

PROGRESS

AMERICAN FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN
2019 LEGISLATIVE IMPACT REPORT



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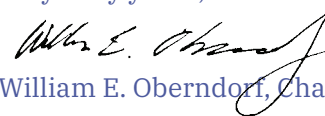
Dear Friends,

I write once again to share our annual progress report of legislative accomplishments. Notable achievements in 2019 include passage of a historic Education Savings Account program in Tennessee, yet another school choice program in Florida, improved funding for choice programs across the country, and defending programs made vulnerable by shifts in legislative makeup and executive powers.

As expected, the 2018 elections were consequential for our work. In states like Tennessee, Florida, Wisconsin, and Illinois, gubernatorial candidates spoke often about school choice. Where choice proponents won, new programs were enacted. Where choice proponents lost, programs were under assault. We are proud not only of creating new opportunities for families seeking additional educational options, but also ensuring that no families lose the options they rely upon to provide their children with the highest quality education possible.

With your ongoing support, the American Federation for Children remains dedicated to our long-term vision of empowering families, especially lower-income families, with the freedom to choose the best K–12 education for their children. Thank you for helping the American Federation for Children in this critically important work.

Very truly yours,

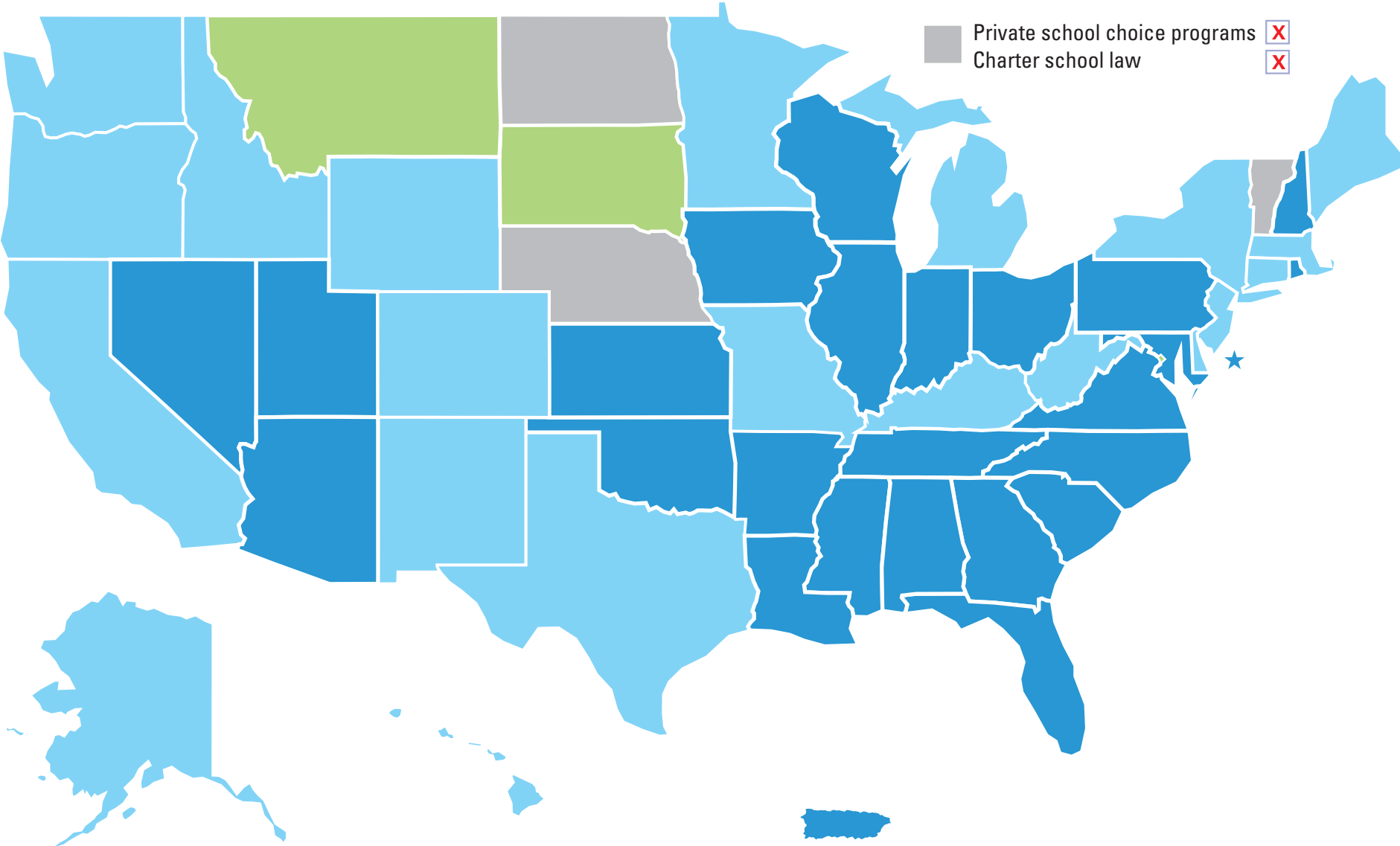


William E. Oberndorf, Chairman, American Federation for Children

STATES WITH SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS

Making An Impact

- Private school choice programs ☒
- Charter school law ☒
- Private school choice programs ☒
- Charter school law ☐
- Private school choice programs ☐
- Charter school law ☒
- Private school choice programs ☐
- Charter school law ☐



This year AFC has continued collecting stories from the students and families who benefit from school choice programs. Our Voices for Choice initiative celebrates the life-changing power of educational freedom and is a testament to the importance of passing and upholding high-quality legislation.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Thomas Stovall

To me, school choice means giving someone the chance to go out on their own adventure. School choice gives someone the opportunity to discover what they want to do with their lives. School choice also gives students a new perspective of the world from a place other than their home. My middle school teachers showed that they cared for us as students and as individuals. If a child comes from a background where they are overlooked, and the right school provides an experience of everyone

caring for each other, that school will change the child's mentality about school and learning.



Alabama

Working with our Alabama partners, AFC successfully defended the Alabama Accountability Act from school board resolutions that would have sought to repeal the scholarship program. Dozens of scholarship families were brought to the state house to ask local legislators to support children in the program. Despite widespread coverage of the school board resolutions, and numerous op-eds written by detractors of the program, legislators who met with scholarship families ultimately refused to repeal the scholarship program.

