



What is being proposed?

School choice advocates have been strongly promoting Senate Bill 1 since January; and more recently, they are also praising House Bill 1708, a similar proposal in the House of Representatives.

Both bills aim to increase the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) scholarship program and to create a voucher program. Parents would be able to use the scholarships and voucher to pay tuition at any school they choose – public or private.

Either one of these bills or a bill with another number will be the vehicle for school choice. The Pennsylvania Catholic Conference (PCC) supports two key components: both vouchers and an increase to EITC.

Who qualifies for scholarships?

There are two different kinds of scholarships: the expansion of the long-standing EITC program and a new program that would give scholarship grants, or vouchers, to qualified low-income students in areas where the neighborhood schools are not performing well academically. Every family statewide that qualifies for an EITC scholarship is eligible to apply, no matter where their children attend school.

Both SB 1 and HB 1708 would phase in the voucher program starting with the students who have the most need in the lowest performing public schools, then expanding to others. If all qualified EITC scholarship students receive a voucher to pay their tuition, it would free up millions of dollars in EITC scholarships for other families of low- and middle- income.

Can parents use a voucher at a Catholic school?

Yes. Just as EITC scholarships can be used at any school, qualified parents can use the voucher to pay tuition at any school they choose.

If Catholic schools accept voucher students, will they be able to maintain their Catholic identity?

Yes. Nothing in the school choice proposals limits the authority of Catholic schools to be Catholic. Religious schools can continue to include religious content in their curriculum and do not have to excuse any student from participating in religious instruction or religious exercises.

Will vouchers students have different admission standards?

No. EITC scholarship recipients are enrolled just as all other students. So too will voucher students be treated the same, assuming the Catholic school has a seat available and its educational program can meet the needs of the child.

Are vouchers constitutional?

Yes. Voucher programs in other states have been tried and tested in federal court. In Pennsylvania, case law upholds the transfer of funds to parents for the purposes of choosing a nonpublic school.

How does school choice benefit Catholic schools?

Not every qualified student will choose a Catholic school, but it is likely that many will. Catholic educators can already attest to how the EITC has helped Catholic schools; school choice will allow even more families the opportunity to receive a Catholic education. More students in our classrooms is good news for our schools; more students will help keep Catholic schools vibrant and available to more families.

Is school choice a contest between public and non-public schools?

School choice is not an “us v. them” debate between public and non-public schools. Thousands of Catholic students attend public schools all over Pennsylvania; thousands of non-Catholic students attend parochial and diocesan schools. School choice is a public program that supports and empowers parents with options to determine the best school for their individual child. Public school may be the right choice for one student, but it may not meet the needs of another.

Will school choice drain resources from public schools?

No. Real world experience and evidence show that states and cities with school choice programs have not seen their public school budgets go down (Source: [The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice](#)). When students leave public schools using voucher programs, they free up more money for the students who remain. Taking a student out of public school removes the cost of educating that student. Most of these savings remain in local school budgets where they benefit other students; the rest of the savings go back into state budgets.

What will school choice cost?

Taxpayers support education is a matter of common good. Tax dollars will be spent one way or another on the education of each child; those dollars should follow the child. Non-public schools provide an excellent education, often for a fraction of the cost of educating the same student in a public school. In Pennsylvania, the average annual public school spending per pupil is \$14,535 (2009-2010); 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). By allowing some students to be educated in less costly non-public schools, school choice will offset the need for future tax increases or state budget cuts. In fact, non-public schools already save Pennsylvanians over \$4 billion annually in tax dollars.

Is school choice anti public school teachers?

Not at all. The National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) reminds us that “strong support of parental choice in education does not mean that Catholic educators are opposed to public education. We recognize that a majority of America's children are educated in public schools, and we respect the professional competence and commitment of our public school colleagues. But we believe that full and fair parental choice will strengthen both families and schools, and improve educational opportunities for all” ([2002 NCEA Statement: Parental Choice in Education](#)).

I don't have school-aged children or grandchildren; why should I support school choice?

Supporting families in educating their children is part of our obligation to promote the common good and ensuring students receive the education that is right for them is vital to Pennsylvania’s future. Further, parents who place their children in nonpublic schools willingly make an enormous financial sacrifice to pay tuition in addition to paying their state and local taxes. In doing so, they save the state and local district the cost of educating their children in the public schools. In Pennsylvania, they save taxpayers \$4 billion annually in education costs. And so, even if you do not have a child who would be impacted by school choice, you will experience the fiscal and societal benefits of school choice.

What can I do to help pass school choice?

Involvement by parents, educators, Catholic school alumni, parishioners, and all citizens and taxpayers will be critical to the success of school choice. Visit, call, write or e-mail your state legislators and ask them to support school choice legislation that creates vouchers and increases the EITC.

Find contact information or easily send a message to your state legislators at

www.pacatholic.org/schoolchoice

A Catholic Guide to School Choice
Contact your legislator at www.pacatholic.org/schoolchoice