Discover where and how school choice can flourish in the months ahead.
The Role of Government in Education – in 2015

In 2015, school choice advocates will celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, in part for how it launched today’s school choice revolution. As they should. But the new year also marks another milestone: the 60th anniversary of Milton and Rose D. Friedman’s “Role of Government in Education”—in which they introduced America to the very idea of school choice.

Passages from the Friedmans’ 1955 article are worth revisiting for advocates, opponents, and the curious alike:

“Government has appropriately financed general education for citizenship, but in the process it has been led also to administer most of the schools that provide such education. Yet, as we have seen, the administration of schools is neither required by the financing of education, nor justifiable in its own right in a predominantly free enterprise society. …

“The alternative (school choice) arrangements…distinguish sharply between the financing of education and the operation of educational institutions, and between education for citizenship or leadership and for greater economic productivity. Throughout, they center attention on the person rather than the institution. Government, preferably local governmental units, would give each child, through his parents, a specified sum to be used solely in paying for his general education; the parents would be free to spend this sum at a school of their own choice, provided it met certain minimum standards laid down by the appropriate governmental unit. Such schools would be conducted under a variety of auspices: by private enterprises operated for profit, nonprofit institutions established by private endowment, religious bodies, and some even by governmental units. …

“They would bring a healthy increase in the variety of educational institutions available and in competition among them. Private initiative and enterprise would quicken the pace of progress in this area as it has in so many others. Government would serve its proper function of improving the operation of the invisible hand without substituting the dead hand of bureaucracy.”

For opponents, notice the Friedmans included local governments as an appropriate financier of education, deliverer of services (among other competitors), and monitor of the market—far from privatization. For supporters, remember how the Friedmans promoted variety among options and warned about bureaucracy, a creeping presence in school choice programs.

As this edition of “The School Choice Advocate” shows, today’s education landscape is far better than the one the Friedmans or Milwaukee leaders faced in 1955 and 1990 respectively. May we use this opportunity to increase and improve the educational opportunities available to all in the year ahead.
An Oklahoma life saved through school choice

A voucher program serving Oklahoma children with special needs is under attack, again, because defenders of the status quo claim it harms public education. But behind that program are people whose lives have been changed because of the education they’ve been able to access and the opportunities they’ve been able to create.

Take Dillon Brumley, who was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome at age seven. In kindergarten, Dillon attended a private school; however, by the time he was ready for first grade, tuition had become too expensive for his single mother, Diana. As a result, she enrolled him in his neighborhood public school.

There, Dillon was bullied instantly. Not a day went by in which he did not come home telling his mother and grandmother he wanted to go to heaven because everyone hated him at school. When Dillon was eight, he was hospitalized for three months to protect him from harming himself.

Then Diana learned about the Lindsey Nicole Henry voucher, applied for it, and, upon receipt, enrolled Dillon in Trinity Episcopal School, where he received multi-sensory learning and individualized instruction. Dillon has been at Trinity since September 2013, and now comes home energized, excited to share what he learned and the new friends he made. For Dillon, the Lindsey Nicole Henry scholarship was nothing less than life-saving.

Passed by a Republican legislature and signed into law by a Democrat governor—who even approved of the program being named after his late infant daughter—the Lindsey Nicole Henry scholarship transcends politics. Union leaders should take notice. If it’s an educated public they want, they are getting it with the Lindsey Nicole Henry scholarship program. And its participants are getting far, far more out of life.

School choice savings, surveys, and stories in the news

Delaware – Paul DiPerna, Friedman’s Research Director, appeared on drive-time WDEL radio to discuss findings from the Foundation’s “Delaware K-12 and School Choice Survey” and why Delaware lawmakers are pursuing education savings accounts.

North Carolina – The Charlotte Observer published an op-ed from President and CEO Robert Enlow, who introduced readers to Khaliah Ellison and her son, Mekhi, a participant in the state’s voucher program. Unions are trying to stop the program through a lawsuit that likely will reach the state’s top court.

Wisconsin – The Foundation appeared in a Milwaukee Journal Sentinel story analyzing the costs of vouchers and whether they save taxpayers money. It is estimated that, since the creation of Milwaukee’s voucher program in 1990, more than $238 million has been saved because of public school students transferring to lower-cost private schools.

National – “The School Voucher Audit,” the Foundation’s national report on the fiscal effects of school choice, received coverage from the Wall Street Journal in lead up to the November elections. In “Schooling GOP Candidates,” Jason Riley noted how “school-choice reforms produce better outcomes in the classroom and are a better bargain for taxpayers.”

