

OUR GREATEST AND BEST INHERITANCE: CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND PARENTAL CHOICE

The education of children and young people is such an important task in forming them as free and responsible human beings. It affirms their dignity as an inalienable gift that flows from our original creation as children made in the image and likeness of God. And because education truly forms human beings, it is especially the duty and responsibility of the Church, who is called to serve mankind from the heart of God and in such a way that no other institution can.

- Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio (Pope Francis)

The Catholic School Advantage: Forming Children for College and Heaven

I. Catholic schools form children for a personal and living encounter with Jesus Christ:



- Catholic school students are more likely to pray daily, attend church more often, retain a Catholic identify as an adult, and donate more to the Church.
- Students in Catholic schools demonstrate higher academic achievement than their public school peers from similar socioeconomic backgrounds.
- The more disadvantaged a child is, the greater the relative achievement gains he or she experiences in a Catholic school.
- The achievement gap between students of different racial and/or socioeconomic backgrounds is significantly smaller in Catholic schools than public schools.
- 99% of Catholic school students graduate from high school on time, and 85% of Catholic school graduates attend college.
- A child who is black or Latino is 42% more likely to graduate from high school and 2.5 times more likely to graduate from college if he or she attends a Catholic school.

Parents who have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children must enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools.

- *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1965

2. Catholic school communities stimulate parental engagement:

- Inner-city Catholic school parents report taking an active role in their children's education, and they believe that participating in the Catholic school community represents an opportunity to break the cycle of poverty.
- Latino Catholic school parents believe their children are more motivated, more focused, and working harder since enrolling them in a Catholic school.



3. Catholic schools generate social cohesion and preserve civic order in the local community:

- Neighborhood social cohesion decreases and disorder increases following the closure of a Catholic elementary school.
- Police beats in Chicago that experienced at least one Catholic school closure had a higher crime rate than those in which there were no closures.

4. Catholic schools are sacred places serving important civic purposes:

- Catholic schools save taxpayers more than \$20 billion annually.
- Catholic school graduates enjoy higher earning potential than public school graduates.
- Catholic school graduates are more civically engaged, more likely to vote, more tolerant of diverse views, and more committed to service as adults, and less likely to be incarcerated than their public school peers.

No child should be denied his or her right to an education in the faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation.

- Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

[T]he right of parents are violated if their children are forced to attend lessons or instructions which are not in agreement with their religious beliefs, or if a single system of education, from which all religious formation is excluded, is imposed upon all.

- Dignitatis Humanae, 1965

Parental Choice in K-12 Education: A Matter of Social Justice

The term “parental choice” in the context of K-12 education typically refers to policies and programs that empower families to choose the best school for their children. Through parental choice programs, at-risk families whose children would otherwise attend assigned public schools are given financial resources enabling them to attend the school of their choice, including traditional public schools, public charter schools, both secular and religious private schools, and homeschooling.

Forms of Parental Choice

Such programs are typically found in one of the following four forms: **Opportunity Scholarships** (also known as “vouchers”), **Scholarship Tax Credits**, **Parental Tuition Tax Credits**, and **Education Savings Accounts**.

- 1.** In **Opportunity Scholarship** programs, public education funding “follows the child,” as families receive some portion of the public funding allocated toward educating the child in the traditional public school system.
- 2.** In **Scholarship Tax Credit** programs, the state permits individuals and/or corporations to donate to qualified nonprofit organizations in exchange for credits against their state-tax liability. These non profit organizations use the contributed funds to provide scholarships for eligible students interested in attending a Catholic school.
- 3.** In **Parental Tuition Tax Credit** programs, parents receive a credit or deduction on their state income taxes that can be used for a child’s educational expenses, including private school tuition. Although several states have such programs, only North Carolina and Alabama provide a credit sufficiently large enough to affect a family’s ability to enroll their child in a private school.
- 4.** In **Educational Savings Account (ESA)** programs, parents receive a deposit of public funds into government authorized savings accounts. These funds can be used for private school tuition, textbooks, tutoring, testing fees, online learning, or higher education expenses such as community college costs.

Each of these forms typically restricts eligibility to a particular set of students.

1. *Means Tested*: eligibility based on family income
2. *Failing Schools*: eligibility based on the performance of students' assigned public schools and districts
3. *Special Needs*: eligibility restricted to children with exceptional educational needs

Parental Choice Today

For nearly 150 years, the Church has unequivocally taught that parents have the right and responsibility to serve as the primary educators of their children. To assist them in this sacred duty, the Church has articulated clearly that children have the universal right to an education in faith, and the state has the fundamental obligation to enable such a right. In both written word and lived witness, the Church has advanced parental choice as a fundamental part of its mission to protect the equality of educational opportunity that is the birthright of all children. Since the passage of the first parental choice program in Milwaukee in 1990, bishops and state Catholic conferences have been among the most important advocates for parental choice.

