

PROGRESS

AMERICAN FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN

2021 LEGISLATIVE IMPACT REPORT



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Dear Friends,

Once again, the American Federation for Children and our allies, partners, and grantees realized historic victories in the fight to support and expand educational opportunities around the country. This year, our efforts helped pave the way for the school choice movement's best year ever.

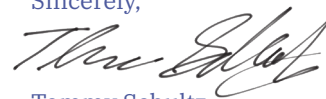
Twenty-one states passed legislation to create, expand, or improve school choice programs this year. AFC successfully engaged with emboldened lawmakers and advocates to achieve remarkable gains toward our long-term goal of delivering school choice to every family in America.

Support for school choice has never been higher. This year's school choice success is representative of the millions of parents and students who persevered through the difficulties of the pandemic and want control over their education. COVID-19 brought the realities of a one-size-fits-all education system to the forefront of the national discourse, and we helped mobilize that awareness to expand educational opportunities for approximately 165,000 additional students with new scholarship funding of \$899 million annually.

As we reflect on this year's success, we must consider the weight of our role as advocates on behalf of millions of American students. As exhibited powerfully through the testimonies of our Future Leaders Fellows and Voices for Choice, the work we do dramatically impacts the lives of children all over the country. We must remain steadfast in our commitment to expanding opportunity.

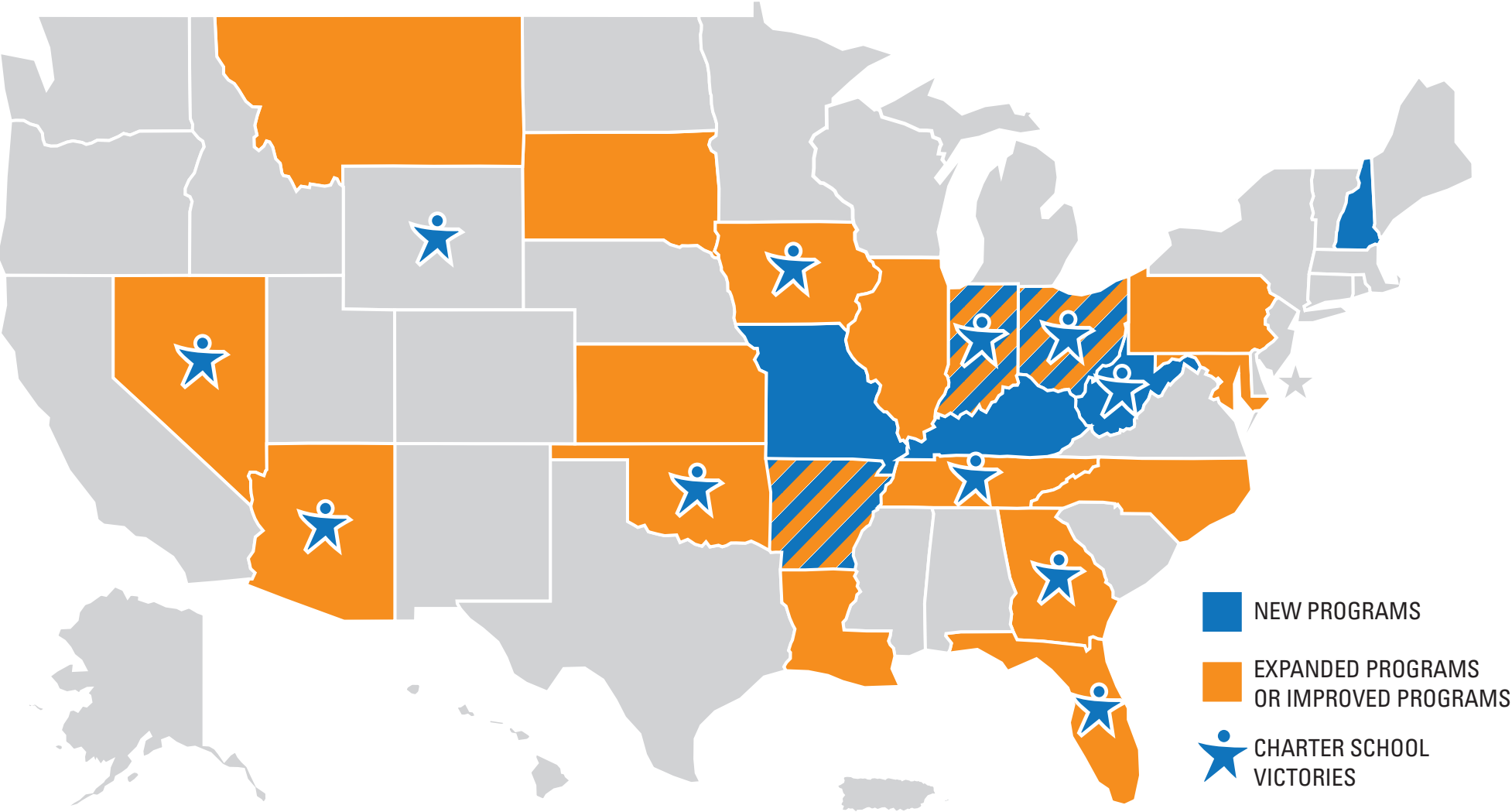
The American Federation for Children remains committed to our mission to ensure that every family, especially lower-income families, has the freedom to choose the best K-12 education for their children. Thank you for your enduring support in the pursuit of this goal.

