

A large, light blue graphic of the letter 'A' is centered on the page. A pencil is integrated into the right vertical stroke of the 'A', pointing upwards and to the right. The pencil is white with a blue eraser and a blue body.

# **SCHOOL CHOICE: A NECESSARY EDUCATION REFORM**

The Facts About School Choice



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**P**ractically everyone in America—from the President to teachers to parents and children—recognizes that America’s education system is in serious need of reform.

Currently, a multitude of public school reforms, including stronger academic standards, alternative teacher certification programs, merit pay, increased class time, charter schools, and cyber schools are being debated or implemented in various states.

While many of these reforms are gaining momentum, their increasing popularity should not diminish the need for private school choice. In reality, school vouchers and scholarship tax credit programs can and should work in tandem with other reforms.

As a matter of social justice, we must ensure all parents have the opportunity to select the best schools for their children because:

**Education is not one-size-fits-all.** One school cannot possibly meet the needs of every child in a district. Empowering parents with reasonable choices enables their children to attend schools that are right for them, whether those schools are public, public charter, or private.

**Students deserve an immediate lifeline to success.** Today, millions of children, most of whom are low-income, African-American, or Hispanic, are trapped in failing schools because their parents do not have the ability to move to a new school district, choose a charter school, or pay full tuition at a private school. This is a moral disgrace, and these students deserve options right now.

**School choice helps public schools and saves money.** School choice provides an immediate and healthy incentive for public schools to implement reforms that help them improve. Additionally, there is evidence that private school choice can save taxpayer dollars—a point that is especially crucial given the state of the economy.

It is no wonder that voucher and tax credit programs have widespread public support, particularly among minorities—those whose children are most often trapped in failing schools.

## **The Research-Backed Benefits of Making Private School Choice an Education Reform Priority**

### **Empowered parents are satisfied parents.**

Parents, not bureaucracies, know what is best for their children. So it makes perfect sense that when parents are given the opportunity to choose their child’s school, they are more satisfied with the results.

Research shows parents of voucher participants in Milwaukee and Washington, D.C. report a higher rate of satisfaction than parents whose children do not participate in the choice programs.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, studies conducted on special needs voucher programs in Florida and Utah indicate that parents report higher rates of satisfaction with their children’s new school than with the original school.<sup>2</sup>

### **Students improve academically.**

When children attend a school that meets their individual needs, they can succeed academically.

Two random assignment studies—the most rigorous type of education research—of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program have demonstrated achievement gains for program participants.<sup>3</sup> A federally sponsored random assignment study of the Washington, D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program has revealed statistically significant reading gains for participants.<sup>4</sup> In all, nine out of 10 random assignment studies of public and private voucher programs have shown statistically significant gains for at least some groups of participants.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, studies by School Choice Wisconsin have revealed that students participating in the Milwaukee voucher program had higher high school graduation rates than students in Milwaukee Public Schools.<sup>6</sup>

### **Competition benefits public schools.**

School choice makes public schools directly accountable to parents. This healthy competition between schools creates incentives for public schools to raise student achievement or risk losing their students to other schools. For example, a state supported evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program has

concluded that the program “has produced a rising tide that has lifted all boats.”<sup>7</sup> According to the report’s authors, “It appears that Milwaukee public schools are more attentive to the academic needs of students when those students have more opportunities to leave those schools.”<sup>8</sup>

Additional studies on Florida’s A+ Program (which included a voucher provision until 2006), Florida’s McKay Scholarship Program for Students with Disabilities, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, and Ohio’s EdChoice program, have also demonstrated increased public school achievement.<sup>9</sup> And, contrary to the myth spread by opponents of school choice, there is no evidence that allowing parents to choose their child’s school has had a negative impact on public school achievement.

### **School choice is fiscally responsible.**

Programs that enable children to transfer to private schools not only benefit parents but also benefit taxpayers as a whole.

State sponsored research on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program has shown that Wisconsin taxpayers saved more than \$30 million in the 2007-08 school year and more than \$37 million in 2008-09.<sup>10</sup> Also, a state sponsored analysis of Florida’s Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program found that it saved the state a total of \$38.9 million in 2007-08.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, a number of independent fiscal impact studies of existing voucher and scholarship tax credit programs have also demonstrated millions of dollars in savings for states.<sup>12</sup>

### **The majority of Americans support school choice.**

Public support for private school choice is strong—a sign of serious public interest in improving educational opportunities through school choice programs.

According to a 2007 poll published by *The Economist*, more than half of Americans support vouchers to pay for private school tuition.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, according to the 2007 Harvard

University/*Education Next* poll, Americans support allowing students in failing schools to transfer to private schools by a margin of two to one, and the majority of public school employees support giving these students private school choice.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, the 2008 edition of the Harvard/*Education Next* poll found the majority of Americans support tax credit programs for low- and moderate-income parents who send their children to private schools and an even greater percentage support these programs if they cover public school expenses. In addition, 65 percent of public school teachers indicated support for tax credit programs that include both public and private schools.

The 2008 poll also found that support for voucher and tax credit programs is highest among minorities, with nearly two-thirds of African-Americans and Hispanics supporting vouchers for low-income students and nearly three-quarters supporting tax credit programs that benefit low- and moderate-income parents who send their children to either private or public schools.<sup>15</sup>

### **Conclusion**

As states across the country debate solutions for fixing America’s education system, private school choice must be part of the portfolio of reforms that are adopted.

By letting parents choose where to send their kids to school and by working to fix our public schools, every child will have the opportunity to succeed in school and in life—so that they can experience the American dream. Every child, rich or poor, will have a chance. And that’s what America deserves.

When parents are empowered to choose, kids win. School choice works.

# School Choice: A Necessary Education Reform

## Notes

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