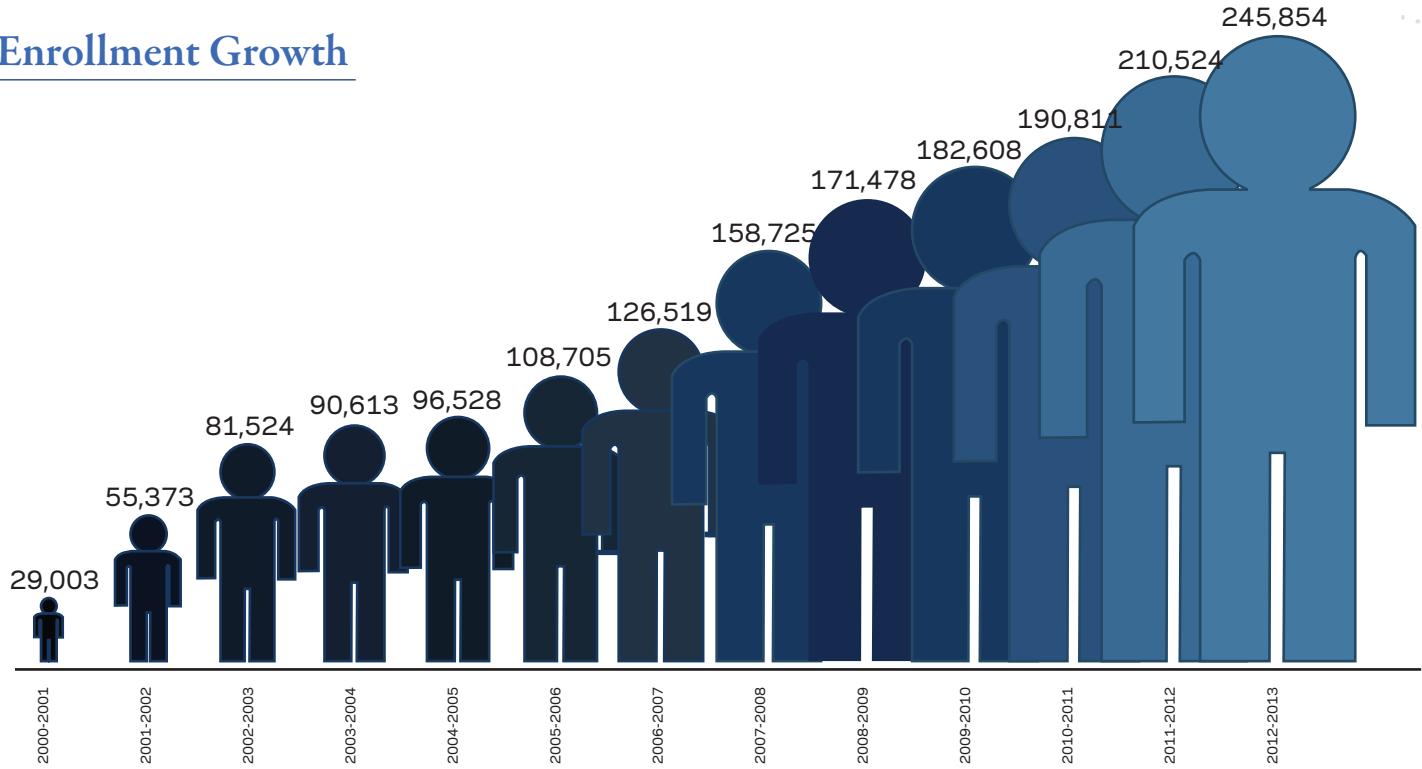
More than 245,000 children participated in a publicly funded private school parental choice program during the 2012-2013 school year. Approximately 50% of these children are enrolled in Catholic schools.

