

# School Choice News

citizens for educational freedom

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## Did you know?

What you need to know about education in America

- A new study from America's Promise Alliance reports that 17 of the country's 50 largest cities graduate less than 50 percent of their students. In some cities, such as Detroit and Indianapolis, only 30 percent of high school students graduate.
- Fifty percent of all dropouts in the United States come from about 2,000 high schools in 15 states, according to Robert Balfanz, a researcher at Johns Hopkins University.
- In Baltimore, only 34 percent of urban students graduate from high school. The graduation rate in the city's suburbs? 81 percent.
- The Hoover Institution reports that 1982 spending was \$5,930 per student, but by 2000, it was 60 percent higher at \$9,230.
- U.S. dropouts from 2007 alone will cost the the country more than \$300 billion in lost taxes, productivity, and wages, according to a report from Alliance for Excellent Education.

## A word from our chairman: Mae Duggan

With a new office, an updated website, and a facelift on our newsletter, Citizens for

Educational Freedom is ready to fight even harder for parents' rights in education. As we ramp

up to 2009, we'll soon be celebrating our 50th anniversary of fighting to empower not only the poor, but all parents to choose the school they feel is best for their child.

Our newly formatted newsletter, *School Choice News*, is brighter, bigger, and in a better package. It is national in scope and full of the latest developments for school choice in America.

When CEF was founded in 1959, there was no voice raised against the powerful and tax-hungry public school monopoly that proposed the first federal aid-to-education program. Not only did their bill call for millions of tax dollars for public schools, but it actually grabbed the

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Photo: ©iStockphoto.com/Ekaterina Monakhova

# Regrouping after Utah voucher referendum

Results were disappointing not only for turnout at the polls, but also for the outcome of a referendum on what would have been the first pure school-voucher program in the country. Armed with large amounts of union cash and mobilized public school employees, opponents of the graded school voucher program, which was dependent on family income, defeated the measure. Once again the needs of the public school establish-

ment were placed above poor children trapped in the government school bureaucracy.

Utah reformers can be proud of the battle they fought against teachers unions and the network of school superintendents across the state who had large amounts of capital, which they used to discourage voters.

Although not ideal, tax credits that enable businesses and individuals to reduce their tax liability to the state by donating

to charitable organizations that provide educational scholarships to the poor are on the rise. Eight states have implemented a tax-credit program.

The Pennsylvania program provides a 90 percent state income tax credit for donations to scholarship organizations, and Florida has a 100 percent tax-credit program. These programs help thousands of low-income families choose the school they feel is best for their child.

Many school-choice advocates view tax-credit programs as gateways to the idealized goal of a universal voucher for all children. The donation tax credits create a palatable political climate that will make it easier to expand school choice through vouchers in the future. Organizations that participate in the school-choice movement and distribute scholarships to the poor are becoming a political force in the eight states that have implemented tax-credit scholarships. The battle for vouchers continues despite the recent setback in Utah.



## Vouchers key to school success in Florida

Research shows that vouchers are effective in improving failing schools.

New research from the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice and the James Madison Institute indicates that vouchers played a critical role in the success of Florida's school improvement initiative, known as Florida A-Plus.

Under the Florida A-Plus choice and accountability system, students whose schools receive failing grades (as judged by student performance on the

Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test) in two out of four years are eligible for vouchers that would allow them to attend private or other public schools.

When faced with the prospect of losing students, those same poorly performing public schools actually outperformed other Florida public schools by 69 points on the state's developmental scale.

But when procedural obstacles made vouchers more difficult for

families to obtain, test scores did not improve by as much.

Finally, when vouchers were removed as part of the program in 2007, its positive influence on Florida's public education fell below 2002 levels.

This study concludes that vouchers played a vital role in the success of the Florida A-Plus program and that elimination of school choice diminished those educational improvements.

## Virtual school: A new choice

Despite resistance among the educational establishment to implement school vouchers for poor families, a quiet trend has begun gaining momentum. Private “brick and mortar” school tuition is currently too expensive for many inner-city urban families, but a “virtual” school option is within the reach of the urban poor where a child and a low-priced laptop can achieve effective school choice. Virtual schools use the internet to create online classrooms that enable a child to effectively escape an unaccredited inner-city public school.