In January, AFC helped organize legislative panels around the state in which legislators engaged with members of the federal Department of Education, students in the scholarship program, and Alabama choice advocates representing charter schools and online schools. The events, which were held in three parts of the state, showcased the different types of school choice that exist in Alabama and the workforce development supported by school choice.

Alabama legislators have expressed interest in the possibility of new forms of educational options in the state, particularly through Education Savings Accounts (ESAs). Demand continues to be high for the scholarship program, with thousands of applicants on a waiting list. AFC will continue to work toward both gaining legislative support for ESAs and continuing to grow its grassroots efforts to bring expanded choices to Alabama students.



Arizona

AFC achieved major victories in the 2019 Legislative session in Arizona. Our primary legislative goal was to implement a third-party financial vendor to manage the Empowerment Scholarship Account (ESA) program in order for the program to run more efficiently and to allow ESAs to expand. This language was successfully inserted into the state budget signed by Governor Doug Ducey.

Inserting the vendor into the budget was key as the initial ESA bill did not have the votes needed to pass. In fact, many, including the Speaker, said no ESA bills would even be considered this year. Therefore, this was a major victory.

Our 529 IRS conformity language narrowly passed in the House and Senate and was signed by the governor in what was another major victory for school choice. This will allow for 529 beneficiaries to use their funds for K-12 tuition in addition to higher-education tuition.

Near the end of the legislative session, newly elected Superintendent of Public Instruction Kathy Hoffman sent letters to Navajo Nation families demanding they pay back thousands of dollars for their children's ESA scholarships. AFC launched an aggressive public relations campaign, which included a video highlighting the plight of the Navajo people, and Governor Ducey demanded immediate action to rectify the situation. Legislative leaders introduced emergency legislation during the last week of session. The bill passed unanimously in both chambers and was signed by the governor.

Finally, AFC was successful in defeating a record 12 anti-school choice bills.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Samantha Jones

I've moved 19 times in my life. Yet school was always a place where I could succeed. However, the public-school system did not provide me with the opportunities and educational development I needed. Having the choice to go to a private school offered me the opportunities that public school could not. I was a member of the National Honors Society, was class secretary sophomore and senior year, took multiple AP classes, and graduated third in my high school class.





VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



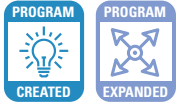
David Spielmaker

When my parents decided that it was best for me to be pulled out of public school, I had absolutely no objections. The classroom I was a part of, the teacher I had, and the environment surrounding me were all toxic. With the use of school choice, my parents were able to put me into a values-based private school started by my church. School choice has given me the ability to grow as a human being, along with giving me a very real opportunity to get involved in a career before I have even graduated.



