



The Many Benefits of Giving Students a PASS

Pennsylvania State Senator Judy Ward

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The Pennsylvania Award for Student Success (PASS) program and Gov. Shapiro's repeated public support for it continues to receive much-deserved media attention. The situation in our low-achieving schools is at a crisis level, and children are suffering every day because of that.

What can we do about it? We can continue to increase funding for Pre-K through 12th grade education, and the Senate-approved fiscal year 2023-24 budget does this to the tune of more than \$1.1 billion dollars. After several years of historic increases in education spending, Pennsylvania is nationally ranked towards the top. However, the desired results have not come. We must think outside the box to help our students in need. What would enacting PASS and expanding school choice do?

School choice improves test scores. According to a University of Arkansas **study** that reviewed correlations between increased education options and standardized test scores across states, "higher levels of school choice are significantly associated with higher National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) achievement levels and higher NAEP achievement gains in all our statistical models."

School choice increases college enrollment and graduation rates. According to a **study** by the Urban Institute, children enrolled in school choice programs like the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, the nation's oldest and largest school choice program, are "more likely than public school students to enroll and persist at four-year universities."

School choice helps to lower crime rates. According to a **study** published in Social Science Quarterly, "mere exposure to private schooling through a voucher is associated with lower rates

of criminal activity,” and “students who used the program through 12th grade...were much less likely to have criminal records than their public-school peers.”

School choice increases diversity and integration. **According to the Cato Institute**, seven out of the eight empirical studies on the subject show increases in school diversity in areas with school voucher programs, with the only remaining study showing no impact. “When school choice programs give disadvantaged children the opportunity to exit their already-segregated neighborhood schools, their transitions unsurprisingly result in a more racially and socioeconomically integrated society.”

School choice helps to meet the state’s constitutional requirement to provide every student a meaningful opportunity to succeed. In its recent **opinion** on school funding, the Commonwealth Court stated that the mandate for reform does not “require reform to be entirely financial” and that “the options for reform are virtually limitless.” A multi-faceted approach, not only more money, was surely in the minds of the court in its opinion.

It is without a doubt that the PASS program and increasing school choice would have a lifechanging impact on the children who participate and the communities where they live. The children in failing schools need our help, and they need it now. I call on Governor Shapiro and House Democrats to stop bowing to unions and special interests and stand with those children in need by enacting the PASS program, giving countless children in failing schools an opportunity today and the future that they dream of tomorrow.