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# THE 2025 EDCHOICE FRIEDMAN INDEX

All Students, All Options, All Dollars

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## ABOUT EDCHOICE

EdChoice is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nonpartisan organization. Our mission is to advance educational freedom and choice for all as a pathway to successful lives and a stronger society. We are committed to understanding and pursuing a K–12 education ecosystem that empowers every family to choose the learning environment that fits their children’s needs best. EdChoice is the intellectual legacy of Milton and Rose D. Friedman, who founded the organization in 1996 as the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice. The contents of this publication are intended to provide empirical information and should not be construed as lobbying for any position related to any legislation.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *2025 EdChoice Friedman Index* is a comprehensive and easy-to-understand measure of the availability of private K–12 educational choice across the United States. Inspired by Milton and Rose Friedman’s vision of universal choice, the index assesses how well each state enables families to direct education funding toward the options they deem best, whether public or private.

Since 2020, there has been a rapid increase in educational choice programs across the U.S. Fourteen states have been labeled as offering “universal choice,” but many of these states lack accessibility due to caps on funding. *The EdChoice Friedman Index* measures how much educational choice families **really** have.

*The EdChoice Friedman Index* ranges from 0 to 100. To achieve a score of 100 on the index, a given state must meet each of the following three criteria:

- **“All Students”:** 100% of the students in the state are eligible to participate in a choice program, with funding available for all who wish to participate (universal funded eligibility).
- **“All Options”:** All choice students are able to participate in an education savings-style program (ESA), which means families have the opportunity to use the taxpayer funds placed in their child’s account to offset tuition payments at private schools and to purchase educational goods and services outside of schools (e.g. tutoring, textbooks, test fees, special needs therapies, etc).
- **“All Dollars”:** Average awards per choice student are equal to the average state and local revenue per public school student, which means that choice students receive the same amount of funding as public school students (sans federal funding), on average.

**State Rankings:** The highest-scoring states, such as Florida (77), Arkansas (60), Alabama (59) and Arizona (59), have widespread eligibility and robust ESA programs. However, even top states fall short in funding parity between choice and public school students.

**Challenges to Universal Choice:** Many states impose budget caps, low per-student funding, or restrictive scholarship programs that prevent full realization of universal educational choice.

## Policy Recommendations:

- Expand eligibility to all students, and guarantee funding for all families who desire to exercise choice for their children.
- Increase funding to match state plus local public school revenues.
- Adopt ESA programs, or similar multi-use programs, to maximize family autonomy in educational spending.

Future iterations of the index will evolve to increase deductions for states that restrict family autonomy, such as deductions for regulatory restrictions on private providers.

*The EdChoice Friedman Index* serves as a benchmark measurement of the degree to which private education choice opportunities are actually available to families in each state. Importantly, the index also serves as a roadmap, as its component scores direct policymakers and advocates to specific policies they could support to truly increase the amount of educational choice for students.

## INTRODUCTION

*“We are at the beginning of the task because as of the moment vouchers are available to only a very small amount of children. Our goal is to have a system in which every family in the U.S. will be able to choose for itself the school to which its children go.”*

- Milton Friedman (2003)<sup>1</sup>

How much private K–12 educational choice does your state really allow families to have? To address this issue, we need answers to three key questions:

Are **all** students in your state eligible and able to receive taxpayer funding to pay for their education in private schools and other private educational settings?

Are **all** K–12 dollars available on an equitable basis to both families who choose to have their children educated in public schools and to families who choose to have their children educated outside of the conventional public education system?

Are families able to participate in choice programs that allow them to access **all** private educational options for their children, including both school and non-school educational services?

If the answers to each of these three key questions is “YES” in your state, then your state **really** allows families to have universal educational choice.

Starting in the 1950s and for the remainder of his life, economist and Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman advocated for universal educational choice, where there would be a separation between public funding for K–12 education and public schools. Instead of continuing to send all taxpayer funds directly to public school districts, Friedman proposed separating the financing of education from the provision of education. Specifically, Friedman wanted to divide all taxpayer funding for K–12 education among all families and allow families to direct how education funds are spent. Thus, the money would follow the child to the schools or educational settings their parents deem best. Under Friedman’s universal choice system, some families would choose public schools for their children, and others would choose to send their children to private schools or other private educational settings. In both cases, all taxpayer funds would flow to the schools and educational settings chosen by families.

Since 2020, there has been a sudden and impressive increase in the passage of new education choice programs and the significant expansion of preexisting smaller programs across many states. Leaders in the education freedom movement commonly note that 14 states have now achieved “universal choice.” That is, in these 14 states, 100% of students are eligible to apply to education choice programs that provide taxpayer funding for families to access private educational options for their children. We put the words “universal choice” in quotes because not all “universal choice”

programs are created equal. Some programs provide very low average financial awards per student, while others have a statewide budget cap that limits how many students may actually participate.

