

Opportunity Scholarship Grants: The right choice for Pennsylvania's future

Providing a quality education for our children is the most critical investment we can make for our future. Pennsylvania needs a more effective and less costly way to educate our children. The Opportunity Scholarship Grant program in SB 1 is the right choice for Pennsylvania's future.

School choice saves tax dollars

Non-public schools provide an excellent education, often for a fraction of the cost of educating the same child in a public school.

- Average annual public school spending per pupil is **\$13,907** (2008-2009); the base cost of the state's subsidy per pupil is **\$8,950**.
- Average non-public school tuition is **\$3,500** (elementary) and **\$6,500** (high school).
- Opportunity Scholarship Grants will not exceed actual tuition paid; the difference between the scholarship amount and the base cost of the state subsidy will be returned to the state coffers.

Non-public schools already save tax dollars. If every one of Pennsylvania's **287,092** nonpublic school students returned to public school, the costs would be significant – $287,092 \times \$13,907 = \3.9 billion annually (not counting construction costs).

School choice works

School choice has been tried and tested in other states.

- Parents in **Milwaukee, Wisconsin** have had school choice for 20 years. Eligible low-income families may send their children to a participating private school of their choice within the city limits. In 2010, more than 20,000 students participated in the program.
- **Cleveland, Ohio** has had school choice for 15 years. More than 5,000 students are participating. Ohio expanded its voucher program statewide in 2005. Now more than 13,000 students are attending the school of their choice.
- **Louisiana** has a new voucher program for low-income students in failing school districts.
- Nationwide there are **26 programs in 14 states** that provide school choice through vouchers or tax credit scholarships.

Studies show school choice makes a difference.

- The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research studied voucher programs including Milwaukee to address whether school choice improves outcomes for students using the vouchers. They found significant positive results, particularly for African-American students. Additional studies by Harvard, Stanford, the Federal Reserve Bank and other institutions confirmed this finding.

Parents want school choice. The public supports parental choice.

Recent polls in Pennsylvania surveyed parents' attitudes toward their children's education. Overwhelmingly, parents say they wish they had more choices.

- In November 2010 Pew Research Foundation survey, **62% of parents** in Philadelphia public schools said they have actively considered sending their children to charter, Catholic or private schools.

Taxpayers favor education vouchers, too.

- In another November 2010 poll, half of Pennsylvanians said they support and another 20% are undecided about education vouchers which help parents pay the costs at the school of their choice (Pulse Opinion Research).

All parents should be able to choose a school that best suits their children. Financial realities often preclude parents from having that choice. Parents who pay their school taxes deserve some benefit from those taxes, in the form of some assistance in the exercise of their right to choose a nonpublic school, if that is best for their children. The Opportunity Scholarship Grant program in SB 1 is a step in the right direction toward expanding those opportunities to more parents.

Opportunity Scholarship Grants: The right choice for Pennsylvania's taxpayers

Providing a quality education for our children is the most critical investment we can make for our future. Pennsylvania needs a more effective and less costly way to educate our children. The Opportunity Scholarship Grant program in SB 1 is the right choice for Pennsylvania's future.

School choice saves tax dollars

With school choice; parents have wider options for educating their children. Most will remain in public schools, but a significant number will choose to enroll or remain enrolled in non-public schools. With fewer students in public school, some of the financial pressure will be lessened on state and local budgets.

- *School choice slows the growth of education costs*
- *Fewer public school students = lower instructional cost, less need for new construction*
- *Smaller class size = more individualized attention for students*
- *Some funding is based on enrollment, but many federal, state and local programs are not – with school choice these public school dollars can go much farther*

Non-public schools provide an excellent education, often for a fraction of the cost of educating the same student in a public school.

- *Average annual public school spending per pupil is **\$13,907** (2008-2009); the base cost of the state's subsidy per pupil is **\$8,950**.*
- *Average non-public school tuition is **\$3,500** (elementary) and **\$6,500** (high school).*
- *Opportunity Scholarship Grants will not exceed actual tuition paid; the difference between the scholarship amount and the base cost of the state subsidy will be returned to the state coffers.*
- *By allowing some students to be educated in less costly nonpublic schools, school choice will offset the need for future tax increases or state budget cuts*

Non-public schools already save tax dollars. If every nonpublic school student returned to public school, the costs would be unbearable.