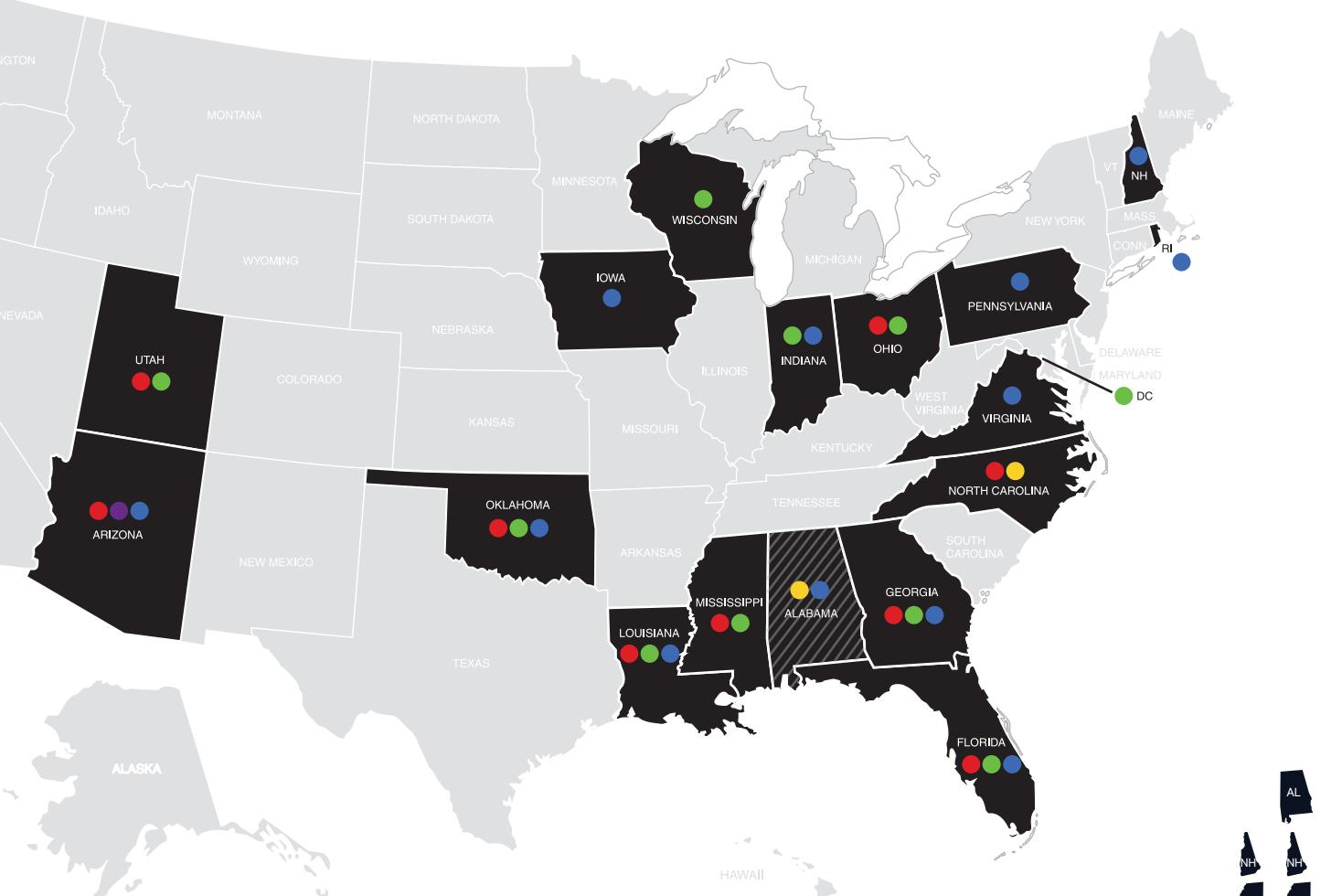
There are currently more than 30 parental choice programs operating in 17 states and the District of Columbia. Through these programs, more than \$950 million in state and federal funds were available to create scholarships for at-risk children during the 2012-2013 school year.

For a state-by-state overview of these programs, please see p.8.

