



THE UNPRECEDENTED RISE IN SCHOOL CHOICE

A NEW ERA IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

AUGUST 7, 2024

In recent years, the educational choice movement has emerged as a powerful force in the political landscape of the United States. With the outcomes of the 2023 school choice victories now evident, it's apparent that this movement has reshaped both the education system and the accompanying political dialogue. As these programs continue to improve student experiences and outcomes, more states are likely to follow with actions that will empower parents to send their children to the schools that best suit their children's educational needs.

The America First Policy Institute's (AFPI) commitment has not wavered, and the level of support for educational freedom in our Nation is unprecedented. Currently, there are 75 school choice programs in 34 states, with 18 states offering Educational Savings Accounts (ESAs). **In just three years, the number of states offering universal school choice has risen from 0 to 12, and 22 other states have passed school choice expansion bills.** In addition to Alabama and Louisiana passing universal school choice this year, Wyoming, Missouri, Georgia, and Nebraska have all passed school choice expansion bills.

National test results for 2022 show that school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating effect on American schoolchildren. Eighth-grade math scores on the National Assessment of Educational

Progress, often called the "Nation's Report Card," shows that public schools have reached a 30-year low. Students consistently fall below proficiency levels in all core subjects.

AFPI recognizes that our Nation still has much work to do to provide educational freedom for all children, and we are optimistic about the path forward. The Center for Education Opportunity (CEO) at AFPI works tirelessly to share the most comprehensive research on the expansion of educational freedom. The CEO highlights the importance of school choice in our Nation with a deep understanding of the urgency of this issue.

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The America First Policy Institute is Doing the Work

Beginning in 2021, AFPI and America First Works (AFW), the advocacy organization of AFPI, were intimately involved in laying the foundation to expand school choice in the states. In January 2022, AFPI hosted a School Choice Speaker Series event in Washington, D.C., to celebrate National School Choice Week. Scott Turner, chair of the Center for Education Opportunity at AFPI, was joined by Kellyanne Conway, chair of the Center for the American Child at AFPI, and Brooke Rollins, president and Chief Executive Officer of AFPI. Together, they discussed the importance of expanding school choice and empowering parents. More than 100 school choice

legislation distributed by AFW, all while supporting the passage of universal school choice in 12 states.

The CEO's commitment has only grown stronger since the start. In January 2024, the CEO held an education freedom webinar for National School Choice Week, featuring a conversation among the top school choice leaders in the country. In a discussion facilitated by AFPI Chief Engagement Officer Ashley Hayek, experts that included Dr. Laurie Todd-Smith, director of CEO and Center for the American Child, Cameron Sexton, speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives, and Sharon Sedlar, a Pennsylvania parent, reflected on the unprecedented school choice wins across the Nation.

States are Fighting for Education Freedom

All state constitutions recognize the necessity of elementary and secondary education. The educational opportunities available to children should not be limited by their family's socioeconomic status. It is the collective responsibility of state and local officials, policymakers, and educational institutions to advance educational standards. However, it is paramount that parents maintain authority over their children's educational choices. Through dedication and cooperative efforts, the United States has the potential to deliver high-quality education, guarantee efficient use of taxpayer funds, and secure a prosperous future for succeeding generations.

More than ever, state leaders can reform the education system and reignite excellence. Through experience, research, and education, AFPI's CEO dedicates itself to fostering transformational action so that every child can achieve the American Dream.

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**No one knows the needs and
interests of a child more than their
parent or guardian.”**

—Scott Turner

advocates attended the event, and more than 20 media outlets covered the discussion. Since then, the CEO has produced more than 20 research reports, 16 state-specific fact sheets, and school choice model



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ALABAMA:

[Creating Hope & Opportunity for Our Students' Education \(CHOOSE\)](#)

Universal: Passed!

