

# MYTH BUSTERS

## Common Education Choice Myths Debunked



### MYTH 1: “EDUCATION CHOICE DRAINS MONEY FROM TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS.”

#### FACT: EDUCATION CHOICE PROGRAMS ACTUALLY SAVE TAXPAYER DOLLARS.

When a student takes part in an educational choice program, he or she is no longer present in the public school creating demand for public school resources. The average per pupil cost for a public school student in West Virginia (state and local only, no federal funds) is **\$11,334**.

But the average Hope Scholarship grant, the full cost for educating a child, is projected at **\$4,500**. That’s because in West Virginia’s Education Scholarship Account (ESA) program, only the state portion of funds follow the student. Public schools will continue to receive local dollars for the student (and federal dollars where applicable).

This windfall is in line with the experience of other states. For **Oklahoma’s** Equal Opportunity Scholarship, the “fiscal return to the Oklahoma taxpayer is \$2.58 for every \$1.00 of tax credit issued, while the savings specific to the state’s funding is \$1.24 for

every \$1.00 of tax credit issued.” An analysis of one of the **Arizona** choice programs found that “the state saves at least \$34.6 million, and potentially upwards of \$285 million per year, compared to the cost of educating those students in public school.”

Also, according to the American Federation for Children, of 28 studies measuring the financial impact on public schools and taxpayers of choice programs, 25 show school choice programs save taxpayers money.

#### Sources:

Oklahoma City University: “Fiscal Impact Analysis of the Oklahoma Equal Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit” (Jacob Dearmon and Russell Evans, 2018)

Meira Consulting: “How the Arizona School Tuition Organization Tax Credits Save the State Money” (Deborah Sheasby, 2020)

American Federation for Children: (Research Shows Favorable Impact of School Choice)

### MYTH 2: “ALLOWING CHILDREN TO ATTEND RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS THROUGH SCHOLARSHIPS IS A VIOLATION OF THE SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE.”

#### FACT: EDUCATION CHOICE IS CONSTITUTIONAL. PERIOD.

The state does not choose or in any way favor religious schools. They are simply vendors for educational services like any other school. This practice has been upheld by numerous state courts and in the U.S. Supreme Court.

In *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue* (2020) the U. S. Supreme Court considered whether it should invalidate a reli-

giously neutral student-aid program simply because the program allows students the choice of attending religious schools. Their answer was a firm no. Espinoza builds on the court’s *Zelman v. Harris decision* (2002).

#### Source:

*Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, 536 U.S. 639 (2002)

### MYTH 3: “CHOICE PARTICIPANTS DO NOT PERFORM AS WELL ACADEMICALLY AS THEIR TRADITIONAL PUBLIC-SCHOOL PEERS.”

**FACT: ACTUALLY, THE OPPOSITE IS TRUE.**

Out of 23 studies that measure the academic outcomes of education choice programs, 65% percent showed positive academic impact for choice program participants.

In Milwaukee, a parental choice program led to 10.7% higher scores in math and 5.8% higher performance in reading than public school peers.

**Sources:**

EdChoice: The 123s of School Choice (2020 Edition): What the Research Says

### MYTH 4: “EDUCATION CHOICE ADVOCATES ARE AGAINST PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND WANT TO PRIVATIZE EDUCATION.”

**FACT: EDUCATION CHOICE SUPPORTERS EMBRACE THE SUCCESS OF CHILDREN REGARDLESS OF WHAT SCHOOL THEY ATTEND.**

The guiding principle of the choice movement is that parents – not bureaucracies — are most qualified to pick the right learning environment for their children. Because of that belief, we celebrate all great schools and *all* great teachers.

A one-size-fits-all approach does not meet the needs of all children.

**“I don’t want to just see my own family succeed in education. I’d like to see our communities succeed. If we give people opportunity, they may choose the right thing, and in West Virginia, they almost bank on that our people will choose the wrong thing.”**

- Jamie



### MYTH 5: “SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS DON’T HAVE ANY ACCOUNTABILITY”

**FACT: THERE ARE NUMEROUS LAYERS OF ACCOUNTABILITY FOR EDUCATION PROVIDERS PARTICIPATING IN CHOICE PROGRAMS.**

Administrative, financial, and academic accountability are built into proposed education choice programs. Most importantly, there is the accountability to parents, who can remove their chil-

dren at any time, if they are not satisfied with the education their child receives.