Sincerely,



Tommy Schultz
Chief Executive Officer
American Federation for Children

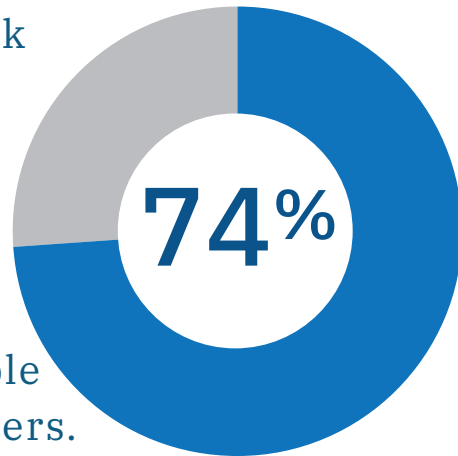
2021 School Choice Victories Map



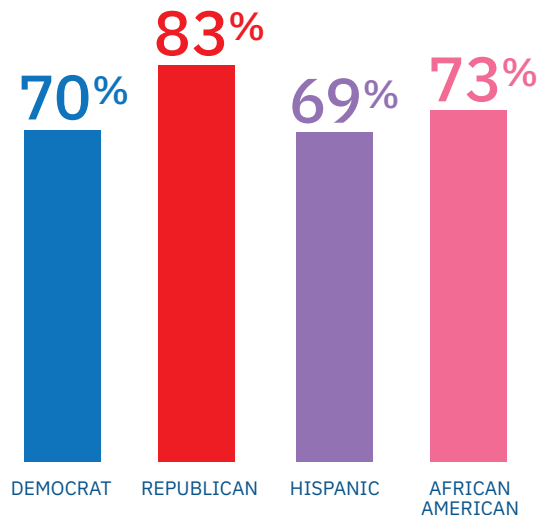
School Choice Support Reaches All-Time High

School choice programs allow families to take their children's education dollars to the approved education provider of their choosing – be it traditional public schools, public charter schools, private schools, virtual learning, or homeschooling.

74% of voters back school choice, the highest level of support ever recorded from major AFC national polling with a sample size above 1700 voters.



Compared to similar polling conducted in April 2020, overall support has increased from 64% to 74%; public-school parent support has increased from 68% to 80%; Democrat support has increased from 59% to 70%.



State Pages

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



Jade Foster

Jade is quiet and reserved, but she is also kind-hearted and smart. We chose SMIS because her previous school had smaller student-to-teacher ratios, and she wanted to continue that at SMIS. I like how the teachers always go above and beyond to help her when she struggles.

My child is in her second year of choir, which she loves. It has helped to build up confidence in herself and she enjoys it. I have noticed that my child's confidence in herself, has risen drastically. Her grades are much better than they were at her previous school, and she enjoys the work that she is given. Although she is quiet, she is excited to attend school and class every day. As a parent, you could not ask for anything more.

I believe that all families should be given the chance to allow their children to attend SMIS. The student-to-teacher ratio is smaller, which means your child gets the one-on-one attention that they need. They have sports and clubs, and they never allow any child to feel left out.

School choice means that my child is given the best possible education that this school has to offer. Because the teachers that care deeply for their students and their futures, I know my child will graduate with all the tools necessary to succeed in the world and become an asset to our community.



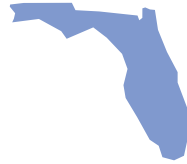
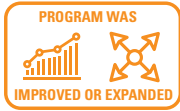
Arizona

AFC started the year with the aggressive goal to dramatically expand the existing Education Savings Account (ESA) program. This proposal would have expanded ESA eligibility to over 700,000 new students from low-income families, making it the largest expansion in Arizona state history. Removing the 100-day rule, a stipulation that required a student to attend a public school for 100 days before applying for an ESA, was also a priority.

The ESA expansion ultimately failed, but through our efforts, other important policy improvements were made to the ESA program – including the reduction, and in some cases, outright repeal, of the 100-day rule, and permitting low-income students who attend failing schools to be immediately eligible to receive an ESA. These reforms will help those who are most in need to access an ESA scholarship right away. Additionally, we succeeded in increasing the cap on Arizona's special scholarship needs program, Lexie's Law, from \$5 million to \$6 million.

This effort was undertaken through the help of a powerful and unprecedented bipartisan coalition of allies, including prominent leaders from the faith community, the Black and Hispanic communities, the Arizona Police Association, the NFL Alumni Association, and over two dozen legislators. We expect that, through our work of organizing this coalition, major ESA expansion is right around the corner.

Separate legislation created a \$30 million transportation modernization program for charter school families. This program will help charters to develop new transportation solutions for their students, as well as provide parents with direct grants to cover school transportation costs.



Florida

Florida's legislative session included decisive expansions and improvements to existing school choice programs.

In May, Governor Ron DeSantis signed House Bill 7045, which will streamline the choice programs in Florida by consolidating the John M. McKay Scholarship and the Gardiner Scholarship, which focus on special-needs students, with the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program to make one single, less-confusing program for students with unique abilities. This new ESA program will be called the Family Empowerment Scholarship for Students with Unique Abilities.

Additionally, the Family Empowerment Scholarship program was expanded, increasing the eligibility threshold from 260% to 375% of the federal poverty level (FPL) while keeping the scholarship priority on foster children, out-of-home care children, military families, and families with income under 185% FPL. This income expansion is an important step for the school choice movement in Florida, moving toward expanded educational options for all families, regardless of income.

Finally, the bill also increased the scholarship award amounts for all means tested programs from 95% of per-public-student funding to 100%, and repeals the prerequisite that students must have previously attended a public school. Separate legislation, Senate Bill 1028, authorizes Florida state universities and colleges to solicit and sponsor charter school applications in certain cases. The bill also authorizes charter schools to build career and professional development academies that help students invest in their future.