On March 7, Gov. Kay Ivey (R-AL) signed the Creating Hope & Opportunity for Our Students' Education Act into law, establishing a new ESA program that will be available to any student in the state by the 2027–2028 school year. [HB 129](#) ensures that Alabama parents have the right to choose which type of education best suits their children by providing up to \$7,000 to offset the cost of private or public school. It prioritizes access to effective teachers, the increase of record-low test scores, and the use of federal/state funds to expand quality childhood education.

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Every American student deserves the opportunity to receive a quality education.”

–Brooke L. Rollins

The ESA's program inception in Alabama was aided by the collaborative efforts of AFPI's CEO and the governor's administrative team. The CEO was instrumental in this initiative, diligently supplying a comprehensive policy framework, conducting extensive research on student academic performance, and disseminating informational fact sheets. Furthermore, the CEO contributed significantly by providing expert testimony, thereby ensuring that policymakers were well-informed on the potential educational impacts of the ESA program.

“Every American student deserves the opportunity to receive a quality education,” said Brooke Rollins, president and Chief Executive Officer of AFPI.

LOUISIANA:

[Giving All True Opportunity to Rise \(LA GATOR\) Scholarship Program](#)

Universal: Passed!

On Wednesday, June 19, [SB 313](#) became law with the signature of Gov. Jeff Landry (R-LA). This sweeping school choice bill will reach all families statewide by 2025. The LA GATOR program will ensure that ESAs are available to every Louisiana family, enabling parents to select the school that best fits their child's needs. AFPI's CEO contributed to this legislative process by providing fact sheets, delivering expert testimony, and formulating strategic communications for legislators, which played a pivotal role in the enactment of this bill. Consequently, private schools will now be available to all Louisiana youth regardless of their families' finances or zip code.



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WYOMING:

[Education Savings Accounts](#)

Expansion: Passed!

On March 21, the Wyoming legislature passed [HB 166](#), creating a broad ESA program. In the final policy, eligibility for the new program was limited to families with incomes at or below 150% of the federal poverty line, making about 21% of the state eligible. The program will be available to families with incomes at or below 150% of the federal poverty line, making about 21% of the state eligible. However, it is Wyoming's first school choice program, which is a positive step forward. The CEO will prioritize supporting universal eligibility in the state during the next legislative session.

MISSOURI:

[Creates and modifies provisions relating to elementary and secondary education.](#)

Expansion: Passed!

In a significant legislative development, the Missouri Senate passed [SB 727](#), which expands the MO Scholars tax credit scholarship program for K-12 students statewide. Following this, Governor Mike Parson signed the bill into law on May 7, 2024. Prior to this, the CEO published [Missouri School Choice Solutions](#), which brought attention to the state's low reading scores and made a case for broader school choice options. Additionally, the CEO contributed by providing essential research and talking points to support the expansion of educational choices further.

GEORGIA:

[The Georgia Promise Scholarship Act](#)

Expansion: Passed!

In April of this year, Gov. Brian Kemp (R-GA) signed [SB 233](#), establishing an Education Savings Account program for students in the lowest-performing 25% of public schools, marking a significant move towards universal school choice in Georgia. This legislative success was greatly influenced by the CEO's close collaboration with the new AFPI-GA state chapter.

In September 2023, the CEO's publication of the [Georgia School Choice Solutions](#) fact sheet assisted in reigniting support for the bill through the use of student achievement data, culminating in its passage after concerted efforts to educate House Education Committee members on its benefits.

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School choice helps ALL students, and we know that education is fundamental to children's future opportunities. By investing in our students and families with smart policy, we can enable a future generation of American leaders to create greater outcomes than we ever imagined.”

-Doug Collins



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NEBRASKA:
[Education Scholarships](#)

Expansion: Passed!

