

# ENGAGE

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF EDCHOICE ■ ISSUE 3: SPRING 2017

## STATE OF THE STATES

THEN AND  
NOW: MILTON  
FRIEDMAN'S  
VISION

CHAMPIONS  
OF CHOICE



**ed** CHOICE

# PRESIDENT'S LETTER

## NEVADA FALLS SHORT ON EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS

"I just don't want this session to be defined by ESAs because there are a lot of other things that have happened that are going to improve the quality of life for the people of Nevada."

Those were the words of Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval immediately following his state's failure in June to fund a constitutional, nearly universal education savings account (ESA) program that was originally enacted two years ago. Unlike the Governor, we had hoped this session would be defined by ESAs, the most flexible and empowering form of educational choice in America today.

Nevada's ESA would have provided the opportunity for families not just to pay for private school like a voucher or tax-credit scholarship does, but to fully customize a learning plan for their kids. That's especially important because Nevada's public schools are routinely ranked among the worst in America; many students are trapped with no options.

As ESAs go, Nevada was a true pioneer, leading the way by making savings accounts available to almost every student in the state regardless of income or special needs. It's located in the Silver State, but the program quickly became the gold standard for the future of school choice.

Unfortunately for the nearly 10,000 families on the waiting list to use the program, neither Sandoval nor Democrats in the Nevada Assembly and Senate, who removed ESA funding from the final budget and replaced it with a small, temporary increase of the state's existing tax-credit scholarship program, were listening.

My heart breaks for those students, many of whom had been on the ESA waiting list for more than a year. All they wanted was a chance to find a schooling environment that meets their needs. For at least two more years, they have been denied that chance.

I typically reserve this space to talk about our latest accomplishments at the state level or within our organization. To be sure, there's plenty of good news in this issue—legislative wins this year; one parent's choice journey; how we can help

private schools meet demand; and a preview of an upcoming publication about Milton Friedman's historic vision for educational choice and what the future holds.

But as we reflect on the year so far and our work in the states, I want to hold Nevada up as a textbook case of what could and should have been, a clear contrast between the profiles in courage we've seen in other states—such as Arizona and Indiana—versus politics as usual, which far too often takes precedence over the interests of students and families.

Nevada's program remains a trendsetter and will continue to serve as a model for other states considering ESA legislation. It's been ruled constitutional in the courts, and demand from families was overwhelming, especially when you consider they were applying for a program that had not been funded.

We will continue to help amplify parent and student voices in Nevada, and we will redouble our efforts to pass and promote similar programs in other states. But we can't do it alone.

One of the most noteworthy features in this issue highlights five "Champions of Choice," state lawmakers from both parties who are devoted to improving K-12 education by promoting or expanding parental choice.

As we move forward, as the debate grows more robust, we need more champions who will stand up and represent families who are not asking for anything more than a chance for their kids to succeed.

Despite the setback in Nevada, we remain ever true to our EdChoice brand promise: We will be optimistic, intellectually honest and forward-thinking. We will fight for those who are not able, and we will never give up until all students have access to an education that works for them.

Best,



Robert C. Enlow  
*President and CEO*



# THE [NEW] ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN EDUCATION

It's hard to believe that nearly seven decades have passed since Milton Friedman first outlined his vision of universal educational choice as a way to empower families and promote a free society.

But when he first published "The Role of Government in Education" in 1955, how could Dr. Friedman have predicted the technological advances and social constructs that shape our world today?

After all, at that point in time color televisions and microwave ovens had barely been invented. Pacemakers, the polio vaccine and the discovery of DNA were cutting-edge science. Americans were just beginning to experience the wonders of non-stick cookware. Round-the-clock cable news, palm-sized supercomputers and instantly connected social media weren't even in the cards.

Yet when it came to the American K-12 schooling system, Friedman saw something that many overlooked: The role of government in education had been moving to even higher levels of government, further away from students, families and educators. It was against this backdrop of increasing government power and centralization in education that Friedman confidently made the case for educational freedom, writing:

*"The alternative arrangements whose broad outlines are sketched in this paper 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."*

Friedman believed then, as we do now, that families should be equipped and trusted to find the best educational fit for their children. He also believed that the public education system was an inefficient monopoly—the costs were too high, and the outcomes were too low.

