

Marty Lueken and Cooper Conway: School Choice Benefits Education and Taxpayers

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IT MAY seem that education freedom would go hand in hand with a state whose motto is “live free or die.” Nevertheless, New Hampshire has a lot of work to do on its K-12 system if it wants to be a bastion of liberty for students and their families. One way the state can live up to its creed is by expanding educational choice programs.

New Hampshire currently offers three private school choice programs, the most extensive of which is an Education Freedom Account (EFA), more commonly known as an Education Savings Account. Valued at around \$5,200, the EFA funds can be used for various private education expenses, including private school tuition, tutoring, educational therapies, and more. Unfortunately, access to the program is severely restricted. More than half of families in the state are unable to participate in the program due to an income limit that caps the number of eligible families at 350% of the federal poverty level (\$105,000 for a family of four in 2023–24).

Despite the program’s limited size, opponents claim school choice could devastate the state budget, and any expansion would be untenable. But the facts tell a different story.

According to a recent report from EdChoice analyzing the fiscal effects of 48 school choice programs from their inception through fiscal year 2022, school choice saved states and taxpayers an estimated \$19.4 billion to \$45.6 billion dollars. In New Hampshire specifically, the state’s Education Tax Credit Program generated cost savings for taxpayers worth up to \$6.74 for every dollar invested in the school choice program in the long run — a sizable return on investment. The current cohort of students in the EFA program will generate up to \$23 million in annually recurring net fiscal benefits over time, according to another analysis. These reduced cost savings represent taxpayer benefits rather than a “drain” on public schools.

Nonetheless, opponents’ claims about the harm of school choice go beyond concerns about undermining public schools. For instance, many opponents argue that school choice expansion would exacerbate what they perceive as underfunding of public schools, negatively impacting student outcomes. Yet, research suggests that private school choice programs incentivize public schools to improve through competitive effects and the ability to find students a better learning environment that suits their needs.

In fact, a meta-analysis of research examining the impact of private school choice programs on public school student test scores after their implementation concluded, “In general, competition resulting from school-choice policies does have a small positive effect on student achievement.” And when states expand choice programs, students in public schools not only experience a learning boost, but also better behavioral outcomes and attendance.

Still, the benefits of education choice are a reality for only a few families in the Granite State. Indeed, a recent survey found that 53% of parents do not feel like they have a choice in what school their child attends. This finding becomes even more disheartening when paired with the fact that only 35% of New Hampshire’s parents are satisfied with their child’s school, and 46% of parents in New Hampshire would not send their children to the school they attend today if they had a choice.

Parents deserve better.

Making education choices accessible to all families would empower parents to determine the best learning environment for their students. If New Hampshire wants to remain committed to individual freedom, all students, no matter their background or circumstance, should be given access to the best education for them. Expanding school choice can make that a reality.

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