Thus, even with the passage of impressive new education choice legislation across several states in recent years, this first compilation of *The EdChoice Friedman Index* shows that in most states “we are (still) at the beginning of the task” of providing all American families with true educational choice. Even the states with very large choice programs have more work to do to truly obtain Milton and Rose Friedman’s vision of universal educational choice.

The purpose of *The EdChoice Friedman Index* is to give policymakers and educational choice communities a clear, data-driven way to see how much private educational choice is **really** available to families in their states. More importantly, we want to provide specific guidance on how states can improve their choice programs to truly achieve the Friedmans’ vision of universal educational choice. To that end, we have used data on the details of choice programs and public school revenues in each state to create an index score to measure progress toward universal choice—and how far each state still needs to go to achieve true universal choice. We call our index *The EdChoice Friedman Index* in honor of Milton and Rose Friedman who wanted their legacy to be universal educational choice, where—in Milton’s words—“If we had that, a system of free choice, we would also have a system of competition, innovation, which would change the character of education.”<sup>2</sup>

Friedman’s vision of universal choice was truly: All Students, All Options, and All Dollars. Once viewed as an intellectual curiosity, Friedman’s vision is starting to become a reality across the nation. However, as readers will see, *The 2025 EdChoice Friedman Index* suggests that we still have a long way to go.

The next two sections describe our methodology and some practical considerations we encountered in index construction. *The 2025 EdChoice Friedman Index* scores for each state, the components of those scores, and how choice advocates can use these scores to promote better educational opportunities for students follows. We conclude with a section on the future of *The EdChoice Friedman Index*.

# METHODOLOGY

We created *The EdChoice Friedman Index* to range from 0 to 100. To achieve a score of 100 on the index, a given state must meet each of the following three criteria:

- **“All Students”:** 100% of the students in the state are eligible to participate in a choice program, with funding available for all who wish to participate (universal funded eligibility).
- **“All Options”:** All choice students are able to participate in an education savings account-style program (ESA), which means families have the opportunity to use the taxpayer funds placed in their child’s account to offset tuition payments at private schools and to purchase educational goods and services outside of schools, (e.g. tutoring, textbooks, test fees, special needs therapies, etc.)
- **“All Dollars”:** Average awards per choice student are equal to the average state and local revenue per public school student, which means that choice students receive the same amount of funding as public school students (sans federal funding), on average.<sup>3</sup>

The formula to calculate *The EdChoice Friedman Index* consistent with these three criteria is:

$$100 \times \frac{\% \text{ Students Eligible for Choice (with funding)}}{100} \times \frac{\text{Average \$ Award Per Choice Student}}{\text{State and Local Revenues Per Public School Student}}$$

(with up to a 5-point deduction from the above formula for states that do not have an Education Savings Account or similar program that permits families to purchase education services outside of school walls).

The concept of eligibility in *The EdChoice Friedman Index* is funded eligibility. The news media, education choice advocacy groups, and even other EdChoice publications consider eligibility—where states that permit 100% of students to apply for choice programs—as having “universal eligibility.” In *The EdChoice Friedman Index* we only count eligibility that has taxpayer funding to allow it. Thus, a state where all children are eligible

to apply to participate in choice program, but there is a budgetary cap such that only 5% of children may actually participate, would only receive a component score of “5” using our funded eligibility approach. While such a state has universal eligibility, it only has funded eligibility for 5% of students to participate. We use this latter concept of funded eligibility to construct the EdChoice Friedman Index.

## Examples

The best way to show how we compiled *The Friedman Index* is to pull back the curtain and give an example or two. In this first example, suppose the fictional state of Wakanda has two ESA programs where a total of 50% of the students in the state are eligible for one or the other program.<sup>4</sup> In Wakanda, the average ESA award among choice students across the two programs is \$8,000,<sup>5</sup> and the public schools in Wakanda receive an average of \$16,000 in state and local funding. In this fictitious example, *The EdChoice Friedman Index* score for Wakanda would equal:

$$100 \times 50\% \times \frac{\$8,000}{\$16,000} = 100 \times 50\% \times 50\% = 25,$$

where

- 50% of the students are eligible for an ESA program, and funding is available for all who wish to participate.
- Choice students receive, on average, 50% as much funding as public school students receive from state and local sources (\$8,000 / \$16,000).
- Finally, there is no deduction because Wakanda’s choice programs are ESA programs, which means families may use their ESA award dollars to access both private schools as well as other private educational settings, such as tutoring centers, special education services, etc.

