

THE A-B-C'S OF SCHOOL CHOICE

WHAT IS SCHOOL CHOICE?

School choice allows parents to decide where their children go to school, rather than the government assigning students to schools based largely on the parent's zip code or inability to afford private tuition. Even the best school is not the right school for all students. School choice allows education dollars to follow the child to the school the parents choose - public or private.

WHAT ARE THE EDUCATION OPTIONS?

Parents deserve to have a myriad of options so they can select the educational environment that best serves their children.

Those options include traditional public schools, magnet schools, and charter schools, but parents should also be able to direct their child's education funding to a private school of their choice, or to pay for online education as well as to hire tutors, or a combination of any of the above.

Parents should also be able to use their tax dollars to support homeschooling as that is an option a growing number of parents are choosing.

Magnet schools are public schools that specialize in a particular area like science or the arts. Magnet schools are funded with taxpayer dollars and flow through the education funding system that includes a combination of local, state and federal funds.

Charter schools are public schools and are funded with taxpayer dollars which would otherwise be going to traditional public school. Charter schools are open enrollment, meaning parents do not need to live within the geographic confines of a school district. However, charters have unique flexibility and room for innovation.

Open enrollment public schools exist in most states, where parents may choose a public school outside their zip code. Parents are often required to provide transportation for open enrollment public schools, but some states provide transportation.

WHAT FORMS OF SCHOOL CHOICE EXIST?

Education Savings Accounts (ESA's) are emerging as the most viable and flexible vehicle for providing parents with the educational options they need to direct their children's education. Rather than providing public funding to educational institutions, the ESA allows parents to have their children's public education funding sent to a savings account to pay for qualified education expenses. ESA's exist in five states - Arizona, Florida, Mississippi, Nevada, and Tennessee. Nevada enacted the nation's first universal ESA program in 2015 and it launches in January 2016.

Private school vouchers provide funding from either private or public education funds for parents to use to pay tuition and fees in private schools.

QUICK FACTS

- According to the American Federation for Children, an estimated 1.2 million students failed to graduate in 2015. That represents 7,000 dropouts a day or one every 26 seconds (1).

NOTABLE & QUOTABLE

In a 1955 essay, Nobel Prize Winning economist Milton Friedman argued that there is no need for government to run schools. Instead, families could be provided with publicly financed vouchers for use at the K-12 educational institutions of their choice.

Tax Credit Scholarships provide a mechanism in some states for the parents to get a credit from their taxes that can be used to pay private school tuition and fees. Some tax credit scholarship programs also allow for tax deductibility for businesses that contribute to organizations that provide tuition scholarships.

WHY SCHOOL CHOICE?

Parents with the financial ability to pay private school tuition, to homeschool or to move to the public school district of their choice already exercise school choice. Students whose parents cannot afford to do so or do not have those options are assigned - by the government - to a public school that may not meet their needs. Disproportionately, poorer and minority-heavy communities stand to benefit from school choice.

We believe that all parents should be able to direct their children's education funding to the school or educational environment where they believe their children have the greatest opportunity to learn, succeed and thrive.

School choice provides parents with the opportunity to exercise education freedom and for parents to take control their child's education. Even the best public schools aren't the right fit for every student.

MORE MONEY IS NOT THE ANSWER.

Some believe that more money will result in better student performance, but that has proven wrong. As we have continued to pour more funding into public schools, test scores have remained relatively flat. Actually, more spending has resulted in bigger bureaucracies, and no appreciable improvement in student scores.

From 1970-2010, funding increased 75% - from an average of \$5,500 per pupil to around \$13,000 - and reading, math nor science scores measurably improved. From 1950-2009, student enrollment grew nationally 96%, and teacher ranks grew 252%, while administrator and other staff ranks grew an astounding 702%.

DISPELLING ARGUMENTS AGAINST SCHOOL CHOICE.

While Americans are accustomed to exercising choice in most areas of our life, school choice has some skeptics.

Though even public programs like food stamps and housing vouchers allow recipients to choose where they shop and live, there are public schools-only proponents, and many of them are public school employees.

The most common argument is that school choice diverts money from the public schools. It assumes that public schools exist for a purpose other than to educate students. Public funds will continue to flow to the public schools unless parents choose another option. The argument to deny parents that option reveals that school choice - opponents are fearful parents, if given an option, will not select the public schools. School choice opponents have little confidence parental satisfaction in the education the public schools are providing.

Endnotes:

1. Drop out rates <https://www.dosomething.org/us/facts/11-facts-about-high-school-dropout-rates>

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