (7.7)** *Plus 29 extra seats*	**99 (29)** *Plus 223 extra seats*	**1,187**

Note: Figures in italics show those grades in which Group D schools have more vacant seats than there are eligible students in the area.

CONCLUSIONS

Part I: Survey Findings

Nearly three-quarters of responding schools would consider participating in a publicly funded voucher program if it were offered in Massachusetts.

The results of the survey indicate substantial interest in vouchers among those private schools in Massachusetts that responded. One hundred thirty-eight schools, 71 percent of the schools that answered the survey, reported that they would consider participating in a publicly funded voucher program if it were offered in Massachusetts (Group A). Another 42 schools reported that they did not know (Group B), and only 14 schools reported that they would not be interested (Group C). Most of the responding schools that expressed interest in participating have a religious affiliation. The level of interest in publicly funded vouchers among religious schools likely reflects in part the recent spate of Catholic school closings tied to financial difficulties.

Most interested private schools would be willing to educate a public school student for less than what the public schools now spend on average per child. About 80 percent of Group A schools either estimated an acceptable voucher amount or had maximum tuition lower than $6,500 for all the grades they provide.

Respondent schools that would consider accepting vouchers reported more than 5,400 vacant seats, about 85 percent of those in grades K-8, and a willingness to add about 2,100 more seats in response to a voucher program.

The survey did not specify a voucher program design when asking whether or not schools would consider participating; it did include questions designed to gauge the degree of concern schools had about various potential requirements of a voucher program. The concern most often rated as significant by the principals of Group A schools was the expectation that they enroll students regardless of behavioral problems. The second most significant concern was that they enroll students regardless of academic achievement. Group A schools had very limited concern about mandatory testing. Most (83 percent) of Group A private schools already administer a standardized test to assess student progress, although the tests typically used are norm-referenced and not aligned with the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

Most interested private schools would be willing to educate a public school student for less than what the public schools now spend on average per child.

Were a voucher initiative launched, a consistent flow of objective school quality information would be critical for parents to make informed choices among public and private schooling options. To ensure public access to school quality information, the collection and dissemination of student test scores and other data would need to be included in the voucher program design.

Part II: Envisioning Vouchers in Massachusetts

To gain a practical understanding of the survey findings, we designed a hypothetical voucher program and calculated the number of seats that participating private schools would make available for voucher students in the program's initial years of operation.

The eligible population for our hypothetical voucher program is low-income students attending schools that have not met adequate yearly progress as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act for four or more consecutive years.

Readily available seats were calculated by identifying only those private schools that 1) responded to the survey, 2) would consider accepting vouchers, 3) would likely accept students at the hypothetical $6,500 voucher amount, and 4) are located in the same district as or near a school that is underperforming according to the federal guidelines (Group D).

The hypothetical voucher scenario makes two necessary assumptions: 1) The state's program design would address the concerns of Group D schools and not cause any to reconsider their willingness to accept voucher students. 2) A change could be made to the Massachusetts Constitution allowing public education funds to flow to schools with a religious affiliation.

With these parameters and drawing on the results of the survey, we predict that in the voucher program's first year of operation, private schools located near underperforming schools would make available appropriate grade-level seats to a minimum of 2,527 low-income students, or 12 percent of all eligible students. (Almost 400 seats would be available in grades in Group D schools for which there are no eligible students.) After the initial years of operation, if Group D schools expanded their capacity as indicated in the survey data, they would be able to accommodate about 17 percent of the eligible population.

In the hypothetical voucher program's first year of operation, private schools located near underperforming schools would make available appropriate grade-level seats to a minimum of 2,527 low-income students, or 12 percent of all eligible students.

The number of students who could be accommodated would change markedly if we derived the key parameters differently, including the number of participating schools, the voucher amount, and the target population. Our calculations do not consider the likely possibilities that some of the 42 Group B schools would participate, that some of the 330 non-respondent schools would participate, or that a voucher program would prompt new private schools to open.

The survey findings and the implications of the hypothetical voucher scenario indicate enough interest and capacity among private schools in Massachusetts for a voucher program to be successfully launched. Were policymakers in Massachusetts to consider expanding school choice to include private schools through vouchers or through tax credits, the particular program design would have enormous impact on public support and largely determine the extent of participation among both students and schools.

Kathryn Ciffolillo is a freelance writer and edits books and research papers on public policy issues. Elena Llaudet is the research project manager at Pioneer Institute. Her main research interest is education policy.

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2003-04 Massachusetts Private School Capacity Survey

Code for the School _____

Enrollment and Capacity

1. How many total students are currently enrolled in your school for the 2003-04 school year? _____

2.

