SCHOOL CHOICE IN D.C.

FRIEDMAN FELLOWS

THE POWER OF ESAs
What an exciting time for educational choice in America!

Right now, there are efforts underway in states across the nation to expand and pass new choice programs, and that’s great news for students.

As you’ll learn in this issue, we’ve got our eye on several states where we expect lawmakers to take strong action to bring about new school choice programs, and we’re especially enthusiastic about those states that are proposing universal education savings account (ESA) programs to give families the most control over how they spend K–12 funding to find the best schooling options.

We’re similarly hopeful that legislators in Nevada find a way to fund the nearly universal ESA program in that state, which was the subject of litigation that ultimately found the program constitutional but lacking a funding mechanism. More than 8,000 students are waiting to use an ESA to customize a learning experience that really works for them.

Perhaps most interesting right now is the fact that there’s new leadership in Washington, D.C., that’s ready to shake things up from the federal perspective.

The confirmation of Betsy DeVos as the new U.S. Secretary of Education is likely to be the beginning of an era where families and their choices always come first.

You’ll find our top five recommendations for the new administration on page 6 of this edition of EdChoice ENGAGE. Chief among them is cutting through the federal red tape that far too often trips up teachers, administrators and schools that are just trying to help students learn.

We’re also eager to find out the details of any federal efforts to increase school choice in states that currently do not have programs operating.

The increase in activity in Washington is one of the key reasons we opened an office there in February.

As the leading national resource for school choice research, data and program design, we want to play an integral role in the national discussion about empowering parents by expanding options.

A presence inside the Beltway enables us to highlight the amazing stories of parents exercising choice in the more than 30 states with school choice laws and be a watchdog when it comes to educational choice and the federal government.

Our new office is located close to Capitol Hill, so we are easily accessible to staffers and members who want to learn more about our issue and our work in their states. The connection between what we’re doing across America and what’s happening in Washington has never been more important.

Finally, I want to thank you for your continued support of our organization as we move forward with our important work at the state level. Recently, we launched a fundraising campaign to support our new Friedman Fellowship program, an elite group of thought leaders who are contributing critical original research to the national debate about educational choice. We named this group after Milton and Rose because we wanted to pay tribute to their incredible ongoing intellectual legacy.

I hope you enjoy this issue of ENGAGE. As always, please let us know how we’re doing—and what we could be doing to better help you advocate for K-12 students and families across the country.

Best,

Robert C. Enlow
President and CEO
We really miss Milton and Rose.

We miss their incredible ideas and their commitment to providing full and unencumbered educational choice to every student in America.

We’ve worked for 20 years to make their vision a reality by training stakeholders, educating policymakers and working tirelessly at the state level to expand opportunities for students.

One of the biggest reasons we’ve been successful has been our network of thought leaders who provide original, insightful research and analysis about educational choice. When we talk the talk, we’ve got the latest data to back up what we’re saying.

As we go forward, we wanted to find a way to continue honoring the intellectual legacy of our founders Milton and Rose D. Friedman.

That’s why earlier this year, thanks to generous financial contributions from our supporters, we established the Friedman Fellowship program. This exclusive group includes the top thought leaders in the field of educational choice, whose work most closely reflects Milton and Rose’s legacy, and who are regarded for their academic credentials.

Not only will Friedman Fellows research, analyze and comment on school choice trends, but they also will become part of the fabric of our organization. They will speak on our behalf and help make the case for expanded educational choice across the nation.

Please join us in welcoming the Fellows to our team. They will be revealed on our website later this Spring.

**THE FRIEDMAN FELLOWSHIP: CONTINUING THE LEGACY**

**GREG FORSTER, Ph.D.**

Greg Forster has conducted extensive research on the effects of school choice programs in Milwaukee, Ohio, Florida and Texas, as well as national empirical studies comparing public and private schools in terms of working conditions for teachers; racial segregation; and teacher and staff misconduct. He holds a Ph.D. with distinction in political philosophy from Yale University.

**BENJAMIN SCAFIDI, Ph.D.**

Ben Scafidi is a professor of economics and director of the Education Economics Center at Kennesaw State University. His research has focused on education and urban policy. He holds a Ph.D. in economics from the University of Virginia and a B.A. in economics from the University of Notre Dame.

**MICHAEL PODGURSKY, Ph.D.**

Michael Podgursky is a professor of economics at the University of Missouri – Columbia. His research focuses on the economics of education. He has written many articles in on the topic, with a primary focus on teacher labor markets and teacher compensation. He holds a B.A. degree from the University of Missouri at Columbia and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Wisconsin at Madison.
ARIZONA
A bill that would expand the state’s Empowerment Scholarship Accounts to near-universal eligibility was introduced to the Arizona legislature in January.