With choice, low- and middle-income families would have access to quality schools that those with more means had long been able to access by moving to desirable neighborhoods or paying private school tuition.

Simply put, he rejected the status quo: a rigid, bureaucratic system that was not meeting the diverse needs of those using it.

We continue that fight today on behalf of the millions of American families who remain without options, but we also know that much has changed since 1955.

We face challenges that Friedman perhaps imagined but could not fully appreciate back then: the intransigence of special interest groups that promote

the historic K-12 system and its employees instead of families; the difficulty of bringing new, innovative educational opportunities to current and future students in the face of strong, emotional support for past practices and facilities; the effect of choice and choices on families; and the many different ways to measure success and outcomes.

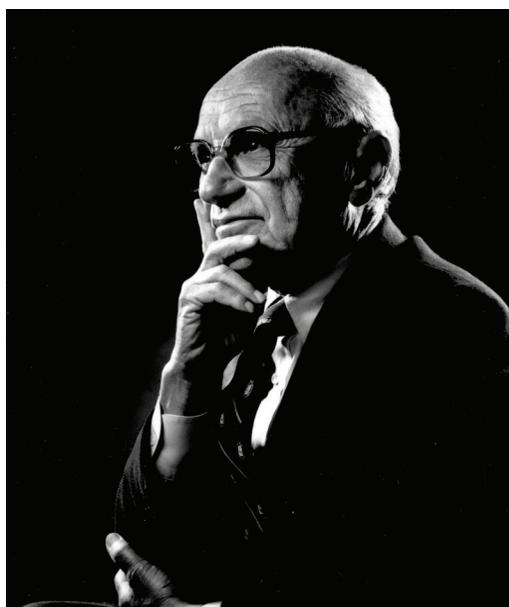
And so, in the coming months, we will publish a fresh look at *The Role of Government in Education*, authored by our President and CEO Robert Enlow and Friedman Fellow and Kennesaw State University economics professor Ben Scaffidi.

They will look back at what Friedman originally wrote and contrast it with how educational choice programs currently are operating. They also will look at the challenges we face as we move forward—and how we successfully navigate those challenges in continued pursuit of Dr. Friedman's vision.

As the oldest educational choice organization in the United States, we are well-situated to bring a unique thought leadership perspective to this issue and to the broader movement at a time when many Americans are beginning to tune in to the debate and expect more from their schools.

If you'd like to support the publication of *The New Role of Government in Education* later this year, please consider making a financial contribution using the enclosed envelope or logging on to our secure website at [www.edchoice.org/donate](http://www.edchoice.org/donate).

We appreciate your ongoing support for the original research that is at the core of our mission, including thought leadership pieces such as this one that help us stay true to our founding vision as we chart a course into the future.



# New Study Shows Public Schools Systematically Favor All Other Staff Over Teachers and Students

This piece is your one-stop shop for resources breaking down new research—*Back to the Staffing Surge: The Great Teacher Salary Stagnation and the Decades-Long Employment Growth in American Public Schools*.

***“Our children would be much better off if only politicians would give public schools more money, so they can pay teachers more and reduce class sizes.”***

If we asked for a show of hands for anyone who’s ever thought this, read it in the news or heard it from friends or neighbors, it’s a safe bet your hand would be in the air. It seems so simple, and so many of us have assumed it to be true our whole lives. But is it?