As another example, the fictional state of Coruscant<sup>6</sup> has a scholarship program with 60% of the students in the state eligible and funding available for all students exercising choice. The average scholarship award is \$5,000. The per-pupil average of state and local revenues provided to public schools in Coruscant is \$15,000.

The Friedman Index score for Coruscant would equal:

$$100 \times 60\% \times \frac{\$5,000}{\$15,000} = 100 \times 60\% \times 33.33\% - 5 = 15,$$

where

- 60% of the students are eligible for the state’s scholarship program that allows families to use the scholarships to offset tuition payments at private schools, and funding is available for all who wish to participate.
- Choice students receive 33.33% as much funding as public school students receive from state and local sources (\$5,000 / \$15,000).
- Finally, there is a 5-point deduction because Coruscant’s scholarship program only allows families to use the award on private school tuition, and does not let families access other private educational settings, outside of school walls, such as tutoring centers, special education services, etc.<sup>7</sup>

## PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In creating the index, we discovered there were many practical considerations that required us to make decisions when computing state-specific index scores.

In this subsection, we mention five of those considerations and the choices we made.

### ***Availability of Data***

First, in constructing *The EdChoice Friedman Index* score for individual states, we are constrained by the availability of data. EdChoice staff have spent years compiling the details of choice programs in each state and continuously updating their repository as states establish new choice programs and expand existing ones. If we do not have the most up-to-date information on the details of choice programs in your state, please let us know via email at [colyn@edchoice.org](mailto:colyn@edchoice.org). Please include a link to where we can verify the information you are sending, so we may cite that source for others.

One area where we had to make assumptions, because we lacked the requisite data, was the issue of stacking. In states with multiple choice programs, sometimes a small number of students receive funding from more than one choice program. Thus, counts of students participating in each program would not be counts of unique students, as some students would be counted in two programs, for example. Typically, these students who receive stacked funding from two programs are special needs students. The assumptions we made regarding stacking for individual states, when it was necessary due to a lack of data, are listed in the online appendix to this report. Again, please let us know if you have better information on the details of choice programs in your state by emailing [colyn@edchoice.org](mailto:colyn@edchoice.org).

### ***The Timing of Data***

A second consideration pertained to the timing of data. Many state programs recently enacted into law create choice programs where 100% of the students in the state will be eligible to participate within a couple of years. We chose to count those states as having 100% eligibility because universal eligibility is in their laws. There is nothing else for those states to do in terms of expanding eligibility (unless they want to move the timeline of universal eligibility forward). Thus, a state may not have universal eligibility in the spring of 2025, but if by law they are phasing in universal eligibility (with no budget caps on program expenditures), we coded them as having 100% eligibility for purposes of the index. Please consult the specifics on the data choices we made for your state in the online appendix.

Given this data choice, to use the most up-to-date information available on choice programs, any EdChoice Friedman Index score of less than 100 for a given state points to the need for policy changes that remain to be enacted into law in order to **really** achieve universal educational choice for families.

Another timing issue was the data on per pupil state and local revenues given to public schools that are comparable across states. The best place to get comparable data across states is from the federal government. The most recent data on public school revenues available for this initial 2025 EdChoice Friedman Index is for the 2021-22 academic year.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, in computing the extent to which “All Dollars” follow children to the schools and educational settings

their families deem best, we typically compare current data on average awards per choice student to state and local per pupil revenues in public schools for the 2021-22 academic year. We see no way around this issue, as state departments of education often exclude some funds from public school fiscal data, even when they post more up-to-date public school revenue data on their websites. Having a multiple-year lag on public school revenue data seems to be the best we can do. The practical effect of this choice (along with excluding federal funds) is that, in reality, we are assigning “All Dollars” scores of 100% to states when their awards to choice students are 85% (or so) as large as total expenditures per public school student. Given their worldview, we are confident the Friedmans would smile upon a universal choice system that was less costly to taxpayers than the conventional public education system.