With all these improvements, we anticipate that an additional 100,000 Floridian students will have access to school choice in the upcoming year.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Bentley Myers

Bentley is a young boy with a very big personality. He can make any situation into something fun due to his creativity and positive attitude. Since the moment he was able to attend pre-school, Bentley has been eager to go to school. His love for school has only increased since entering Victory Christian Academy. He says his favorite things about school are "fun Fridays," his friends, and his teacher, Mrs. Young. Bentley even asks his Nana if she can pick him up later, so he can play with his friends after school.



Aundrea, Bentley's mother, chose Victory Christian Academy for her child because she saw the positive effect it had on her cousin. After watching her cousin thrive and graduate, she decided on Victory for Bentley. She had this to say: I never have to worry if my son is getting enough attention. The school always discusses his progress and what he needs to work on with us. I know for a fact that he is loved and cared for when he goes to school. I think school choice is an extremely important option to have. Everybody wants what is best for their child, and I don't believe that my ZIP code should determine whether or not my child gets the best education for him.

School choice means being able to make the best choice for your children. The ability to ensure that your children are getting the education to which they are entitled should be a given. No parent should have to compromise on something as important as their child's learning.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Samoria Milton

My name is Samoria, and I'm in the 7th grade at Bright Futures Academy. I like the golf program we have here. I like the after-school programs, and the technology room. I like computers. I like coding.

Before this school, I went to a public school. My family chose to send me to Bright Futures because my cousin went here. I have other cousins that went here as well.

My family wanted me to do things in the community, and my old school wasn't doing that. We couldn't go anywhere or express ourselves more. Being at Bright Futures has made me come out of my shell a little bit. I feel comfortable here.

I love my teachers. My favorite subject is math. I also like my English class, computers, my Bible class, and my Georgia history class.

After high school, I want to study philosophy. I was thinking Georgia State or Michigan State. I want to go to grad school and get my education degree and become a professor. I like asking questions. I like knowing things. I like being informed about what I'm doing. I like research, like when we get projects, so I know what I'm saying and how I'm going to say it.

Policies and scholarship programs are important because I know we wouldn't be able to afford this school otherwise. I was thankful to be accepted to Bright Futures. Without the scholarship, going here wouldn't be possible for me.

A certain ZIP code shouldn't determine where a student goes to school. You should have the best education possible.



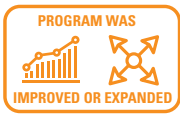
Georgia

AFC pursued the expansion of school choice in Georgia on many fronts this year.

As the result of significant involvement by our team, Georgia significantly expanded its Special Needs Scholarship Program this legislative session. Senate Bill 47 will widen the pool of eligible special-needs students by including those with a 504 plan and other specific conditions. As a result, we estimate that as many as 50,000 additional children will have the opportunity to choose the education provider that's right for them, making this a tenfold expansion for Georgia families.

Our other legislative efforts were not ultimately passed, but laid important strategic groundwork for next year. Our bills to establish Georgia's first ESA program and to increase the giving limits for the tax credit program made significant progress this session, picking up momentum among Republicans and finding some key supporters among our Democrat allies. This legislation will continue to move forward next year.

Lastly, this session, AFC also helped pass Senate Bill 59, which increases per-pupil funding for public charter schools, gives teachers greater access to the State Health Benefit Plan, and requires local school districts to make facilities available to those schools or provide a financial stipend for those costs. Ultimately, it's a move toward greater funding equity for charters in Georgia.



Indiana

Through the hard work of our in-state partners at Hoosiers for Quality Education (HQE), AFC's efforts in Indiana resulted in multiple landmark victories. Legislation was passed to create a brand-new ESA program for students with disabilities and to expand the existing voucher and tax credit programs. By passing this legislation as part of the state budget, AFC met all three of our primary goals in Indiana this year.

The Education Saving Account program will become available for students with disabilities in the 2022-2023 school year. With a \$10 million cap, the ESA program will be worth 90% of per-pupil state funding, plus some ancillary allocations for special conditions.

The expansions of the Choice Scholarship Program voucher and the Tax Credit Scholarship program included an increase in program eligibility to 300% of the Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL). Vouchers will be worth 90% of state per-pupil funding and tax credit scholarships will be worth up to 100% of tuition and fees. Both will greatly expand access to school choice for both low-income and middle-class families. This is one of the highest income thresholds of any school choice program in the country and represents the important step of protecting lower-income families' access to educational choice, while also expanding so that all families may direct their students' educations, regardless of income.

Additionally, the bill established a progressive cap on the tax credit program, increasing the limit by one million dollars in each of the next fiscal years. We estimate that as many as 10,000 new students could be served by these programs in the coming two years. Indiana will look to continue this success next year as a national leader in the school choice movement.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Jair Adams

In the state of Indiana, students are forced to go to the school that their ZIP code routes into. Whether that school has a good rating does not factor into that decision. Many parents are forced to send their children to a failing public school if they cannot afford an alternative school.



Many of the public schools in Indiana have a D or F overall school rating. The right to a good education should not be reserved for just the wealthy people in society. Everyone deserves the right to a good education. This problem especially impacts minorities because of the lack of opportunities in those communities. The parents of minority students sometimes struggle to make ends meet and cannot afford to also pay for their children's education. They should not be forced to send their kids to a failing school because of that. That will only continue the cycle of minorities struggling to make it in life.

The voucher program affected me and my family directly. My mom met all the requirements for the voucher program so she thought she would apply and give it a chance. In my eighth-grade year, my mother sent my sister and me to Heritage Christian School. It was a tough adjustment to the academic workload because the school we came from was failing and not teaching the proper things during class.

I never thought about going to college before I became acquainted with people who wanted to succeed in life. They never thought about not going to college and pushed me to become a better person with positive thoughts.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Gabby Chiodo

I came to private schools to be challenged academically. I went to a rural public school that did not offer advanced courses. My mom knew I needed a better learning environment so she, along with my dad, sent my siblings and me to private schools.