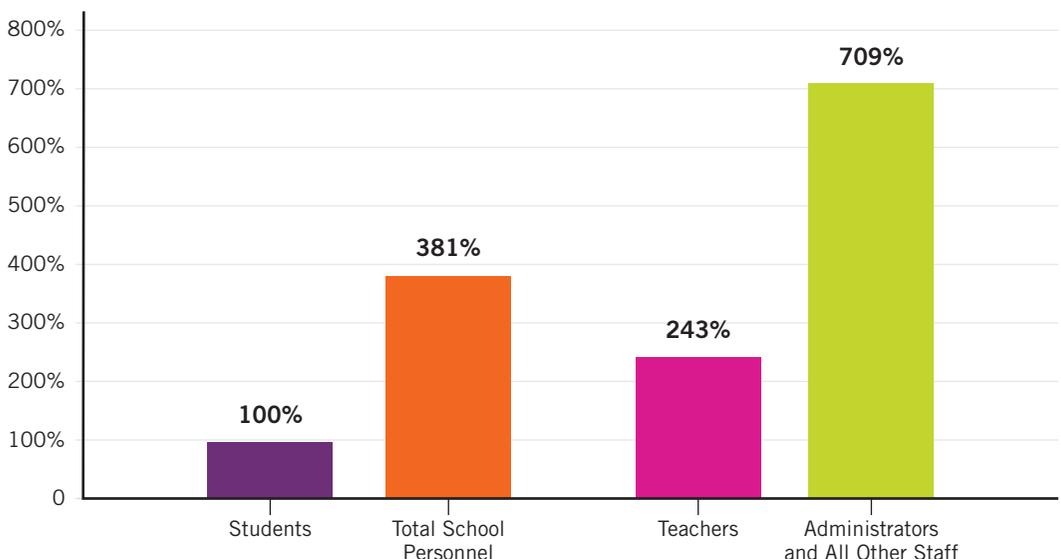
Our latest report—*Back to the Staffing Surge*—measures U.S. public school employment growth versus student growth as well as teacher salary fluctuations and student outcomes over the past 65 years, using publicly available data that state departments of education annually report to the U.S. Department of Education. The results were shocking. As the report’s author Dr. Ben Scafidi, professor and director of the Education Economics Center at Kennesaw State University, said:

“Given the massive increase in public school personnel—well over and beyond what was needed to accommodate student enrollment growth—given the data on stagnant student achievement in public schools over time, and given that students in recent years have characteristics that are slightly more favorable for student achievement, the productivity of American public schools has fallen rather dramatically over the past few decades. And, in retrospect, the staffing surge in American public schools appears to have been a costly failure.

## What are the numbers exactly?

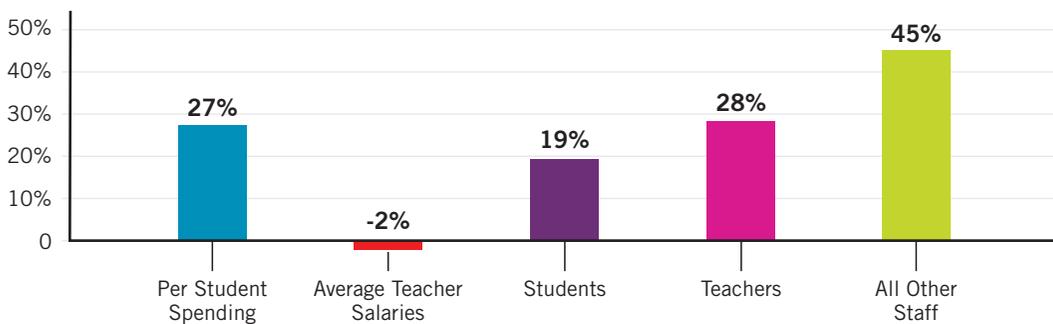
We found that while the number of full-time teachers increased almost two and a half times as fast as the increase in students, resulting in significantly smaller class sizes, the number of non-teachers or “all other staff” increased more than seven times the increase in students.

**Growth in Students and Public School Personnel, United States, FY 1950 to FY 2015**



We also know that inflation-adjusted salaries for public school teachers fell by 2 percent at the same time hiring of non-teaching staff continued to outpace student growth.

### Inflation-Adjusted Changes FY 1992–2014



Even during the Great Recession, a rare anomalous time when public school staffing declined, public school administrators showed they were more likely to fire teachers than they were to fire other administrators and non-teaching staff.

The disproportionate favoring of “all other staff” in the modern staffing surge has presented the public education system with a very large opportunity cost.