ARKANSAS
A bill that would create a tax credit-funded education savings account (ESA) program was introduced to the Arkansas legislature.

INDIANA
Two education savings account bills—one for special needs students and one universal program—and one school voucher expansion bill were put forth in Indiana. The voucher bill would remove income guidelines for the state’s voucher program, making it a universal voucher program.

IOWA
Educational choice proponents in the Hawkeye state expect that lawmakers will propose what would be the nation’s first fully universal ESA program. That means all Iowa students—including public school students as well as the current private and home school populations—would be eligible to participate in the program.

KENTUCKY
Kentucky lawmakers have proposed the creation of a statewide tax-credit scholarship program.

MISSOURI
Missouri legislators have introduced a bill that would create a tax credit-funded education savings account program.

NEVADA
Nevada’s lower courts in Lopez v. Schwartz and Duncan v. State reaffirmed the ruling of the Nevada Supreme Court that the state’s education savings account legislation is constitutional. Legislators are considering a funding mechanism for the program.

NEW HAMPSHIRE
New Hampshire lawmakers are considering a bill that would create a nearly universal education savings account program as well as a bill that would create an ESA for students with special needs.

PENNSYLVANIA
With so many scholarship-granting organizations (SGOs) across the state, Pennsylvanians from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia are supporting a $75 million increase to the state’s tax-credit scholarship program.

TEXAS
Texas lawmakers are considering a bill that would create the state’s first educational choice programs: a nearly universal education savings account and a means-tested tax-credit scholarship.

WEST VIRGINIA
West Virginians expect lawmakers will propose a universal ESA program despite limited chances that the governor would sign such a proposal.
Although news headlines have focused primarily on the presidential race, our team took a closer look at the results from last year's 12 state gubernatorial races. After all, education is—and always should be—a local issue.

Of course, just because a governor supports or opposes private school choice does not guarantee a proposal's success or failure. Over the past two decades, we have seen supportive governors veto school choice legislation, and we’ve seen opposed governors’ vetoes overridden. Still, governors’ actions, positions and statements serve as likely indicators of what might happen if educational choice proposals were to reach their desks.

**DELAWARE: John Carney (D)**
Private School Choice Supporter? NO
Carney voted NO on reauthorizing the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. John Carney’s own education policy never mentions the word “choice.”

**INDIANA: Eric Holcomb (R)**
Private School Choice Supporter? YES
Holcomb made this pledge during his campaign: “Protect the rights of Hoosier families and parents to choose the best educational setting for their child’s individual needs through strong support of every type of school—traditional public schools, public charter schools, non-public schools and home schools—always working in a way that complements, rather than pits them against one another.”

**MISSOURI: Eric Greitens (R)**
Private School Choice Supporter? YES
Greitens’ campaign promise: “I believe every child in Missouri has the right to a first-rate education. Too many Missouri children are trapped in failing schools. I will lead efforts to provide more choices and opportunities for kids who need it most.”

**MONTANA: Steve Bullock (D)**
Private School Choice Supporter? NO
Bullock vetoed a school choice bill in 2013 and failed to sign a tax credit in 2015. According to the Missoulian, Bullock will oppose “any bill that will undermine our public education system” by using public money or tax credits to help fund private schools.

**NEW HAMPSHIRE: Chris Sununu (R)**
Private School Choice Supporter? YES
Sununu penned an opinion editorial in the New Hampshire Union Leader entitled “Education choice is the foundation for equal opportunity.”

**NORTH CAROLINA: Roy Cooper (D)**
Private School Choice Supporter? NO
Cooper’s campaign promise: “I believe that public education is one of the most critical duties of state government. As governor, I will protect it from being further undermined by politicians in Raleigh wanting to dismantle it.”

**NORTH DAKOTA: Doug Burgum (R)**
Private School Choice Supporter? UNCLEAR
Burgum has said the state of North Dakota can’t continue to drop money into education and expect different results if some schools continue to lag. “It’s unfair to students,” Burgum said in the Bismarck Tribune. “It’s unfair to taxpayers.” He added that charter schools or a school voucher system may need to be considered.

**OREGON: Kate Brown (D)**
Private School Choice Supporter? NO
Oregon’s high school graduation rate is the third lowest in the nation and 10 percentage points below the national average. The Register-Guard reported, “Gov. Brown said earlier this year that the state’s low graduation rates are caused in part by decades of the state’s “under investment” in public schools.”

