

# School Choice for *Maryland*



A Guide for Families and Voters



## ABOUT SCHOOL CHOICE FOR MARYLAND

We believe that all parents in Maryland should have a wide variety of educational options for their children, based on the needs of their individual students. We do not think that children should simply be assigned to schools just because of where they happen to live.

Children's educational needs are often unique, and many students simply do not excel in the "one size fits all" environment that exists in Maryland. Parents should therefore have greater opportunities to choose the school that is best for their individual child, whether that school is a traditional public school, charter school, private, or religious school.

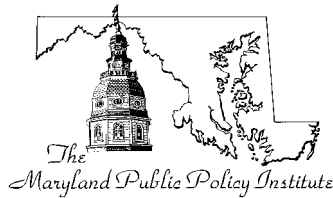
School Choice for Maryland is a project of the Maryland Public Policy Institute.

## ABOUT MPPI

Founded in 2001, the Maryland Public Policy Institute is a nonpartisan public policy research and education organization that focuses on state policy issues. Our goal is to provide accurate and timely research analysis of Maryland policy issues and market these findings to key primary audiences. The mission of the Maryland Public Policy Institute is to formulate and promote public policies at all levels of government based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, and civil society. The Institute is a member of the State Policy Network. In order to maintain objectivity and independence, the Institute accepts no government funding and does not perform contract research. The Maryland Public Policy Institute is recognized as a 501 (C) (3) research and education organization under the Internal Revenue Code.

# SCHOOL CHOICE FOR MARYLAND

A Guide for Families and Voters



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A Letter from the President  
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## EMBRACING THE SCHOOL CHOICE REVOLUTION

A revolution is occurring in America's education system. Public schools are being held accountable to higher standards and families are expecting more from their tax dollars. In many districts, discontented parents believe the only choice for their children is the local public school, which may or may not meet the needs of their children. However, alternatives are possible. Around the country, school choice reforms are giving parents the power to shape their children's destinies by determining how and where they are educated.

Traditionally, American children have been assigned a public school based on zip code. As a result, most families were only able to switch schools by moving to a new district—an expensive, inconvenient, and time-consuming proposition. Some private schools were available, but usually only for those families that could afford to pay tuition on top of the taxes they already paid to support the public school system. Most families—particularly those in low-income communities—have had no choice but to send their child to the local public school, even when they believed that school was not providing their child with an excellent education.

In 1955, Nobel Laureate economist Milton Friedman proposed school vouchers as a way to ensure that children have access to a high quality education. Rather than have government bureaucracies dictate how our education system is administered, government could instead subsidize children's educations and allow parents to determine where their children go to school. This, Friedman argued, would lead to “a great widening in the educational opportunities open to our children.”

## School Choice for Maryland: A Guide for Families and Voters

Over the past two decades, parents have begun to demand more options and more control over where their children go to school. And elected officials across America have listened to parents and delivered options by embracing programs and initiatives that create new ways for parents to select schools for their children.

For example, taxpayer-funded scholarship programs are helping more than 100,000 children across the country to attend private school. More than 3,000 publicly-funded charter schools are now teaching more than a million children. Charter schools, which are independently-run but part of public school districts, offer parents a diverse menu of instructional and extracurricular options. Tax credits and vouchers are other ways that parents can determine how their education tax dollars are spent, and where.

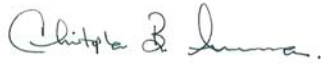
Other parents are creating their own miniature schools, some with the help of inter-district programs, online learning centers, and diverse curricula available for private purchase. As a result, millions of American children are now being homeschooled. And other learning opportunities are now available to American families, from after-school tutoring programs to computer and online educational programs and early college high schools.

This *School Choice for Maryland* handbook is written to inform Maryland parents and taxpayers and help give them the tools they need to benefit from the school choice revolution—a movement where, thus far, Maryland has been left behind. My hope is that this handbook will help Marylanders begin a conversation about how we too can benefit from embracing policies that give parents more options for how to educate their children. The more we know and understand about school choice opportunities that currently exist in our country, the better able we will be to call for these options in the Old Line State.