If the increase in “all other staff” alone had matched student enrollment growth between 1992 and 2015, American public schools could have saved \$35 billion in annual recurring savings. That’s \$35 billion every single year from 1992 to 2015, for a cumulative total of \$805 billion.

We can think of better ways that money could have been spent. The system could have:

**OR**

### Who’s responsible for this costly modern staffing surge?

Many would think it’s the local school district officials because they are the ones who literally hire and fire teachers and make salary decisions. But really, there are three levels of government that influence public school staffing.

“When I speak publicly about the staffing surge—depending on where the educators are located—they always blame the other two levels of government,” Scafidi said. “So local officials will say, ‘Oh it’s the state’s fault. It’s the feds’ fault.’ State officials say, ‘Well, it’s the locals bloating the payroll, and it’s federal regulations.’ Federal officials say, ‘No it’s happening at the state and local level.’ But truth be told, they’re all to blame.”

### So what do we do now?

We can continue the staffing surge and its diversion of resources away from teachers and school choice opportunities for parents and students. Or, perhaps it is time to move to a new education system—one that is student-centered and one that devotes more of its considerable resources to its frontline talent: its teachers.

For more details and for data from your state, download the full report at

[WWW.EDCHOICE.ORG/STAFFINGSURGE](http://WWW.EDCHOICE.ORG/STAFFINGSURGE)

# CHECKING IN ON SCHOOL CHOICE LEGISLATION IN THE STATES

EdChoice's ideal school choice policy? Universal education savings accounts, or ESAs, with minimal regulations on families and education providers. A few states have made great strides toward that goal, and many more have taken baby steps. But all are working hard to expand educational opportunity to more children, and we commend them for it. Learn more about the states to continue watching as state legislative sessions begin to draw to a close.

*Note: The status of active legislation reported in this breakdown is only as current to the date this article was written. To learn the latest, sign up for our monthly email newsletter on our website at [www.edchoice.org](http://www.edchoice.org) or follow our real-time updates on Twitter @edchoice.*

## ARIZONA

Gov. Doug Ducey signed an expansion of the state's education savings account program, creating the strongest operating educational choice program in America to date in terms of student eligibility. Notably, a few changes were made to the bill before its passage, which you can learn more about on our website at [www.edchoice.org/AZ\\_ESA](http://www.edchoice.org/AZ_ESA).

## ARKANSAS

Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson signed into law several bills making changes to the state's Succeed Scholarship Program, expanding eligibility to children in foster homes and more. The Arkansas House also voted down HB 1222, a bill that would have created a tax credit-funded education savings account program.

## FLORIDA

Florida Gov. Rick Scott signed HB 15, a bill that would increase the size of the scholarships students receive through the state's Tax Credit Scholarship Program. The bill previously passed the Florida House unanimously and passed the Florida Senate 27–11. The governor also signed HB 7069, a school funding bill that includes an additional \$30 million for the Gardiner Scholarship Program, an ESA program for students with special needs.

## GEORGIA

The Georgia Senate passed an amended version of HB 217, a bill that would expand the tax credits available through the state's Qualified Education Expense Tax Credit from \$58 million to \$65 million. The Georgia House previously passed a version that would have scaled up the credits to \$150 million over six years. The bill failed to pass the committee of conference. On the other hand, the Georgia Supreme Court ruled, unanimously, on June 26 that Georgia's universal tax-credit scholarship program may continue, holding that the plaintiffs had no standing to bring litigation against the program because they suffered no injury. (*Gaddy v. Georgia Department of Revenue*)

## INDIANA

Indiana's governor signed HB 1001, a bill that increases the tax credit cap for the state's tax-credit scholarship program and ultimately allows the program to serve more students.

## MISSISSIPPI

Mississippi Gov. Phil Bryant signed a scaled-down version of HB 1046, which expands Mississippi's Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship program.

## MISSOURI

The Missouri legislative session ended before the all of the votes to pass SB 313 could happen. This bill would have created a tax credit-funded education savings account program for students with special needs.

## NEBRASKA

Three educational choice bills have been filed in Nebraska; LB 295, a means-tested tax-credit scholarship bill; LB 118, a parent-funded education savings account; and LB 608, a traditional school voucher bill aimed at children in "failing" schools. LB 295 and LB 118 were both referred to the Revenue Committee, while LB 608 was referred to the Education Committee.

