

parents and children deserve educational choices

School Choice REPORT

September 2008

School Choice for Hoosiers

The real hurdle in expanding choices

“I just don’t understand why Indiana doesn’t provide real school choice yet. It just makes sense that willing parents should be able to do something about choosing a good school for their kids.”

A very good question we received from Janice in Fort Wayne, an exasperated parent looking to improve the education and, ultimately, life opportunities available to her children.

As the public, news media, and community organizations become more and more involved in facing the problems in our state’s educational systems, demands for real change - including choice - are getting real traction in neighborhoods and legislative hallways.

Powerful political forces continue to deny families school choice.

The people of Indiana overwhelmingly support school choice.

Seventy two percent of Hoosiers and over ninety percent of African-Americans in this state support it. Earlier this spring, while states like Georgia and Florida created and expanded school choice programs with bipartisan support, Indiana’s legislature failed to act.

So what are our elected officials waiting on? What are they so afraid of or what makes them so unwilling to move forward for families?

Put simply, politics and political power are the primary roadblocks that have delayed a significant school choice program in Indiana.

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Do You Know How Much Is Being Spent?

Citizens overwhelmingly under-estimate the actual spending in K-12 schools

A major gap exists between what taxpayers think is being spent on schools and what really is, according to a recent study published by the Hoover Institution.

Professors William Howell and Martin West conducted a survey of 2,000 Americans in school districts across the country. They compared school funding levels in the districts of respondents.

The study found that over 90 percent of respondents under-estimated the per-pupil amount actually spent by their local schools. More than 40 percent estimated per-pupil spending at less than \$1,000 a year (the national average is \$9,435).

The average estimate of per-pupil spending, even after prompting the respondent with

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2008 Indiana Network Survey

Enclosed with this edition of the *School Choice Report* is a brief questionnaire on education issues for our network. We want to learn more about what matters to you and what questions you might have.

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BEN STEIN To Join School Choice Supporters at Dinner

From actor and game show host to political figure and noted economist, Ben Stein is a name few wouldn't recognize. This year, Indianapolis will welcome Stein as the featured speaker at the Educational CHOICE Charitable Trust's annual dinner, with co-host the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice.



The December 3, 2008 dinner will be held at the Eiteljorg Museum in downtown Indianapolis. For more information, please call (317) 951-8781 or visit www.choicetrust.org.

Proceeds will benefit the privately-funded CHOICE Trust, which provides scholarships for low-income children to attend private K-12 schools in Marion County.

Indianapolis Grad Rates Lowest of 63 Urban Districts

A recent study by the Schott Foundation for Public Education found that the Indianapolis Public Schools have the lowest graduation rate for black male students among the 63 urban districts nationwide. In the 2005-06 school year studied, only 19% of black males graduated from IPS schools.

"This continues to emphasize what I've been trying to emphasize: the urgency of turning this district around as fast as possible," explained IPS Superintendent Eugene White. (Indpls. Star)

Study Finds Ohio's EdChoice Program Improves Public School Performance

A study of the new Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship program's effect on public schools has found academic gains among students in the public schools. This suggests that the threat of competition and losing students is causing these public schools to improve their academic outcomes.

Released in August 2008 by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, the Alliance for School Choice, and several Ohio groups, the study provides empirical evidence of the benefits to children from the school choice program - children in the program and those who remain in the public school.

The EdChoice program was created to provide students from under-performing public schools the opportunity to attend participating private schools. The program provides up to 14,000 scholarships to eligible students.

Democrats for School Choice

from the Wall Street Journal Editorial (05/19/08)

When Florida passed a law in 2001 creating the Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program for underprivileged students, all but one Democrat in the state legislature voted against it. Earlier this month, lawmakers extended the program - this time with the help of a full third of Democrats in the Legislature, including 13 of 25 members of the state's black caucus and *every* member of the Hispanic caucus. What changed?

Our guess is that low-income parents in Florida have gotten a taste of the same school choice privileges that middle- and upper-income families have always enjoyed. And they've found they like this new educational freedom. Under the scholarship program, which is means-tested, companies get a 100% tax credit for donations to state-approved nonprofits that provide private-school vouchers for low-income families.

The program already serves some 20,000 students. The expansion will allow it to assist an additional 6,000. It's no surprise that poor families would embrace educational options, given that their government-assigned schools are clearly failing their children. The high school graduation rate for black students in Florida is 45% overall, 38% for black males. The 52% graduation rate for Hispanics is also nothing to brag about.

What's encouraging is that these parents have managed to convey their pro-choice sentiments to their representatives, who are responding even though voucher programs infuriate powerful liberal special interest groups like the teachers unions. Given that 70% of the program participants are black or Hispanic, you'd think Democrats would be taking the lead on a measure that mostly benefits their traditional constituency. Apparently they needed a little prodding, but we're glad to see they did the right thing.



Lindsey Brown Named Program Manager

School Choice Indiana is proud to announce that Lindsey Brown has joined our staff as Program Manager.

Improving educational opportunities for those most in need is a passion for Lindsey Brown - and she's had a lot of hands-on experience.

Lindsey most recently served as Associate Director of the Charter School Resource Center at the Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation in Indianapolis. Working closely with public charter schools around the state, Lindsey developed and managed unique programs and services for this growing public school choice area.

Previously, Lindsey was a Teach For America corps member where she got invaluable education experience as a special education teacher in inner-city Philadelphia. This highly-competitive, national program recruits the best and brightest young people from around the country to spend two years teaching in the nation's most severely under-resourced urban and rural schools.