Arkansas

The 2019 legislative session was tumultuous for school choice in Arkansas. Though not ultimately successful, AFC and partners helped pass a \$3 million Education Savings Account program through the State Senate, before it died in the House Education Committee at the end of the legislative session. Despite this setback, funding for the Succeed Scholarship, the state's lone private school choice program that provides vouchers to special needs students, was nearly doubled – fully funding the program for the first time. The \$3 million appropriation, provided through executive action by Governor Asa Hutchinson, will allow nearly 200 new students into the program.



Florida

Working closely with our state partner, Step Up for Students, we addressed the expansive waitlist of economically struggling families seeking a private school option, as well as the families on the waitlist for a Gardiner Scholarship for students with special needs. These efforts led to the successful passage of a new voucher program, the Family Empowerment Scholarship, which prioritizes giving scholarships to students in households living at 185% or less of poverty.

The state-funded Family Empowerment Scholarship program will provide approximately 18,000 new students with access to additional educational options this year, and an estimated 7,000 new students each year after that. Our efforts to educate Democrats and connect families with their lawmakers resulted in six Democrats supporting this new program.

Additionally, the legislature appropriated \$150 million for charter school capital projects, and an additional \$23 million for the Gardiner Scholarship Program, which will fund the waitlist for students with special needs.

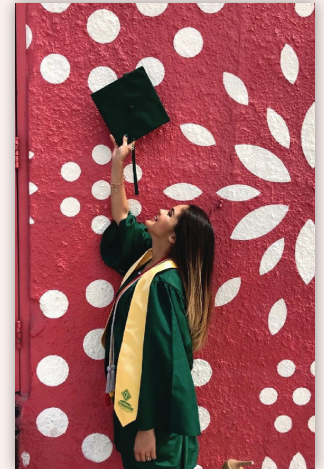
Governor Ron DeSantis made expanding school choice options in Florida a top legislative priority this year. With support from our team, the governor held ceremonial bill signings around the state to celebrate the bill passage and highlighted families who will be served by the Family Empowerment Scholarship and Gardiner Scholarships.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Leidiana Candelario

Every weekday I anxiously waited to go home from school, as home became my shelter. The moment my father, with excitement in his eyes, told me “Mi hija, nos dieron la beca!” – “My daughter, we got the scholarship!” I knew the best of changes would come. My sisters and I were granted the Step Up for Students scholarship. In June of 2018, I graduated from the school that changed my nine-year trajectory and helped me grow from a scared fourth grader into a well-equipped high school graduate. Thanks to school choice, I learned to love education. I learned to reach for my wildest dreams. And I learned that I am cared for by a small school in Little Havana in Miami with a faculty I call family.





VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Meredith Dudley

When she started experiencing bullying at school, I knew I needed to find another option. That's when I found out about the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship...Meredith started her third-grade year at the Academy of Innovation, a private school for students facing learning barriers. There, the teachers had specialized training in reading instruction, and students were taught in small classes to help students like Meredith.

Meredith has blossomed. I don't know what we would do if we weren't at her new school. I know, without a doubt, my child would not graduate from high school if we had remained in the public system.



Georgia

Working with our allies in Georgia, AFC helped secure an additional \$2 million for charter school facilities. AFC also worked toward passing an Education Savings Account (ESA) bill. ESA bills were introduced in both the House and Senate, and with full-throated support from newly elected Lt. Governor Geoff Duncan, ESA legislation passed out of two different committees in the Senate. One bill ultimately reached the floor but fell four votes short of passage.

Since the Georgia General Assembly operates on a biennial session, the House version of the ESA legislation remains alive and available for the 2020 session. And AFC is already working to reintroduce ESA legislation in the Senate and secure the necessary support for its passage.

This year, donations under the tax credit scholarship program reached \$100 million, the highest in the state's history, after AFC's successful efforts to expand the cap from \$58 million last session.



Illinois

In Illinois, newly elected Governor J.B. Pritzker campaigned on eliminating the \$100 million scholarship tax credit program and proposed a budget that would have phased it out over three years. Empower Illinois and its local allies rallied to protect the program.

The 7,000 families participating in the scholarship program and 42,000 additional families on the waitlist engaged in a “Save My Scholarship” campaign, led by One Chance Illinois and a coalition of families, education advocates, and school leaders from 146 schools. They visited the vast majority of state lawmakers and wrote more than 3,000 letters demonstrating the impacts of this scholarship program.

