

THE OKLAHOMAN

Helping families

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October 1, 2016

We're constantly assailed by bad news in Oklahoma. How about some good news for a change? The liberty-loving Cato Institute measures freedom in all 50 states, and it rates Oklahoma second best in the nation! What got us this high rank? A lot of reforms, including education reforms such as the Lindsey Nicole Henry scholarships for disabled kids and a "tax benefit for contributions to private scholarship funds."

Those "private scholarship funds" are called "Scholarship Granting Organizations" here. They help level the playing field for lower income parents who want to be able to choose a private school for their children. There are two main SGOs in Oklahoma City: the Catholic Schools Opportunity Fund, providing scholarships to Catholic schools, and the Opportunity Scholarship Fund, for most non-Catholic private schools. Both SGOs are already helping a number of local families.

Not only do low-income parents benefit from the SGOs, so do donors. Most donors get 50 percent credits against state income tax. A promise to make the same contribution for two years ups that credit even more. The benefits are eye-popping. A \$1,000 donation made directly to a school costs the average taxpayer about \$700, net of taxes. If that same \$1,000 contribution goes to an SGO, the net cost shrinks to about \$200.

Parents or donors wanting more information can contact their local Catholic school or non-Catholic private school. These SGOs are part of the reason Cato ranks Oklahoma high on freedom, and they deserve our warm support.