### ***Use of Friedman Index scores***

The third consideration regards how to use *The EdChoice Friedman Index* score for each state. One of us (Scafidi) has worked in many states on choice issues for over 25 years, while the other (Ritter) has spent years working on choice data every day all day. Thus, we know firsthand how hard it is to go from zero to one on The EdChoice Friedman Index’s 100-point scale. Like you, we have been called nasty names, we have wounds in our backs (and in our fronts), and we have known the pain and frustration that members of educational choice communities and choice-supporting elected officials in every state know. **We are not here to denigrate any state that receives an index score of one. Mathematically, one is infinitely higher than zero!**

We are here to point to specific ways that your state can move toward the Friedmans’ vision of universal educational choice. Readers should not compare their score to a neighboring state and be happy or mad. Instead, readers should borrow policy ideas and strategies from high-scoring states to begin thinking about how your state can enact policy changes that increase your EdChoice Friedman Index score until choice programs in your state provide All Students with All Options and All Dollars—which is truly universal educational choice. The state team at EdChoice stands ready to help you learn from policies and experiences from other states: [www.edchoice.org/state-work](http://www.edchoice.org/state-work)

### ***Local Funding***

The fourth consideration involves our comparison of average financial awards given to students in choice programs to the average state and local per pupil funding in public schools. Constitutions in most states do not permit state legislatures to place locally generated K–12 funding into awards for students exercising choice. Thus, some may believe we have set the funding bar too high, since locally generated tax revenue may not be practically available to fund choice students.

Despite any constitutional and/or political considerations, we feel strongly that this comparison is warranted because an EdChoice Friedman Index score of 100 is aspirational. States will have to get creative to achieve the goal of funding parity across students educated inside and outside the conventional public education system (“All Dollars”). There are several specific avenues whereby states can move toward funding parity between public school and choice students:

First, state funding per student for public schools tends to increase over time at a rate higher than the rate of inflation. We do not believe that those increases are the best educational investment for this growth in state dollars. Perhaps states should use future increases in their K–12 expenditures to provide larger per-student awards to choice students, as public school students receive local (and federal) funding not available to choice students.

Second, due largely to demographic trends, public school districts are projected to see enrollment declines in upcoming years. Thus, states will not have large—or even any—need to budget for enrollment increases in public schools moving forward. Moreover, recent research on public school districts across the nation documents that when student enrollment declines, districts receive a financial windfall.<sup>9</sup> That is, students who remain in districts experiencing enrollment declines saw larger increases in resources devoted to their education, relative to students in growing districts.<sup>10</sup> Thus, district public schools are on autopilot to realize increases in funding due to the retention of funds for students they no longer serve—even without inflation-adjusted per-student funding increases from states. Therefore, states will be able to use future increases in their revenues to fund choice programs.



As Lueken (2023) details, 34 states have “declining enrollment provisions” and/or “hold harmless” provisions that protect declining enrollment districts from some funding losses.<sup>11</sup> So, a third avenue would be to end these provisions. Smith and Barnard (2024) show that in the 2022-23 academic year, 84.7% of school districts in California received state funding for an estimated 400,974 “ghost” students—students no longer served by these districts.<sup>12</sup> They estimate that this practice cost California \$4.06 billion in the 2022-2023 academic year alone. States could discontinue this practice of funding “ghost” students by ending declining enrollment and hold harmless provisions and use those funds instead to move choice students toward funding parity. As noted above, in this era of enrollment declines, public school districts will see significant real (inflation-adjusted) increases in per-student expenditures, as they can retain local and some federal dollars for students they not serve—even if states discontinue funding for “ghost” students.<sup>13</sup> There is evidence that ending funding for ghost students also yields positive academic benefits for public school students.<sup>14</sup>

A fourth potential avenue to achieve funding parity would be to use state dollars to fund choice students on the same basis as state dollars fund public school students, but to supplement funding for the choice students by allowing taxpayers to redirect some of their state income tax liability to scholarship-granting organizations (SGOs). These SGOs would then be able to “top off” awards to choice students, moving them closer to funding parity with their counterparts in public schools.

Fifth, states have gotten creative at funding charter public schools with limited or no local dollars, and states can use an analogous funding mechanism to give choice students funding parity with public school students.

Finally, someday, when choice programs become the norm, it will be politically possible to change state constitutions to ensure that all students receive equitable funding, regardless of whether their families choose a public school, private school, or other private educational setting for their children.

### ***ESAs for Only Some Choice Students***

The fifth consideration regards states that offer ESAs to a subset of choice students, but not to all choice students. For example, several states offer ESAs to

special needs students, but not to other students. In these cases, we deducted a proportion of the 5 points (for not having an ESA or similar multi-use program), where the proportion was the percent of choice students who receive scholarships that do not permit families to choose educational settings outside of school walls. For example, if a state had 16% of students eligible for an ESA, because they have special educational needs, we deducted 4 points (as opposed to deducting 5) because the state did not give the remaining 84% of choice students “All Options.”