A new position, SCI's program manager will be responsible for a series of programs in marketing, communications, outreach and policy analysis.



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Why Not School Choice?

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The most powerful political force in Indiana remains the Indiana State Teachers Association (ISTA) labor union. With a virtual veto power over much of the legislature, this union typically spends over \$1 million in each election cycle to elect candidates opposed to school choice.

This level of direct campaign contributions by a special interest group is almost unheard of among the states.

Opposition to providing parents with school choices is the first and/or most important litmus test the union bosses use in deciding whether to back a candidate. This is a tragedy.

Yet, time and again we hear from legislators on both sides of the aisle that they support school choice, want to see it for the families in their district, but there is always a really big "but..." Politics.

Unfortunately, the education establishment is also a major political player in erecting roadblocks to school choice. Like any monopoly, entrenched education bureaucracies would rather protect the status quo than embrace new concepts such as school choice that would introduce competition - even if

*It's time to put politics aside
and put the education
of children first.*

parents are clamoring for more educational options.

Ten years ago, state lawmakers were divided along party lines on whether to create charter schools, an innovative public education option to provide more choices. Today, with more than fifty charter schools operating and thousands of students enrolled, charter schools enjoy relatively strong, bipartisan support. It's working.

The same will come for a broader school choice program, but first our state's elected leaders must have the courage and vision to move forward and make it possible.

Good and reasonable people can disagree about the issues and merits. However, a driving force behind resistance to school choice, more than maybe any other issues in this state, is resistance to change and the preservation of political power.

We can do so much better as a state. We should expect more. We shouldn't be afraid of change. We should focus on putting children first.

Charter News

Five New Charter Schools Authorized by Ball State

Ball State University has approved five new charter schools in Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, Muncie, South Bend and Bloomington. All will open in fall 2009.

Ball State President Jo Ann M. Gora approved the sponsorship of the schools after receiving a recommendation from a charter school review panel and community input at each school's public meeting.

- Imagine Bridge Academy in Fort Wayne will serve grades K-5 and have proposed an enrollment of at least 400 students.

- Imagine Indiana Life Sciences Academy-West in Indianapolis will serve grades K-5 with a proposed enrollment of at least 300 students.

- Cardinal Academy in Muncie will serve grades K-5 with an enrollment of at least 300.

- Xavier School of Excellence in South Bend will serve grades K-5 and a proposed enrollment of 300.

- The Project School in Bloomington will serve grades K-7 with a proposed enrollment of 224 students.

Last year, Ball State approved seven new charter schools that were slated to open this fall of 2008.

Rev. Al Sharpton Calls for Accountability and Choices

The Rev. Al Sharpton has joined New York City Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and other education policy leaders in a new effort calling for more charter schools and accountability.

The Education Equality Project, formed in June, seeks to bring serious attention to achieve serious results in urban schools.

"We keep going to the old ways that don't work, to protect the political careers of some and the contracts of others at the expense of the children," said Sharpton. "And someone has to have the political and the social courage - and I hope this group helps to begin that nationally - to say, 'Wait a minute, the children are suffering.'"

The bipartisan project's goals include accountability for outcomes, effective teachers assigned to where the need is the greatest, and increased charter school choices for parents.



Useful Facts

There are now 23 school choice programs in 14 states plus the District of Columbia. Two-thirds of these programs (15) have no family income restrictions for eligibility - nine have no demographic restrictions at all, and six are restricted only in that they serve disabled or foster care students.



www.schoolchoiceindiana.org

The mission of School Choice Indiana is to empower families with choice in educational opportunities, which will improve the quality of life for all Hoosiers and the economic viability of our state.

We are non-partisan and will work with anyone who is willing to engage in efforts that promote educational freedom for Hoosier families. We will educate the public, community leaders and policy makers on the positive impact that school choice can have on children, families, local communities and our state as a whole.



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The School Choice Report is published periodically by School Choice Indiana as a resource on education issues for interested parents, policy makers and the general public. Articles are accepted for consideration for publication.

Did You Know? Indiana School Funding Stats



- Per-pupil spending has increased 23% (adjusted for inflation) in the last decade for general fund education in the state.¹
- Factor in capital and debt service costs, and inflation-adjusted per-pupil spending has increased 28% in the last decade.²
- Most districts are now spending over \$10,000 per student annually. Several urban districts, such as IPS, now spend over \$14,000 per student.
- Taxpayers are already paying nearly \$2,000 per student annually for school construction debt alone.

Expenditures Per-Pupil in a Sample of Indiana Urban School Districts 2006-07 (all funds)³

Indianapolis Public Schools	\$13,357
Fort Wayne Community Schools	\$10,648
Evansville-Vanderburgh School Corp.	\$10,400
South Bend Community School Corp.	\$12,263
Lafayette School Corporation	\$10,048
Gary Community Schools	\$11,874
Statewide Average (3 year)	\$10,252

Sources:

- ¹ Indiana Dept. of Education Per-Pupil Expenditures, adjusted for inflation (i.e. current dollars).
- ² Indiana Farm Bureau.
- ³ Indiana Dept. of Education. All funds includes Debt Service and Capital Outlay but not funds 130-159 (transfer funds). Pupil count is Oct 1 Enrollment plus "ADM Transfers Out".

School Spending

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the facts on what the number included, was \$5,262. The average actual per-pupil spending in those districts was \$10,400.

The report concludes: "In sum, Americans think that far less is being spent on the nation's public schools than is actually the case. The vast majority of the public think we spend amounts that can only be described as minuscule, and almost 96 percent of the public underestimate either per-pupil spending in their districts or teacher salaries in their states."