## Embracing the School Choice Revolution

We Marylanders owe present and future generations of children the best opportunities possible through our public school system and elsewhere. As you read this handbook, please consider what kind of education your child is receiving, and if you are satisfied with what is being delivered in your district. I thank you for taking the time to read *School Choice for Maryland* and look forward to having you join the conversation.

Sincerely,

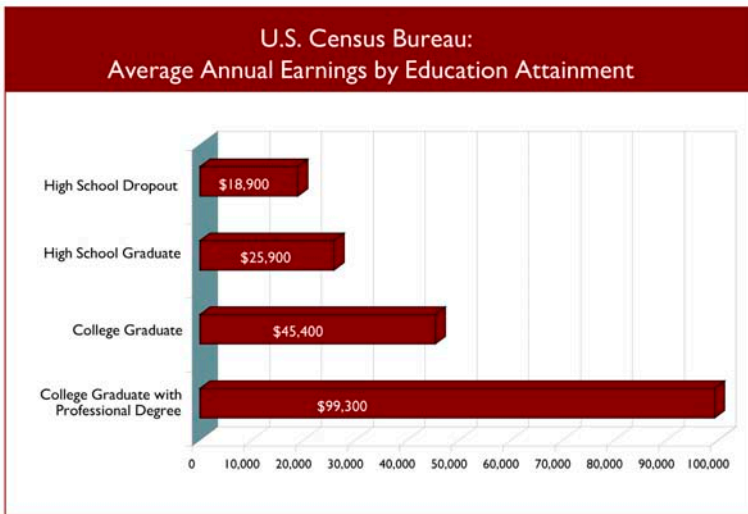
A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Christopher B. Summers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a period at the end.

Christopher B. Summers  
President  
The Maryland Public Policy Institute



# I Restoring the American Dream: The Public Education System Needs Improvement

A good elementary and secondary education is the foundation of the American dream. A 2002 study by the U.S. Census Bureau found that the average annual earning of a high-school dropout is \$18,900; a high-school graduate, \$25,900; a college graduate, \$45,400; and a college graduate with a professional degree, \$99,300. Annual earnings are just a crude measure of a person's success in life. But common sense tells us that, in the 21st century economy, a good education is critical to both finding a job and enjoying life to its fullest.



These disparities demonstrate that the public education system, which was established and exists to serve every American child, is underserving its target population. In total, U.S. taxpayers spend more than \$500 billion on K–12 public education in America, or approximately 4.5 percent of the nation's gross domestic product. On a per-pupil basis, the U.S. spends more than \$8,500 annually on each of the nation's 53 million public school students, according

to the U.S. Department of Education. This means that a child who is enrolled in America's public schools will have roughly \$100,000 invested in his or her education by taxpayers by the time he or she has graduated.

Considering how much American taxpayers invest in K–12 education each year, shouldn't we expect that every single child have an opportunity to receive a first-class education? Unfortunately, despite the \$100,000 allocated to each American student, the U.S. public school system does not provide high-quality education to all children. For example, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress—a standardized test administered across the nation—36 percent of all fourth grade children scored “below basic” on the reading exam. This means that more than one out of three American 4th graders cannot read—a devastating roadblock to future success in the classroom and in daily life.

## The Achievement Gap

These national test scores reveal that poor children score far below their peers in the classroom. On the NAEP reading exam in 2005, more than 54 percent of low-income children scored “below basic” in reading, compared to just 23 percent of children who were not eligible for the free and reduced school lunch program. This means that underprivileged children are often not receiving the skills they need to succeed in the workforce and break the cycle of poverty.

## American Students Compared to their International Peers

How are U.S. students faring in comparison to their peers around the world? As bestselling author Thomas L. Friedman explains in *The World Is Flat*, the global economy puts American workers in direct competition with their international peers like never before. Unfortunately, U.S. students scored just in the middle of the pack on international math and science exams in 2003. Estonia, Hungary, and Latvia were among the developed countries whose students placed higher than American children.