More than 700,000 students across the country currently are using online schooling, with states such as Missouri now setting up free state-run public schools through the internet. Online learning has been in place for some time at the university level, but it is now making inroads in the K–12 grade levels. Research findings show students’ performance does not suffer when they are moved from a traditional to a virtual classroom. The internet not only provides insulation from the physical disruptions of poorly performing inner-city schools, but it also creates a personalized learning environment

for the student. Online schooling is also driving a trend of performance-based education-funding models.

The Commission on International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA), a well-respected accreditation agency for private schools, has certified a number of online schools as meeting their high standard for excellence in education. While legislators across the country continue to fail in terms of implementing free-market reforms in public education, the market is finding a way around through online schools that are not only of high quality, but of low cost to many inner city families.



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“A WORD FROM OUR CHAIRMAN”

money counted in for the private school children and added it to the public school funds. This greedy discrimination was too much for our founding members to let go unchallenged. So eight of us founded Citizens for Educational Freedom in St. Louis. Our slogan was “A Fair Share for Every Child.”

Unbelievable as it sounds, we actually held off the National Education Association for six years until, in 1965, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which provided that all school children, whether in public or private schools, should receive equal educational benefits.

This provision in the federal education-aid law is still the law of the land. Yet the public school officials who administer the program find ways to stop the money from aiding the private school children.

CEF fights on, and now we have a very successful parents’ choice scholarship program in Washington, D.C. The scholarships are funded by federal tax dollars. CEF has for its ultimate goal a nationwide parents’-choice, tax-paid scholarship system, the Educard Plan, which will benefit all school children.

So join CEF now and be part of the change in American education from public school (i.e. government) monopoly in education to a system that allows freedom of choice.

# Missouri judge rules for state

Cole County Judge Richard Callahan has upheld Missouri's educational funding formula in a lawsuit that pitted about half of Missouri school districts against the state.

The school districts claimed the state does not spend enough on public education and that its methods of allotting funding are inequitable.

But Callahan found that the state meets its constitutional requirements to fund state education. The Missouri constitution requires the state to spend at least 25 percent of its annual revenue on funding for public education

The current funding formula for allotting that money among school districts considers each district's average attendance, number of students in special programs, and the cost of living within the district.

This case is unusual because three private citizens—Menlo Smith, Bevis Schock, and Rex

Sinquefield—intervened to fund defense against a lawsuit that would affect Missouri taxpayers. They spent close to \$800,000 in attorney's fees and case preparation costs.

"The language of Judge Callahan is so strong and the defeat of the plaintiffs so complete that we should revisit the question of why these school districts felt compelled to spend taxpayer dollars to sue the taxpayers," Sinquefield said. "Hopefully, this ruling will discourage the use of taxpayer dollars to sue the state."

The court battle has cost Missouri taxpayers at least \$4.6 million between the \$3.2 million spent by the school groups pursuing the case and the \$1.4 million the state spent defending against the suit.

Losing the case could have cost the state an additional \$480 million to \$1.3 billion each year on public education, a cost that would have been passed on to taxpayers.



## Presidential choice

How do the presidential candidates stack up on the issue of school choice? Take a look:

Presidential Candidate	Supports educational vouchers
John McCain	Yes
Barack Obama	No

## New from CEF

### On the Web

Check out the redesigned [www.educational-freedom.org](http://www.educational-freedom.org). You can find ways to support school choice and updates on all the latest developments in educational research and legislation.

### Let's celebrate!

Citizens for Educational Freedom is turning 50. Stay alert for information on our upcoming anniversary celebration. Location and date to be announced.

### We've moved

Citizens for Educational Freedom has a new address:  
287 N. Lindbergh Blvd.  
Suite 202  
Saint Louis, MO 63141  
Phone: 314.997.6361  
Fax: 314.997.6321  
Email: [citedfree@educational-freedom.org](mailto:citedfree@educational-freedom.org)

### Remember

Donations made payable to "Educational Freedom Foundation" are tax deductible and can be

mailed to the new address listed at left. We appreciate your support and commitment to educational freedom.

### Book pick

Check out *The Case Against My Brother* by Libby Sternberg (Bancroft Press; \$19.95), a riveting mystery set in the time of anti-Catholic bigotry when the state of Oregon passed a law requiring all school children to attend public schools, forcing the closing of religious schools.