

Parental Choice in Education

The Texas Catholic Conference **supports** a School Choice experimental program to ensure equal educational choices for poor families.

As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to *choose a school for them* which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental. As far as possible parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators. Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2229*)

A Texas Bishop Speaks:

"School choice is ultimately about parents, rather than government, having the authority to choose a school for their children. School choice does not represent a judgment against our Texas public school system nor its teachers or administrators whose public standing would, we believe, be enhanced in a choice environment. Unfortunately, in Texas, our choices are limited by a family's economic means. A pilot school choice program offers an opportunity to open the door to greater parental involvement by their choosing the best possible school for their children. "



-Bishop Armando Ochoa, Diocese of El Paso

Church Teaching

- ★ Our motivation for educational reform springs out of a deep conviction that we must correct long-standing social injustices in educational funding and a lack of access by providing real opportunities for parental choice. For the Church this is clearly a matter of justice because those families with limited educational choices are the very families trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty. A quality education is what these families need so their children can develop their fullest potential as participants in our democracy. (*Educational Opportunity for All, Texas Catholic Conference of Bishops*)
- ★ Parents have the right to freely choose schools or other means necessary to educate their children in keeping with their convictions. Public authorities must ensure that public subsidies are so allocated that parents are truly free to exercise this right without incurring unjust burdens. Parents should not have to sustain, directly or indirectly, extra charges which would deny or unjustly limit the exercise of this freedom. (*Charter of the Rights of the Family*)
- ★ The task of educating belongs fundamentally and primarily to the family. The function of the State is subsidiary: its role is to guarantee, protect, promote and supplement. Whenever the State lays claim to an educational monopoly, it oversteps its rights and offends justice. It is parents who have the right to choose the school to which they send their children and the right to set up and support educational centers in accordance with their own beliefs. The State cannot without injustice merely tolerate so-called private schools. Such schools render a public service and therefore have a right to financial assistance. (*Instruction on Christian Freedom and Education*)

Resources

- ★ **National Catholic Education Association (NCEA)** The NCEA provides leadership American Catholic Educators (www.NCEA.org)
- ★ **The Foundation for Educational Choice** (<http://www.edchoice.org>)

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The Texas Catholic Conference recognizes parents as the primary educators of their children and supports that role by promoting parental choice in education. Parental choice enables parents to choose the schools best-suited for their children and research demonstrates that the availability of school choice improves public school performance.

Does school choice drain funding and resources away from public schools?ⁱ

No. Real world experience and evidence show that states and cities with school choice programs have not seen their public school budgets go down. 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 into state budgets. States and cities with school choice programs have all increased their per-student instructional spending in the years since the programs began. [This is because] the cost of a voucher or scholarship for a participant in a school choice program is less than what would have been spent on that student if he or she had remained in public schools. While the average public school spends about \$10,000 per student, the average private school charges about \$6,000 in tuition. That difference is the fundamental reason school choice policies will save money.

How does a school choice program affect public schools?

Sound research has consistently demonstrated school choice policies improve public school performance. More than twenty credible studies indicate school choice programs introduce more competition among all public and private schools, compelling them to go out of their way to attract and retain students. Not a single empirical study has ever found that outcomes at American public schools got worse when exposed to school choice programs, and numerous studies have found that they improve over time.

Are participating private schools held accountable?

Private schools are accountable to both parents (they have power and leverage by way of choosing a school) and various government entities (through existing codes, rules, and regulations). Private schools are primarily accountable to parents and caregivers, who can pull their children out of a school that fails to serve them. If a public school fails to perform, parents are essentially powerless. They have very little practical means to hold it accountable; they are stuck.

Private schools are not just accountable to families; they are already accountable to the public and government authorities. Private schools in every state comply with a vast array of health and safety regulations, antidiscrimination and civil rights laws, as well as accreditation standards recognized by the state. In addition, most private schools are already required to undertake financial audits and evaluate student performance using standardized tests. Private schools that participate in school choice programs are required to be safe, non-discriminatory and fiscally sound and to file regular reports and disclosures.

School choice improves public school graduation rates & Saves Millionsⁱⁱ

- School districts with more students in private schools have higher public school graduation rates. All Texas children would benefit from increased competition from private schools.
- The beneficial effect of private school competition on public schools is large enough that even a modest school choice program, one that increased private school enrollment by fewer than 5 percentage points, would reduce the number of Texas public school dropouts by 8,720 to 17,440 students per year, saving Texans between \$27 million and \$53 million in tax revenue, Medicaid costs and incarceration costs every year. The total savings from preventing these students from dropping out, over an expected lifetime of 50 years, would be between \$1.4 billion and \$2.8 billion.

(Last updated August 13, 2010, 82nd Legislative Session)

ⁱ "School Choice FAQs." *The Foundation For Educational Choice*. Web. 13 Aug. 2010. <www.edchoice.org/School-Choice/School-Choice-FAQs.aspx#>.

ⁱⁱ Gottlob, Brian J. *The High Cost of Failing to Reform Public Education in Texas*. Rep. Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, Feb. 2007. Revised Jan 2008. Web. 13 Aug. 2010. <www.edchoice.org/CMSModules/EdChoice/FileLibrary/107/TEXAS_STUDY%200108.pdf>.

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