Average Scores for 8th Grade Students  
on the TIMMS Math Examination, 2003

Singapore	605
Republic of Korea	589
Hong Kong	586
Chinese Taipei	585
Japan	570
Belgium-Flanders	537
Netherlands	536
Estonia	531
Hungary	529
Malaysia	508
Latvia	508
Russian Federation	508
Slovak Republic	508
Australia	505
UNITED STATES	504
Lithuania	502
Sweden	499
Scotland	498
Israel	496
New Zealand	494
International Average	466

Source: Trends in International Mathematics and  
Science Study, 2003.

## The Price of Our Lagging Education System

How can we quantify the cost of our lagging public education system in America? The effects of a substandard education on each individual are difficult to measure. But we know that a more educated workforce would greatly improve our economy and our communities as well as strengthen our nation's standing in the world, and that good education also leads to more high school and college graduates and hence higher incomes.

## Public School Performance in Maryland

Maryland has not escaped the problems that face public school systems throughout the country, despite the considerable investment in education by Maryland taxpayers. In Maryland, taxpayers spent more than \$9,266 per pupil in 2002, above the average nationwide of \$8,259 that year. But judged in a number of ways, Maryland's public education system still fails to provide all its children with an excellent education.

On the nationally administered NAEP reading examination, only 65 percent of all Maryland 4th graders scored above a basic level in reading. In other words, 35 percent of Maryland 4th graders cannot read. On the math examination, 34 percent of 8th graders who were tested scored below basic.

On the Maryland State Assessment, a significant number of children are not achieving proficiency. On the 2005 MSA Reading Examination for 8th graders, one in three students received a score of "basic"—the lowest possible category. According to the Maryland Department of Education, students who receive a score of "basic" in reading at their level of study "are unable to adequately read and comprehend grade appropriate literature and informational passages."

## Special Education in Maryland

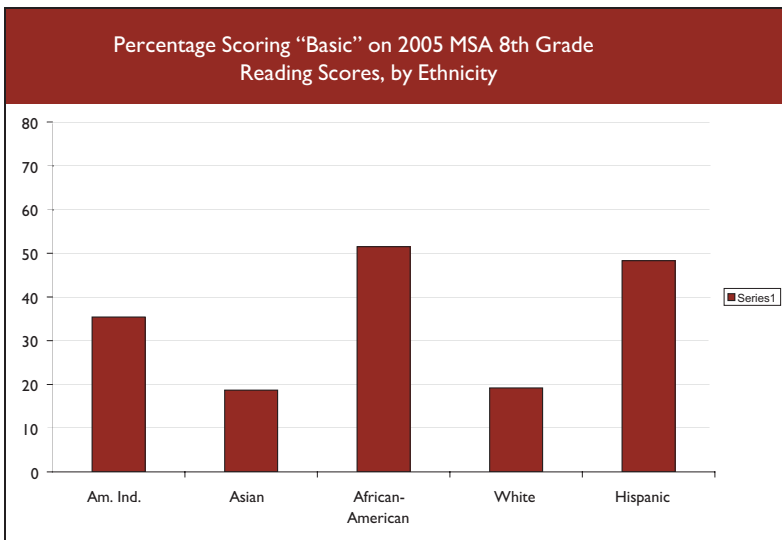
The ongoing and systemic failure of Baltimore City's special education system in public schools is an extreme but very real example of what happens when a public school district is allowed to under-serve its students for decades. Under state management since summer of 2005, the city's special education services have been ordered

to provide 90,000 hours of makeup services from 2005 on top of what is due children in 2006. A state report also showed that 25 percent of city high school seniors in special education received diplomas last spring without meeting graduation requirements. Baltimore City's school system is an excellent example of a situation where both mainstream and special education students would benefit greatly from the opportunity to take their per-pupil money elsewhere to a better school.

### An Achievement Gap in Maryland

Looking more closely at the results of standardized test scores, one finds that Maryland's African-American and Hispanic children are scoring below non-minority children. Eighty-one percent of white children scored above basic on the 2005 NAEP reading test for 8th graders; however, only 67 percent of Hispanics and 53 percent of African-American children achieved a score of basic or higher.

On the Maryland State Assessment, African-American and Hispanic children also scored below their peers, with far higher numbers of students falling into the "basic" category—the lowest level of achievement on the examination. For example, the results show



that half of all African-American children in Maryland cannot read at grade level by the time they reach 8th grade.