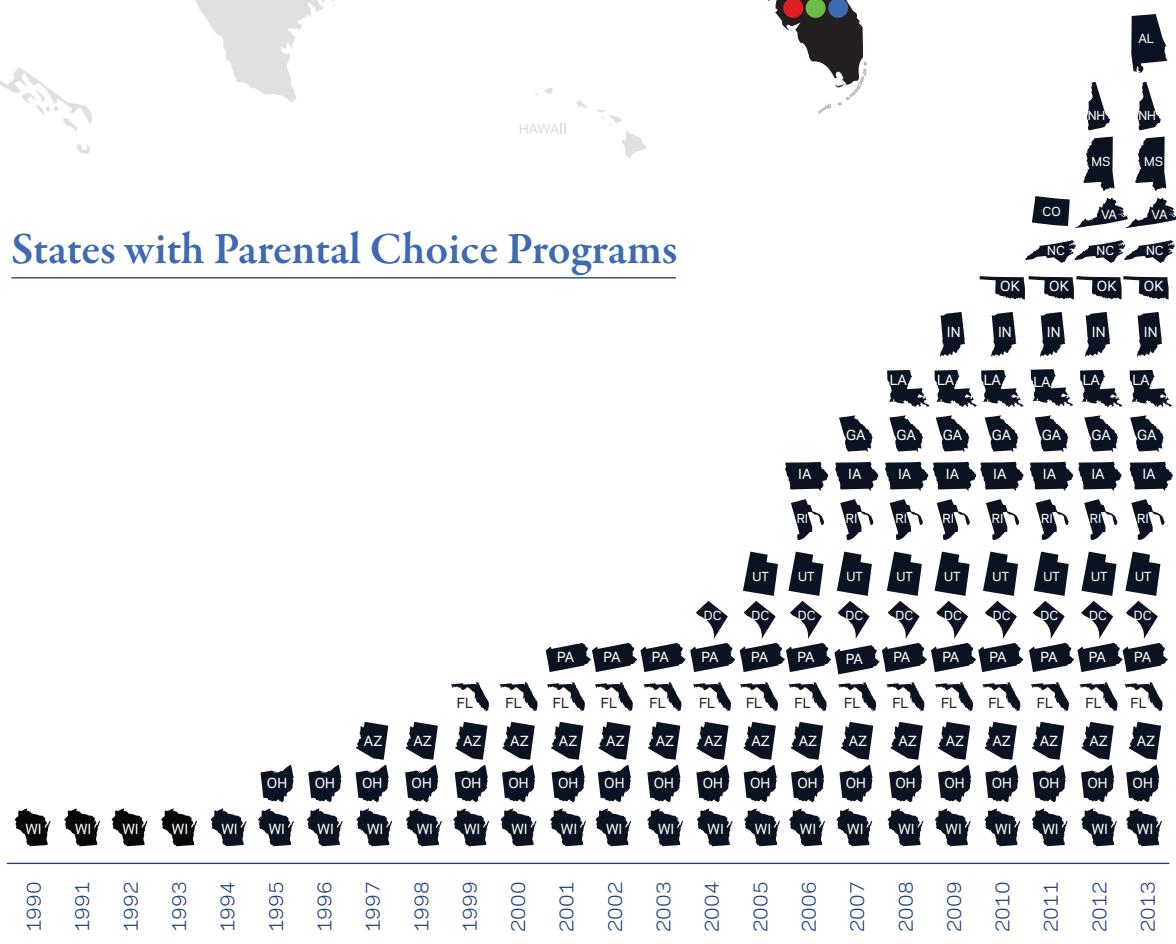
- Voucher Programs
- Scholarship Tax Credit Programs
- Special Needs Programs
At least one program in the state is designed to serve students with special needs.
- Individual Income Tax Credit
- Education Savings Account Programs

Enrollment Growth





States with Parental Choice Programs



The Constitutionality of Parental Choice

At the Federal Level

The United States Supreme Court has made clear that parental choice is constitutional, unequivocally rejecting the claim that opportunity scholarships (“vouchers”) and scholarship tax credits violate the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause. The Court has clearly stated that the Constitution permits public education funds to flow to authentically religious schools through a parental choice program, so long as the program is religion-neutral and open to a broad class of beneficiaries.

The fundamental reason that parental choice does not violate the federal Establishment Clause is that any aid to religious schools in these programs is indirect. Parents – not the government – determine how the public funds are spent among a variety of religious and non-religious educational options.

At the State Level

Although state courts can interpret their respective constitutions more restrictively than the U.S. Supreme Court has interpreted the Establishment Clause, well-crafted parental choice programs are constitutionally permissible in almost every state.

More than 35 state Constitutions contain provisions that prohibit public funding of religious institutions such as Catholic schools. These provisions, often referred to as “Blaine Amendments” are a sad legacy of anti-Catholic bigotry. However, these provisions have not proven to be an insurmountable barrier to a well-designed parental choice program in most states. In fact, almost every one of the states with parental choice programs has a “Blaine Amendment” in its constitution.

For it is in and by these schools that the Catholic faith, our greatest and best inheritance, is preserved whole and entire. In these schools the liberty of parents is respected; and, what is most needed, especially in the prevailing license of opinion and of action, it is by these schools that good citizens are brought up for the State.