On April 24, Gov. Jim Pillen (R-NE) signed [LB 1402](#) into law. It will devote \$10 million to the state treasurer to distribute private K–12 scholarships to students. This new and improved voucher program will take effect in July and replace the Opportunity Scholarship tax-credit scholarship program. The voucher will be available to:

- Students from households with incomes at or below 213% of the federal poverty line and entering kindergarten or first or ninth grade at a qualified school.
- Those transferring from a public school.
- Students who are dependents of active or reserve duty military personnel moving into Nebraska.
- Those who have previously received an education scholarship under the Opportunity Scholarships Act.
- Any sibling of a scholarship recipient who resides in the same household. Students must be enrolled in a qualified school.

AFPI's CEO provided research and guidance on the impact the Opportunity Scholarship program in other states as well talking points on the benefits of school choice.

SOUTH CAROLINA:
[The Education Scholarship Trust Fund Program](#)

Universal: 50% of the way there!

In March 2024, South Carolina's House passed [HB 5164](#), a bill to expand the state's Education Trust Fund ESA program to universal eligibility, signaling a significant shift in educational policy. This legislation proposes an annual increase in the scholarship amount and aims to eliminate all income eligibility rules by 2026.

In September 2023, AFPI's CEO published the [South Carolina School Choice Solutions](#) fact sheet commending Governor Henry McMaster for his support of school choice and highlighted the necessity of universal eligibility, setting the stage for the recent advancements in the state's educational offerings.

TENNESSEE:
[Education Freedom Scholarship Act](#)

Universal: Priority for 2025!

In 2023, Tennessee launched an [ESA program](#) to provide about \$8,000 to eligible low and middle income families in Chattanooga, Memphis, and Nashville. This money offers families much-needed flexibility, as it can be allocated toward tuition, fees, and other educational needs. It also allows Tennessee students to attend schools outside of their district, private schools, and charter schools, which are expanding in the state.

The CEO played a pivotal role in expanding upon this effort, working in partnership with Gov. Bill Lee (R-TN) to establish a groundbreaking plan to



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develop school choice further and make it a reality for every family in the state. The CEO has assisted with messaging, polling, and dispelling misinformation with a fact sheet entitled [Myths vs. Facts: School Choice in Tennessee](#). Despite the universal school choice bill not passing this session, AFPI remains committed to supporting these efforts. As the CEO Chair Scott Turner often says, “No one knows the needs and interests of a child more than their parent or guardian.”

TEXAS: [Senate Bill 1](#)

Priority for Next Session!

Over the past two years, Texas has seen significant developments in school choice legislation. In 2023, Governor Greg Abbott advocated for a major education bill known as [S.B. 1](#), which proposed the allocation of \$500 million to ESAs. These accounts would provide \$8,000 annually to families opting out of public schools for private education, tutoring, or other approved expenses. Despite passing the Texas Senate, the bill encountered resistance in the House, leading to a special session being called. A bipartisan committee suggested amendments to prioritize high-need students and finance the program with the state’s general revenue instead of the primary education fund. The debate continues, with proponents emphasizing parental choice and opponents concerned about the impact on public school funding.

Recent elections in Texas have seen a significant shift that could influence the passage of the school choice bill. Governor Greg Abbott’s success in the primaries against Republicans who opposed school

vouchers has increased the likelihood of passing such legislation. CEO will continue to work with education stakeholders in providing research and support for the voucher program in the 2025 legislative session.

The Center For Education Opportunity Is Looking Ahead

In addition to supporting these states, the CEO also closely tracks the progress of school choice in AFPI chapter states. With [Florida](#) and [Arizona](#) already having passed universal school choice with support from the CEO, the focus is now on [Georgia](#), [Pennsylvania](#), [California](#), and others.

To stay informed on school choice in your state:

- Find the Center for Education Opportunity overview [here](#).
- Find the latest center publications [here](#).
- Track your state’s progress on [America First Parents](#).