## MYTH 6: “EDUCATION CHOICE HURTS PUBLIC SCHOOLS.”

**FACT: WHERE EDUCATION CHOICE PROGRAMS ARE PRESENT, THERE IS A POSITIVE IMPACT FOR STUDENTS WHO REMAIN IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.**

A study published in 2016 based on data from West Virginia county school districts found that nonpublic enrollment and the competition it provides improves public school performance.

Florida, who has some of the oldest and most robust education choice programs in the country, has seen incredible increases in math and reading achievement. In 1998, Florida’s public education system was one of the worst in the country. Just recently, The Nation’s Report Card ranked them 5th in fourth grade reading achievement. Between 1998 and 2018, nearly 150,000 low-income and disabled students received scholarships to attend a pri-

vate school and an additional 280,000 students began attending a public charter school.

### Sources:

EdChoice: The 123s of School Choice (2020 Edition): What the Research Says About Private School Choice Programs in America

Orlando Sentinel: “Nation’s report card: ‘Something very good is happening in Florida’”

Foundation for Florida’s Future: “Florida 1998 v. 2018”

Richard J. Cebula, Joshua C. Hall & Maria Y. Tackett (2017) Non-public competition and public school performance: evidence from West Virginia, Applied Economics, 49:12,1185-1193

## MYTH 7: “USING SELECTIVE ADMISSIONS POLICIES, PRIVATE SCHOOLS PARTICIPATING IN EDUCATION CHOICE CHERRY PICK HIGHER PERFORMING STUDENTS.”

**FACT: THERE IS ZERO EVIDENCE PRIVATE SCHOOLS ARE CHERRY PICKING HIGHER-PERFORMING SCHOLARSHIP STUDENTS.**

For example, in Florida, years of standardized test results show students on education choice scholarships are typically the lowest-performing students from the lowest-performing public schools. All of the annual test score analyses from Florida is available and backs up this claim.

### Sources:

Florida Department of Education: Facts & Figures

Step Up for Students: The plan to help disadvantaged students this year

EdChoice: Greg Forster, “A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on Education choice” (EdChoice, 2016)

## MYTH 8: “EDUCATION CHOICE MAKES PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN AMERICA MORE RACIALLY SEGREGATED.”

**FACT: THERE IS NO REPUTABLE RESEARCH THAT PROVES THIS FINDING.**

Of ten studies conducted on education choice and segregation, one found no impact and nine found that education choice leads to more diversity.

### Sources:

American Federation for Children: Research Shows Favorable Impact of School Choice

**MYTH 9: “CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS LOSE LEGAL PROTECTIONS IF THEY LEAVE THE PUBLIC SCHOOL BECAUSE PRIVATE SCHOOLS DON’T WANT THEM AND CAN’T SERVE THEM.”**

**FACT: MANY PRIVATE SCHOOLS ARE UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO SERVE CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS. EDUCATION CHOICE GRANTS MORE KIDS ACCESS TO THESE SCHOOLS.**

Every year in America, over 76,000 students with special needs take part in twenty-one education choice programs designed specifically for them. During COVID, these students have been among the hardest hit. These “parental placements” in private schools are perfectly legal under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The level of parent satisfaction

with these programs is extremely high. No one knows better than a parent what their child needs.

**Sources:**

Heritage: “Education Savings Accounts: Giving Every Child the Chance to Succeed”  
American Federation for Children: 2020 School Guidebook

**MYTH 10: “HOPE SCHOLARSHIPS (ESAS) ARE JUST ANOTHER TERM FOR A VOUCHER.”**

**FACT: PRIVATE EDUCATION CHOICE TAKES THREE DISTINCT FORMS: ESAS, VOUCHERS, AND TAX-CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS.**

A voucher is equivalent to a parent buying a seat in a private school with public dollars. In a tax-credit scholarship, the state uses tax-credits to incentivize donations to scholarships for students to use toward private school tuition. An ESA uses a state’s per-pupil calculations to set-aside state money into accounts

that parents can legally use for an array of education expenses, while federal and local dollars stay with the district. An ESA is an innovation of previous education choice models, giving parents important flexibility to be able to fully customize their child’s education.