How would the Draper school voucher initiative work?

It provides an annual $4,000 voucher funded by public tax dollars to students currently enrolled in a private or religious school and to every public school student who leaves a public school to attend a private or religious school. Although the initiative claims that the money is paid to the parent, the money will be paid directly to the voucher school.

Who can start a voucher school and receive voucher subsidies?

Nearly anyone can. The Draper initiative allows any person or company to start a voucher school and receive $4,000 per enrolled student. Voucher school operators are not required to have a credential, experience or training in educating children, or even a college degree. The one requirement is that the operator cannot be a felon. However, there is no system to monitor compliance and schools that violate this provision do not lose their voucher-redeeming status.

Can someone who claims to home school his or her children receive the $4000 voucher?

Yes. Parents can declare their home a private voucher school and receive a $4,000 annual state subsidy per child for teaching their children at home with no standards on curriculum, materials, or teaching methods to qualify for state subsidies. Again, there is no system in the initiative to monitor fraud and abuse.

Are there minimum or maximum class sizes for voucher schools?

No. A voucher school can open with just one student or with one hundred per class. Laws governing class sizes in the public schools do not apply.

What regulations would cover voucher schools?

Very few. Teachers in voucher schools would not be required to hold a state teaching credential or a college degree. These schools will be exempt from the state’s new curriculum standards, minimum performance standards, and high school exit exam.

Voucher school students would not be required to attend a minimum number of hours or days and unlike public school students, are not required to study courses like reading, English, math, history or science.

Under this initiative, voucher schools are allowed to spend public money in secret, closed meetings and there is no requirement that they provide public audits of how they spend taxpayer money. In short, voucher schools are unaccountable for how they spend our money and even for what they teach.

Do earthquake and building safety standards that apply to public schools also apply to voucher schools?

No. The initiative exempts voucher schools from the earthquake safety standards for school construction and maintenance that apply to public schools. It curbs the ability of local communities
to control how voucher schools in their neighborhoods are built, maintained or managed, requiring a
two-thirds vote by the local governmental body and a 50 percent vote of every registered voter to pass new regulations.

Can the State Legislature regulate voucher schools?

It will be very difficult. The Draper voucher initiative states that no additional laws, other than penalties for fraudulent conduct, shall be enacted by the legislature pertaining to voucher schools unless approved by a three-fourths vote of each house of the Legislature. This requirement will be nearly impossible to meet, preventing the legislature from enacting laws to require accountability and prevent fraud.

Won’t vouchers provide more parental choice?

No. Under this initiative, voucher schools—not parents or students—will decide which school a student can attend. Voucher schools could have entrance requirements and other criteria that control which students get in. Voucher schools would be able to reject any student for almost any reason.

And voucher schools are allowed to discriminate on the basis of gender, religion, income, physical or mental disability, prior academic achievement, standardized test scores, interviews with applicants and parents, and student behavior history. Voucher schools will not be required to tell parents why they have rejected a child’s admission.

Does the Draper Initiative take money away from local public schools?

Yes. Every child that leaves a public school for a voucher school will result in a loss of funding to that local neighborhood school. Every dollar spent on vouchers for students already in private schools is a dollar that could be spent on improving public schools.

Will the Draper initiative save the state money?

No. The initiative will cost taxpayers billions of dollars. The initiative claims to save money when public school students leave to attend voucher schools, but this so-called savings is more than offset by the need to pay for the 700,000 students already enrolled in private or home schools. Providing each of them with a $4,000 voucher would cost $3 billion over and above the current state budget.

The only way to pay for this initiative is to raise taxes or cut much needed services such as law enforcement, fire protection, health care, childcare, public transportation or prisons.

The state Legislative Analyst says the Draper initiative would “result in a major rearrangement of the state school finance system.” It removes funding guarantees for community colleges, childcare, state schools for the deaf and blind, and schools for the neurologically handicapped. It also replaces Prop. 98 (the initiative that voters approved that guarantees 40 percent of the state budget will be spent on public education) with a new method based on national average per pupil spending. This change would undermine the funding guarantee that protects our schools.

Will this initiative raise the state’s per-pupil funding to the national average?

No. The initiative simply states that the state legislature “may” increase funding to the national average. It does not require lawmakers to increase funding to public schools, nor does it provide the mechanism to do so. If the proponents of this initiative had really meant to help public schools, they would have “required” the Legislature to raise per pupil funding.

The Yes on 38 campaign has admitted that the funding provisions are meant to deceive voters and are unlikely to result in any additional funding for public schools. (San Francisco Chronicle, June 29, 2000.)
Are school vouchers exempt from income taxes?

The initiative exempts voucher payments from state income taxes. However, the initiative cannot exempt parents from federal income tax.

Can taxpayers or state agencies require voucher schools to provide information about how they are spending public money?

No. The Draper initiative requires no public accountability for the billions of tax dollars it would transfer to voucher schools. It prevents state agencies and the news media from reviewing financial records, administrative salaries, or curriculum information. Exposing fraud and mismanagement would be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Won’t vouchers “level the playing field” between rich and poor students?

No. If anything, vouchers will have just the opposite effect by producing a two-tier educational system. The more resources that vouchers drain from schools serving low and middle-income students, the more likely these schools will suffer. That is why voucher supporters who are concerned about low-income students have urged voters to vote against Proposition 38.

How many public school students will be able to attend voucher schools?

Very few. Most private schools are almost filled to capacity. A survey of private schools in California by the education research group, WestEd, several years ago revealed fewer than one percent of public school students could expect to find additional spaces in private schools. Tim Draper says his goal is to replace public schools with private schools, a seemingly impossible task, as there are more than 5.8 million students currently enrolled in California public schools.

Are voucher schools required to provide transportation for their students?

No. Voucher schools, unlike public schools, would not be required to provide student transportation. Without transportation, many children, especially those from low-income families, cannot even consider a voucher school.

What is the track record of voucher schools?

Publicly funded voucher programs are in effect in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and the state of Florida. The Florida and Cleveland programs have been ruled unconstitutional.

Several national academic studies show no significant achievement differences between voucher students and public school students in Milwaukee and Cleveland. The Florida program is too new to draw any reliable conclusions. However, these studies have also shown that vouchers take resources away from public schools.

What happens if a voucher school violates the proposed law?

Nothing. There is no provision for enforcement of any of the initiative’s requirements. The initiative does not provide for any penalties if a voucher school violates the law. The voucher school would not lose its status as a voucher school or its ability to receive public funds.