Performance levels are worst in Maryland's poorest communities. For example, in Baltimore City, 60 percent of 8th graders scored "basic" on the 2005 MSA reading exam, compared to just 33 percent across the state. This important statistic is worth underscoring—six out of ten 8th graders in Baltimore City cannot read at grade level. No wonder, then, that only 59 percent of Baltimore City students graduate from high school, compared to 85 percent across the state.

## Summary

While Maryland is home to many fine public schools, too often its children, particularly those in underprivileged and minority communities, do not receive the education they need to be secure, successful individuals and later compete in the modern economy. We parents, taxpayers, and members of our communities need to start demanding more of our schools and keep an open mind to other options, all in the name of getting the best education possible for our children.

## 2 School Choice: Giving Parents Power

The idea of school choice is based on a simple but revolutionary principle: parents deserve the power to control their children's destinies. Parents know their children better than anyone else, and as individuals living in a free society, should possess the freedom to send their children to the best and most appropriate school, without paying more than the annual per-pupil taxpayer expenditure.

Today, many families have very limited ability to influence how and where their children are educated. School choice reforms, on the other hand, give parents a money-back guarantee that their child will receive a quality education. Put simply, school choice gives parents the ability to choose where their children go to school. This freedom in turn holds schools even more accountable when parents have that power.

### What is School Choice?

School choice can come in a number of forms. Many families exercise school choice through location-based choice—choosing their home based on the quality of that community's local school. Many real estate decisions are made based on a particular school district.

Many other families exercise school choice by forgoing their child's right to a taxpayer-subsidized public education by paying for tuition at private school. In all, more than 154,000 children are enrolled in private schools in Maryland, thanks to their parents who are willing and able to pay private school tuition for their children. Still more parents wish they had the wherewithal to send their children to private school.

Unfortunately, many families simply do not have the means to exercise these types of school choice. They cannot afford to pay to live in a community with an excellent public school system. Nor can they afford to pay private school tuition after paying the rest of

their bills, along with state and local taxes to support public education in Maryland. With no other choice, these families simply make do with the public school available to them, with serious cost to their children's education.

Yet the disheartening state of affairs outlined in the previous section need not continue. For these students, policymakers across America have been working to enact parent-centered education reforms that give families greater control over how their children experience public education. These school choice reforms include:

- **Public School Choice Programs** that give families the ability to enroll their child in the best possible public school available
- **Charter School Programs** that allow parents to enroll their child in public schools that have greater freedom and autonomy than traditional public schools
- **Opportunity Scholarship or School Voucher Programs** that allow families to use taxpayer funds to pay tuition costs for their children in private schools
- **Tuition Tax Credits or Deductions** that give families a tax incentive to purchase private school tuition for their children
- **Scholarship Tax Credits** that give taxpayers a tax break for contributions to charities that fund private school scholarships for children

Public school choice now exists in various forms around the nation. Charter school programs have been open in 40 states including Maryland, as well as the District of Columbia. Charter schools are publicly-funded schools that agree to meet certain performance standards set by the state, but are otherwise, depending on the state's charter laws, free from the bureaucratic rules and regulations that encumber traditional school systems. In all, more than one million children are enrolled in an estimated 3,600 public charter schools across the nation. Maryland has 15 charter schools educating nearly 4,000 students.



## School Choice: Giving Parents Rights

But growing attention is being paid to the third kind of school choice programs—opportunity scholarships or school voucher programs—which have been gaining popularity in recent decades. In the next section, we will learn more about private school choice programs.

### Private School Choice Programs Around the Nation

In the fall of 2006, more than 130,000 children will attend private schools through private school choice programs. In all, publicly-funded private school choice programs now exist in 12 states. Last year, 38 state legislatures considered various forms of private school choice initiatives.

#### Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Since 1990, low-income children in Milwaukee, Wisconsin have been eligible to use a tuition voucher worth up to \$5,943 to attend private school. In all, more than 15,000 children are currently participating in the Milwaukee voucher program, attending 118 private schools across the city. A 2004 study by the Manhattan Institute found that children participating in the voucher program had higher graduation rates than public school students. A Harvard University study found that the voucher program has led to improvement in student performance.