**UTAH: Gary Herbert (R)**
Private School Choice Supporter? YES
Herbert issued a 2012 National School Choice Week proclamation. In it, he said, “All children in Utah should have the right to the highest-quality schools possible; and citizens across Utah agree that improving the quality of education in Utah and expanding access to highly effective schools should be an issue of importance to our state’s leaders.”

**VERMONT: Phil Scott (R)**
Private School Choice Supporter? YES
In the first Vermont gubernatorial debate, Scott said, “Act 46 was sold to many lawmakers as including school choice, to the surprise of many they found out that was not the case. I think competition is good. I believe that within reason parents should have a choice as to where they send their children. I would like to see some expansion of that.”

**WASHINGTON: Jay Inslee (D)**
Private School Choice Supporter? NO
Inslee “grudgingly” allowed a charter school bill to become law without his signature. Publicly, Inslee strongly opposes school vouchers and private school choice. Inslee has a 100 percent rating by one of the largest opponents of school choice, the National Education Association.

**WEST VIRGINIA: Jim Justice (D)**
Private School Choice Supporter? NO
Justice is against charter school choice, according to the Charleston Gazette-Mail. Because he does not support charter schools, he is unlikely to support private school choice measures, such as school vouchers or education savings accounts.
FAST FACTS: K–12 Education Under Recent Administrations


• Wanted to be known as “the education president”
• Made public school choice a priority
• The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) took effect on his watch, ensuring that children with disabilities are entitled to a “free and appropriate” public education that meets their unique needs

Bill Clinton (1993–2001)

• Established the Educate America Act in 1994, which became the precursor to No Child Left Behind
• Created a framework for identifying and establishing standards, measuring student progress and providing student support
• Charter schools grew during this administration, and Congress created a federal grant program, though Clinton always made it clear charters were a state issue and did not support private school choice


• No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was established in 2001, setting up standards-based education reform to combat “the soft bigotry of low expectations”
• Pushed for school choice so families in failing schools could have better options but made it clear that private school choice should be a state issue
• Signed the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program into law in 2004, setting up the first K–12 voucher program in the District of Columbia


• Sought to establish consistent educational standards across the states under the Common Core initiative, which was sponsored by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers
• Signs the Every Student Succeeds Act to replace NCLB and reauthorize Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), allowing more state control in judging school quality
• Came out in support of charter schools and once stated that “we need to uphold the idea of public education, but we also need reform;” did not support private school choice
How the Federal Government Can Help Families Choose

We’re a nonpartisan organization that doesn’t take sides in political campaigns, but we know that President Trump and Vice President Pence, as school choice champions, have an incredible opportunity to elevate the issue to new audiences and take definitive action at the federal level to empower parents and support school choice policies and programs.

Here's our Top Five wish list for the new administration:

1. ** Advocate, advocate, advocate. **
   Every new administration has a chance to use the bully pulpit of the White House to spread the word about its priority issues. We encourage the President and Vice President to take every opportunity to educate and engage Americans on the need for educational choice.

2. ** Push to reauthorize and fully fund the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program. **
   Washington, D.C., is home to one of the most successful educational choice programs in America, which is amazing given that the program is limited to so few and woefully underfunded. The program’s authorization and funding depend on Congress, which could work with the new administration to expand the program and ensure that funding is consistent.

3. ** Cut through red tape like it’s going out of style. **
   The only time it’s acceptable to run with scissors is if you’re on the way to cut up the bureaucratic red tape that keeps schools from performing their primary duty: educating kids. Anything the U.S. Department of Education can do to help educators and school leaders get back to their jobs would be a welcome relief at the state level.

4. ** Start a conversation about expanding the D.C. program into something even more family-friendly. **
   Education savings accounts (ESAs) allow parents to use public funds for a variety of services, including private school tuition, online learning, tutoring and other approved customized learning services and materials. President Trump and Vice President Pence could kick-start a conversation about converting the D.C. voucher program into an ESA program, which would represent true educational freedom for families there.

5. ** Connect ESA programs in states to Title 1 and IDEA funding or provide block grant funding to states. **
   The federal government could support school choice by sending IDEA funding and Title I block grant Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) funding back to state legislatures to let them direct those funds—or better yet, place them in an education savings account for the parent to use.

As the incoming administration undertakes its first year in office, we offer one cautionary note: Please avoid federal overreach. Just because you can do something doesn’t necessarily mean you should, and with roughly 90 percent of K–12 education funding at the state level, that’s where our focus will remain.
Private School Parents, Followed by Charter Parents, Most Satisfied with Schools

Across five key characters—teacher quality, school discipline, expectations for student achievement, safety, and instruction in character or values—charter school parents are, on average, 13 percentage points more satisfied with their schools than are parents of children in district schools.