Our preference for multi-use choice programs, like ESAs, stems from—you guessed it—Milton Friedman:

*“Why not add partial vouchers? Why not let (parents) spend part of a voucher for math in one place and English or science somewhere else.”*

### ***The 2025 EdChoice Friedman Index***

*The 2025 EdChoice Friedman Index*, based on the formula in the prior section and the most recent data available, is shown in Table 1. The purpose of *The EdChoice Friedman Index* is to provide state-level policymakers, advocates, and families with accurate information about the extent to which families have the opportunity to exercise choice, and—more importantly—to clearly show what steps can be taken to move their state toward true universal educational choice. *The EdChoice Friedman Index* ranges from 0 (the state provides no private choice opportunities for families) to 100 (the state has achieved Milton and Rose Friedman’s vision of universal educational choice—All Students, All Options, All Dollars). The details of the index calculation for each state are listed in the online appendix.

As shown in Table 1, Florida, Arkansas, Alabama, and Arizona have the highest EdChoice. Friedman Index scores. Florida’s score of 77 reflects that all children in the state are eligible to participate in and actually receive funding from a choice program (“All Students”), and that all children may access a multi-use ESA, where their parents may use their award dollars to access approved educational services outside of school walls (“All Options”).

What Florida and several other states have achieved in permitting families to have more educational choice opportunities is truly remarkable! Advocates

in those states and their legislative and gubernatorial allies should feel very good about their tremendous accomplishments.

That said, the job is not done! For example, the Sunshine State has room to grow in respect to “All Dollars.” Florida’s awards to families are, on average, 77% as large as state plus local revenues per pupil in Florida public schools. If the Florida choice community and policymakers supportive of their cause want to move even closer to Milton and Rose Friedman’s vision of universal choice, they will seek to increase average awards to choice students until they are equal to state plus local funding for public students.

Likewise, Arizona (Friedman Index = 59) also needs to increase the per-student awards in their great choice programs in order to obtain Milton and Rose Friedman’s vision of universal educational choice.

Others that have been labeled as “universal choice” states have budget caps that limit the number of students who may actually exercise choice. For those states (e.g. Utah and North Carolina), we constructed a measure we call funded eligibility, where funded eligibility equals the total dollar amount of the budgetary cap divided by the average award per student. This quotient yields the maximum number of students who may actually participate in the state’s “universal choice” program, given the existence of a budget cap. To compute the “All Students” component of The EdChoice Friedman Index, we then took the number of funded eligible students divided by the total number of K–12 school-aged children in the state to yield the percentage of students able to participate in a choice program in the state. In Utah’s case, their ESA program has a budget cap of \$80 million in 2025, along with an average award amount of \$8,000. Thus, only 10,000 Utah’s students (roughly 1% of Utah’s students) are funded to participate in this program.

**TABLE 1** The 2025 EdChoice Friedman Index

State	EdChoice Friedman Index Score	All Students	All Dollars	All Options
		% Students Eligible for Choice Programs (With Funding)	Award \$ Per Choice Student / State+Local \$ Per Pupil in Public Schools	Does State Have an ESA Program for Choice Students?
Florida	77	100%	77%	Yes
Arkansas	60	100%	60%	Yes
Alabama	59	100%	59%	Yes
Arizona	59	100%	59%	Yes
Indiana	45	98%	50%	Yes*
Iowa	40	100%	40%	Yes
West Virginia	33	100%	33%	Yes
Ohio	32	100%	37%	No
South Carolina	27	72%	41%	Yes*
Wisconsin	23	40%	70%	No
Alaska	20	100%	25%	No
New Hampshire	12	48%	30%	Yes*
Oklahoma	7	19%	64%	No
Georgia	4	15%	45%	Yes*
Tennessee	4	6%	71%	Yes
Mississippi	3	7%	67%	Yes*
Montana	3	13%	53%	Yes*

\* States with an asterisk under “All Options” offer ESAs or other multi-use choice opportunities to only some choice students (where other students receive scholarships that may only be used to offset tuition payments at private schools), and their EdChoice Friedman Index scores were reduced proportionally to the percent of choice students who may access ESAs. Please see the computations for individual states in the appendix for details.

TABLE 1

The 2025 EdChoice Friedman Index (continued)

State	EdChoice Friedman Index Score	All Students	All Dollars	All Options
		% Students Eligible for Choice Programs (With Funding)	Award \$ Per Choice Student / State+Local \$ Per Pupil in Public Schools	Does State Have an ESA Program for Choice Students?
Utah	2	2%	79%	Yes
Washington, D.C.	1	1%	46%	No
Kansas	1	1%	22%	No
Louisiana	1	1%	46%	Yes
Maine	1	2%	72%	No
Maryland	1	0.31%	16%	No
Minnesota	1	33%	2%	No
Missouri	1	1%	48%	Yes
Nevada	1	0.35%	30%	No
North Carolina	1	5%	66%	Yes*
Pennsylvania	1	10%	11%	No
Rhode Island	1	0.35%	15%	No
South Dakota	1	2%	18%	No
Vermont	1	4%	67%	No
Virginia	1	1%	20%	No
Wyoming	1	4%	31%	Yes

\* States with an asterisk under “All Options” offer ESAs or other multi-use choice opportunities to only some choice students (where other students receive scholarships that may only be used to offset tuition payments at private schools), and their EdChoice Friedman Index scores were reduced proportionally to the percent of choice students who may access ESAs. Please see the computations for individual states in the appendix for details.

