

Private school tuition rates in Arkansas are escalating as the voucher scheme escalates.

An analysis of private school tuition rates by the [Arkansas Advocate](#) shows that tuition rates have increased in Arkansas private schools by about \$1400. In Ohio it is being reported that with the implementation of the universal voucher program, private school tuition rates are increasing. Most of the private schools in Ohio have religious institution sponsorship; hence Ohio taxpayers are subsidizing various religious groups.

Eventually these religious groups will become heavily dependent on tax funds. Government regulations will follow, which will, in most cases, compromise the religious tenets of the schools. Everyone loses. Vouchers hurt Ohio.

UPDATED: Private school tuitions rise as Arkansas voucher program enters third year

The program opens to all students for the first time.

By: [Antoinette Grajeda](#)-August 18, 2025 4:30 am

As participation in Arkansas' school voucher program has grown, so too has tuition at the private schools receiving state funds.

Since its creation under the [LEARNS Act](#) in 2023, the Educational Freedom Account program has provided state money for allowable education expenses such as private school tuition. The program has been phased in over three years with increasing eligibility and is open to all students for the first time this fall.

Of the 164 schools that applied for the 2025-2026 academic year, 160 have been approved to participate, according to Arkansas Department of Education spokesperson Kimberly Mundell. Students used the EFA program at 97 schools in the program's first year in 2023-24 and 126 schools the second. Additional schools were approved to participate both years, but did not have students who accessed EFA funds, Mundell said.

Correction: A previous version of this story incorrectly stated that North Little Rock's Immaculate Conception Catholic School had the largest three-year increase in tuition. The school's actual increase over the period was \$1,650. The earlier version incorrectly used the school's 2023-2024 semester tuition amount instead of the full year amount.

According to an Arkansas Advocate analysis of private school tuition obtained through a public records request, the average tuition for the 2025-2026 year is around \$8,800, which is more than the roughly \$7,000 the state will provide each student this year.

The average tuition increase among the 93 schools that participated in all three years of the program was about \$1,400, the Advocate's analysis showed.

Under EFA program [rules](#), ADE may prohibit schools from participating in the program if the department determines tuition or fee increases "are unreasonable or arbitrary." Asked if a school's proposed increase has ever been rejected, Mundell said "each private school's tuition is reviewed individually to ensure compliance with state law."

"The department reviews each school's proposed tuition before granting approval for the upcoming year," Mundell said in an email. "If any concerns arise, the department contacts the school to learn more."

[Read online to view chart]

High and low tuition

Fayetteville Christian School, which has participated in the EFA program since its inception, doubled its K-12 tuition from \$3,000 to \$6,000 this year. Students paid between \$700 and \$850 in additional fees last year that are included in this year's tuition cost. According to the school's application, its superintendent sent the 2025-2026 tuition structure to ADE for review on Dec. 9 with an explanation for the increase. An official reviewed and "pre-approved" the increase the same day, according to the application.

Calvary Christian Academy, which joined the program last school year, included in its application three reasons for increasing tuition by \$2,900 to \$6,200 this year. Officials at the Berryville school said they didn't previously charge "the full amount available," so they wouldn't financially hurt families ineligible for the EFA program. They also didn't charge for some operational and technology fees, which they didn't realize could be included in the EFA program. Additionally, the tuition hike will provide teachers and staff "a much-deserved raise," according to the application.

The largest year-over-year increase belongs to PLUM's St. Howard's Academy in Forrest City, which increased its tuition by roughly \$5,100 to \$12,000. The average tuition increase from last year among participating schools was about \$860. [PLUM Foundation](#) is a nonprofit dedicated to community development in impoverished areas of the state, according to its website.

First-time participant Ewing Adventist Junior Academy in Bonnerdale has the lowest tuition at \$2,000 for K-8 students.

Bentonville's Thaden School has the most expensive tuition at \$29,300 for high school students. Head of School Michael Maloy told the Advocate [last summer](#) that Thaden offers "a robust financial aid program" that includes indexed tuition, meaning families pay according to their income.

Three new EFA participants, Excel High School, Northgate Academy and Veritas Scholars Academy, are not included in the Advocate's analysis because instead of traditional tuition, the online schools' charges vary based on how many and what type of courses students register to take.

[Read online to view chart]

Doing more

Although Christ Academy received approval to participate in the inaugural year of the EFA program, principal Nyesha Greer [decided to wait](#) until this fall when all of her students would be eligible.

The Newport school, which opened in 2018 and can serve around a dozen students in grades 6 through 8, is affiliated with a church and has previously relied on private donors and grants for funding.