How many students are currently enrolled in each grade (2003-04 school year)?	How many vacant seats (if any) does your school currently have in each grade?
K: _____	K: _____
grade 1: _____	grade 1: _____
grade 2: _____	grade 2: _____
grade 3: _____	grade 3: _____
grade 4: _____	grade 4: _____
grade 5: _____	grade 5: _____
grade 6: _____	grade 6: _____
grade 7: _____	grade 7: _____
grade 8: _____	grade 8: _____
grade 9: _____	grade 9: _____
grade 10: _____	grade 10: _____
grade 11: _____	grade 11: _____
grade 12: _____	grade 12: _____

3. Do you have any current plans to increase or decrease your capacity? ☐ Increase ☐ Decrease ☐ Neither
   If so, by how many seats? _____ ☐ Don't know
   In what year will these changes be in effect? _____ ☐ Don't know
4. How many applicants did you have for the 2003-04 school year? _____ ☐ Don't know
5. How many applicants did you accept for the 2003-04 school year? _____ ☐ Don't know

Tuition and Cost

6.

What is the average annual tuition for a day student?	What is the current average per-pupil cost of educating a day student? Please exclude capital expenditures such as buildings and land; evening programs; and recreation expenditures.
K: _____	K: _____
grade 1: _____	grade 1: _____
grade 2: _____	grade 2: _____
grade 3: _____	grade 3: _____
grade 4: _____	grade 4: _____
grade 5: _____	grade 5: _____
grade 6: _____	grade 6: _____
grade 7: _____	grade 7: _____
grade 8: _____	grade 8: _____
grade 9: _____	grade 9: _____
grade 10: _____	grade 10: _____
grade 11: _____	grade 11: _____
grade 12: _____	grade 12: _____

PERFORMANCE MEASURES

7. Does your school administer a standardized test to assess student progress?
   - ☐ Yes → If so, which one? _____
   - ☐ No
   - ☐ Don't know

IF A VOUCHER PROGRAM WERE OFFERED IN MASSACHUSETTS...

8. If a publicly funded voucher program were offered in Massachusetts, would your school consider accepting them?
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No → Skip to question 11
   - ☐ Don't know

9. If you were required to accept a voucher as a full payment for a student's tuition, what is the minimum monetary value the voucher would have to be for your school to seriously consider accepting them in your:

Elementary school (grades K-5)?	$_____/student	☐ Don't know
Middle school (grades 6-8)?	$_____/student	☐ Don't know
High school (grades 9-12)?	$_____/student	☐ Don't know

10. Do you anticipate that your school would expand beyond its current capacity in response to a voucher program?
    - ☐ Yes → If so, by how many seats? _____ And, how many years would it take? _____
    - ☐ No
    - ☐ Don't know

11. Some voucher programs have certain requirements. Which of the following requirements would concern you? Please rate on a scale of 0 to 5, with 0 meaning "not concerned at all" and 5 meaning "very concerned."
    - ___ Requirement that school accept voucher students, regardless of academic aptitude or achievement
    - ___ Requirement that school accept voucher students, regardless of behavioral issues
    - ___ Requirement that school accept voucher students, regardless of religious background
    - ___ Requirement that voucher students participate in a mandatory testing program
    - ___ Specific curriculum requirements
    - ___ Specific personnel requirements, such as teacher certification
    - ___ Other requirements → Please explain _____

GENERAL QUESTIONS

12. In what year was your school founded? _____
13. Does your school have a religious orientation or purpose? ☐ Yes ☐ No
14. Is your school predominately boarding? ☐ Yes ☐ No
15. Please provide the percentage of students in the 2003-04 school year that were:
    White _____% African American _____% Hispanic _____% Asian _____% Other _____%
16. In the 2003-04 school year, what percentage of students received financial aid? _____% ☐ Don't know
17. Please attach a separate sheet with any additional information and/or comments.
18. Would you be willing to participate in a focus group? ☐ Yes ☐ No

(Optional) Name: _____ Tel: _____ E-mail: _____

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION

Please send the completed questionnaire to:

Elena Llaudet, Research Project Manager
Pioneer Institute, 85 Devonshire Street, 8th floor · Boston, MA 02109
T: 617 723 2277 x 301 · F: 617 723 1880
ellaudet@pioneerinstitute.org

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey Instrument and Methodology

The survey instrument, shown on the preceding two pages, was mailed to the heads of the 524 non-special education private schools in Massachusetts. An electronic version of the survey was made available on Pioneer's web site, giving recipients the option of completing the survey online. The schools were given three weeks to return the survey before follow-up calls were placed.