My parents both worked jobs that were not very high-paying, but they could manage the tuition cost for a while. This is when the Catholic Tuition Organization stepped in and offered my family financial assistance. Sadly, my mom passed away in January of 2019. While her departure left my entire family heartbroken, I will be able to fulfill my mom's dream of receiving private education in May.

I am so thankful I didn't have to change schools during a time in which everything else was changing. I will be the last of three children to graduate from the private-school system, and I wholeheartedly believe in the right to choose your educational path. Government support for tuition assistance organizations is critical to incorporate in advocacy for school choice.



Iowa

This year, the school choice movement was able to both secure historic wins for Iowa's families and lay the groundwork for future success.

Hopes for a broad school choice package, bolstered by the support of Governor Kim Reynolds, were high going into this year's legislative session. Earlier in the year, the governor proposed an ESA program specifically targeted to students in failing schools. Despite emphatic support in the Senate, the bill stalled in the House. Eventually, the two chambers agreed to set aside the proposed ESA and instead, dramatically expand the existing tax credit scholarship program.

This bill expands the School Tuition Organization Tax Credit program from \$15 million to \$20 million, and increases the tax credit from 65% to 75% of donation amounts. We estimate that, as a result, roughly 1,500 additional students will have access to school choice in Iowa. This is the largest expansion in the history of the state's tax credit program.

Additionally, legislation was passed to create independent charter schools, expand open enrollment, and double the parental tuition tax credit. Given these significant improvements, and the governor's aspiration for an ESA program, we hope to return with substantial momentum next session.



Kentucky

Kentucky became the 28th state with a school choice program this year after the legislature voted to override Governor Beshear's veto of HB 563. The legislation created a \$25 million tax credit funded Education Savings Account program, which will be available to students whose family incomes equal 175% or less of the Free and Reduced-Price Lunch threshold. As a result of this legislation, private-school choice will become available to students in counties with populations that exceed 90,000, and an expansive list of other educational services will be covered statewide for public, private, and homeschool students. House Bill 563 also created an open enrollment policy for public schools statewide, starting in 2022.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Anna Carson

Becoming an educator was a deliberate choice. Being a student most of my life instilled a love for learning, and I knew being a lifelong learner was a desire and joy. As I grew and matured, I realized that education was a great joy in my life. I loved learning, growing, children, and guiding.



Education is not just book knowledge or passing a test. True education is growing, developing, and applying what I have learned within the context of a student/teacher relationship. What a privilege and honor to grow and guide others within that context.

The mission of our school is why I am here. The mission of the Christian Academy is to develop students' hearts for God, so they grow, as Jesus did in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and man.

The ability to have an education of choice should not be limited by dollars. Educational choice should be a freedom and opportunity for all students, regardless of income. I am blessed and thankful to be an educator. It is hard work, but heart work is hard work.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



London Landry

London is a very independent student. She loves her school. She enjoys science, soccer, swimming, and anything outdoors. In her free time, she enjoys being with her family.

I chose Hynes Charter for London for multiple reasons. Academics are number one for me. I have older relatives that attended Hynes. It's a structured school with a family atmosphere. It is in a great location as well! All students are cared for and respected.

They are all treated like family. The staff and teachers work hard and support the students to help them to achieve all their goals. The staff works hard to make things happen, and they hold themselves and their colleagues responsible for greatness. All children deserve a great education. Income shouldn't be a factor at all. Parents should be able to choose a school depending on what they want for their child. Everyone has different needs and schools should meet those needs.



Louisiana

Our efforts in Louisiana were centered around a comprehensive education reform package that included several school choice bills. We were ultimately successful in passing all our major focus bills, a big success for the students of Louisiana.

House Bill 280 removes a stipulation in the Louisiana Scholarship Program that private schools must operate for more than two years before accepting a significant portion of voucher students. With this improvement, the scholarship program can grow at increasing rates and ultimately serve more students. The bill also implements new accountability standards for schools taking part in the program. The Louisiana Scholarship Program currently serves more than 6,000 students.

House Bill 85 creates a brand-new Education Savings Account for students currently underperforming on literacy standards. Falling literacy rates are a crisis in Louisiana, especially after the crippling conditions of COVID-19 and resulting learning loss. This bill will put \$1,000 ESA scholarships into the hands of public-school students to assist in their remediation efforts.

Lastly, House Bill 211 creates more opportunities for kids through the expansion of public-school choice, creating more flexibility in the transfer application process. Students who are enrolled in D- or F-rated public schools will have the ability to transfer to higher-performing schools with capacity.

In addition to this year's success, we laid major groundwork for the future. One of our bills, which ran out of time in the legislative process, intended to create an ESA program for military and foster families, or students in D or F public schools without the option to attend a higher-performing school. Due to the time constraints of a shorter fiscal session, the House passed a resolution demanding the development of a statewide ESA plan by the Louisiana Department of Education. We anticipate that similar legislation will be authored in the 2022 regular legislative session.



Missouri

After the promising results of the 2020 elections, our hopes grew that the Missouri Legislature would pass landmark Education Savings Account legislation this year.

Working extensively with our local allies at the Opportunity Trust and the Children's Education Council of Missouri, and thanks to the dedication of the House Speaker and Senate Majority Leader, AFC was successful in creating a \$25 million ESA program that will award thousands of students with scholarships of \$6,350 annually.

This is the first private school choice program in Missouri, and it will open the door to educational freedom for approximately 4,000 students. Students with special needs and those in families making less than 200% of the income guidelines for Free and Reduced-Price Lunch are eligible for an ESA.