#### Ohio and the Cleveland Voucher Program

Since 1996, thousands of low-income children have been using school vouchers worth \$2,700 to attend private school. In 2005, 5,600 children participated in the program. In 2006, 14,000 additional children will be eligible to participate in a private school choice program, using school vouchers to transfer out of low-performing private schools. Ohio also has a school choice program for autistic children.

#### Arizona Scholarship Tax Credit Program

Since 1997, Arizona taxpayers have been allowed to take a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for donations made to charities that fund private school scholarships. The tax credit is worth \$500 for individuals and \$1,000 for married couples. In all, more than 21,000

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children received private school scholarships from the program in 2004. A 2003 Goldwater Institute survey of low-income families participating in the program found that scholarships led to higher parental satisfaction rates with their children's school.

### Florida

Florida has three private school choice programs. In 1999, Florida created the A+ Opportunity Scholarship program, which allows students who attend, or are assigned to a Florida school that has consistently received a failing grade to transfer schools through the use of a voucher. More than 700 children participated in the program last year. In 2001, Florida created the McKay Scholarship Program for Children with Disabilities. In 2004–2005, over 14,000 students participated in the program to attend 609 private schools. In 2001, Florida also created a program that allowed businesses to take a tax credit for donations to charities that fund tuition scholarships for low-income children. More than 15,000 children benefited from these scholarships in 2005.

### Pennsylvania Corporate Tax Credit Program

Since 2001, Pennsylvania has allowed businesses to take a partial tax credit for donations made to charities to fund private school scholarships for middle- and low-income children. During the 2004–2005 school year, approximately 25,000 low- and middle-income K–12 students received scholarships.

### Maine

Since 1873, some rural communities in Maine have permitted children to attend a different public or private school outside of their town through a “tuitioning” program. In 2004, 14,000 Maine children attended a school of their family’s choice through the “tuitioning” program. A 2002 Friedman Foundation study found that public high schools near tuitioning towns had higher test scores than regular public schools.

### Utah

In 2005, Utah created the Carson Smith Special Needs Scholarship Program, which provides a school voucher to some children with disabilities so they can attend a private school. An estimated 138 Utah students were scheduled to participate in the Carson Smith program in the first year.

### Vermont

Like in Maine, children in some small towns in Vermont that do not have regular public schools are eligible to attend a chosen public or private school in another town. In 2004, 8,000 Vermont children participated in the program and attended public or private schools of their parents' choice. A 2002 Friedman Foundation report found that public schools that faced more competition from the tuitioning program performed better than regular public schools.

### Washington, D.C.

In 2004, Congress created the federally-funded D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program for low-income children in the nation's capital. The program is currently helping 1,700 children from low-income families attend a private school with a \$7,500 voucher. Initial research suggests that the opportunity scholarship program is boosting parental satisfaction and increasing parental involvement in their children's education.

## A Recent History of Private School Choice Initiatives

- 1990 Milwaukee school voucher program for low-income students
- 1995 Cleveland school voucher program for low-income students
- 1997 Arizona passed first scholarship tax credit program.
- 1999 Florida passed McKay Scholarships for children with disabilities.
- 2001 Florida passed corporate scholarship tax credit program

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- 2001 Pennsylvania passed corporate scholarship tax credit program.
- 2003 Ohio Autism Scholarship Program passed
- 2004 Congress created Washington, D.C. school voucher program
- 2005 Utah created scholarship program for special needs students
- 2005 Ohio expanded school voucher program to children across the state

### School Choice Works: A Review of the Research Evidence

If the state of Maryland were to enact school choice programs, what should parents and taxpayers expect to see? Evidence from existing school choice programs around the country suggests that we can expect a few things will happen. First, we would see parents become more satisfied with their children's schools. Second, students participating in the program would improve academically. Third, existing public school systems would be forced to improve due to the threat of competition caused by school choice.