Table A-1. Survey Response Rate

	Number of non-special education private schools	*Number of K-12 private school students*
Responded	194	50,435[a]
Did not respond	330	66,066[b]
Response rate	37.0%	43.3%

Source: 2003-04 DOE database.

[a] Enrollment is for 185 schools. DOE lacks enrollment data for nine of the schools that responded.

[b] Enrollment is for 305 schools. DOE lacks enrollment data for 25 of the schools surveyed.

Response rate. One hundred ninety-four schools serving a total of 50,435 students in grades K-12 (according to the Massachusetts Department of Education) responded to the survey. Respondent schools comprise 37 percent of all K-12 non-special education private schools in Massachusetts; they serve approximately 43 percent of the private school student population.

Response rates varied across cities and regions. The highest response rates were in Lawrence (71 percent, 5 of 7) and Fall River (67 percent, 8 of 12). Sixty percent (6 of 10) of Springfield's and 57 percent (4 of 7) of Brockton's private schools responded to the survey. Fewer than half of the private schools responded in Boston (48 percent, 27 of 56), Worcester (41 percent, 7 of 17), New Bedford (40 percent, 4 of 10), Lynn (25 percent, 1 of 4) and Lowell (17 percent, 2 of 12). Three of 11 (27 percent) Cambridge schools responded. Of the nine schools in North Adams, Holyoke, Westfield, and Southbridge combined, five responded. None of the 13 Newton schools responded.

Accuracy of the data. Every effort was made to ensure the accuracy of the data. We compared K-12 enrollments in responding schools as recorded in DOE files to the data reported directly to us from the schools and found a difference of less than 2,000 students out of more than 50,000 in total. This difference can be attributed in part to the fact that DOE does not have enrollment data for the nine Montessori schools that responded to the survey.[7] Also, the two sets of enrollment data were collected at different points during the 2003-04 school year.

The survey sample does contain some bias. Schools that were more inclined to consider accepting vouchers were undoubtedly more likely to answer the survey. Three-quarters of the schools that responded had some religious orientation or purpose. The 2001-02 National Center for Education Statistics' Private School Universe Survey estimated that only 55 percent of private schools in Massachusetts had a religious purpose or orientation.[8] Fewer than 5 percent of respondents were boarding schools, which tend to be more expensive and have highly selective admissions.

Because of the inherent bias in the sample, the research findings cannot be extrapolated to the remaining 330 K-12 non-special education private schools in Massachusetts.

Respondent school characteristics. Compared to public schools, respondent schools are smaller on average, with mean and median enrollment of 270 and 212 students, respectively, compared to 525 and 440 for public schools.[9] Respondent schools that reported demographic information educate a slightly higher proportion of white students than public

[7] K-12 enrollment according to the survey is 52,345; DOE data: 50,435.

[8] Characteristics of Private Schools in the United States: Results from the 2001-2002 Private School Universe Survey, available online at **nces.ed.gov**.

[9] Private schools, N=194; public schools, N=1,815. Data for private schools come from our database. Data for public schools come from DOE.

schools (82 percent vs. 74.6 percent), fewer Hispanic students (5 percent vs. 11.5 percent), and a similar proportion of African-American students (7 percent vs. 8.9 percent).[10] About one-quarter of students who attend the respondent schools receive some form of financial aid. The schools had an average acceptance rate of 73 percent of applicants. More than half of the schools that responded accepted at least 80 percent of applicants.

Appendix B: A Brief Survey of Voucher Programs in the United States

In several cities and states, including Milwaukee, Cleveland, Washington, DC, and Florida, voucher programs provide a specified student population with access to private school. The parameters of these programs vary somewhat, but they typically target low-income students and/or students in failing schools.

Milwaukee. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program has been in place since 1990 and targets households at or below 175 percent of the federal poverty level. According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, in January 2005, 117 private schools were participating, serving 13,978 voucher students. Vouchers were provided up to $5,943, depending on the private schools' per-student costs.[11] A Milwaukee think tank's January 2005 research brief reported that 69 percent (83 of 121, by its count) of participating schools were religious schools. The number of Catholic schools had declined from the previous year, while the number of secular schools had increased, due largely to start-ups. Student participation in the program is capped at 15 percent of the Milwaukee public school enrollment, about 15,000 students. Observers expect the cap to be reached in the 2005-06 school year. Milwaukee has seen the supply of private schools increase with demand for vouchers: this year, more than half of participating schools (63) were founded since the voucher program began in 1990; one-quarter are less than five years old.[12] An investigative series published in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* in June 2005 focused on the ease with which new schools can become program participants and on education officials' ongoing challenge to ensure school quality under existing regulations.[13]