The Illinois coalition convinced the legislature to maintain the program. Governor Pritzker announced that he would sign the budget and continue the tax credit scholarship program because of the budget’s robust increases in public school funding. AFC provided both strategic advice and financial assistance to support Empower Illinois’ successful efforts.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Jeraldo Rodriguez

In July of 2015, my son, Jerry Jr., and my daughter, Kiara, lost their mom in a house fire while we were all sleeping. Over 35% of Jerry’s body suffered burns and over 15% of Kiara’s. Both had skin grafts. If Jerry had stayed in the public-school system, I feel like there would not have been a lot of attention on him, making sure he wasn’t bullied. Having the scholarship program for my family means a lot. Because of these resources, you’re able to be a doctor. You’re able to be an astronaut. You’re able to be whatever you want to be. This scholarship shows families that their children are capable of great things. They can go to Harvard. They can go to Yale. They can go to any college they want to.





VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Reyna Rodriguez

Eight years ago, I never would have imagined myself where I am today, but I would have it no other way. The only reason I was able to attend Bishop Luers is because the school choice program assisted my family tremendously. I thought I was ready for high school, but after my first big exam I realized I truly was behind academically. Now I'm a high school graduate and studying to be a nurse. The School Choice Program has forever changed my life and will continue to help my family and many other families that are financially burdened.



Indiana

In 2019, AFC's Indiana partners' top priority was to obtain more equitable funding for all Hoosier students, particularly for those who participate in Indiana's private school choice programs and those who choose to attend a charter school. This year was a biennial budget session in Indiana, and the final version of the budget clearly demonstrated the commitment of the Indiana legislature and Governor Eric Holcomb to K-12 education and school choice. A record new investment of \$539 million (a 2.5% increase each year) in the K-12 funding formula for Hoosier students over the biennium was just the beginning.

AFC's Indiana partner, the Institute for Quality Education, worked with legislative and fiscal leaders to improve funding of Indiana's private school choice programs. Of note, a third tier was established in the Choice Scholarship Program. Now families whose income is between 100-125% of Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) guidelines will receive a voucher equal to 70% of the state per pupil allocation they would receive in their assigned public school (up from 50%).

Because of this increase, we estimate that more than 1,000 students will be able to afford to attend the private school of their choice. Additionally, a second voucher application window was added (November 1 – January 15), allowing eligible students to enroll at a participating school after the current September 1 deadline, and receive a prorated voucher for the second semester.

This session also brought more equitable funding for Indiana's charter school students through the expansion of the Charter Innovation Grant Fund. On average, a traditional public school receives approximately \$3200 per year in local property tax dollars to fund capital expenses, utilities, transportation, etc. Charter schools, which do not receive local property tax dollars, will now receive \$750 per pupil each year (previously \$500 per pupil) to help cover these expenses, which must otherwise be paid out of their state tuition support and classroom dollars.

Finally, Indiana's tax credit scholarship program grew this legislative session as the program cap was raised from \$14 million in FY 2019 to \$15 million in FY 2020 and \$16.5 million in FY 2021.



Iowa

This year, the Iowa legislature agreed to add \$2 million to the state's existing tax credit scholarship program, raising the cap from \$13 to \$15 million. Governor Kim Reynolds, who is an individual contributor to the program, signed the increase into law. Based on current distributions, this will result in scholarships for nearly 1,800 more students, allowing them to attend a school of their family's choice. AFC provided both strategic advice and financial assistance to support the efforts of state allies.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Ellie Bildstein

Thanks to school choice, I was able to attend a school that I believe fit me best. I started my education at Hennessy Catholic school, a small school with approximately 70 students. The teachers helped me to learn and grow in my faith. My Catholic education also brought me closer to God. I was fortunate enough to be able to decide what school to attend. As I graduate from high school and plan to further my education, it is my decision to pick a college that is right for me. By this time, I will be an adult and it will be time to start making big decisions on my own. My future is all about making decisions — starting with yet another school choice.





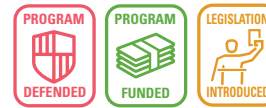
VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Dominique Hagans

My dad had always wanted to send all three of his children to private schools. Unfortunately, his dreams were held at a standstill due to his financial situation. I can recall receiving my acceptance letter in the mail and seeing the old man jump for joy, his eyes glinting with delight. I've been attending St. Mary's since sixth grade. I formed bonds that I'm not sure I would have made had I gone somewhere else. My teachers did whatever they could to help me reach my goals. Some families don't get the chance to

choose due to monetary situations. In that sense, it isn't fair, but it is also how life is. It is also why I'm so grateful for the Louisiana Scholarship Program, which graciously gives people like me a fighting chance.