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Difference from charter school parents statistically significant at the 90% confidence level, *95% confidence level, **99% confidence level

Notes: Respondents could choose one of five response categories: very dissatisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, satisfied, very satisfied. The statistical significance of the findings is calculated by estimating sector differences across all five categories of responses after adjusting for differences in respondents’ background characteristics.

Source: The 2016 EdNext Survey
GEORGIA

EdChoice (formerly the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice) has reports that gauge parental satisfaction in educational choice programs in three states. Jim Kelly and Ben Scafidi show in their report More Than Scores: An Analysis of Why and How Parents Choose Private Schools that 84 percent of parents with children receiving a tax-credit scholarship from Georgia’s largest scholarship-granting organization were very satisfied with their scholarship school, using the same scale as the USDOE survey.

ARIZONA

In Schooling Satisfaction: Arizona Parents’ Opinions on Using Education Savings Accounts, Jonathan Butcher and Jason Bedrick found that 71 percent of Arizona education savings account (ESA) families were very satisfied with their children’s education through Arizona’s ESA program—and this was using a seven-level Likert scale, which, in addition to the four categories for the national survey, included: satisfied, neutral, unsatisfied.

INDIANA

Earlier this year we conducted our own survey of 2,056 school parents in Indiana, of which 1,185 had at least one child participating in the state’s voucher and/or tax-credit scholarship program in 2015–16. In Why Parents Choose: A Survey of Private School and School Choice Parents in Indiana, we show that within the population of private school parents, those with children participating in a school choice program were significantly more likely to say they were very satisfied when compared to non-participants. Interestingly, the same percentage of Indiana voucher and tax-credit scholarship parents said they were very satisfied as the national sample of private school parents, although our survey of Indiana parents included the neutral response category of “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied” while the national survey did not. The accompanying chart shows the level of significant differences for the Indiana parent responses and the national parent responses; significant differences were not calculated by the authors of the other EdChoice reports.

Though a plethora of studies have looked at the empirical evidence on school choice, parental satisfaction surveys are arguably just as important. After all, as Paul Peterson himself wrote nearly two decades ago in summary of his research of school choice programs in multiple cities, “If the only thing that counts is consumer satisfaction, school choice is a clear winner.”

As educational choice programs continue to grow and serve more students across the country, our ongoing research continues to prove that families are happy with the options and opportunities they are being provided. We will continue to track parental satisfaction and offer that data to help policymakers understand just how much parents and students value school choice.


| Indiana Private School Choice Parents | 84% |
| Indiana Private School Parents | 76 |
| Indiana Non-Choice Private School Parents | 68 |
| U.S. Private School Parents | 81† |
| U.S. Public Charter School Parents | 63 |
| U.S. Chosen District Public School Parents | 61 |
| U.S. Assigned District Public School Parents | 56* |

†Difference from non-choice private school parents statistically significant at the 99% confidence level
*Difference from charter school parents statistically significant at the 99% confidence level

Notes: National respondents could choose one of four response categories: very dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, somewhat satisfied, very satisfied. Indiana respondents had those categories and a fifth: neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Raw percentages are used because background characteristics were not collected in the survey of Indiana parents.

Who am I?

My name is Valerie McMurray

My birth mother was a heroin addict and an alcoholic all throughout her pregnancy, and because of that, I was born prematurely at 3 pounds 3 ounces on 3/30/03. (I think three should be my lucky number.)

Her heavy use of drugs and alcohol caused me to have cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy is a muscle disorder that is caused by damage to the brain normally before birth. My C.P. effects my walking and my speech.

In utero, my mother chose drugs over me. Thankfully, the Lord knew my birth mother would not be a fit parent and placed my adoptive mother Lynn McMurray in my path before I ended up being moved around in the foster care system.

When I was 2 years old, my neurologist said I would never walk or talk...so, I guess I shouldn’t be standing here today. When I learned to walk and talk, my mother took me back to his office and told him he owed me an apology.

School Failures

My struggles and triumphs were not just limited to my early childhood and health issues. Growing up, school was never something that came easy for me.

I started prekindergarten in the Special Education classroom. When I moved into elementary, things got a little harder. I was in a Christian private school, and I wasn't thriving.

When that didn't work, my mother tried traditional public schools. The public school system was not working for me either. My social life finally thrived, but I was failing all classes and not getting the one-on-one care I needed as a student.

ESA Success

After my multiple failures, my mother was approached about Arizona's education savings account (ESA) program, where I would get government grants to fund my at-home learning.