Cleveland. The Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program was launched in 1996 and for the 2004-05 school year awarded via lottery, to some 5,600 students, vouchers to pay tuition costs at one of 45 participating private schools.[14] Students from the lowest-income families are offered the scholarships first; remaining vouchers are available to progressively higher-income students.[15] Depending on the family's income level, the program pays 75 to 90 percent of private school tuition, up to $3,000 for students in grades K-8, and up to $2,700 for students in grades 9 and 10. The majority of participating schools are religious schools; roughly 60 percent of participating private schools are Catholic schools.[16] The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2002 that Cleveland's voucher program was not unconstitutional, even though most students use the state-funded vouchers at religious schools. The Court determined that parents are making a free choice for their children from among available education options. In February 2005, Ohio Governor Taft proposed a second voucher program, this one targeting the 71 Ohio schools where students have failed to meet math and reading proficiency standards three years in a row.[17]

Washington, D.C. The Opportunity Scholarship Program in the nation's capital offers low-income children in grades K-12 vouchers of up to $7,500 per year. Funded by the federal government, the program in its first year (2004-05) enabled 1,016

[10] Ten respondent schools did not report demographic information. Public school demographic data from DOE.

[11] Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (**www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dfm/sms/choice.html**).

[12] Public Policy Forum, "Who's putting pressure on voucher enrollment cap?" Research Brief, Milwaukee, WI, January 2005.

[13] Alan J. Borsuk and Sarah Carr, "Lessons from the voucher schools," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel,* June 11, 2005; Alan J. Borsuk and Sarah Carr, "A question of accountability," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel,* June 12, 2005; Sarah Carr, "Gut instinct guides parents' choices," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel,* June 13, 2005; Alan J. Borsuk, "Religious schools are a top choice," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel,* June 14, 2005; Sarah Carr and Leonard Sykes, Jr., "Big 'C' or little 'c' Catholic?" *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel,* June 15, 2005; Alan J. Borsuk, "It's All About Relationships," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel,* June 16, 2005; Leonard Sykes, Jr., "Given the same choices, results can vary widely," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel,* June 17, 2005.

[14] Dennis J. Willard and Doug Oplinger, "Private school funds to go up," (Akron) *Beacon Journal,* February 20, 2005. Participating schools are listed on the Ohio Department of Education website (**www.ode.state.oh.us/school_options/scholarship/Forms/CSTPSchoolList0405.pdf**).

[15] There is no hard evidence as to why low-income families turn down the scholarships. Among the theories are that the costs the vouchers do not cover are beyond the families' means, there are not enough non-religious schools to choose from, they are satisfied with their public school, or they could not get into the private school of their choice. Connie Mabin, "Perspective: Why are minority, poor parents turning away vouchers?" (Akron) *Beacon Journal,* March 26, 2004.

[16] Mabin.

[17] Sandy Theis, "Taft plans to expand school vouchers," (Cleveland) *Plain Dealer,* February 10, 2005.

D.C. children to attend one of 53 participating non-public schools in the district. An additional 13 schools plan to participate in the program's second year.[18] Of the 66 schools expected to participate next year, 35 are religious schools and 31 are independent, non-faith-based schools. The Washington Scholarship Fund, which operates the program, reported 2,702 applications for the 2005-06 school year had been filed by March 2005. Priority is given to students attending a school designated as "needs improvement" under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Florida. A legal battle over vouchers in Florida began in 1999, when education legislation that established the Opportunity Scholarship Program was signed into law. The Opportunity Scholarship Program allows parents whose children are assigned to or who have attended a failing Florida public school to choose between a higher performing public school or a participating private school. While fewer than 1,000 students participate in that program, an upcoming Florida Supreme Court decision might also affect more than 25,000 students who receive vouchers through two other programs—McKay vouchers for disabled children and corporate tax credit vouchers.[19] Voucher opponents have based their case on a Florida state law that prohibits state money from flowing to religious institutions and expect the Florida Supreme Court to agree. Such laws, called Blaine Amendments, are in place in 37 states, including Massachusetts.

[18] Washington Scholarship Fund, "High Demand for School Choice: More Than 2,700 D.C. K-12 Children Apply for 2005-06 Publicly Funded Scholarships," news release, March 23, 2005.

[19] See Institute for Justice, Litigation Backgrounder, "Safeguarding Educational Freedom: Latest Legal Showdown for School Choice Heads to Florida Supreme Court," available online at **www.ij.org**.

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