#### Choice Boosts Parental Satisfaction

To understand why school choice increases parental satisfaction, try thinking about the other areas in life where having a choice makes you happier. If you had the choice between eating in a school cafeteria (where there is limited choice of food) or a food court at the shopping mall (where choices of restaurants are plentiful), you would probably choose the food court. The concept makes sense: having choices is more satisfying to the individual.

School choice programs—from charter schools to voucher programs—all have been found to increase parental satisfaction. Simply having a choice is more likely to guarantee that parents are more likely to be pleased with their children's school. Dozens of surveys and research studies have found that families participating in school choice programs are more satisfied with their children's school. Also, the U.S. Department of Education's National House-

## School Choice: Giving Parents Rights

hold Education Survey Program found that school choice boosts parental satisfaction:

Parents whose children attended either public, chosen schools or private schools were more likely to say they were very satisfied with their children's schools, teachers, academic standards, and order and discipline than were parents whose children attended public, assigned schools. Parents whose children attended private schools were more involved in activities at their children's schools than were parents whose children attended public, assigned and public, chosen schools.

### Choice Boosts Test Scores for Participating Students

School choice programs have been found to boost the academic achievement of participating children. There have been eight randomized studies that have examined the effect of school voucher programs on participating students. (In medical research, randomized experiments are considered the 'gold standard' because the researcher is able to compare a test and control group while accounting for background characteristics.) According to Dr. Jay Greene of the University of Arkansas, "Every one of the eight random-assignment studies finds at least some positive academic effects for students using a voucher to attend a private school."

### Competition Improves the Entire Public School System

One of the most important arguments for school choice is that it will not just benefit the participating children. In theory, it is reasonable to expect that public schools threatened by competition from school choice would spur improvement and greater efficiency. After all, market competition has led to improvements in nearly all other sectors of American life. Competition brings Americans their plentiful supermarkets; the lack of it brought the old Soviet Union its bread lines.

In education, the competition theory has been proven to work in practice by existing research on existing school choice programs. Studies have suggested that competition does have the desired effect system-wide: it has encouraged traditional public schools

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threatened with a loss of students to make better use of their resources.

Harvard University economist Caroline Hoxby has studied the effects of competition in Arizona, Michigan, and Milwaukee and found that competition sparked improvement in threatened public schools. Hoxby's findings point to significant benefits from competition:

If every school in the nation were to face a high level of competition both from other districts and from private schools, the productivity of America's schools, in terms of students' level of learning at a given level of spending, would be 28 percent higher than it is now.

Imagine that: According to this estimate, America's public school system could be 28 percent more productive if the system had more competition due to school choice. With this research in hand, school choice sounds better and better for Maryland children, and better for society.

# 3 School Choice Proposals for Maryland

Maryland currently has only 15 charter schools and a charter school law that was graded with a “D” by the Center for Education Reform. To offer Maryland families more choices within the public school system, lawmakers should improve the state’s charter school law to encourage more independently run schools to open.

## Opportunity Scholarships

Maryland could follow states like Florida and Ohio and cities like Milwaukee and D.C. to offer opportunity scholarships or school vouchers to families to help children attend private school. An opportunity scholarship program could be created for a specific city or school district as well as throughout the state. The program could be means-tested to allow help serve disadvantaged children who are often our most at-risk. Or, opportunity scholarships could be offered to all families.

## Tuition Tax Credits and Deductions for Private School and Homeschooling

Tax incentives could be provided for parents to help purchase private school tuition or other education-related expenses for families who teach their children at home. Iowa, Illinois, and Minnesota have various tax incentives for families to purchase private school tuition. Maryland could increase school choice by offering families similar benefits.

## Scholarship Tax Credits

To provide school choice to underprivileged children, Maryland could create an education tax credit program that provides taxpayers an incentive to make donations to charities that fund private school scholarships for low-income children. Florida and Pennsyl-

vania have scholarship tax credit programs for corporations to help low-income children. Arizona has a scholarship tax credit program to help all children.

## Voucher Programs for At-Risk Communities

Opportunity scholarship programs can be designed to offer school choice to at-risk communities, such as children with special needs or those who are in foster care. A number of targeted school choice programs are currently operating or under consideration across the nation.