At the time of writing, Louisiana had not yet appropriated funds for its recently enacted GATOR choice program. Once this funding becomes law, we will update the Bayou State’s EdChoice Friedman Index score accordingly, and we expect their score to increase considerably.

The most important parts of Table 1 are not the index scores themselves. What is most important for educational choice communities and policymakers—and ultimately for the education of students—are the components that comprise *The EdChoice Friedman Index*: “All Students,” “All Options,” and “All Dollars.” State and national advocates for choice and state policymakers should use the component scores to see

exactly what policy changes need to be undertaken in each state in order to move closer to—and someday attain—universal educational choice for families. The next section provides an example of using these components to identify how to improve K–12 educational opportunities for families.

States with no private educational choice opportunities for children and families receive an EdChoice Friedman Index score of zero. These states are shown below in Table 2. Perhaps a few of these states are likely to have new, and perhaps large, private educational choice programs in the near future, and we look forward to updating their EdChoice Friedman Index score when they do!

TABLE 2

States with No Taxpayer-Funded Private Educational Opportunities for Families

State	EdChoice Friedman Index Score	All Students	All Dollars	All Options
		% Students Eligible for Choice Programs (With Funding)	Award \$ Per Choice Student / State+Local \$ Per Pupil in Public Schools	Does State Have an ESA Program for Choice Students?
California	0	0	0	0
Colorado	0	0	0	0
Connecticut	0	0	0	0
Delaware	0	0	0	0
Hawaii	0	0	0	0
Idaho	0	0	0	0
Illinois	0	0	0	0
Kentucky	0	0	0	0
Massachusetts	0	0	0	0
Michigan	0	0	0	0
Nebraska	0	0	0	0
New Jersey	0	0	0	0
New Mexico	0	0	0	0
New York	0	0	0	0
North Dakota	0	0	0	0
Oregon	0	0	0	0
Texas	0	0	0	0
Washington	0	0	0	0

## WHAT CAN STATES DO TO INCREASE THEIR EDCHOICE FRIEDMAN INDEX SCORE?

Perfection in measuring the amount of private educational choice opportunities in each state eludes us, given the practical considerations listed above. That said, the genius of *The EdChoice Friedman Index* is in its simplicity and clarity in the roadmap it provides educational choice advocates. Let's use Indiana as an example. As shown in Table 1 (*page 7 and 8*), Indiana has a 2025 EdChoice Friedman Index score of 45. If the educational choice community and choice-supporting lawmakers in the Hoosier State want to boost the state's score, they need to look at the components of The EdChoice Friedman Index. Indiana has 98% of students eligible for a choice program, but the average award to choice students is only 50% as large as state and local per pupil funding given to public schools. Indiana also receives a deduction of 4 points for not offering ESAs to most choice students. If the good people of Indiana wish to increase their EdChoice Friedman Index score

and fully realize Milton and Rose Friedman's vision of universal educational choice, the state should:

- Make all children eligible for a choice program.
- Increase the funding of awards to choice students to be equal to state and local per pupil funding in public schools.
- Convert existing scholarship programs to ESA programs to provide choice families more freedom and autonomy over how educational dollars may be spent.

In Indiana's case, the best way to boost their index score would be to boost financial awards for choice students, so that these students do not receive significantly less taxpayer support for their education relative to public school students. That is, all students in Indiana (and elsewhere), should be funded equitably regardless of whether their families think a public or private educational setting is best for their education.

The components of *The EdChoice Friedman Index* in Table 1 above show how to increase educational choice in your state as well.

## THE FUTURE OF THE EDCHOICE FRIEDMAN INDEX

If educational choice communities in the states find *The EdChoice Friedman Index* useful, EdChoice will periodically update the index so that states may ascertain their progress toward Milton and Rose Friedman’s vision of universal educational choice. More importantly, families, policymakers, and choice advocates will know precisely what concrete steps their states need to take in order to move closer to true universal choice.

It is worth mentioning again: If we do not have the most up-to-date information on the details of choice programs in your state, please let us know via email at [colyn@edchoice.org](mailto:colyn@edchoice.org). Please include a link to where we can verify the information you are sending, so we may cite it for other readers. (We cannot use a different source for data on public school revenues, because state department of education data often understate the truth. We will continue to update that data when it becomes available from the federal government.)

