How to be a Chalkbeat source

For Chalkbeat to tell the story of education in America, we need folks like you — teachers, parents, students, and curious citizens — to help inform our reporting. This guide will help you share your tips and experiences with Chalkbeat.

What to expect from Chalkbeat
One of Chalkbeat’s aims is to foster a nuanced conversation about education changes
Education voucher plan by Tennessee’s governor generates more questions than answers

WHAT WE KNOW:

Enrollment: The program would be limited to 5,000 students in the first year, increasing by up to 2,500 students annually.

Money: The governor has set aside $25.5 million to launch the program, with each participating student’s family receiving about $7,300 in a special account to go toward approved education services. (Note that 5,000 participants times $7,300 equals $36.5 million, significantly more than the governor’s proposed allocation.)

Where: Students would be eligible if they attend public schools in districts with three or more schools that are rank in the state’s bottom 10 percent. Currently, that means students in Davidson, Hamilton, Knox, Jackson-Madison, and Shelby counties, as well as in the state-run Achievement School District, which operates mostly in Memphis, would be eligible.

Private schools: Schools or other education service providers must receive authorization to participate.

Oversight: The state education department would have authority to remove schools and providers that perform poorly.

WHAT WE DON’T KNOW:

Would school systems lose funding in the shift?

The governor’s advisers say money for the voucher program won’t take away from Tennessee’s Basic Education Program, the funding formula through which dollars for public schools are distributed to districts. They also don’t say exactly where the money would come from if the program expands later.

Voucher opponents believe that public schools ultimately will pay the price. “We know we have a very finite amount of dollars for public education, and it is not good for our schools when those monies are diverted. This is just a voucher scheme,” said Beth Brown, a Grundy County teacher who is the president of the Tennessee Education Association, the state’s largest teacher organization.

Would private schools have to accept the $7,300 voucher amount as the full cost of a student’s tuition and fees?

Tennessee’s previous voucher bills have made that a condition, but few private schools committed to participate if those bills passed and were signed into law. Most private schools charge far more and therefore might have to eat the balance, which isn’t good for their bottom line, said Sonya Smith, an education advocate in the Memphis neighborhood of Frayser. “Bill [Lee] is a businessman, and he wouldn’t allow somebody to come in and pay him less than what he said his company’s value,” she said. “That’s not a logical model.”
The idea for the stories emerged when I first started covering schools in Detroit and noticed many parents I talked to had a list — a long list of schools their children had attended, and a long list of reasons why they left one for another. “That school had three principals in two years,” they’d tell me. Or, “my daughter didn’t have a certified math teacher all year.” Or, “my son was being bullied.”

At the same time, as I visited schools, I heard heartbreaking stories of students who came for a while, then vanished. I heard of turmoil in classrooms as new students arrived, forcing teachers to scrap a day’s lessons while they scrambled to find a desk and a textbook for a shell-shocked new arrival.

This was a story well known to educators in Detroit, but one I rarely heard discussed by policymakers or on the campaign trail. Yet the research on enrollment instability was clear: it drives down test scores. It exacerbates behavioral problems. It fuels drop out rates — and not just for students who are on the move, but also for their classmates who stay. It seemed like a major reason why it’s so difficult to fix Detroit’s schools.

So last year I approached Bridge, one of our partners in the Detroit Journalism Cooperative, about collaborating on a deep look at the issue.

I first caught wind that something big was in the works on the campus of Marygrove College about a year ago. The storied institution had just stunned the city with the news that it would stop offering undergraduate courses, and I soon started hearing from sources that an innovative new public school could be part of the campus’ future.

When the Kresge Foundation announced last fall that it would build a comprehensive early childhood center in an undisclosed location, I kept getting one answer to where that could be: Marygrove. And when I heard that the University of Michigan’s school of education was looking to create a new kind of “teaching school” in Detroit, I almost didn’t have to ask where that might land. It was already clear that a lot of people were pulling to make the stars align for a “cradle to career” educational program on the elegant grounds of the college.

My story on yesterday’s formal announcement has lots more details about the new school, including Kresge’s historic $50 million investment in the effort, and the story of how all the pieces came together. Scroll down for more on that and the rest of the week’s headlines. And have a great weekend!

— Erin Einhorn, bureau chief
Five things we’ve learned from a decade of research on school closures

BY MATT BARNUM - FEBRUARY 5, 2019

People protest during a Panel for Educational Policy meeting at Brooklyn Tech High School before they vote on whether to close or partially close 23 schools that the Department of Education considers failing on February 9, 2012 in New York City. (Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

17 studies that tell us something about how school closures affect students

What happens to students when you close a school?

We wrote about that here.

We know it can be useful to know where those conclusions come from, too. So we’ve collected the studies we examined on the topic below. They’re listed in order of how many schools they look at, with the national study first.

National (26 states), 1,522 schools closed between 2006 and 2012 (Chalkbeat story)

- What happened to students in schools that closed? “Charter closure students had weaker growth than [similar students] from low-performing charter schools that remained open… [Traditional public school] closure students also made less academic progress than did [comparison students] …. The relative negative growth of charter and TPS closure students suggests that closure of low-performing schools somewhat hampered academic progress for the average student.”

- Did it matter if students ended up at better-performing schools? “Closure students who attended better schools tended to make greater academic gains than did their peers from not-closed low-performing schools in the same sector, while those ending up in worse or equivalent schools had weaker academic growth than their peers in comparable low-performing settings.”
Chalkbeat Chicago invites parents in Chinatown to join us for an informal conversation over bubble tea and buns about the future of education in their neighborhood.

Office Hours: Education News, In Person.

📅 March 22nd
8:30 am – Noon

📍 Tbaar Bubble Tea & Juices
2234 S. Wentworth Ave.
With new mayor on horizon, Chinatown parents resume push for Near South Side high school

BY ADESHINA EMMANUEL - APRIL 22, 2019

Chalkbeat Chicago recently visited Chinatown and sat down with parents, Local School Council members, and community residents to talk about schools.
How it feels to be Javion: 16 and struggling to read in Chicago Public Schools

BY ADEPOYO YEMI-ALADE - OCTOBER 12, 2018

Reading was always painful for Javion Goyer, 16. But now, he's working hard to change the school. The stakes are high.

Estos padres quieren eliminar los obstáculos para hispanohablantes en las escuelas de Detroit

BY Koby Levin - September 25, 2018

These parents want to eliminate obstacles for Spanish speakers in Detroit schools. They are working to create a more inclusive learning environment.

5 bold ideas for how Chicago can send more kids through college

BY CASSIE WALKER BURKE, ELAINE CHEN - AUGUST 15, 2018

Tackling the issue of college access in Chicago, these five ideas aim to increase the number of students who graduate from high school and go on to higher education.

I went down with educators and OneGoal staff as part of our series of listening tours throughout the city.

The conversation on Tuesday, educators, Chalkbeat reporters and editors, and students brainstormed ways to make the transition from high school to college more seamless.

One idea is to increase access to financial aid, which can be a significant barrier for low-income students. Another approach is to provide more support during the transition to college, such as mentorship and counseling services.
Memphis, what do you want in your next school superintendent?

Chalkbeat wants to know what is important to you.

We asked and you answered: Here’s what Memphians want in their next school leader

BY CAROLINE BAUMAN - MARCH 18, 2019