- *In 2010-2011, **44,000** students received school choice scholarships through the Educational Improvement Tax Credit program (EITC). If those students return to public school, it will cost the taxpayers of Pennsylvania **over \$600,000,000 each year!***
- *If every one of Pennsylvania's **287,092** nonpublic school students returned to public school, the costs would be significant – $287,092 \times \$13,907 =$ **\$3.9 billion** annually (not counting the costs of new construction).*

The Opportunity Scholarship Grant program in SB 1 makes good educational sense and can be part of a fiscally responsible state budgetary strategy.

School choice works. It has been tried and tested.

School choice works in Wisconsin.

Parents in Milwaukee, Wisconsin have had school choice for 20 years. Started in 1990, Milwaukee's program has grown to become one of the nation's largest, and it is by far the most prominent. Eligible low-income families may use the voucher to send their children to a participating private school within the city limits. The value of the voucher is based on a percentage of public school funding or the actual non-public school's per-student costs. In 2010-2011 school year, 20,328 students are participating and attending 111 schools.

The constitutionality of the Milwaukee program was upheld in several legal challenges in Wisconsin courts. In 1998, the Wisconsin Supreme Court found that including religious schools did not violate the First Amendment because the program "has a secular purpose" and "will not have the primary effect of advancing religion." The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal. The Wisconsin Supreme Court also rejected a "uniformity" challenge to the school choice program. It held that while the legislature is required to provide public schooling to all, it can also offer additional educational opportunities outside the traditional public school system.

School choice works in Ohio

Ohio has had school choice for 15 years in the city of Cleveland. In 2005, the Educational Choice Scholarship Program expanded school choice statewide and another program offers choice to parents of autistic students.

Students who attend a public school that is in a state of "academic watch" or "academic emergency" for two of the last three years, or would be assigned to that school based on their residence, are eligible for a voucher under the statewide program. The Cleveland program has separate eligibility requirements.

In the 2010-2011 school year, 13,213 students are participating in the statewide program at 273 schools. Another 5,238 students in Cleveland are also using a voucher to attend the school of their choice. Depending on a family's income eligibility, vouchers cover the non-public school's actual tuition and fees or some percentage of it.

The Ohio Supreme Court upheld Cleveland's voucher program under the state constitution. The U.S. Supreme Court also upheld the federal constitutionality of the Cleveland Program in 2002. The statewide program has not been subject to a legal challenge.

School choice works in Louisiana

Louisiana's Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program began in 2009. Low-income students in grades K-4 located in failing school districts (currently New Orleans and Jefferson Parish) are eligible for vouchers to attend the public or private school of their choice. Additional grade levels will be added in the future. In the 2010-2011 school year, 1,823 participating students are attending 32 schools.

The voucher is 90 percent of the total state and local funding per student in the student's home school district or the actual cost of education in the private school whichever is less. If more students apply than the program will allow, participation is to be determined by random lottery.

No legal challenges have been filed against the program. The Louisiana Constitution contains parallel language to the federal Constitution's religion clauses under which voucher programs have already been tested and upheld. The Louisiana Supreme Court specifically noted in other case law, "The great similarity of the establishment clause of our Constitution and that of the United States Constitution allows us to use the United States Supreme Court interpretations of the federal clause as an aid for interpreting our own."

Providing a quality education for our children is the most critical investment we can make for our future. Nationwide there are 26 programs in 14 states that provide school choice through vouchers or tax credit scholarships. School choice works. **School choice works. The Opportunity Scholarship Grant program in SB 1 is the right choice for Pennsylvania's future.**

Opportunity Scholarship Grants: The right choice for parents

Providing a quality education for our children is the most critical investment we can make for our future. Parents have the duty and responsibility to provide the best education possible for their children. They have a right to determine which school will best meet the needs of their children. The Opportunity Scholarship Grant program in SB 1 is the right choice for Pennsylvania's parents.

Parents want school choice.

Recent polls in Pennsylvania surveyed parents' attitudes toward their children's education. Overwhelmingly, parents say they wish they had more choices.

- *In November 2010 Pew Research Foundation survey, **62% of parents in Philadelphia public schools said they have actively considered sending their children to charter, Catholic or private schools.***
- *Despite the new array of options including charter schools and EITC scholarships, parents want still more. Seventy-two percent say that parents in Philadelphia **do not have enough good choices in picking a school.***

The public supports parental choice.

Taxpayers favor education vouchers, too.