In the future, there will be a natural evolution in our compilation of *The EdChoice Friedman Index* as states expand choice opportunities for families. Specifically, the “All Options” portion of the index will evolve with a higher weight and more criteria for states to meet in order to avoid deductions. Currently, states

that do not have ESAs or similar multi-use programs for students receive a 5-point deduction from their EdChoice Friedman Index score. As states expand their programs, we envision that the deduction for restricting educational freedom in choice programs will rise to 10 points—and maybe even rise to 20 points in future years. We can even envision grading states based on the quality of the implementation of their choice programs. Future deductions for limiting the educational freedom of families within choice programs will include restrictions on private educational providers and other regulations that inhibit families from making the ultimate decisions about what is best for their children and their education, which is what the entire education choice debate is about:

Who should decide what is best regarding the education of youth: their families or a combination of lawmakers/bureaucracies/and courts across three levels of government?

*The EdChoice Friedman Index* provides families with school-aged children, educational choice communities, and lawmakers friendly (or even those who are still skeptical) to their cause with the most clear and up-to-date measure of how much opportunity families in each state **really** have to choose what they deem as best for their children and their education.



Scan QR to Read Appendix  
or Visit [edchoice.org/  
friedman-index-appendix-2/](https://edchoice.org/friedman-index-appendix-2/)

## NOTES

1. Milton Friedman on Vouchers, MSNBC Inc. (2003). Retrieved from <https://www.edchoice.org/who-we-are/our-legacy/articles/milton-friedman-on-vouchers/#::-:text=The%20purpose%20of%20vouchers%20is,more%20innovation%20and%20more%20evolution>.

2. Ibid.

3. Of course, students in public schools also receive federal funding. Thus, our conception of The EdChoice Friedman Index does not require literal parity between the taxpayer funding given to students across public and private educational settings, as choice students would receive less taxpayer support for their education than students in public schools. However, the construction of *The EdChoice Friedman Index* requires that students exercising choice receive about 90% of the total funding that students in public schools receive. We exclude federal funds for two reasons—one practical and one strategic. The practical reason is that state policymakers do not have the authority to put federal K-12 dollars into choice programs. The strategic reason is that it would be unwise to include federal dollars because they come with myriad federal regulations. In our view, the benefits of this 10% of the funding would be far lower relative to the loss of educational freedom that would come via myriad federal regulations. Some federal laws, such as civil rights, health, and safety laws, already apply to private educational settings, even without federal funding. Federal funding of choice programs would bring more regulation that would inhibit true educational choice.

4. Wakanda is a fictional African kingdom (or a real, but hidden, African kingdom) in the world of Marvel Comics. If Wakanda is real, it surely has an ESA program with universal eligibility and funding for all who want to exercise choice, where the average ESA award is equal to the average of state and local funding for public schools. Thus, the real Wakanda would have an EdChoice Friedman Index score of 100.

5. If a state had multiple programs, we added up the total number of dollars spent on the choice programs and divided by the number of unique students to compute the average award per choice student. In the next section, we describe how we deal with the issue of states that allow stacking, where students (typically special needs students) may access funding from more than one choice program.

6. Coruscant is a fictional planet in the Star Wars universe (or is a real planet in a galaxy far, far away), but—like Wakanda—Coruscant would surely have a truly universal school choice program, except when the planet was controlled by the Sith Lord Emperor Palpatine. Palpatine would dictate a one-size-fits-all education system with universal and boring monochrome uniforms for both students and teachers. Under the Dark Lord Palpatine (also known as Darth Sidious), Coruscant would have an EdChoice Friedman Index score of 0.

7. As is well-known, the Enchanted Mesa, Barbieland, El Dorado, and Shangri-La each have EdChoice Friedman Index scores of 100.

8. The data we used on state and local revenues per public school student come from the U.S. Census Bureau 2022 Annual Survey of School System Finances Summary Tables, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2022/econ/school-finances/secondary-education-finance.html>.

9. Ben Scafidi (2025), *The Enrollment Decline Windfall: Enrollment Declines Leave More Resources for Students Remaining in Public Schools*, retrieved from the EdChoice website: <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/2025-The-Enrollment-Decline-Windfall.pdf>.

10. As described in Scafidi (2025), the reasons for this fiscal windfall include: local funding is often not automatically reduced when student enrollments decline; some state funding is not directly tied to enrollment; and, in practice, federal funding is not proportionately reduced when enrollment decreases. Consequently, public school districts retain funds for students they no longer serve, giving them more resources, on a per-person basis, for students who remain.