## NEVADA

The Nevada legislature failed to fund the state's ESA program, meaning no ESAs will be distributed to parents. Conversely, the legislature enacted a one-time temporary tax credit cap increase of an additional \$20 million for the state's tax-credit scholarship program. That money will be exhausted when the entire cap is used, and currently there is no plan to make up any shortfall after the money runs out.

## NORTH CAROLINA

The North Carolina legislature overrode the governor's veto to enact SB 257, a bill creating a new education savings account program for students with special needs. Eligible students can receive up to \$9,000 per year for a wide variety of educational and therapeutic uses as well as education-related transportation.

## OHIO

Gov. John Kasich signed HB 49, a budget bill which increases per-student funding for the Cleveland Scholarship Program, continues the phase-in of the Income-Based Scholarship Program and extends the application window for the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program to year-round for children who have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

## OKLAHOMA

SB 301, expanding the Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program to also include children in foster care or children adopted out of state custody, passed unanimously in both chambers of the Oklahoma legislature and was signed into law by Gov. Mary Fallin on May 12, along with SB 445, which increases the cap on credits provided through the Oklahoma Equal Opportunity Education Scholarship Act.

## OREGON

A bill that would create a completely universal education savings account, SB 437, was introduced by Oregon Sen. Ted Ferrioli. It has been referred to both the Education and Ways and Means Committees. No hearing date has been scheduled.

## SOUTH CAROLINA

SB 622, a bill that would create the state's first education savings account, was introduced to the South Carolina legislature this session. S 241—a bill that would expand the state's Educational Credit for Exceptional Needs Children from \$10 million to \$25 million—is still pending in the Senate Committee on Finance. Both bills will be held over until the next session as the legislature has adjourned.

## TEXAS

Two noteworthy bills are up for consideration in Texas. The Senate passed SB 3, which would create an education savings account (ESA) program and a tax-credit scholarship program. The House is considering HB 1335, an ESA specifically designed to serve students with special needs.

## VIRGINIA

Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe vetoed HB 1605, which includes a "re-enactment clause" that would only have created an education savings account program if the next legislature passed the same bill again.

## WEST VIRGINIA

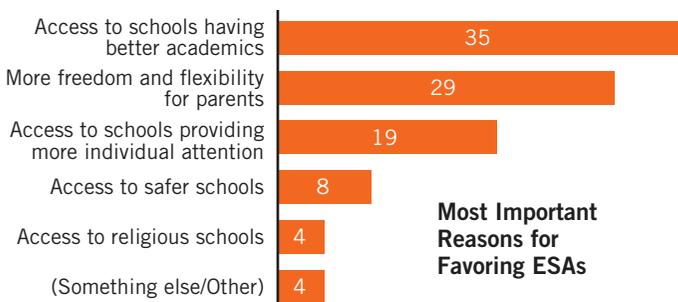
SB 273, a bill that would create a pilot education savings account program capped at 1,000 students with a \$3 million appropriation, failed to advance before the end of the regular session. The West Virginia legislature has been called into a special session, but currently no school choice bills are being considered.

## STATE SPOTLIGHT: NEW HAMPSHIRE

New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu signed SB 8, a bill allowing towns lacking a public school for certain grades to provide "town tuitioning" grants to students who attend non-sectarian schools. This is New Hampshire's second school choice program. The governor also signed HB 386, a bill that modifies New Hampshire's tax-credit scholarship program so that eligible families can use the funds for a wide variety of educational expenditures in addition to (or instead of) private school tuition, similar to education savings account programs.

**The New Hampshire Senate passed SB 193, a bill that would create a nearly universal education savings account program, but the House retained the bill to consider in the 2018 legislative session.**

EdChoice published a representative survey of New Hampshire voters in April that showed 58 percent favor the proposed ESA program, and only 31 percent oppose it.



