



School Choice for Special Needs Students

In the school choice debate, some opponents say that students with special needs will be left out. Supporters of school choice know this is not true.

[Senate Bill 1](#) would create a voucher program and significantly expand the EITC, allowing many more students, including those with special needs, to get scholarships to non-public schools.

The Catholic school system is the largest provider of nonpublic education in Pennsylvania. Catholic schools view their role as partners in fulfilling parents' role as primary educators as well as their moral obligation to educate their children.

Admission to a Catholic school involves

collaboration with parents to define a student's individual needs and a plan to meet those needs as best as the school is able. Many Catholic schools provide special education or assisted education through specific programs, specially certified staff and/or entire buildings designed to educate those with special needs. Catholic schools coordinate instructional support through local [Intermediate Units](#) and other state and federally funded programs. All dioceses have policies to place transfer students who are behind where they should be academically into an appropriate grade level to get them on a reasonable timeline for high school graduation. Catholic schools work with parents to determine what the best course of action will be for the child to succeed, thus educating the total person with dignity.

Financial realities prevent many parents from having any educational choices for their children, especially when students have special needs. 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. A school choice program that includes both vouchers and an increase in EITC scholarships is a step in the right direction toward expanding those opportunities to more families.

Catholic schools across Pennsylvania put significant effort into providing a nurturing environment based on dignity and respect for every student. Parents - Catholics and non-Catholics alike - desire this experience for their children with special needs. Only they can determine if this is best for their child. School choice will empower *parents* to make this choice, not the state.

Send a message to your legislators in support of school choice at www.pacatholic.org.

Photo from John Paul II Center for Special Learning, Diocese of Allentown