

School Choice Works. It Has Been Tried and Tested.

School choice works in Wisconsin

Started in 1990, Milwaukee's program has grown to become one of the nation's largest and most prominent. Eligible low-income families may use the voucher to send their children to a participating private school. 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 from 111 schools are participating.

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

Cleveland, Ohio has had a school choice program for 15 years. 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 from 273 schools are participating in the statewide. 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 worth 90% 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. Vouchers have been tried and tested. **School choice legislation that includes a voucher program and an increase in EITC scholarship funds is the right choice for Pennsylvania's future.**