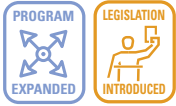


Louisiana

The Louisiana Federation for Children (LFC) had another successful legislative session, securing a line-item appropriation to fully fund potentially 7,500 students in the Louisiana Scholarship Program for the 2019-20 school year. The budget was signed by Governor John Bel Edwards with the program fully funded.

For the second year in a row, no harmful bills were filed against the Louisiana Scholarship Program or the tax credit scholarship program. Unfortunately, a plethora of anti-charter bills were filed. Once again, all harmful charter bills were defeated in the House or Senate Education Committees. So far, no school choice reforms have been rolled back in Louisiana, and both the test scores and graduation rates of students have increased.

Finally, the public-school Education Savings Account progressed through three committees, House Appropriations, House Education and Senate Education Committees, before stalling in Senate Finance due to a \$46 million fiscal note. This legislation would have allowed parents of students who scored below mastery in grades 3 through 5 to access a \$500 stipend for remedial reading work. Representative Steve Carter (R), a major champion for educational choice, carried the bill and has vowed to bring it back next session if he is elected to the Senate.



Mississippi

AFC worked with our in-state ally, Empower Mississippi, to expand school choice options in the state. Our two main policy goals – changing the funding mechanism of the special needs ESA program and expanding the current program or creating a new near-universal ESA program – were ultimately unsuccessful this session, largely because legislators did not want to tackle this issue in an election year. But that did not stop our allies, and they were successful in achieving a \$2 million increase for the special needs ESA program, bringing the total appropriation to \$5 million and providing approximately 300 additional scholarships. With the program automatically set to sunset in 2020, the addition of 300 students will make it tougher for lawmakers to take scholarships away from these special needs students next year.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



The Ferrettis

If we did not fight for Thomas, he would be another unfortunate statistic. Even at his young age, he was already broken. He had already been retained for one year. His dyslexia was not identified, and that was part of the problem. He was broken emotionally and socially because he did not fit into a certain mold. It's three years later and Thomas is finally at a point where he is successful in the classroom. He wants to go to school now and he has friends.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



The Mazanos

Without the Nevada Opportunity Scholarship, my children could not attend their school and I would have to send them back to public school. My biggest concern has been my children's safety. The difference that I noticed when my children moved to private school is that they feel safe.

The Opportunity Scholarship helped

me to choose a school that can help make sure my children do not fall behind. My hope is that lawmakers protect programs like the one our family uses because there are too many children in need of this support.

Nevada

This year, the AFC Nevada team prioritized protecting funding for the Opportunity Scholarship Program. The team was able to secure an additional \$9.5 million for the next biennium, on top of the \$6.7 million yearly base funding, totaling \$11.45 million per year.

Parents started advocating for the program the first day of session during a two-hour public comment period before a meeting of the joint money committees, making news headlines. They persistently attended every single hearing, filling the room and showing solidarity and support for the program. They also wrote op-eds, which were published in local newspapers almost every week, sharing stories about how the program has changed the lives of their families.

AFC organized an Opportunity Scholarship Day at the legislature where dozens of parents, private school representatives, and other supporters of the program met with legislators, were hosted as guests on both the Senate and Assembly floors, and gave presentations of proclamations announcing March 7, 2019, as Opportunity Scholarship Day at the legislature. The day also included a rally of support in front of the legislative building. A second rally was held in Las Vegas two weeks prior to the end of session. Hundreds of parents showed up in support of the program for both rallies.

Additionally, the team canvassed 220 homes of recipients of the Opportunity Scholarships in key districts and asked families to call their representatives. The team also focused on building support from education, business, and faith leaders. Thanks to those efforts, more than 700 handwritten letters and 1,500 emails were submitted from constituents asking their lawmakers, including the governor's office, to support the Opportunity Scholarship Program. In addition, hundreds of comments were left in support of the program on the legislative website.



ONGOING



North Carolina

Our state partner, Parents for Educational Freedom in North Carolina (PEFNC), introduced several pieces of legislation that would strengthen the state's school choice programs. The North Carolina General Assembly, under Republican leadership, has been supportive of the programs, while Democratic Governor Roy Cooper remains strongly opposed.

In order to strengthen Opportunity Scholarship access, legislation was introduced to remove the 40% cap on K-1 Opportunity Scholarships, remove age restriction loopholes, and raise the income limitation from 133% to 150% FRL. Our partners also worked side-by-side with the state scholarship-granting agency to introduce legislation to better equip PEFNC to meet the growing demand for scholarships.

