



## Memorandum

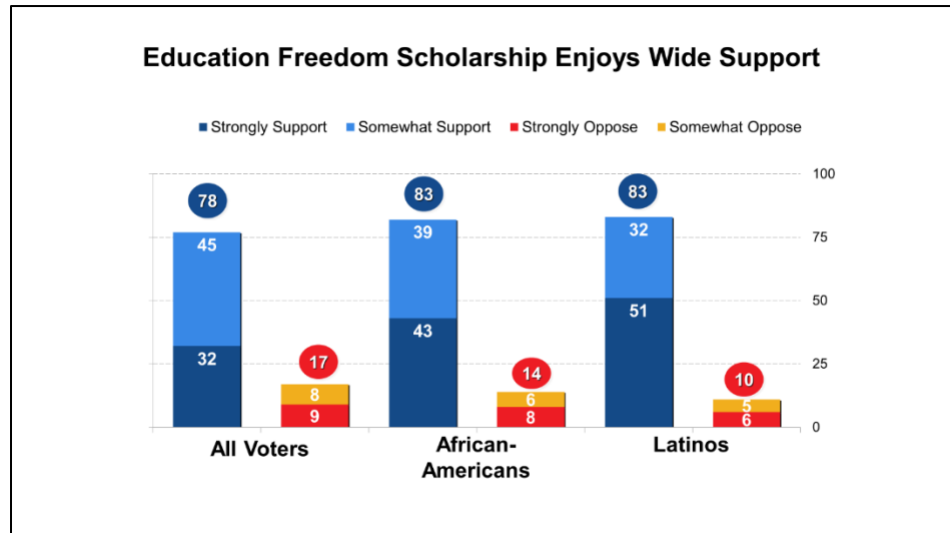
To: American Federation for Children  
From: Beck Research LLC  
Date: January 21, 2020

### Re: AFC’s Sixth Annual National School Choice Poll Results

Voter support for school choice continues to grow year after year. Over the past six years, enthusiasm for the general concept of school choice has remained highly favorable and stable, and specific school choice proposals have grown in support. Our sixth annual national survey among likely 2020 General Election voters illustrates that both the concept of school choice and the specific bill in front of Congress receive strong and diverse support across the country. This year, the concept of school choice is favored by a 69%-to-25% margin, which is the second year in a row with an increase, but support for Education Freedom Scholarship Legislation outpaces the general concept. An incredible 78% back the federal tax-credit scholarship program, including 83% of both African-Americans and Latinos.

#### Four out of Five Voters Back the Education Freedom Scholarships.

A federal tax-credit scholarship has very strong support, with 78% supporting the initiative. This year the description was updated to reflect the bill before Congress: “The Education Freedom Scholarship is a federal scholarship tax credit that allows individuals and businesses to donate to in-state non-profit scholarship



granting organizations that would provide scholarships for students to attend public, private, or career or technical schools of their choice.”<sup>1</sup> This more detailed description boosted overall support from 69% last year to 78% this year. Support is even higher among Latinos (83%) and African-Americans (83%). Three-quarters of all Democrats (77%) back the bill, including 67% of Democratic Primary voters.

<sup>1</sup> 2019 Language: “The scholarship tax credit allows companies or individuals to donate to non-profit organizations that award scholarships to eligible students to attend private schools.”

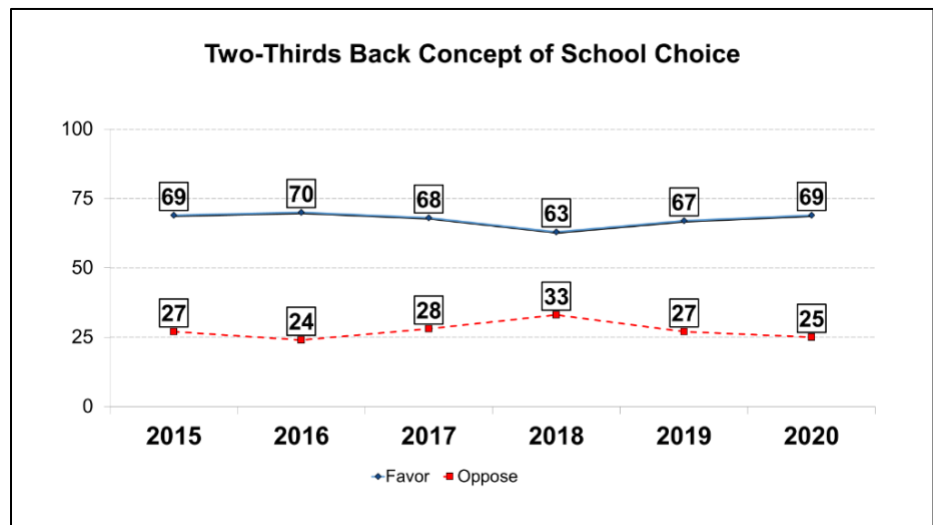
A majority of voters found all of the arguments in favor of the bill persuasive, but the top reasons to back the federal scholarship tax credit center on improving the quality of education and increasing access to school choice across the country:

- “A federal tax credit could help more than one million students access a quality education. The tax credit is a creative way to inject more education funds into educating children without raising other taxes” (mean of 6.9 out of 10, 69% provide a positive rating).
- “A federal tax credit could expand school choice to all 50 states so children across the country could have additional funds to seek a quality education” (mean of 6.9 out of 10%, 68% provide a positive rating).

**Support for School Choice Continues to Climb.** For the second year in a row, support for school choice has inched up. Support remains very high, with 69% of voters backing the concept of school choice, including 41% who strongly support the concept of choice, up from 67% last year and 63% in 2018.<sup>2</sup>

As we have seen in the past, a broad and deep coalition of voters back school choice:

- Latinos are very enthusiastic supporters of school choice. This year, 82% of Latinos support school choice, for one of the largest jumps in support (up from 73% last year).
- African-American support is steady (68% in 2020 and 67% in 2019).
- Support is high across all generations and age groups. Millennial/Gen Z support continues to be the highest, with 71% backing choice, but two-thirds of Generation X (69%), Baby Boomers (69%) and Silent Generation (66%) voters also favor school choice.
- School choice continues to enjoy bipartisan support, and support has increased among Republicans to 84% from 80% last year. Support among Independents (69%) and Democrats (57%) is unchanged since last year. Opinion is split among Democratic primary voters, with 48% supporting school choice and 44% opposing it.



**School Choice Has Many Faces.** School choice comes in many forms and support for all of the eight specific proposals tested this year remains steady. Three proposals are backed by 80% or more voters this year (Special Needs Scholarships, Active Military Scholarships, and Education Savings Accounts). For the fourth year in a row, support for Education Savings Accounts increased and now is one of the most popular forms of school choice. Overall, support for the broad set of school choice proposals continues to trend upwards and has remained stable as we look back across the six years.

<sup>2</sup> "Generally speaking, would you say you favor or oppose the concept of school choice? School choice gives parents the right to use the tax dollars designated for their child’s education to send their child to the public or private school which best serves their needs."

Support for Individual School Choice Proposals (Support – Oppose)						
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Special Needs Scholarships	83% - 14%	83% - 15%	83% - 13%	83% - 14%	86% - 12%	83% - 13%
Active Military Scholarships	N/A	N/A	N/A	77% - 20%	79% - 18%	80% - 17%
Education Savings Accounts	66% - 29%	65% - 29%	69% - 24%	75% - 19%	78% - 16%	80% - 14%
Public Charter Schools	76% - 20%	75% - 21%	74% - 22%	72% - 25%	74% - 22%	70% - 26%
Scholarship Tax Credit	70% - 26%	74% - 23%	73% - 23%	65% - 30%	68% - 28%	65% - 29%
School vouchers (any school)*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	65% - 31%
Virtual learning	N/A	55% - 42%	59% - 37%	55% - 40%	60% - 37%	61% - 34%
School vouchers (only private or religious)*	49% - 49%	53% - 46%	51% - 47%	47% - 49%	53% - 44%	53% - 43%

\* In previous years, school vouchers were described as “allow[ing] individual parents to use public funds to pay for tuition at private or religious schools.” This year, a new, more generic question was added to capture the sentiment of the term “school vouchers” by probing support for “School vouchers that allow families to send their child to any school they deem best.” These two questions were split and asked to half of the respondents.

**Parents desire to have different options for their children.** According to [federal data](#), 82% of school age children currently attend district public schools and 69% of our survey respondents report having their children or grandchildren attend district public schools. However, only 47% of parents in this survey indicated they would prefer to send their child to a district public school, while 50% of parents would prefer a different option. Private school is the top choice (41%), followed by public charter schools and (7%), home school (1%).