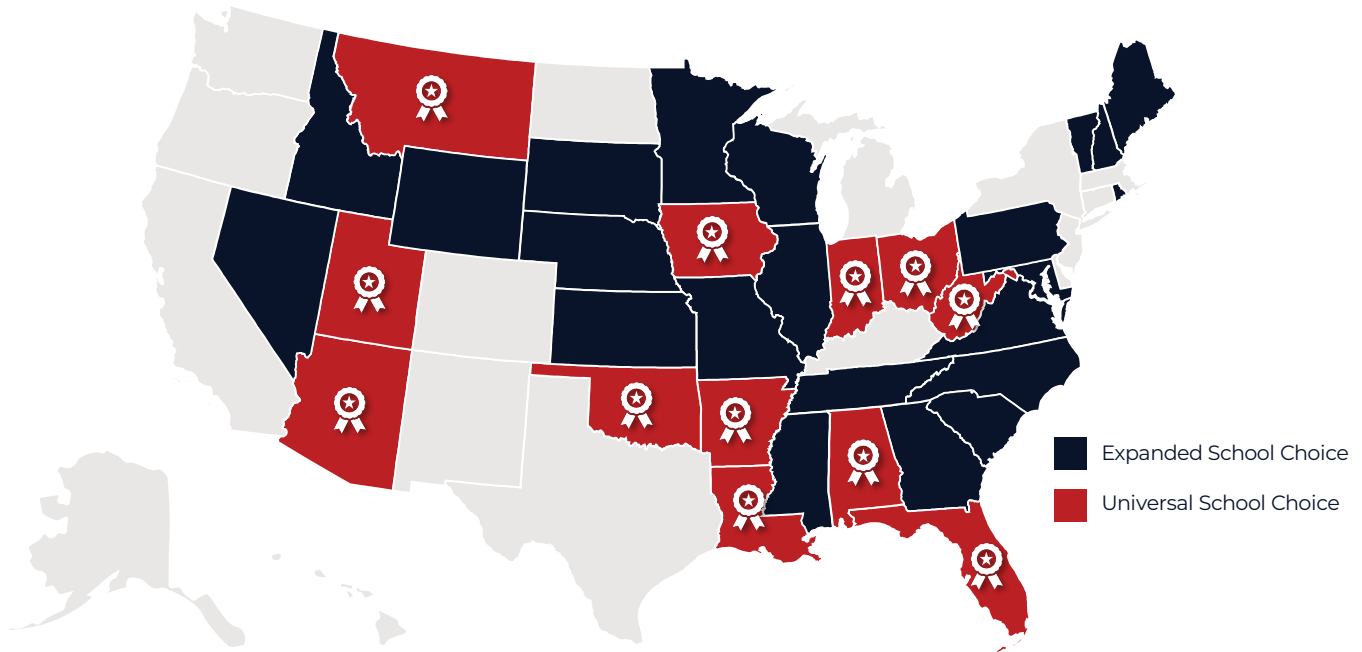
Regardless of the status of school choice in your state, stay informed and advocate for accountability in your district with these resources:

- [Accountability in America’s Public Schools](#)
- [Restoring Parental Rights in Schools](#)
- [School Choice Empowers Families and Creates Greater Student Outcomes](#)
- [Give Every Parent More Control Over Their Child’s Education](#)



SCHOOL CHOICE WINS RECAP

★ In just three years, the number of states offering universal school choice has risen from 0 to 12, and 22 other states have passed school choice expansion bills (see map).



★ Now a total of **34 states** or territories (including Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C.) offer some school choice programs.

Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, District of Columbia, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

★ **12 states** have now passed universal school choice.

★ **18 states** have ESA programs, but not all are universal.

★ The majority of states, including Washington, D.C., allow charters. Approximately 7.5% of all public school students attend charters.





THE CENTER FOR EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY

The Center for Education Opportunity at AFPI aims to restore our system of public education to its original, legitimate purpose: educating and raising the next generation of Americans, facilitating their dreams, and our prosperity. Providing a high-quality education with opportunities that benefit every student will create greater outcomes for our next generation.

The Honorable Scott Turner

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