Legislation was introduced to streamline application processes by combining the Scholarship for Children with Disabilities into the more user-friendly Personal Education Savings Account, thus establishing the new North Carolina Personal Education Student Accounts for Children with Disabilities. This one program could provide qualified students with up to \$17,000 per year toward educational expenses, while decreasing workload for the state scholarship-granting agency and with no additional appropriation required.

Grassroots momentum was built as this legislation trickled through committees and eventually rolled into the biennial budget bill. Our state partner ramped up grassroots efforts as their parent liaisons reached thousands of families and hosted community events and forums across the state. After the legislation passed both chambers, grassroots strategies pushed advocates to speak out on behalf of the programs.

However, the governor vetoed the budget, creating a standstill and holding up the legislative priorities AFC has been tracking in North Carolina. Our partners on the ground have continued to execute grassroots strategies, giving their advocates the tools to personalize constituent communications to legislators. Session was ongoing at the time of this publication.

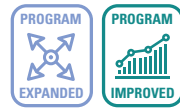


VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Charlonda and Amoree Brown

I could no longer afford a private-school education. That forced me to put Amoree back into the public school system—back to a school far worse than the one he left. It was chronically failing and unsafe. He didn't have the books he needed, and he was bullied constantly by both students and teachers...That's when I found the Opportunity Scholarship Program through a Google search. I applied and could hardly believe the good news when accepted. After getting back into private school, my son became the bubbly person that I knew before. Today, he's absolutely thriving.





VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Nathan and Micah Smith

School choice has given us the opportunity to send our children to a school with a safe, loving, and encouraging environment. I have seen the positive impact our small Christian school has made on their lives and I am grateful for the assistance. Before choosing a school, we looked at all our options, including the local public school. After visiting our current school, we discovered an environment unlike anything else. The teachers cared about every student and truly seemed to enjoy their job. The positive

attitudes, encouraging words, and inclusiveness of the student body was a rare example of how a school ought to be. We applied for an Ed Choice scholarship and were accepted, which has allowed us to send our children to a school that I know will give them the best environment possible to succeed.

Ohio

In Ohio, the state legislative session typically runs from January through June (July this year) and then returns in the fall. The first six months of the odd-numbered year of the biennium focuses on the state budget.

Through efforts led by AFC's in-state partner, School Choice Ohio (SCO), there were a number of significant improvements and expansions to the state's private school choice programs. Expanded access to the state's income-based program to all eligible students in all grade levels was among the most significant. This program was previously phased in by one grade level each year and was serving students in K-6. The budget appropriation for the program will also increase substantially in the next fiscal year (by over \$60 Million).

Current private and homeschool students will also now become eligible for the EdChoice scholarship program at the high school level if they are otherwise eligible based on their school zone. There was also an increase to the budget appropriation for the Cleveland voucher program by \$5.9 million in each of the next two fiscal years. Also notable is the move to a year-round application period where students can apply for the EdChoice underperforming schools voucher program as well as the income-based program year-round and receive a prorated scholarship. In addition to other private choice improvements, high-performing charter schools will also see a \$30 million funding increase per year, allocated on a per-student basis.

In addition to legislative work, SCO engaged in extensive outreach to families with information on the EdChoice Scholarship Program, as well as the other four state programs. For several years, the number of EdChoice-eligible students remained the same due to a prohibition on the state using performance measures to determine whether or not students were eligible. Through its legislative advocacy work in the previous general assembly, SCO ensured that this prohibition was lifted. As a result, the number of eligible students more than doubled.



Oklahoma

The existing Oklahoma Equal Opportunity Education Scholarship program has long been capped at \$5 million, with \$3.5 million initially set aside for private school scholarships and \$1.5 million available for donations to small rural school districts. State Senator Dave Rader proposed a dramatic expansion of the program that would increase the initial amount available for private school scholarships to \$10 million, while also raising the cap for public schools to \$10 million and making all school districts eligible for the program.

The Oklahoma State Senate passed Sen. Rader's bill with a 27-20 bipartisan vote. The Oklahoma House did not consider the bill prior to the end of session, but it will be ready for a floor vote when the House returns to session in February 2020.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Judy Paden

I discovered Kurt could attend a private school thanks to the Opportunity Scholarship Fund. Kurt is no longer a stressed-out little boy who dreads going to school. His overall mental, spiritual and physical health has improved immensely. He feels like he matters and that he is important. He is now in an environment he can trust and focus on being the best student and person he can be!



