

School Choice: The Keystone to a Great Education

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More than two decades ago, the Keystone State embarked on a new—and successful—experiment, one that gave more power and accountability back to parents. Just over 20 years ago, in June 1997, then-Gov. Tom Ridge signed into law a measure allowing for the creation of charter schools in the Commonwealth. As we prepare to celebrate National School Choice Week, we should reflect on the progress that school choice initiatives of all shapes and sizes have made on Pennsylvania’s educational system.

School choice has as its core a fundamental principle: One size does not fit all. Just as no two snowflakes are alike, so too does each child have his own unique interests, talents, skills, and abilities. School choice empowers parents to select the option that works best for each child—because no single school, no matter how good or well-funded, can meet the distinct needs of each and every young American.

Charter schools provide parents with more, and more diverse, educational options. Funded by public dollars, charter schools focus on delivering accountability—to parents, students, and taxpayers. [To deliver results](#), charter school leaders often use innovative classroom techniques, prompted by the regulatory freedom many charter schools have when compared to more traditional public schools.

While many students remain in the traditional neighborhood model, charter schools have grown by leaps and bounds over the past two decades. A total of 17683, more than 180 charter schools, both brick and mortar and cyber charter schools, currently enroll more than 130,000 students across the Commonwealth. And charters continue to grow nationally, with 433 other states and the District of Columbia authorizing creation of charter schools.

This proliferation of school choice gives parents more options and promotes innovation within the entire educational community. At its best, school choice should foster an “all of the above” approach focused on diversifying the educational system.

For some parents, school choice might mean enrollment at a brick and mortar charter school or academy. For other parents, school choice could mean home schooling their children. Still other parents could choose cyber charter schools and distance learning options, or magnet schools with specialized programs. Other parents could use tutoring programs, scholarships to attend private schools, or—a new school choice option—educational savings accounts, which allow parents to spend a certain amount on a variety of options for their children.

Regardless of the particular option a given parent selects, when parents and families choose, children win. Through school choice, children can study in an environment where they’re most interested in learning—motivating them in ways that will shine forth throughout their schooling.

This Jan. 21-27, parents, teachers, students, and educators will gather across the Commonwealth, and across the country, to celebrate National School Choice Week. At more than 30,000 events, students will demonstrate the infectious enthusiasm that a positive learning environment can create in their lives. That enthusiasm represents hope—hope for a quality education, and hope in that quality education as the ticket to a better life and a better future.

As we celebrate National School Choice Week here in Pennsylvania, let's give thanks that a movement that came to our Commonwealth more than two decades ago has yielded such positive results for millions of families.