*"I feel like our current system of assigning children by ZIP Code is frankly kind of socioeconomic discrimination because you've got to buy an expensive house to get into a good district," said Kate Baker, executive director of Children's Scholarship Fund New Hampshire. "I was really happy to see that the people of New Hampshire believe that families should be able to choose an education regardless of their income or ZIP Code."*

Source: EdChoice, *New Hampshire K-12 & School Choice Survey* (conducted March 15 to 22, 2017), Q19 (if Q18 = somewhat/strongly favor).  
Notes: Responses within parentheses were volunteered. "Don't Know" and Refusals not shown nor reflected in this chart.

# CHAMPIONS OF CHOICE

Working to expand educational choice at the state level would be impossible without support from legislators on both sides of the aisle who are willing to stand up for K-12 students and their families. Without their support, which sometimes must endure withering attacks and extreme political pressure, choice programs simply wouldn't exist. That's why we wanted to take a moment to thank five lawmakers who are proven Champions of Choice by asking what motivates them to pursue educational choice for K-12 students in their states. Here are their answers:

## Jim Dotson, Arkansas House of Representatives



*"Education is the most important responsibility we as a society owe to the next generation. It is the foundation on which our nation is built and the only way we can truly "secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity." I believe the best way to ensure those Blessings of Liberty is by empowering parents with the ability to provide the best educational environment for their individual student. Because every student is unique with individual learning needs, the parent/guardian of every student is best suited to guide their student's educational journey, ensuring those learning needs are met."*

## Roger Chamberlain, Minnesota State Senate



*"It's about the kids! Few things are more important than providing children with quality education opportunities, and we should do everything within our power to ensure that happens. I believe in the idea that educational choice will liberate parents, kids and educators and will dramatically improve outcomes for children."*

## Debbie Lesko, Arizona State Senate



*"ESAs allow parents to choose the best education for their child. A parent knows what's best for their child, and a parent should have the right to choose the best school for their child. It is just that simple."*

## Glenn Cordelli, New Hampshire House of Representatives



*"New Hampshire is the "Live Free or Die" state. Parents in NH should have the ability to find the best education for their children, regardless of address or wealth. We hear about "local control" in NH, but what is needed is parental control. Education freedom is the proven education reform."*

## John Deberry, Tennessee House of Representatives



*"My motivation and support of school choice began in 1968 when my parents decided that their children would integrate the schools. "We deserve better," they said. That is why I support school choice today because "our children deserve better." No official or organization should have the authority to deny parents the basic right of choosing the best education possible for their children. Educational choice is therefore a multidimensional concern which expresses the fundamental concept of freedom and independence granted by our constitution to determine the character and aptitude of our posterity."*

# WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT SCHOOL CHOICE'S SUPPLY-SIDE PROBLEM

If you build it, they will come.

But what happens if you know they'll come, and you just can't get it built in a timely fashion?

In one of our recent reports (*The Private School Landscape*) we tested the theory that educational choice programs that increase access to private schools will, in turn, increase both the number of students in those schools and the number of seats available overall.

Our theory was wrong—or at least it hasn't taken hold yet in the way Milton Friedman predicted it would back in 1955 when he first laid out the merits of school choice.

Why haven't we seen noticeable growth in private school populations and capacity? It could be limitations on the number and type of students participating, less funding for private school choice students than public school students, and unreliable funding from year to year.

Another reason for slow growth may be the inability for private schools to expand quickly because they lack access to the low- or no-interest capital that's available to traditional public and charter schools for infrastructure needs.

Dr. Mike McShane, director of education policy at the Show-Me Institute and former American Enterprise Institute Scholar, noted in a 2015 report that “[p]rivate schools have generally looked to more traditional avenues of philanthropic support when they have needed a new building or wanted to start fresh.”

School choice programs are leveling the playing field for students, but private schools aren't able to quickly build new schools or expand existing facilities to educate additional students.

Meanwhile, their counterparts in the public and charter sectors have access to municipal bonds, low-interest loans and venture capital regardless of demand.

A public school district, for example, can ask voters to remedy a longstanding deficit via public referendum despite decades of declining student enrollment, but a private school must spend years raising money—even if there's an immediate need for more seats.