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Rian Slade-Bowers

While attending St. Stephen's and Bishop McDevitt, I felt that they had the same or similar expectations of me as my mom would. I was taught to share, respect and love others, strive to do my best, and help when I can. As a family, we've made sacrifices in order to succeed at home and school...Today I am a sophomore at Penn State Altoona. I am majoring in global and international studies with a minor in business.

Pennsylvania

In Pennsylvania, local advocates worked with legislative leadership to expand the state's two tax credit scholarship programs. During the 2016-17 school year, more than 50,000 tax credit scholarship applications were denied. So, legislation was proposed in the House and the Senate that would increase the tax credit caps by 25 percent every year if 90 percent of available credits were used. While neither bill ultimately made it through both chambers, allies were successful in adding a total of \$30 million through the budget process. This represents the largest funding increase to the program since 2013 and brings the total program size to \$190 million. This will provide as many as 15,000 new students the ability to attend the school of their choice.



South Dakota

Since 2016, South Dakota has had a \$2 million scholarship tax credit program for insurance premium taxes. Because the tax credit was limited to 80% of the donation and insurance companies were not able to immediately claim the credits, the program has struggled to raise donations. So, in 2019, AFC worked with our local allies to develop policy changes and a legislative strategy to make the tax credit more successful.

In March, the South Dakota legislature, with the encouragement of newly elected Governor Kristi Noem, agreed to raise the tax credit to 100% of the scholarship donation and to make the credits immediately available upon the quarterly payment of insurance premium taxes.

“In South Dakota we have both created and expanded this program by cooperating with public and private schools. And the message we have shared every step of the way is that we are about educating every child. We’ve tried to create opportunity for families no matter where they are on the education spectrum – public, private, or homeschool – we support educating all kids.”

- Senator Lee Shoenbeck



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Joi Taylor

There is power in opportunity. A chance to rewrite your family history. Picture this: A 17-year-old senior in high school who just had her first child, not having the slightest clue on what to do, but knowing how she lived her life should not be the same way her child lives. I am that child. I lived in a ZIP code where poverty ran rampant. New Hope school instilled in me the importance of hard work and servant

leadership, teaching me to dream bigger of what my future could actually hold. I want more students who are just like me to get a chance to break the chains of poverty. I truly believe that every family and student deserves to make the decision when it comes to their education and have access to any school in their community.

Tennessee

This year, Tennessee passed historic Education Savings Account (ESA) legislation that will provide private school options to 15,000 lower-income students in Memphis and Nashville. No single piece of legislation faced more scrutiny during the 2019 legislative session, with the final bill being voted on 13 times prior to being signed by Governor Bill Lee. AFC not only faced these hurdles head-on but maintained positive momentum and a narrative focused on the immediate need for bold reform.

AFC's success during the 2019 Tennessee General Assembly's term was a result of years of advocacy, legislative, and grassroots efforts, but can especially be traced back to the 2018 election season. Tennessee had a record amount of legislator turnover between 2018 and 2019, which presented AFC and other coalition partners with an opportunity to gain a school choice majority in both chambers.

Once legislators were seated, AFC launched its legislative education program in earnest, extolling the benefits of school choice and positioning ESAs as a necessary tool in the education reform toolbox. AFC drafted legislation and worked closely with the governor's administration, House and Senate leaders, and a broad coalition of advocacy nonprofits, schools, and families.

During the legislative session, AFC was called upon for testimony in committees and coordinated other key testimonials from independent school leaders, policy experts, parents, and scholarship recipients. As a complement to this testimony, AFC launched a statewide advocacy campaign that included radio advertising, digital targeting, phone banking, and school tours. The combined strategic actions that came as a result of AFC's leadership were crucial in this victory.



Washington, D.C.

The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) is due to be reauthorized by the end of 2019. Senator Ron Johnson, chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs (R-WI), which oversees the OSP, is the key champion of the reauthorization effort. He and longtime supporter Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) are negotiating for a permanent reauthorization of the program. A five-year reauthorization would be negotiated if a permanent reauthorization is not agreed upon. We are working closely with Senator Johnson and other Senate staff, however, this will ultimately have to be negotiated with the Democratic majority in the House, which added language to its FY 2020 appropriations bill that would undermine the program. This language must be removed from the final product.