## Education Savings Accounts

Maryland could expand school choice by providing tax incentives for families to save on behalf of their children's education. Maryland currently provides a tax deduction of up to \$2,500 per child for families to save for their children's higher education costs. Similar tax incentives could be offered for contributions made to children's education savings accounts for K–12 as well as higher education expenses.



## 4 Frequently Asked Questions

### Does school choice really lead to improvements in academic achievement?

Yes. Dozens of research reports have found that school choice improves student outcomes. Columbia University researchers analyzed 35 empirical studies testing the effects of competition in the educational marketplace. Overall, they found that “a sizable majority of these studies reports beneficial effects of competition across all outcomes.”

### Would school choice increase the tax burden on taxpayers?

No. School choice programs can be designed to be revenue-neutral or actually save taxpayers money. The average per-student expenditure in Maryland public schools is more than \$9,000 annually per student. The average cost of private school tuition in America is \$4,700. Likewise, charter school programs can be designed to cost less than tuition in private school.

### Does school choice drain funding from the public school system?

No. When a student leaves a public school to attend another school, the first school no longer has to bear the costs of educating that student. Allowing students to get a better education outside of the public school systems reduces the number of students in public school classrooms and frees up resources for other students. Moreover, the

amount of money that follows the student through the school choice program is typically less than what is spent on a given student in a public school, so the public school system has more resources for the students who remain at that school.

### Are schools held accountable in school choice plans?

Yes. School choice programs make schools accountable to parents by allowing families to become customers shopping for the best school for their children. If parents decide that the school they selected is not performing adequately or meeting their child's unique needs, they are free to enroll their child elsewhere the following quarter. It is important that school choice programs do not lead to over-regulation of private schools. Most private schools already take standardized tests and school choice programs give parents the power to truly hold schools accountable for performance. After all, who is better able to assess the value a school is providing and hold schools accountable than parents?

### Does school choice lead to racial segregation?

No. According to a number of studies, school choice actually leads to more integrated schools. The traditional public school system assigns children to public schools based on where they live. Since housing patterns tend to be segregated by race and class, the current system naturally leads to segregation. School choice programs that allow children to choose among a variety of schools would break this pattern and lead to greater integration. Research on the Cleveland and Milwaukee school voucher programs has found that children attending private schools using vouchers attend

## Frequently Asked Questions

less segregated schools than their peers in public schools.

### Does school choice lead to “creaming”—i.e., private schools only taking the most successful students?

School choice programs have been found to benefit many children who are currently underserved in the existing public school systems—specifically, children from low-income families and those with special needs. In the current system, only families with means have the opportunity to choose their children’s school by location-based choice. With school choice options, all families would have the opportunity to choose a better school for their children.

### Is school choice constitutional?

In 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a school voucher program in Cleveland that allowed families to send their children to private school (including religious schools) was legal under the federal constitution.

Many scholars believe that because government money is given to parents to use at any school, and not given directly to a religious school, these programs do not constitute government support of religious schools. However, some states have more restrictive state constitutions that place barriers to programs that allow families to use public funding to send their children to religious schools. The Maryland state assembly has not ruled that a school choice program would violate the state constitution.

## Does school choice help children with special needs?

Yes. Children with special needs can benefit from school choice. A scholarship program for children in special education has proven extremely popular with parents, with more than 90 percent of participating families reporting that they are satisfied with their children's school. All too often children with special needs are unable to receive appropriate services. Giving parents a choice gives them the opportunity to find a school that will meet unique needs.

## How can we get school choice in Maryland?

The only way that policymakers will enact a program to provide parents with real school choice will be if parents and voters alike speak out and demand school choice. A number of powerful special interest groups actively oppose any form of school choice policies. Specifically, groups that benefit from the existing public school monopoly—such as the public teacher unions—are active in Maryland and around the nation to oppose school choice.

It is time lawmakers heard from a special interest group that has too long been neglected: parents and children underserved by many public school systems. If you are interested in learning how to support school choice in Maryland, please visit the website: [www.SchoolChoiceforMaryland.org](http://www.SchoolChoiceforMaryland.org). At the Maryland website you will be able to join an active conversation about improving education in the Old Line State.

