

Celebrate National School Choice Week

By Julie Borowski on Jan 24, 2011

During National School Choice Week, events are being held to raise awareness for parental choice educational options around the country. On Tuesday, FreedomWorks will be in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania for a panel and rally at the Capitol to promote school choice in the Commonwealth. With a conservative governor and General Assembly this year, we believe that Pennsylvania and many other states have a great opportunity to pass education reforms that emphasizes choice and competition.

American students are falling behind in the world. The world is becoming increasingly competitive and globalized. The educational quality of American students is vital in order for them to compete on a global scale. The National Center for Education Statistics found that Americans ranked 16th and 21st out of 29 developed countries in science and mathematical scores, respectively. It is dangerous for America's future prosperity if the academic gap continues to grow between American and international students.

Everyone benefits from educational choice. Regardless of your parental or income status, there are a multitude of reasons to support school choice initiatives. Here are just a few explanations on why everyone should support all school choice options:

1. It Allow Parents to Choose Their Child's School.

School choice initiatives give students the opportunity to escape their local failing school and enroll in a school that better suits their needs. Multiple studies have confirmed that school choice boosts parental satisfaction in their child's education. Many parents have expressed gratitude that they could choose a better and safer learning environment for their children.

2. School Choice Programs Will Boost Our Global Competitiveness.

By increasing choice and competition, school choice initiatives are proven to have a positive effect on student's test scores. For instance, in the former D.C. School Voucher Program, voucher students were scoring higher in mathematics and were 3.1 months ahead in reading than non-voucher students. In the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, the National Bureau of Economic Research found that school vouchers boosted high school graduate rates and

improved mathematics scores.

3. It Saves Taxpayers' Money.

School choice programs have proven to be cost effective. In most cases, the average private school tuition is about half of total public school spending per pupil. According to Mackinac Center for Public Policy President Joe Lehman, “Choice is more than just a way to get kids into better schools, as important as that is. It's also a way to fix the state's budget problem.” The cost of educating one student in Milwaukee public schools cost taxpayers \$14,011 every year. However, students in the Milwaukee Parental Choice program are eligible for half the cost or up to \$6,501. According to the Cato Institute, the government spends \$24,600 to educate one student for one school year in the District of Columbia. The D.C. Voucher Program allowed students to attend the school of their choice for almost half of that expense. This amount is generally enough to cover the tuition cost at most non-public schools in their area.

4. School Choice Programs Are Constitutional.

The Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of Ohio's school choice program in *Zelman v. Simmon-Harris* in 2002. Chief Justice Rehnquist, writing for the majority, stated that: “This Court's jurisprudence makes clear that a government aid program is not readily subject to challenge under the Establishment Clause if it is neutral with respect to religion and provides assistance directly to a broad class of citizens who, in turn, direct government aid to religious schools wholly as a result of their own genuine and independent private choice.” As long as parents who receive the aid have a wide array of religious and non-religious schools to choose from, it does not conflict with the Constitution.

5. It Has Helped Children Rise From Poverty.

In inner-cities, poverty is becoming a never-ending vicious circle as the local public schools fail to provide students with a quality education. So far, most of the school voucher programs have been targeted at poor families. These vouchers have allowed thousands of poor students to obtain a better education helping them become self-sufficient adults. In New Orleans, Torrianna Treaud's two children receive school vouchers to go a better school. She said “I had to go to public schools so to give them the opportunity to go to a private school for a better education just to go on with life is a blessing.” Sadly, there's a lot of

resistance against any school choice bill from powerful teachers unions. After we win these crucial battles, we hope to see more comprehensive school choice programs that allow all parents and students to choose the school that matches their needs.

Around the nation, school choice programs have been a win-win for all. They have saved taxpayers' money while increasing parental satisfaction and student achievement. Where bureaucracies and monopolies exist, innovation is stifled and the incentives for controlling costs are either non-existent or counter-productive. Children and parents should be empowered to escape their zip code in order to choose the school that best suits their individual needs. Just as competition has improved everyday products, it can produce better performing schools.