National – Robert Enlow joined “The Independents” on Fox Business to explain to a national audience how voucher programs have saved billions of dollars and how few Americans actually know where those savings went.

This infographic from “The School Voucher Audit” shows just how much Americans could have saved had a robust school voucher program been in place decades ago. For the full image and report, visit edchoice.org/SchoolVoucherAudit
51 programs in 24 states and Washington, D.C.

23 voucher programs in 13 states and D.C.

18 tax-credit scholarship programs in 14 states

8 individual tax credit/deduction programs in 7 states

2 education savings account programs in 2 states

State Leadership on School Choice

- Governor a Go for School Choice
  Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Wisconsin

- Governor a No for School Choice
  Connecticut, Delaware, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, South Dakota, Virginia, Washington

- Governor Unsure of School Choice
  Alaska, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Vermont, West Virginia, Wyoming

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Field Guide For 2015

SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM KEY

- Voucher
- Tax-Credit Scholarship
- Education Savings Account
- Individual Tax Credit/Deduction

VOUCHER, TAX-CREDIT SCHOLARSHIP, ESA ENROLLMENT

+867,000 taxpayers claiming tax credits/deductions for educational expenses


- Voucher: 36,000 106,000 212,000 260,000 314,000 +337,000
- Tax-Credit Scholarship: 0 0 0 0 0 0
- Education Savings Account: 0 0 0 0 0 0
- Individual Tax Credit/Deduction: 0 0 0 0 0 0

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What was school choice’s most notable development in 2014?

Kansas! When a state adopts school choice for the first time that is reason to celebrate. More Kansas families now have a choice among schools thanks to the creation of a tax-credit scholarship program. Although the program is limited, it signals to families, and to businesses looking to expand or relocate to Kansas, that the state is serious and willing to take bold moves to improve the quality of education. As educational outcomes rise, quality of life also increases for families and communities, and children have a better chance to become successful adults.

What can we expect from school choice in 2015?

Education savings accounts (ESAs) are growing in visibility, capturing the attention of policymakers in Delaware, Iowa, Mississippi, Nevada, Oklahoma, Oregon, North Carolina, and several other states. Arizona was the first to offer this program, with Florida following in 2014. Although vouchers and tax-credit scholarships remain sound choices for policymakers, expect to see states exploring ways to adopt ESAs. Policymakers are responding to a strong undercurrent of support for greater diversity of educational choices to serve children from all walks of life, without limitation.

Should school choice advocates engage new public officeholders?

Yes, if you want educational options for your children, and you want this to be a priority, tell your elected officials. Communication between citizens and state legislators is protected in state constitutions; it is vitally important to the proper functioning of our democratic republic. Officeholders are overwhelmed by requests from lobbyists and others; these requests must be balanced by communication from constituents. Each person has the power to make a difference. Let your voice be heard and help others understand what school choice means to you!

Leslie Hiner is a member of the Friedman Foundation’s Speakers Bureau. To request Leslie for one of your events, visit edchoice.org/SpeakersBureau

For more information on the Friedman Foundation’s research efforts, contact Paul DiPerna at paul@edchoice.org

The Friedman focus on research in 2015

Empirical research is the cornerstone of the Friedman Foundation. And to further engage Americans on school choice and spark needed discussions in the policy community, Team Friedman has a sizeable slate of projects planned in 2015. Here are just a few topics being covered:

- **School choice and economic growth.** It’s long been known educational attainment translates into increased employment and earnings. But can expanding school choice add to those financial benefits? School choice advocates will find out in this report that synthesizes various studies, analyses, and surveys on the economics of education.

- **Education savings accounts (ESAs).** In 2013, the Foundation released a first-of-its-kind report analyzing Arizona’s ESA program using data from that state’s department of education (DOE). The findings revealed how parents use that innovative program. But since then, Arizona’s ESAs have changed. Have participants’ interests and actions changed as well? Again using Arizona DOE data, this report will give readers a wider glimpse into a burgeoning school choice program.

- **Residential and school district integration.** Most Americans’ schooling assignments are based on where they live. How has that affected residential patterns in the country’s 300 largest metropolitan areas over time? Computed using data from the U.S. Census and the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education, this report seeks to answer that question.

- **School choice’s legislative fiscal notes.** When state lawmakers consider school choice legislation, they must rely on predictive analyses on how much those proposals would cost and/or save. But are the current “fiscal note” practices as strong as they could be? If not, how could they be improved? This report will assist researchers, policymakers, and legislative staff as they consider the financial impact of school choice.

The public, policymakers, and education stakeholders have valuable, warranted questions on school choice. Through its myriad research projects, the Friedman Foundation will aim to answer more of them in 2015.
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