11. Martin F. Lueken (2023), *How States Protect Funding for K-12 Public Schools: A Summary of State Policies*, retrieved from EdChoice website: <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Hold-Harmless-POLICY-SCAN-1.pdf>.

12. Aaron Garth Smith and Christian Barnard (2024), *Billions: The Cost of State Hold Harmless Policies in K-12 Education*, retrieved from the Reason Foundation website: <https://reason.org/wp-content/uploads/the-cost-of-state-hold-harmless-policies-in-k-12-education.pdf>

13. To get into the weeds, states could grandfather in all current funding for ghost students and merely eliminate future increases—which frees up funding for choice students.

14. Specifically, there is empirical evidence that more enrollment-driven funding improves academic outcomes for students: Rajashri Chakrabarti (2008), Can increasing private school participation and monetary loss in a voucher program affect public school performance? Evidence from Milwaukee, *Journal of Public Economics* 92(5-6), pp. 1371-1393, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2007.06.009>

# ABOUT THE AUTHORS



## Ben Scafidi

Ben Scafidi is a professor of economics and director of the Education Economics Center at Kennesaw State University. He is also a Friedman Fellow with EdChoice (the legacy foundation of Milton and Rose Friedman), a senior fellow with the Georgia Public Policy Foundation, and was appointed by Governor Brian Kemp to serve a second stint on the Georgia Charter Schools Commission. Previously, he served as the director of education policy for the Georgia GOAL Scholarship Program, the first chair of the state of Georgia's Charter Schools Commission, a member of the Charter Advisory Committee, the Education Policy Advisor to Governor Sonny Perdue, a staff member to both of Governor Roy Barnes' Education Reform Study Commissions, and as an expert witness for the state of Georgia in school funding litigation. He received a BA in Economics from the University of Notre Dame and a PhD in Economics from the University of Virginia. Ben and his wife Lori reside in Kennesaw, Georgia and have four adult children.



## Colyn Ritter

Colyn Ritter is a Senior Research Associate at EdChoice, where he studies school choice, public opinion data, and other education related topics. As part of the Research team, he authors original research and writing, analyzes polling data, and designs statewide and national surveys of K-12 parents and school leaders. His research interests lie in school safety's impact on the K-12 education landscape, the public's awareness of private school choice programs, understanding the relationships between various stakeholders in K-12 education through public opinion data, and ongoing implementation efforts for private school choice programs.

Colyn's work has featured on the EdChoice blog, as well as a variety of other opinion and education related outlets like *The 74*, *RealClearEducation*, *Fox News*, and *The Hill*. Before EdChoice, Colyn taught ACT crash courses to St. Louis area teens, surveyed development companies, as well as with the School of Social Work at Saint Louis University. He received a bachelor's degree from Saint Louis University in Accounting and Sports Business.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our effort to assemble the *EdChoice Friedman Index* owes tremendous intellectual debts to Milton and Rose Friedman, John Merrifield, and to the entire team at Milton and Rose Friedman’s legacy foundation: EdChoice. First, through brilliant and clear thinking, Milton Friedman brought the vision of true universal school choice to debates over how to best improve educational outcomes for students and get the most educational benefits for the significant financial investment that American taxpayers make in K–12 education. That is, it was Milton Friedman who put universal choice on the policy agenda. And Friedman’s thinking was always sharpened by his wife and collaborator, Rose Director Friedman. So, we owe her an intellectual debt as well.

Economist John Merrifield was one of a small number of early researchers analyzing educational choice and was the founding and longtime editor of the academic journal, the *Journal of School Choice*. In 2023, John worked on an index to measure the degree of private school choice available to families in each state. He called his index the Private School Access Index (PSAI). *The EdChoice Friedman Index* is merely a few minor adjustments to John’s PSAI, coupled with hours of legwork to nail down state-specific details of choice programs in order to compile the index.

Finally, the EdChoice team has spent numerous and painstaking person-hours over many years collecting the details of each and every choice program in the states. Because of their efforts, *The EdChoice Friedman Index* can be compiled, allowing us to see how much educational choice is **really** available for families in each state. In particular, we thank Paul DiPerna, Drew Catt, Marty Lueken, Mike McShane, John Kristof, Cooper Conway, Ed Tarnowski, and Robert Enlow for thier contributions to this effort.

Without Milton Friedman’s vision, without Rose’s collaboration that sharpened Milton’s thinking, without John Merrifield’s great work on the PSAI, without the help and support of our EdChoice colleagues and without the years of careful data collection of choice program details by myriad EdChoice staff, we would not have been able to create *The EdChoice Friedman Index*. Thus, we owe them all a tremendous intellectual debt.



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