This will be the first year the school charges tuition, \$6,500 per student. That's just under the \$6,994 being provided to each EFA student this year. The per-pupil EFA amount in the program's first year was \$6,672 and \$6,856 the following academic year. Each year's amount was based on the prior year's per-student foundation funding for public schools.

Greer said delaying participation in the EFA program "was the best decision." The state funding will reduce stress on parents and allow the school to provide more programs and expand extracurricular activities, she said.

"It just means we'll be able to do a little bit more. It opens doors for us," she said.

Those sentiments were shared by Esmerki De Los Santos, principal of Fe Viva Christian School. The school is a ministry of Iglesia Bautista Fe Viva, an independent Baptist, Spanish-speaking church in Rogers. De Los Santos said the school provides instruction in English, but with a bilingual emphasis.

Fe Viva joined the EFA program last year and is educating nearly 50 students in kindergarten through 12th grade this fall. The school's funding was much smaller previously, and although money was "tight for

a lot of parents,” De Los Santos said they educated students regardless. The EFA funding will enable the school to do more this year, such as providing students meals and additional resources, the principal said.

“It’s life-changing. It’s life-changing for them, for the school,” De Los Santos said.

Tuition at Fe Viva is \$6,000 for kindergarten through 7th grade and \$6,500 for 8th through 12th grade. In deciding tuition, De Los Santos said they consider the cost of education and tuition prices in Northwest Arkansas.

“We are probably by far one of the cheapest here in the area just because we are working mostly with bilingual families,” he said. “We reach a lot of Hispanic families that would like to give their kids a little bit of Christian and better education, and so we reach out to families that wouldn’t be able to afford any other type of private school otherwise.”

While he’s grateful for state funding, De Los Santos said that, in the back of his mind, there’s always a concern about how the EFA program could shift in the future, such as new rules infringing on the school’s “religious liberty” or if funding runs out. De Los Santos said 80% to 90% of Fe Viva’s budget relies on EFA funding, and he’s not sure parents could afford tuition if the program goes away.

Likewise, Greer said she’s mindful of how the program might shift once a new governor comes into office.

“That has been a thought, but I’m not concerned,” she said. “The way I see it is we’ve been able to function before, and so this is not a determining factor whether we’ll be successful or not. This is just something that comes along and it’s a great help to us right now.”

Covering all applicants

The state has approved \$277 million for the program’s third year; however, there are plans to fund every approved application, Mundell said. The deadline for schools and students to apply was Aug. 1 and Aug. 15, respectively. Mundell said it is yet to be determined if more students will be allowed to apply later in the year.

As of Thursday afternoon, ADE had received 50,630 total applications — 29,836 private school students, 20,782 homeschool students, 12 incomplete. Of those, 44,599 had been approved, including 27,779 private school students and 16,820 homeschool students.

By this same time in 2023 and 2024, ADE had approved participation for roughly [5,000](#) and [12,000](#) students, respectively.

Of the currently approved students, 456 are former recipients of the Succeed Scholarship. The program, which was absorbed into the EFA program, provided private school tuition for students with disabilities, foster children and military families.

Students who participated in the Succeed Scholarship during the 2022-2023 school year have continued to receive the scholarship amount awarded to them. Their funding has increased from \$7,413 to \$7,618 to \$7,771 since the 2023-2024 school year.

The EFA program is only open to Arkansas schools, with the exception of the Madonna Learning Center in Tennessee, which has been allowed to participate in order to continue serving a former Succeed Scholarship recipient. The school will not be allowed to continue in the EFA program once the student graduates, Mundell said.

ADE did not have data on when the last of the former Succeed Scholarship students are expected to graduate, but Mundell said graduation data will be presented in the annual EFA report. The program's [rules](#) require that a legislative report be submitted no later than Sept. 30 each year.

How we did it:

Data was collected from Educational Freedom Account program applications provided by the Arkansas Department of Education through a state Freedom of Information Act request. Annual tuition rates for schools that provided weekly or monthly rates were calculated based on a 10-month school year.

Schools generally provided tuition rates for the 2025-2026 and 2024-2025 academic years. Some schools only provided one document for tuition rates. Although that may be because the tuition rate is the same for the current and previous year, only the tuition rate for the specific year listed on the document was included in the analysis.

Some schools included all fees in their listed tuition price, but the majority listed separate fees to be paid in addition to the tuition rate. The tuition rates in this analysis do not reflect discounts for things like being a church member or enrolling more than one child.