We know from our original research that a much higher percentage of families would prefer a private school than currently are able to access one, and private school families are overwhelmingly satisfied with their schooling experiences.

Of course, there's an argument to be made that all types of schools should consider new solutions to their real estate needs, pushing beyond the traditional bricks-and-mortar ownership model. Online schooling requires very little square footage, and charter schools have long been pushing the envelope when it comes to facility reuse, leasing space or putting schools in non-traditional settings.

The bottom line: We may not have to build it for them to come, but we need to pay closer attention to what families want versus what's currently available to them.

We know that parents would overwhelmingly choose private schools if they could, so it follows that we should make it easier, not harder, for those schools to start up or expand to meet that demand. That includes avoiding burdensome regulations and providing a steady stream of funding for educational choice programs. It should also include making sure those schools have access to capital that would help them serve more students.

## School Funding Sources for Capital and Start-Up Costs

	Traditional Public	Charter	Private
Bond Financing	<i>Large Investment</i> \$3–4 billion per year (estimate)	<i>Moderate Investment</i> 730 total bonds valued at \$9 billion from 1998 to 2014	<i>Little Investment</i> Less than 200 total bonds (estimate)
Venture Capital	<i>Little Investment</i> Almost no investments are made for whole school models, though some are made for tools for use in schools.	<i>Moderate Investment</i> Several prominent sources, including the Charter School Growth Fund, New Schools Venture Fund and The Charter School Fund	<i>Little Investment</i> Mostly for high-end disruptive models around the world; Burgeoning efforts (The Drexel Fund)
Philanthropic Investment	<i>Large Investment</i> A lot is invested, but it is hard to say how much is for capital costs particularly.	<i>Large Investment</i> \$2.1 billion in direct support of facilities funding)	<i>Large Investment</i> Support from religious groups; Foundation support (limited); Institutional support (limited)
Direct Government Support	<i>Large Investment</i> Dedicated funding streams just under \$1,000 per student per year (varies by state)	<i>Moderate Investment</i> Federal funds and some state programs	<i>Little Investment</i> Voucher, tax credit and ESA funding does not cover capital costs

Source: Funding Growth, Expanding Opportunity

# PARENT PERSPECTIVE: SCHOOL CHOICE BUILDS COMMUNITIES

By Abby Hayes

Last winter, my husband and I started kindergarten shopping for our 5-year-old daughter. Besides the expected “I can’t believe she’s this big already” nostalgia, there was an element of confusion—even angst—as we tried to find her best educational fit.

This does not stem from a lack of good choices. We had at least five options, including public magnets, a charter, a private school and even our neighborhood school, that could have worked well. Our struggle was balancing the line between giving our daughter the best and being an integral part of our largely low-income community.

I believe in educational choice for all kids. But I also know many kids in my neighborhood whose families can’t yet make these choices. They might not know all the options available or be able to provide transportation, and there are not enough seats at the district’s highest-performing schools, even in the choice-rich environment of Indianapolis.

I believe that strong democratic systems benefit the social good. That’s why we live in a developing part of town, send our kids to a diverse local daycare and tried to find a local school for our soon-to-be kindergartner.

The problem is that many who make this argument insist that only ZIP Code-assigned district schools can help families promote the greater good. Try telling that to my neighborhood friends who have chosen charters, magnet schools or even homeschooling. These families are deeply invested in their chosen schools, and their communities benefit from their investment.

Still, my husband and I considered our district-assigned school, especially since the school—Thomas D. Gregg School 15—has been making national headlines for its innovative neighborhood-driven model.

The school starts operating under control of a local nonprofit this coming school year. Its plan—which includes more teachers in classrooms, a blend of online and project-based learning and increased social support for families—is fascinating.

But we won’t be sending our daughter there—at least.

We were lucky enough to lottery into our top-choice magnet school, one with a curriculum we feel will be a great fit for our daughter. So we’ll send her there in July, while keeping an eye on developments at Thomas D. Gregg.



But the bottom line here isn’t which school my family chose. It’s the fact that we had a choice at all.