It is invigorating to see our efforts so powerfully pay dividends for Missouri's children. We are excited that in the fall of 2022, thousands of disadvantaged students in Missouri will be able to choose the education that is best for them.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Camellia Peterson

Camellia Peterson, a product of school choice herself, is a homeschooling parent who enjoys the freedom that homeschooling allows. Camellia's parents understood the need for parental choice, moving to the Joplin area for the sole purpose of enrolling Camellia in a particular private school.



"It required a lot of sacrifice," she said. "We didn't have a lot of money by any means, but it allowed me to work at my own pace, and I was able to graduate early." For her own children, Camellia decided homeschooling was the best option.

"I wanted to have a little more control over what they were getting, not only in terms of curriculum, but also in terms of their worldview," she said, noting that homeschooling is a commitment in terms of both of time and finances. "Not everybody can homeschool. That's not an option for everybody. We need all of the different options open to people because for some people, public school is what they need, and for other people, that's not going to work. They need private options, they need charter school options, and for families that can homeschool, we need them to be able to choose to do that too." Camellia supports ESAs to help parents afford to choose the education system that works best.

"I think that parents need more options and more freedom to be able to determine what is best for their child," she said. "Parents know their child. I mean, you are your child's best teacher, and if parents see that your child is not learning for whatever reason in the school that they're in, you should be able to make a different decision."



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Jayleesha Cooper

Without school choice, I wouldn't be where I am now. I'm very invested in it. I started in Omaha Public Schools. They're great schools, but weren't the right fit for me. My mom worked multiple jobs so I could go to a private school. I was eventually able to attend Holy Name Catholic School. From there, I was able to go to Duchesne Academy, where I am now.

I would not have been able to do that without the hard work my mom put in. But sometimes parents can't work that many jobs. Kids need a backup option where they can get funds to be able to have a chance to better their education and go to the school that's right for them.

I went to the school choice rally in Lincoln in 2017. I testified before the legislature about why school choice is important. I told my story to try to motivate them and show them that it is affecting kids and we deserve a better education.

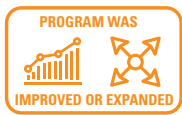
After high school, I plan to attend the University of Chicago to study sociology and political science. Then, I'd like to go to law school and become a lawyer. I want to be a lawyer because I want to be able to help people. I want to do pro-bono as well as criminal justice to help reform our system.

Nebraska

Our efforts in Nebraska are focused on one primary goal: passing the Opportunity Scholarship Act, which will create the first school choice program of any kind in Nebraska. The legislation proposed would have created a \$10 million tax credit scholarship program to benefit low-income and working families in Nebraska. The state does not currently have any public charter schools or private school choice programs, so establishing a tax credit program would be a major win for Nebraska families.

Unfortunately, despite the support of the governor and 16 cosponsors, the measure fell four votes short in overcoming a filibuster. However, our actions produced significant gains for our coalition. Two Democrats emerged as passionate and outspoken supporters of school choice, and they will be crucial in our future efforts.

We are focused on building meaningful relationships that will support our efforts in upcoming sessions. We continue to invest in grassroots engagement through partnership with the faith community, the Institute for Justice, and the Nebraska Parents Coalition. Our affiliated political action committee plans to support strong school choice supporting candidates whom we hope will help us get this bill over the finish line.



Nevada

This legislative session produced key victories on both the private and charter school fronts. Our team in Nevada was successful in expanding the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program to new students by eliminating a harmful provision that stated that SGOs must budget for students through high school. This is accompanied by a nearly one hundred percent increase in the program's funding cap, from \$13.3 million to \$22.8 million over the biennium. We estimate that this expansion will result in 1,500 additional students having access to tax credit scholarships.

Furthermore, we were fruitful in protecting charter school programs and obtaining a one-time \$15 million federal appropriation that can be used for a variety of purposes, including capital funding for Title I charter schools. All of these gains were achieved despite an incredibly challenging political environment.

These wins were made possible through the valuable support of our allies, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, the Charter School Association of Nevada, ExcelinEd, Power2Parent, and countless parents, school leaders, and educators.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Dilia Rodriguez

My son went to first grade last year at a magnet school. He completed kindergarten in a virtual school due to school closings. His teacher was always very patient and loving with my son.

He learned to read and do mathematics virtually. He reads at a third-grade level, and his math is at a second-grade level. He had elective classes like Spanish, art, and music, subjects that he likes very much. The teachers motivated him to keep going, and although at first, it was difficult for both of us, we managed to finish the year well.

I like magnet schools because they help children learn, and I think this experience was very beneficial for my son. This year, we have high expectations, hoping that in-person learning works even better than virtual school. As parents, we have always tried to support our children, motivate and encourage them to seek more, and, above all, learn that learning is the best tool they can have. I firmly believe that everyone should have school options that help our children reach their goals.

Good education should not be exclusive to a group. It must be available to everyone, and parents know what is best and what works the most for their children. It is the responsibility of parents to search, explore, ask questions, and do everything possible so that their children go to the best school, where they feel accepted, loved, and valued as individuals.





VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Melanie Osborne

My name is Melanie Osborne, and I have five daughters; four of them are quadruplets. I remember back when my oldest, now a high-school senior, was in the seventh grade, and her sisters were in the third grade. I knew my oldest, Allaura, was not getting what she needed in the setting she was in (traditional

public school), and I was concerned. I just knew that she needed more. I felt she was underserved because she likes to be pushed and it just was not happening.

We applied for the Opportunity Scholarship, and we got picked. That was phenomenal, and it has been life-changing. I could see a difference in my children within months of being at the school. This all happened because I was able to get access to the school that I knew could meet her and her sisters' needs. One of her young sisters has special needs, and we have the Children with Disabilities Grant for her as well. This has not only been life-changing, but it has also been a lifesaver.

For our family being able to choose our choice of school, that met our needs – it has made a world of difference. Every parent should be able to do what's best for their child because as a parent, you know what is best for your children. I ask people across our state to support these scholarships, and I urge our lawmakers to keep this program going for kids that currently have it and to expand it to reach more families across our state.