The OSP, along with DC's charter schools and district schools, is currently funded at \$52.7 million (\$17.5 million per sector). The House of Representatives maintained the current level of funding at \$52.7 million in its version of the FY 2020 appropriations bill. We are working to increase this appropriation on the Senate side to at least \$60 million (\$20 million per sector) FY 2020. This is the minimum amount of funding needed for renewals and adding new students. In addition, there are other technical corrections we are seeking related to accreditation, administrator funding and tutoring assistance. However, these items would likely only be included in a formal reauthorization.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Yisehak Abraham

Growing up in a low-income household in D.C., my options of where to go to school were limited. It was not until the fourth grade that I became discontent in my school. The older I got, the less I felt stimulated or inspired. The environment seemed uncongenial for those who took their academics seriously. In the fifth grade, I had the privilege of being awarded a scholarship to attend a private school through the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). I believe in the success of such programs and of the positive impact that school choice can have on the lives of ambitious individuals and their families.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Kenya Green

As an African-American student coming from the impoverished inner city of Milwaukee, it was hard for me to get a quality education. Growing up, I was forced to go to multiple schools – I wasn't getting along with others and my mother had a pretty chaotic lifestyle. That was, until I heard about the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program through a presentation by HOPE Christian High School. When they told me it was

a tuition-based institute, I thought for sure my chances of receiving a quality education were over – until they told us about the choice program. None of my current success would have been possible without the choice program. Now I'm a college graduate pursuing a career in communications.



Wisconsin

In 2019, by a razor thin margin, former Department of Public Instruction Superintendent Tony Evers replaced school choice champion Scott Walker as governor. Evers, a public-school advocate and anti-school choice proponent, ensured that very little expansion of school choice would occur in Wisconsin. But, despite hostile rhetoric during the campaign, initial reports indicated that Evers would not push adverse school choice policy.

But this changed in late February when Evers quietly rolled out his budget with proposals taking direct aim at school choice, including: putting a moratorium on independent public charter schools, freezing enrollment in the Milwaukee, Racine, and Wisconsin parental choice programs, removing private school control over the application process for parental choice programs, ending the special needs scholarship program, repealing the private school tuition tax subtraction, requiring private schools in the parental choice program be fully accredited, and requiring all private school teachers at a choice school be licensed.

AFC-WI worked with the Joint Finance Committee and legislative leadership to strip all undesirable proposals out of the budget. Additionally, AFC-WI organized hundreds of parents to rally at the Capitol during Governor Evers' budget address and used resources such as Phone2Action to send thousands of pro-school choice messages to their representatives. A multifaceted digital campaign, in conjunction with these efforts, helped grow our advocate database by several thousand names and grew our social media presence by more than 50% in the first half of the year.

The budget went on to pass with no negative impact to the school choice program. Conversely, the budget passed with a substantial increase in K-12 funding. Currently the program is structured to grow organically with enrollment caps already increasing each year and voucher funding indexed to increase with public schools' funding. As passed, the Legislative Fiscal Bureau estimates that a voucher will increase several hundred dollars over the next biennium.

Federal Progress

Lobbying in support of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos's Education Freedom Scholarships proposal, the federal K-12 tax credit bill, has continued. Currently there are 10 cosponsors in the Senate (lead sponsor is Sen. Ted Cruz, R-TX) and 69 in the House (lead sponsor is Rep. Bradley Byrne, R-AL).

The only difference between the Cruz (Senate version) bill and the Byrne (House version) bill is annual funding. The Cruz bill is \$10 billion, with \$5 billion for K-12 and \$5 billion for apprenticeships; the Byrne bill is \$5 billion total.

The chances of this legislation passing in 2019 remain slim. But as Secretary Betsy DeVos and her team have noted, this is the first time something like this has ever been tried and the first time it will be inserted into the national debate. Moreover, because of the bill design and state flexibility in the use of funds, there is plenty for Democrats and organized labor to like in the bill. The only way it can pass is if it is added to a must-pass bill that includes other tax items. Should the bill pass, it will be up to AFC and our allies to ensure that states that opt in devote a significant percentage of these funds for private school choice.



In July, the American Federation for Children Future Leaders Fellows traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and discuss Education Freedom Scholarships.

The American Federation for Children and AFC Growth Fund seek to empower families, especially lower-income families, with the freedom to choose the best K–12 education for their children.

There are 55 publicly funded private school choice programs in 26 states plus D.C. and Puerto Rico.

Private school choice programs are serving more than half a million students today.

Since 2012, enrollment has more than doubled.

AFC's team has helped pass 37 new school choice laws in 19 states since 2009. Over this period, the work of AFC Growth Fund and local allies has produced a 185 percent increase in private school choice program enrollment.



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