

Does School Choice Only Help Those Who Live Near a Failing School?

The school choice proposal being considered in Harrisburg right now does two things – creates a pilot program for school vouchers and increases the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program. The voucher program prudently starts small; low-income students with a household income of \$41,000 or lower who attend schools that have persistently scored in lowest 5% of statewide tests will qualify for vouchers first. In the second year, the program expands to all low-income students who live in the neighborhood of the failing school, no matter which school they attend.

It is not hard to see why students and their parents who will qualify for vouchers are cheering for this bill; but what about everyone else? Why should we support school choice?

Financially, vouchers to low-income students would free up EITC funds for other low-income and middle-income families. Additionally, diocesan and parish tuition assistance that is currently directed towards low-income families would be freed up for other families.

Yet vouchers are only one small part of school choice. Catholic schools can attest to how the EITC has already helped thousands of students achieve and excel because their parents were able to choose the best school for their children. Senate Bill 1 will increase the EITC to \$100 million in the first two years and \$125 million in the third year, with scheduled increases in all future years. Thousands more low-income and middle-income students would be able to obtain an EITC scholarship in the first year, no matter where they live or attend school. This would help everybody everywhere.

But school choice is not just about who qualifies for which scholarship; it is about improving education and breaking away from the status quo. 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.

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, Catholic schools save taxpayers \$4 billion annually in education costs.**

Not everyone is the parent of a school-aged child but most of us are taxpayers. In Senate Bill 1, the difference between the state subsidy for education and school tuition will be returned to the state coffers. School choice saves tax dollars because non-public schools often provide an excellent education for a fraction of the cost of public schools. 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.

Nonpublic schools should be included, not excluded, from the plan to create a more effective educational system. A good education helps children grow up to be good citizens. Growing as many good citizens as we can will help ensure a better and brighter future for all of us. Citizens who care about Pennsylvania's future should support school choice.

Concerned citizens are encouraged to visit, call, write or email their state legislators using the online tools of the Pennsylvania Catholic Advocacy Network. Go to www.pacatholic.org/schoolchoice to learn more and send your [email message to your state legislators](#).

