



Poll: Americans back Trump's school choice proposal by 33 percent margin

Victor Skinner

April 17, 2017

A new poll shows strong public support for President Donald Trump's plan to launch a nationwide block grant program to support school choice for America's families.

A [Gallup poll](#) conducted late last month shows Americans back President Donald Trump's call to promote school choice options by a 33 percent margin, with overall support from both Republicans and Democrats.

When asked whether they agree or disagree with Trump's plan to "provide federal funding for school choice programs that allow students to attend any private or public school," 60 percent of Republicans and 8 percent of Democrats were in net agreement.

The president proposed spending \$250 million in fiscal year 2018 to support school choice options, and both Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos have spent considerable time in recent months highlighting how state voucher programs are helping students thrive outside the public school system.

"Trump called out Denisha Merriweather in his joint address to Congress (in February), applauding the young woman who received a school voucher from (a Florida program) to attend a private school and eventually became the first member of her family to graduate from high school and college," according to [U.S. News & World Report](#).

"Days later, Trump and DeVos visited a Catholic school in Orlando, where hundreds of students attend the school using a voucher from the state's tax credit scholarship program."

Trump's proposal to spend \$250 million on school choice is part of a broader campaign promise to eventually steer up to \$20 billion to expand educational options for families, particularly low-income families that are often stuck in poor performing school districts.

It's currently unclear exactly how the Trump administration envisions the program will work, but "a lot of people expect that the proposal you'll hear from the administration directly will likely be for a tax credit for people who donate to organizations that give scholarships," Neal

McCluskey, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Reform, told U.S. News & World Report.

"A tax credit would get a lot less political pushback," McCluskey said. "The interesting part of that is, I don't know if the Department of Education itself would have to be all that involved in it because it's working through the tax code. But I think what you'd see is Secretary DeVos being the public spokesperson for the administration's proposal to have a scholarship tax credit."

A total of 17 states currently have some type of scholarship tax program in place, though each carries different eligibility requirements for students and those who donate.

Lawmakers from two of those states, Sen. Marco Rubio, of Florida, and Rep. Todd Rokia, of Indiana, introduced the Educational Opportunities Act in January for a federal tax credit program that would establish a maximum \$4,500 tax credit for those who donate to the program. Money raised would go to vouchers for students whose family incomes do not exceed 250 percent of the federal poverty level.

"It would allow corporations a tax credit up to \$100,000 for contributions to scholarship granting organizations, which would be required to distribute 90 percent of their total donations," according to the news site.

And yet despite the public support for the idea, Democrats in Washington – and the teachers unions who help to elect them – remain steadfastly against virtually all types of vouchers.

"These programs rely on non-profits and are often used to skirt state constitutional requirements that prohibit funds from being used to subsidize religious entities," Sen. Patty Murray wrote in a 20-page anti-choice memo to her colleagues in late March.