North Carolina

In close coordination with our in-state partner, Partners for Educational Freedom in North Carolina (PARTNERS), we focused on riding momentum to expand and improve school choice programs in the state once again.

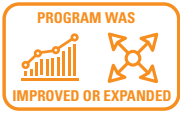
The passage and signing of the state's first budget bill under Governor Cooper comes as a big legislative win for school choice in North Carolina. The General Assembly successfully passed the bipartisan bill in November, which includes the following measures to support and expand school choice in North Carolina:

Opportunity Scholarship Program:

- Expands the Opportunity Scholarship Program for eligible families from 150% to 175% of Free and Reduced Lunch.
- Moves the Opportunity Scholarship Program from a flat \$4,200 to 90% of the Average Daily Membership (state cost to educate a child in a traditional North Carolina public school), which is approximately \$5,900.
- Allocates up to \$500,000 for the state agency (NCSEAA) to contract with a non-profit for scholarship marketing, outreach, and implementation.

Special Needs Scholarship Grant Programs:

- Creates a forward-funding component for the Special Needs Scholarship, similar to what is already in place for the Opportunity Scholarship.
- Increases funding for the Disabilities Grant by \$5.95M and increases funding for the ESA program by \$9.65M for the 2021-22 school year.
- Combines the Children with Disabilities Grant and Education Savings Account program into one program: NC Personal Education Student Accounts for Children with Disabilities, with over \$31.6M for 2022-23.



Ohio

AFC's in-state partner, the School Choice Ohio Alliance, and other allies have once again made significant progress in the fight to expand school choice in Ohio. The biggest victories were the expansion of the existing voucher programs and the creation of a new tax credit scholarship program. Priorities were successfully packaged into the state budget, which includes a plethora of measures to provide more equitable opportunities and funding to all students, regardless of the type of school they attend.

Legislation increased scholarship amounts for the programs, including an increase in the Ed Choice and Cleveland Scholarship Programs from \$4,650 to \$5,500 per pupil for K-8 students, and \$6,000 to \$7,500 per pupil for high-school students. A mechanism was included to increase scholarship amounts as public-school funding rises. The bill also directly funds all the scholarship programs as part of the funding formula, an improvement that will protect it from future attempted cuts. There were also notable expansions to program eligibility, including siblings of current scholarship students, foster children, and students entering high school who become eligible for scholarships in the upcoming school year.

In addition, the bill creates a multi-component tax credit scholarship program, including credits for donations made to Scholarship Granting Organizations and also for parents paying tuition to certain types of private schools.

Lastly, significant gains were made on the charter school front. The budget bill invests \$54 million annually in high-quality charter schools and doubles the facilities appropriation for brick-and-mortar charters, while also removing restrictions on charter school locations, further opening the doors for choice expansions.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Aleah Gibson

For some, private school is a family tradition and esteemed privilege. For others, it may be the only choice one has to ensure a quality and meaningful education.

I learned of the Ohio Educational Choice Scholarship through a friend at church. When I first heard of it, I thought it was too good to be true. There was no way that all this free money would be available to hundreds of students to give them a better education. But it was true, and our family is so grateful for the scholarship. Aleah attends Shepherd Christian School and her experience has truly been phenomenal.

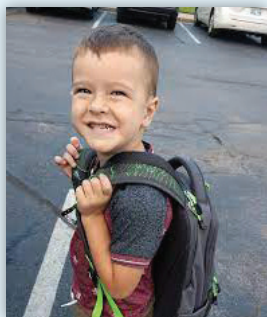
We like the smaller class sizes and the academic benefits of being in a private school. Aleah has loved every single teacher she has had at Shepherd. We know beyond a doubt that private school has made a difference in Aleah's life. Her character is extraordinary. Because it's a Christian private school, they are teaching her spiritual values that we also embrace at home.

We feel very fortunate to receive the Ohio Ed Choice Scholarship each year. We know that without it, we may have had to make some very tough decisions as we endeavor to give our children the best possible school experience.





VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Gabe Sandoval

We moved to Oklahoma two years ago after leaving active duty in the Marine Corps. My husband and I are both veterans. Our son, Gabe, had just turned four, and we were more than a little concerned about the quality of education he would receive in the public school system.

We found out about the Opportunity Scholarship Fund (OSF) and started looking at it more seriously

when our son, who can already read short sentences, kept asking to go to school.

It is amazing to see how much Gabe is growing and learning at a school that values and encourages hard work and collaboration between teachers and families. Without the OSF, there is no way we would have been able to provide our son with such a fantastic start to his formal education.

Every family deserves the same opportunity to choose where to send their children to school. Our ZIP code should not determine the quality of education that Gabriel receives. We are beyond thankful that the Opportunity Scholarship Fund has empowered us to choose a school that best meets Gabe's needs, and provides him with the best opportunities to develop as a whole person – academically, athletically, emotionally, and spiritually.

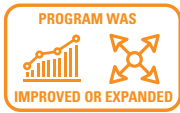


Oklahoma

Our legislative efforts in Oklahoma were focused on two primary goals: raising the cap on the tax credit scholarship program and eliminating the public-school attendance requirement in Oklahoma's special-needs voucher program.

Despite vocal support from leadership, both goals encountered procedural challenges throughout the legislative session. Our bill amending the special-needs voucher program was not voted down, but didn't make it out of committee by the legislative deadline. However, with some political creativity, AFC successfully addressed the funding cap by passing Senate Bill 1080 as part of the state budget.