- *In another November 2010 poll, half of Pennsylvanians said they support and another 20% are undecided about education vouchers which help parents pay the costs at the school of their choice (Pulse Opinion Research).*

Newspapers are endorsing school choice.

- *"The objective of school choice programs is not just to transfer students out of poor schools, but to create competition that will force all schools to improve in order to survive. The Legislature should embrace the opportunity to help do that by passing the Williams-Piccola bill." **EDITORIAL: School choice is about justice**, Scranton Times-Tribune, January 14, 2011*
- *"The system is just not working for our poorest kids and hasn't for a long time. It is something that should upset each and every one of us and urge us to call for a huge change." **EDITORIAL: If school districts fail, why not give students vouchers?** Harrisburg Patriot News, September 19, 2010*

Parental choice is a matter of social justice.

All parents should be able to choose a school that best suits their children. Financial realities often preclude parents from having that choice. Parents who pay their school taxes deserve some benefit from those taxes, in the form of some assistance in the exercise of their right to choose a nonpublic school, if that is best for their children.

The Opportunity Scholarship Grant program in SB 1 is a step in the right direction toward expanding those opportunities to more parents.

Opportunity Scholarship Grants: The right choice for Pennsylvania's students

Nationwide there are 26 programs in 14 states that provide school choice through vouchers or tax credit scholarships. Policymakers who care about education have asked: do they work? Do students benefit academically from vouchers? Nine independent, random assignment studies evaluated the voucher programs and concluded "that some or all of the participants benefited academically from using a voucher to attend a private school. The evidence to date suggests that school voucher programs benefit many of the disadvantaged students and parents that they serve."¹

Consider the results of two long standing school voucher programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland:

	<u>Math Test Scores*</u>	<u>Reading Test Scores*</u>	
Milwaukee ²	10.7 NPR gain after 4 yrs.	5.8 NPR gain after 4 yrs.	
Cleveland ³	15 NPR gain after 2 yrs.	7 NPR gain after 2 yrs.	* NPR - National Percentile Rank

The study of the Washington, DC program looked at the impact of vouchers on certain subgroups. African American students had the most notable positive results. Their student test scores showed a **9.2** NPR gain in just two years.

School vouchers have made a difference for thousands of students; but success can be measured by more than academic test scores.

For more than a century, Catholic parochial and diocesan schools have educated students with high standards, strong motivation, effective discipline and an atmosphere of caring. Catholic schools offer a challenging academic program that fosters excellence and a high quality of student performance. Catholic schools aim to develop each student as a "whole person" – academically, of course, but also spiritually, physically and emotionally.

- Currently, 171,000 students are enrolled in 530 Catholic schools in Pennsylvania.
- Most Catholic high schools boast graduation rates **at or near 100%** for non-transferring students.
- Of those graduates, over **90%** go on to attend either a two or four-year institute of higher learning.

Pennsylvania's Catholic schools have enough empty seats to enroll **50,363 more students** immediately.

National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education found that parents with a choice are significantly more satisfied with their child's teachers, academic standards, order and discipline, staff interaction, and the school overall.⁴ In 2007, 79% of parents of students in parochial or nonsectarian private schools reported being happy with their child's education; only 52% of parents with students in assigned public schools said the same.

Academic performance is very important; but to many parents, so is safety, discipline, respect, dignity, faith, and an atmosphere that supports and upholds the same values they impart to their children at home. All parents should be able to consider this when choosing an educational path for their child. Financial realities often preclude parents from having that choice. Parents who pay their school taxes deserve some benefit from those taxes, in the form of some assistance in the exercise of their right to choose a nonpublic school, if that is best for their children.

The Opportunity Scholarship Grant program in SB 1 is a step in the right direction toward expanding those opportunities to more students.

¹ Patrick J. Wolf, *School Voucher Programs: What the Research Says About Parental School Choice*, *Brigham Young University Law Review*, Volume 2008, No. 2.

² Jay P. Greene, Paul E. Peterson, and Jiangtao Du, *Effectiveness of School Choice: The Milwaukee Experiment*, *Education and Urban Society*, January 1999; vol. 31, 2: pp. 190-213.

³ Paul E. Peterson, William G. Howell, Jay P. Greene, *An Evaluation of the Cleveland Voucher Program After Two Years*, Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University, June 1999

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), 2007, http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010004/figures/figure_9.asp