We were able to opt in to an innovative, high-performing magnet school. But if it doesn’t work out, we can always choose something else later. We could move to Thomas D. Gregg or a charter school. We could slash expenses to pay for a private school. One of us could quit working to homeschool.

Every family in America should have access to those same options. For many, private school choice programs are the only way to ensure all doors—not just one out of three—are open to their children.

If you find yourself responding, “But if we just fix the public schools, no one will need school choice,” you’re certainly not alone. It’s a nice thought. But it’s not realistic.

For one thing, even the “perfect” neighborhood school can’t meet the needs of every kid in its catchment zone. Interests and learning styles are too diverse. If you need evidence of that, just look to the highest-performing district in your area. You’ll still find families who choose other options that better fit their children’s needs.

And think of the message that “we need to make all public schools great” sends to parents like me who are making school decisions right now. We can’t waste our children’s limited school years waiting for politicians to eventually agree to fix schools or districts to finally implement real changes.

That kind of uncertainty isn’t good enough for my kid. Would it be good enough for yours?

# ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST SCHOOL CHOICE IN 2017

What are opponents saying about school choice in the Trump/DeVos era—and how does our team combat their flawed rhetoric?

When it comes to lobbying to block school choice in the states, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) are the two biggest spenders. So what are they saying to turn teachers, parents and policymakers off to the idea of educational choice programs? And what are the best ways to refute those claims when you hear them? We've got you covered.

**AFT: “Private school vouchers offer false choices.” Look at negative effects coming out of Louisiana, Ohio and Indiana.**

**EdChoice:** In one breath public school advocates say their schools and teachers should not be penalized based on students' test scores because there are so many more measures of educational success, yet in the next breath, they claim school choice should be stopped at all costs because a handful of studies show slight declines in students' test scores.

The truth is our opponents are cherry-picking a few instances where some children test poorly in their first years using school vouchers. They do not account for the adjustment period any child goes through when they switch school cultures and curricula. They don't mention that many of those students' scores improve in their second year. They leave out that these outcomes could be improved by simply changing how these programs are designed. Worst yet, they omit the fact that more than a dozen studies find vouchers result in better student performance, and 32 studies find that students who choose to stay in their public schools actually perform better when other students leave their schools to find a better fit using school choice programs.

**NEA: “Vouchers were not designed to help low-income children.”**

**EdChoice:** School choice is designed to help all children, regardless of their income or neighborhood. The ZIP Code-based public education system has kept low-income kids out of quality schools, and studies have shown it also has contributed to—nay, exacerbated—socioeconomic segregation in public schools for decades.

**NEA: “A pure voucher system would only encourage economic, racial, ethnic, and religious stratification in our society.”**

**EdChoice:** According to every single empirical study on the topic, school vouchers lead to more ethnic and racial integration in schools, so there is literally no evidence to support that vouchers, in practice, result in more racial or ethnic stratification. Moreover, vouchers break down the socioeconomic barriers to entry that have historically prevented many students from accessing schools that work best for them.

**AFT: “Private school vouchers lack accountability.”**

**EdChoice:** Private schools have been regulated by the federal, state and local governments for a long time—long before school vouchers ever existed. Private schools are held accountable for their fiscal health and student performance by parents. In the private sector where families have the freedom and means to choose, parents will leave a private school if it doesn't serve their children well.

**AFT: “Vouchers take money away from neighborhood public schools.”**

**EdChoice:** This one is pretty easy. Education funding belongs to students, not a particular school type or building. When lawmakers allocate taxpayer resources for K-12 education, they do so on a “per-pupil” basis. If a family chooses a public school, the dollars follow the student to that school. That's how it should work across the board.

**NEA: “There is no need to set up new threats to schools for not performing. What is needed is help for the students, teachers, and schools who are struggling.”**

**EdChoice:** Vouchers are not a threat to any school or schooling option that families want to utilize. If a school isn't meeting the needs of those it serves, they will leave. For decades, though, they haven't been able to leave unless they bought or rented a house located in a “good” school district. We're breaking down those lines, making it clear that families should be in the driver's seat, not bureaucrats drawing lines on maps.

# THE 2017 ABCS OF SCHOOL CHOICE

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