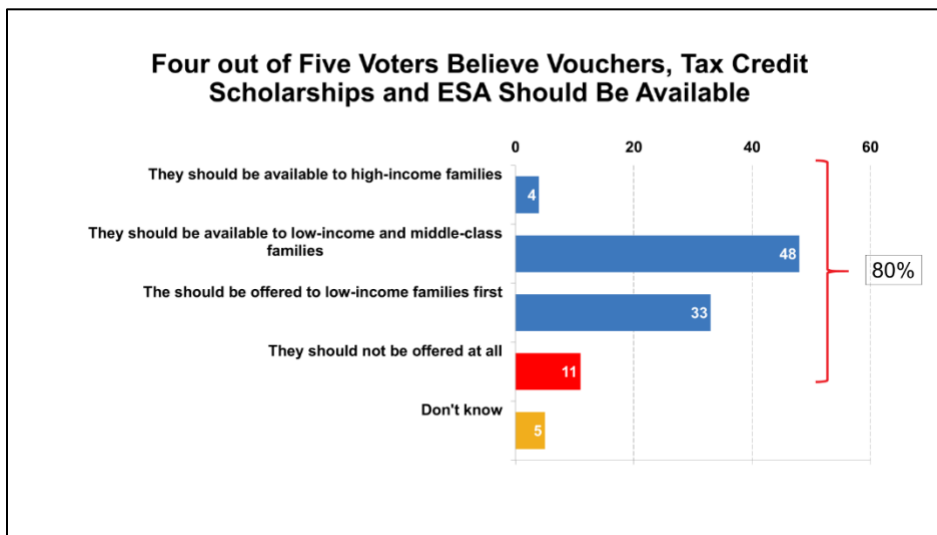
**Academics and Culture Influences School Choice.** As a follow-up, parents were asked, “If your child is currently in public school, why would you prefer a different option?” Respondents volunteered a range of academic issues (52%), religious education (16%), cultural issues (14%), and safety issues (8%) as the top reasons to pick a different option. Parents were most likely to highlight the quality of education (26%) and kids’ ability to focus on their strengths at charter schools as top academic draws.

**Great Schools Need Both High-Quality Teachers and A Safe Learning Environment.** Voters prioritize a wide range of elements when asked about the two most important things for selecting a great school. High quality and experienced teachers top the list (50%), followed by a safe learning environment (30%). Student individual academic progress (18%), innovative approach to learning (16%), less government involvement (15%), and high school graduation rates (15%) also are important elements. African-American voters disproportionately prioritize high school graduation rates while both African-Americans and Latinos point to student’s individual academic progress as an important aspect of any great school.

**Voters Are Wary of Candidates Who Would Eliminate All Federal Public Charter School Funding.** A majority of voters, including a majority of Democratic primary voters, are less likely to vote for a presidential candidate who wanted to eliminate all federal public charter school funding. Overall, 58% of voters would be less likely to vote for a candidate with Senator Elizabeth Warren’s position, but the policy also is unpopular with Democratic primary voters (56% less likely) and even less popular among African-Americans (62% less likely) and Latinos (65% less likely). This stance is more likely to hurt Warren than help her since just 11% of Democratic primary

voters report that they would be much more likely to support a candidate who would eliminate all federal funding for public charters.

**Families Are Willing to Make Significant Sacrifices for School Choice.** For the first time last year, we asked about the sacrifices parents were willing to make so their children could go to a private school for free or to a different public school. Voters indicated in this year's survey they are willing to cut out all eating out or take-out from restaurants (49%), stop drinking coffee or caffeine for a year (48%), drive their child 25 miles each way to school (47%), move 10 miles away (39%), have their child ride the bus 45 minutes each way (37%), move to a much smaller home (34%), change jobs (31%), or sell their car (20%).



**Voters want Lower-Income and Middle-Class Families to Access School Choice Policies.**

Four out of five voters (80%) believe that publicly-funded vouchers, tax credit scholarships and Education Savings Accounts should be available. A plurality (48%) say that they should be available to low-income and middle-class families, with another one-third (33%) believing that low-income families should have priority. Only four

percent of voters indicated that educational choice policies should be made available to high-income families.

### Conclusions

- Looking back over the past six years, support for school choice continues to grow and evolve. Year after year, school choice enjoys a strong appeal that cuts across political and demographic groups.
- Support for a federal proposal remains high, and support for specific educational choice options have been stable or increasing.
- Families have indicated that they want educational options for their own kids and that they're willing to make sacrifices in their own lives to access those options.
- Voters believe that lower-income and middle-class families should be the main beneficiaries of these reforms.
- School choice's strong, consistent support signals that candidates should embrace these education proposals in 2020 and beyond – and certainly shouldn't call for abolishing options that families already access.

### Methodology

The survey fielded January 7-13, 2020, among a total of 1,275 likely November 2020 voters. The national survey among 800 voters was supplemented with 75 additional African-American voters, 175 additional Latino voters, 75 additional Millennials, 75 additional Democratic primary voters, and 75 additional Republican primary voters. Millennials are defined as likely voters born between 1981 and 1996. Generation Z is defined as 1997 and after. Interviews were conducted via live callers on landline and cell phones and in English and Spanish. The base sample margin of error is +/- 3.5%.