## 5 A To-Do List for Maryland School Choice Supporters

- ✓ Visit [www.SchoolChoiceforMaryland.org](http://www.SchoolChoiceforMaryland.org)
- ✓ Voice your support for school choice by signing a petition.
- ✓ Join a message board to discuss education with other parents and taxpayers.
- ✓ Ask questions of policy experts.
- ✓ Learn more about school choice.
- ✓ Learn about the latest developments in the effort to bring school choice to Maryland.

# 6 Talking Points for Parents

## Why would school choice be good for Maryland?

- School choice gives every parent the opportunity to choose the best school for their child.
- School choice programs are working around the country.
- School choice programs have been found to be popular with parents, to improve academic achievement, and cause public schools improve through competition.
- School choice programs have the opportunity to make our education system more efficient and improve schools without increasing taxes.

# 7 Further Reading

## Websites

School Choice for Maryland

[www.schoolchoiceformaryland.org](http://www.schoolchoiceformaryland.org)

The Maryland Public Policy Institute

[www.mdpolicy.org](http://www.mdpolicy.org)

The Heritage Foundation

[www.heritage.org/Research/Education/SchoolChoice/schoolchoice.cfm](http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/SchoolChoice/schoolchoice.cfm)

The Alliance for School Choice

[www.allianceforschoolchoice.org](http://www.allianceforschoolchoice.org)

The Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation

[www.friedmanfoundation.org/](http://www.friedmanfoundation.org/)

The Center for Education Reform

[www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com)

## Books

Megan Farnsworth, *Getting Results: High-Performing, Low-Income Schools in Maryland*, The Maryland Public Policy Institute, 2004.

Milton and Rose D. Friedman, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement*, Harcourt, 1990.

Virginia Walden Ford, *Voices, Choices, and Second Chances, D.C. Parents for School Choice*, 2005.

Jay P. Greene, *Education Myths: What Special-Interest Groups Want You to Believe About Our Schools*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005.

## 8 Quotes from Notable School Choice Supporters

It's time to give all Baltimore parents the option to pull their children out of poorly run schools and place them in schools where they believe their children will get a better education. If exercising this option leads to a mass exodus from some schools, these schools will learn a painful lesson: either they will have to improve or declining enrollments will force them to shut down and poorly performing staff would lose their jobs. Successful teachers and administrators, on the other hand, would be rewarded for the progress of their students.

—*Former Baltimore Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke (D)*

School vouchers are a viable method of allowing all American children access to high-quality schools, including private and religious schools. Every parent should be able to obtain the highest quality education for their children, not just the wealthy. Tuition vouchers would provide low-income children trapped in mediocre, or worse, schools the same educational choices as children of economic privilege.

—*Arizona Sen. John McCain (R)*

The reason I support vouchers is because I think things are improving in the school system, but we can't wait. Thousands of children can't wait until we do everything we need to do to improve the school system.

—*D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams (D)*

We must give low-income and working-class parents the power to choose schools—public or private, non-



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sectarian or religious—where their children will succeed. And we must give all schools the incentives to work to meet children's needs. Consider the power of choice in the hands of families who have little or no power because they control no resources. Consider how the absence of choice will continue to consign their children to schools that the affluent parents who oppose choice would never tolerate for their own children.

—*Dr. Howard Fuller, Marquette University*

I have supported the Milwaukee school choice program for over a decade. It's good for this city's poor children. It's good for all of this city's schools—Milwaukee public schools, charter schools, and private schools. And it's good for the community.

—*Milwaukee Mayor John O. Norquist (D)*

School vouchers can push elementary and secondary education out of the 19th century and into the 21st by introducing market competition on a broad scale, just as competition has made progress possible in every other area of economic and civic life. The biggest winner from such an educational revolution would be American society as a whole.

—*Nobel Laureate Milton Friedman*

The parents that I've been around for the last almost 10 years have been folks that have looked at the public school system and tried to stick by it and saw not enough changes happen. We can't ask parents to wait any longer. We have to give them something right now because children are suffering.

—*Virginia Walden Ford, Executive Director of  
D.C. Parents for School Choice*

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