The bill expands the existing funding cap for the Equal Opportunity Education Scholarship by more than 700 percent, from \$3.5 million to \$25 million. This is the largest expansion in the history of the program, and a huge win for Oklahoma families. We estimate that this massive expansion will result in 1,500 additional students being able to choose the education that's best for them.



Tennessee

The Tennessee Legislature began the 2021 session expressing their intentions to address COVID-19 learning loss, which created an environment to pursue education choice initiatives on several fronts.

We succeeded in reforming the existing Individualized Education Account Program to the benefit of Tennessee's special-needs students. Senate Bill 127 reinforces that funds received in individualized education accounts should be considered non-taxable income. This will eliminate the cost burden from families and encourage program participation.

Despite this achievement, the primary focus in Tennessee is on the pending legal challenge to the recently passed Education Savings Account program. We continue to fight to maintain this program, which will allow thousands of families to access the education that is best for their students. Unfortunately, while the case remains before the Tennessee Supreme Court, the ESA program remains frozen. In the meantime, we continue to educate the public about what these options could mean for families.

The Tennessee legislature also passed legislation to improve charter school teacher portability. Charter school teachers will now have the ability to opt in to group health insurance plans, and the charter commission will be given the power to issue one-year certifications to teachers who have pending licenses, so that charters can fill teaching spots.

Additionally, AFC worked with Americans for Prosperity to pass an intra-district enrollment law. The law requires districts to report to parents the number of vacant seats at the school and grade levels. While not a private-school choice law, this bill will allow public-school students to transfer to a different public school in case of over-subscription.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Veronica Chambers

My name is Veronica Chambers. I am a lead instructor at Bridges Memphis youth organization.



There is no doubt that children are our future. This means that we should be sowing into these children everything that they individually need to be successful and comfortable to lead generations to come. Financial status should not determine whether that is possible.

All my life, I've been hyper and active. In public school, I would be placed in the library with all of my classwork for the day and told not to interact with my peers because I was a "distraction." This broke me down and made me think I was abnormal. My mom realized early on that it wasn't me; it was the school. She took me out and placed me in a charter school here in Memphis and it was the best thing that ever happened to me. All the classwork and activities were catered to my learning style and ability.

The teachers were patient and gentle and they fit me. I felt as if I was accepted. This truly helped shape me as a human being, and I try to implement that patience in my everyday life working with kids in my career. I am forever grateful for school choice, the option to choose, and more importantly, to be chosen.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Alquin Spencer

I became an educator because of the teachers who impacted my life. I wasn't always the best student, but they loved me anyway. Even at the age of 23, I am still in contact with them. My teachers/principals became a part of my family and for that, I am forever grateful. I truly believe

opportunity begins with education. As a recent college graduate, I have truly seen the power of education that can change lives for the better.

I believe my students have more opportunities to build upon their foundational learning than I did in middle school. My students have reading and math intervention classes to aid in closing knowledge gaps or just support students.

Schools in lower-income neighborhoods have a reputation for being low-performing and under-resourced. Teachers typically try to avoid these schools and they have high turnover rates. It is important that children can attend schools of choice so that they can get access to the education they deserve.

Texas

Last year, AFC succeeded in persuading Governor Abbott to provide some of his GEER funds directly to special-needs parents of profoundly disabled public-school students, so they could purchase some of the special-education services and therapies their children had missed during the pandemic. This year, AFC helped pass Senate Bill 1716, which expanded this program to all special-needs public-school students and allocated \$60 million in additional state funding to provide these families with \$1,500 catch-up grants. This is an incredibly important milestone for our efforts in Texas, representing the first time a bill passed the legislature and was signed by the governor that would give parents control of public funds to make educational choices for their children. In doing so, we successfully countered the heavily union-funded opposition, and even managed to force them to retract some of their false claims about the program.

In addition, AFC helped pass The Learning Pods Protection Act, which ensures that parents who have chosen a learning pod for their kids can continue to do so free of burdensome regulations by local governments. This bill was overwhelmingly supported by both parties, and will help to protect this emerging educational option.

Finally, AFC helped shepherd a comprehensive \$200 million tax credit-funded Education Savings Account bill through the Senate Education Committee on a 7-3 bipartisan vote and supported additional protections and opportunities for charter schools.



Wisconsin

AFC's work in Wisconsin persisted despite the political grandstanding and posturing by staunch school choice opponent Governor Tony Evers. The governor began this year's budget negotiations by once again announcing measures that would severely limit school choice in Wisconsin. This was roundly defeated in the legislature, with no adverse impact to school choice passing.

Although evident from the beginning that any legislation approved in the legislature would likely face a veto, elected officials inspired by a growing demand for choice pursued legislation to raise the statewide income eligibility cap in the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP). The bill (AB59) would have provided equal access across the state to tens of thousands of working-class families outside of the Milwaukee or Racine Parental Choice Program. Currently, families living across the street from each other could be unfairly excluded from the program because of invisible, arbitrary boundaries.

While AB59 passed both houses by large margins, Governor Evers vetoed the expansion. Afterward, the governor acknowledged that the WPCP has grown over 30 percent this year. This growth shows why Assembly Bill 59 was important for Wisconsin families. The WPCP is meeting a demand, especially during the pandemic, and families in the 220%-300% income threshold are looking for the same access rather than unfair exclusion.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT

Jyllian Jasper

I chose to go to a charter school because of the rigorous curriculum that they had to offer. When my parents and I went to the orientation for Milwaukee Excellence Charter School, I immediately noticed how welcoming the staff was. At the orientation, the principal stated the expectations of each student. Afterward, he also stated what each student can expect from them.



Since I have been attending Milwaukee Excellence Charter School, I have excelled scholastically. My parents and I have noticed a great improvement in my knowledge of course content; this has also become evident as displayed by my GPA. I had a tough time transitioning from grade school to middle school, but I have settled in and have adjusted to the rhythm.