- Spectata Fides, 1865



Parental Choice Benefits

1. Parental Choice Improves Student Achievement and Attainment:

- Students participating in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program demonstrated higher academic growth in reading than similar students in Milwaukee Public Schools.
- Students participating in the Washington, D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program achieved more than 3 months of additional gains in reading over their public school peers in a single school year.
- Students participating in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program had a graduation rate more than 7.2% higher than students in Milwaukee Public Schools. Students participating in the Washington D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program had a graduation rate more than 20% higher than similarly situated public school students.
- Students who are black participating in a privately funded parental choice program were 24% more likely to enroll in college as a result of receiving a voucher.

2. Parental Choice Empowers Families:

- More than 90% of parents participating in the Washington D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program report being happy with their current scholarship school.
- More than 97% of the parents participating in the Florida Scholarship Tax Credit report being happy with their current scholarship school.

3. Parental Choice Provides Fiscal Savings:

- The Indiana Choice Scholarship Program saved the state more than \$4 million in its first year of operation.
- The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program saved Wisconsin approximately \$51 million in 2011.
- The estimated 5-year savings of the Washington D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program is \$76 million.
- The Florida Scholarship Tax Credit will save the state more than an estimated \$100 million from 2012-2014.

For an overview of the research on the “Catholic school advantage” and to view two succinct video presentations on Catholic schools and parental choice, please visit the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops webpage at usccb.org. To access these resources, first click on the “Catholic Education” tab (bottom left of the homepage) and then proceed to the “Catholic education toolkit” (top of the page).

Parental Choice Programs

State	Program	Form	Start	Students in 2012-2013
Alabama	Alabama Accountability Act	Individual Tuition Tax Credit	2013	N/A
	Alabama Accountability Act	Scholarship Tax Credit	2013	N/A
Arizona	Individual School Tuition Organization Tax Credit	Scholarship Tax Credit	1997	24,327
	Corporate School Tuition Organization Tax Credit	Scholarship Tax Credit	2006	5,838
	Lexie's Law	Scholarship Tax Credit (Special Needs)	2009	120
	Empowerment Scholarship Accounts Program	Education Savings Account (Special Needs)	2011	302
Florida	John M. McKay Scholarship	Voucher (Special Needs)	1999	25,366
	Florida Tax Credit Scholarship	Scholarship Tax Credit	2001	50,821
Georgia	Georgia's Special Needs Scholarship Program	Voucher (Special Needs)	2007	3,227
	Georgia Scholarship Tax Credit Program	Scholarship Tax Credit	2008	11,292
Indiana	Corporate and Individual Scholarship Tax Credit	Scholarship Tax Credit	2009	2,890
	Choice Scholarship Program	Voucher	2011	9,324
Iowa	School Tuition Organization Tax Credit	Scholarship Tax Credit	2006	10,446
Louisiana	Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence	Voucher	2008	4,963
	School Choice Pilot Program	Voucher (Special Needs)	2010	197
	Tuition Donation Rebate Program	Scholarship Tax Credit	2012	N/A
Mississippi	Mississippi Dyslexia Therapy Scholarship	Voucher (Special Needs)	2012	13
New Hampshire	New Hampshire Education Tax Credit	Scholarship Tax Credit	2012	N/A
North Carolina	Tax Credits for Children with Disabilities	Individual Tuition Tax Credit (Special Needs)	2011	N/A
Ohio	Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program	Voucher	1995	6,513
	Autism Scholarship Program	Voucher (Special Needs)	2003	2,241
	Educational Choice Scholarship Program	Voucher	2005	17,057
	Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program	Voucher (Special Needs)	2011	1,371
Oklahoma	Lindsey Nicole Henry Scholarship	Voucher (Special Needs)	2010	197
	Equal Opportunity Education Scholarships	Scholarship Tax Credit	2011	35
Pennsylvania	Educational Improvement Tax Credit	Scholarship Tax Credit	2001	42,149
	Educational Equal Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit	Scholarship Tax Credit	2012	N/A
Rhode Island	Rhode Island Corporate Scholarship Tax Credit	Scholarship Tax Credit	2006	382
Utah	Carson Smith Special Needs Scholarship	Voucher (Special Needs)	2005	672
Virginia	Education Improvement Scholarships Tax Credits	Scholarship Tax Credit	2012	N/A
Washington, D.C.	D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program	Voucher	2004	1,584
Wisconsin	Milwaukee Parental Choice Program	Voucher	1990	24,027
	Racine Parental Choice Program	Voucher	2011	500



Secretariat of Catholic Education