Since learning at home, I discovered I do best at visual learning. I enjoy learning now. My favorite subject is anatomy. I truly love learning about how the human body works.

I also enjoy the fact that I am able to learn through Christian-based textbooks. In public school, we are barely allowed to say the Lord’s name without getting in trouble. At home, I don’t have that problem.

Learning at home, I get to sleep in. I no longer have to rush, and that was a big hassle in public school. The idea of learning doesn’t scare me anymore, I actually get excited to learn new things. I enjoy the fact that we can hit the road and go on fieldtrips whenever we want. My favorite place so far would be Kauai, Hawaii.

I like having one-on-one attention from my tutors. I ask questions without the fear of being made fun of or feeling embarrassed. My tutors teach me at my own speed.

I am happy that I no longer have to sit still in one spot for hours at a time. Learning at home, we change it up. We can learn from the kitchen table, outside or anywhere else in the house.

I am happy that I no longer have to sit still in one spot for hours at a time. Learning at home, we change it up. We can learn from the kitchen table, outside or anywhere else in the house.

Math is not my favorite subject, but it is getting easier for me, I have learned that you need math every day of your life.

Another thing I love about learning at home is that I don’t have to deal with bullies anymore. With my disability affecting the way I walk and talk, I was no stranger to bullies. In public school, kids can be really mean. At home, I am surrounded by people who are kind, understanding and actually care about my wellbeing. They don’t make me feel uncomfortable about the way I walk or speak.

The ESA program has helped my self-esteem, not only through learning, but in the real world. I have so much confidence in areas where I used to be confused. Without the ESA program, I would probably still be failing in the public school system. I am so happy to be a part of the ESA program. I am a lucky kid.
Advocates have long argued that school choice would change the landscape of education through competition. Properly implemented, school choice programs should diversify private school student populations and the education marketplace as a whole.

But have they?

EdChoice recently released a research report—The Private School Landscape: The Effects of School Choice on Student Capacity and Composition—concluding that school choice programs across America have not delivered increases in private school enrollment or capacity over the past two decades.

The good news: There's a path forward that will help spur that growth.

The report also looked at the effects of choice on racial diversity in private schools in choice and non-choice states and found that contrary to what critics often allege, private school choice programs have not caused more racial segregation at the school level. However, school choice programs with broader eligibility enacted within the last five years did not fit the data time frame of this report.

“In 1955, Milton Friedman posited that educational options available to all families would increase the number of students in private schools and the number of private schools in existence,” said EdChoice President and CEO Robert Enlow. “This report makes it clear that the limited choice programs that exist today have not achieved that outcome, but we can make greater strides by truly embracing Dr. Friedman's vision of full and unencumbered choice.”

There are 61 school choice programs in 30 states and the District of Columbia, and almost all of them provide students with less funding than they would receive to attend a public school. Most programs also place additional regulations on schools that accept choice students, which deters some schools from participating.

“The more hurdles you throw in front of private schools and school leaders, the harder you make it for them to provide and expand options,” Enlow said. “And if you're not fully funding students or providing a sustainable funding stream from year to year, that's just one more barrier to growth. Policymakers should be sensitive to these concerns and design programs to promote increased access and more equitable funding.”

EdChoice Director of State Research and Policy Analysis Drew Catt, who authored the report along with Dr. Dick Carpenter and Rebecca Keith from the University of Colorado, said the findings mirror other analyses.

“We were surprised to learn that enrollment and capacity growth has been stagnant for so long? Not entirely. Most of these state programs came online within the last five years, and we've long known there's an issue with growing private school supply,” he said, noting that many private and parochial schools were forced to close their doors before educational choice programs put them within reach for low- and middle-income families.

Catt highlighted the racial diversity data in the report as another opportunity for growth but also proof that opponents of choice should not rely on racial segregation as a talking point.

“We can categorically say it's not true that private schools have become ‘whiter’ in states with school choice programs in operation,” Catt said.

EdChoice CEO Enlow concluded that as educational choice advocates look toward future growth, one way to potentially increase racial diversity within private schools would be to locate more schools within diverse communities.

“We know parents are willing to sacrifice a lot to access the right educational fit for their kids, but we need to start making it easier for them by providing convenient options that meet their needs where they live,” he said.

The report authors identified several ways policymakers can help:
- Expand student eligibility
- Strike the right balance between accountability and autonomy
- Establish reliable funding streams

For more detailed analysis, methods and more, you can read the full report at edchoice.org/PrivateSchoolLandscape.
ORDER YOUR COPY TODAY!
edchoice.org/order