Families should be able to choose the right school for their children regardless of their income. Families should be allowed to choose a place that is a positive environment and offers an exceptional educational experience for their kids. They should be allowed to choose to be somewhere their children can concentrate, feel comfortable, be treated equally, and receive the type of education that will help them to compete in society.



VOICES FOR CHOICE HIGHLIGHT



Dezire and Willia

Dezire and Willia are eight years old and are very lovable. Both girls receive a scholarship from the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program.

The scholarship program has been something our family has used for a generation now, for fifteen years. My cousins have used it and now my daughters. It's important to me because public

schools don't offer the same curriculum as private schools. Private schools are also more structured, and I feel my daughters are learning more.

Private schools also made a difference for my family members. They got further in life than they expected. They are firefighters, police officers, government workers, and lawyers. My hope is that the same will be true for my daughters. I want them to get far in life and succeed. I don't want them to have to live paycheck to paycheck. The school matters in making that possible.

I think all families should be able to choose the school for their children because it makes a difference. If the schools don't care, the students won't care.

Federal and Washington, D.C.

Given Democrat control over the executive branch and both houses of Congress, AFC has been forced to act in a mostly defensive role this year. Our efforts first centered around encouraging and then succeeding in getting all 50 states plus Washington, D.C., to apply for their portions of the \$2.75 billion we helped secure for non-public schools in the December 2020 COVID-19 relief bill. While it is unclear how many non-public schools in each state applied for funds, an early snapshot conducted in AFC states showed that about 50 percent of schools sought funds. In the March 2021 American Rescue Plan, Congress set aside an additional \$2.75 billion in aid for non-public schools, but added highly restrictive language that significantly limits the number of schools eligible for funds. Despite an intensive lobbying effort by private-school advocates, the U.S. Department of Education issued equally restrictive guidance for this second round of funding.

More recently, we have turned our efforts to saving the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP). AFC has been the principal advocate for this highly successful program since 2006, securing three reauthorizations of the program. While our primary legislative goal remains permanent authorization, we have been forced to play defense as House Democrats try to impose onerous new financial and regulatory burdens on participating schools and ultimately phase out the program. We are working closely with Senate allies to ensure the FY 2022 budget fully funds and protects the OSP, which remains one of the iconic and formative examples of school choice in America. We continue to work closely with Serving Our Children, the program administrator, and allied groups to maintain a strong coalition of city leaders, OSP families, parent advocates, and community leaders. Considering this most recent attack on the program, marshaling this support will be vital to ensure continued funding.

Finally, in early 2021, we launched what will be a long-term effort to educate Members of Congress and staff about the progress and benefits of school choice in America, and to keep the school choice issue top-of-mind for congressional supporters through regular communications outreach. Seven school choice bills have been introduced in Congress this year.

We applaud the lawmakers and allies of the following states for putting students first in the 2021 legislative session.

Arkansas:

Lawmakers in Arkansas successfully passed legislation to create a new tax credit scholarship program in the state. Senate Bill 680 creates a \$2 million tax credit program for students with family incomes below 200% of the federal poverty level. Program donors will receive a 100% tax credit for donations. Additionally, House Bill 1446 expanded the existing voucher program, the Succeed Scholarship, to include military families.

Illinois:

Illinois legislators successfully combated an attempt to reduce the Illinois tax credit scholarship program by decreasing the credit amount from 75% to 40%. These efforts also guaranteed that the program will remain in operation for students through at least 2024.

Kansas:

Kansas enlarged its existing tax credit scholarship program by removing a requirement that students be “at-risk” for scholarship eligibility. Lawmakers also removed the limitation that only elementary schools could receive scholarship students. Now, all income-eligible K-12 students will have access to school choice.

Maryland:

This year, Maryland’s lawmakers fully funded the existing Broadening Options and Opportunities for Students Today (BOOST) Program, increasing program funding from \$7.5 million to \$10 million.

Montana:

The lawmakers of Montana passed legislation to raise the statewide cap on its tax credit program to \$2 million in 2022. Additionally, Montana passed a gargantuan increase in the maximum tax credit donors can receive, from \$150 to \$200,000. This expansion will result in more scholarships to be distributed among Montanan students.

Pennsylvania:

Pennsylvania lawmakers expanded the K-12 Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program by \$40 million this year. This expansion brings the program’s total funding cap to \$175 million and will empower as many as 13,000 additional Pennsylvania students.

New Hampshire:

New Hampshire created a new Education Freedom Accounts (ESA) program this year. Accounts can be used for tuition, tutoring, online learning, textbooks, and other educational related needs. Families up to 300% FPL are eligible for the program, making it the third-largest ESA program in the country.

South Dakota:

South Dakota expanded its tax credit scholarship program during this year’s legislative session. The bill removes stringent prerequisites that mandate that a student must attend a public school prior to receiving a scholarship, or be entering kindergarten, middle, or high school for the first time. Now, any income-eligible student in any grade, even those already enrolled in private schools, are eligible for a scholarship.

West Virginia:

West Virginia created a landmark new Education Savings Account program by establishing the Hope Scholarship Program. The program will allow students leaving the public-school system to use up to \$4,600 for private-school tuition, homeschooling costs, or other educational expenses. Ninety percent of students in the state could ultimately be eligible for the program, making this a massive win for school choice in West Virginia.

Also, legislation passed to expand the number of charter schools in the state, and it allows for the establishment of virtual charter schools. The virtual charters have the capacity to serve up to ten percent of West Virginia’s total student population.

Wyoming:

Legislators in Wyoming paved the way for new charter schools by creating a new authorizing procedure for charter procurement. The state modified their charter school program to allow would-be charter founders to apply for formation directly with the State Loan and Investment Board, instead of routing applications through local school boards.

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



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