

PRIORITIZING K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION

COSSBA Requests



Support the nation's public education system by stopping the diversion of federal funding to non-public school choice options, vouchers, tax credits, and ESA programs.

Issue History

K-12 public education has long been viewed as a pillar of our nation's democracy. It is an underpinning for civic engagement, quality of life, and economic opportunity. Study after study highlights that high-quality public education produces students who are healthier, wealthier, and more engaged citizens. Studies have also substantiated that supporting public education does make a difference; investments in public education result in many positive externalities for communities, states, and the nation.

For more than three decades, state legislatures and, more recently, Congress, have debated the pros and cons of school choice to introduce "competition" and drive improvement in student achievement outcomes. Conceptually, school choice is designed to empower the rights of parents to choose the most proper school setting for their children, be it a public school (traditional or charter), private school, or homeschool. Other policy levers have emerged that further spur the notion of choice, including a multitude of tax credit programs and Education Scholarship Accounts (ESA) that function like a consumer Health Savings Account. For example, in 2022, Arizona passed a universal ESA program for all K-12 education students.

According to research and reports from the Education Commission of the States, the landscape of school choice in states across the nation includes:

- 43 states with state policies explicitly permitting interdistrict open enrollment;
- 23 voucher programs in 13 states and the District of Columbia;
- 14 states with ESA programs;
- 25 scholarship tax credit programs in 21 states; and
- 45 states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws.

An escalation of social and political challenges confronts K-12 public education more than ever before. Despite these challenges and the expanding market of school choice, public schools continue to remain the schools of choice for parents. Nationwide, according to the National Center for Education Statistics - Condition of Education 2022 report, more than 49.4 million students attend a public school compared to 4.7 million students in private schools, and 1.7 million students who are homeschooled.

COSSBA opposes increased federal government activity and funding for non-public school choice options, including but not limited to voucher, tax credit, and ESA programs. These programs divert funding from public schools, lack financial transparency and accountability, are subject to less regulation and oversight, and do not improve student achievement.