University of Missouri Sued for Failing to Follow Donor’s Intent

**By Harry Painter**

The University of Missouri misused a deceased donor’s endowment gift, a lawsuit against the institution charges.

Sherlock Hibbs, a 1926 Missouri graduate and Wall Street financier who died in 2002, left his alma mater $5 million, which, totaled $9 million after investments were made and $4 million was spent on salaries. The bequest was made on the condition the university use the money to hire six “dedicated and articulate disciples” of the free-market Austrian school of economics and preeminent Austrian thinker DONOR’S INTENT, p. 4

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**Chalkboard**

Ohio Adopts SEL
A controversial K–12 social-emotional learning program will be voluntary for school districts and individual students won’t be assessed, but parents remain concerned. Page 5

PA Scholarship Tax Credit
Pennsylvania raised its scholarship tax credit cap after the governor vetoed a much larger increase. Page 7

Vacant DC School Facilities
Charter schools would like to buy the one million square feet of vacant space in closed DC public schools, but the city is stalling. Page 9

Student Loan Debt
College loan debt is a bigger problem for those who don’t graduate. Page 17

Military Families and Choice
A new survey of military families shows choice in education is important to them and affects their decisions about whether to serve. Page 22

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**Trump Admin. Proposes More Flexible Apprenticeship Rules**

**By Edward Hudgins**

The Trump administration is proposing a regulatory rule that would expand access to apprenticeships by allowing private enterprises, colleges, and other nongovernmental entities to set standards for training programs.

Currently, U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) regulations under the National Apprenticeship Act of 1937 require these programs to be approved by DOL or state-level agencies.

The regulatory change, published on June 25, would establish “Standards Recognition Entities”—nongovernmental standard-setting organizations that would “recognize Industry-Recognized Apprenticeship Programs.” The period for public comments on the changes was scheduled to end August 26, and a final rule could be enacted this fall.

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Louisiana Approves Full Funding for Choice Scholarship Program

By Bonner R. Cohen

Louisiana is providing full funding for the state’s school choice program for the 2019–20 school year.

Bipartisan majorities in both houses of the legislature passed H.B. 105, which provides $41.9 million for the Louisiana Scholarship Program (LSP), on June 6, and Gov. John Bel Edwards signed it on June 18.

Created in 2008 and expanded statewide in 2012, the LSP allows students in low- and moderate-income families from failing public schools or children entering kindergarten for the first time to transfer to or enroll in a participating private school of their choice.

Participation Growing

“The Louisiana Scholarship Program provides access to quality education options for the state’s most at-risk students—with 100 percent coming from lower-income families and many having attended underperforming public schools,” said Kelli Bottger, state director of the Louisiana Federation for Children (LFC), in a press release on June 7.

The program “received more than 10,000 applications from parents for the 2018-2019 school year with 6,892 students enrolled in 121 schools in 31 school districts across the state,” the LFC press release stated. “Participation in the program has grown steadily since it was expanded statewide in 2012, when 4,967 students received scholarships.”

The program provides scholarships averaging $6,000 per student per school year for tuition at participating private schools.

Scholarship Parents Highly Satisfied

The LFC’s annual Parental Satisfaction Survey found an overwhelming majority of parents approve of the academic gains achieved and support the program, states the group’s press release. Specifically, “96.7 percent of parents surveyed were happy with their child’s academic progress and 92.5 percent of parents were very satisfied or satisfied with every aspect of their child’s Scholarship Program school,” the organization’s June 7 press release states.

Sixty percent of LSP students graduating from high school enrolled in college in 2018.

Overall, Louisiana was rated 48th in education in the 2019 U.S. News & World Report ranking published on May 14.

Problem: State Tests, Curriculum

The success of the LSP is limited by government interference, says Jude Schwalbach, a research assistant in education policy at The Heritage Foundation.

“Only one-third of Louisiana’s private schools chose to participate in the program,” Schwalbach wrote in The Daily Signal on May 16.

LSP participants score lower on average than their peers in public schools on state tests, especially in math, states an evaluation of Louisiana by the School Choice Demonstration Project at the University of Arkansas published on April 24.

The cause of the low participation and inability to recreate other states’ successes in academic achievement is Louisiana’s excessive regulation of schools in the LSP, Schwalbach says.

“To enroll scholarship recipients, participating private schools must participate in state testing, aligned with the public school curriculum,” Schwalbach wrote.

Private schools are reluctant to participate in choice programs that are highly regulated, because the rules and mandates increase costs and prevent the schools from teaching the values and curriculum they consider important.

‘Burdensome Regs’ Curtail Choice

If scholarship schools are required to duplicate the education offered in government schools, it is difficult for them to provide real alternatives, Schwalbach says.

“Burdensome regulations can prevent schools from creating a diverse education marketplace,” Schwalbach told School Reform News. “States serious about school choice should remember that parents who can vote with their feet, not heavy-handed government regulations, are a better accountability measure.”

There is much to be learned from Louisiana’s experience, says Don Soifer, president of Nevada Action for School Options.

“One takeaway we have from school choice research is that the specific details of a school choice program matter when it comes to its success and student outcomes,” Soifer said. “The Louisiana Scholarship Program is a private school choice program that is heavily regulated in ways that are unfortunately holding back the success of participating students.”

Bonner R. Cohen, Ph.D. (bcohen@nationalcenter.org) is a senior fellow at the National Center for Public Policy Research.

LEARN MORE


University of Missouri Sued for Failing to Follow Donor’s Intent

Continued from page 1

Ludwig von Mises.
Austrian economists emphasize individual choice and subjective preferences in human action. In addition to Mises, the Austrian school is associated with 1974 Nobel laureate F.A. Hayek.

Under the terms of the gift, the University of Missouri was to establish and fund three new chairs and three new distinguished professorships at its Trulaske College of Business, all to be filled by Austrian economists. Bruce J. Walker, former dean of the business school, created the positions but “appointed individuals to the Chairs and Distinguished Professorships whom he knew were not Austrian economists,” the plaintiff’s attorneys stated in a brief to the Missouri Supreme Court.

Donor’s Enforcement Mechanism
To enforce the restriction on his gift, Hibbs arranged a unique backup plan involving Hillsdale College, a conservatively-leaning liberal arts school in Michigan that houses Mises’ personal library.

Hibbs’ bequest required Mizzou officials to regularly certify to Hillsdale the Misesian credentials of its new hires. If Missouri violated the terms of the gift, the money would go to Hillsdale, thus creating a strong incentive for Hillsdale to take care in monitoring Missouri’s stewardship of the funds.

“Mr. Hibbs named Hillsdale College not only to ensure that his gifts were used as described in his will, but also to take action if the intent of his gift was not fulfilled,” stated Hilldale attorney Peter W. Herzog III, The Columbia Misesian reported on July 14. “Hillsdale takes that obligation very seriously.”

Four professors hold positions created by Hibbs’ gift. The other two posts are vacant. Each of the four professors signed an affidavit affirming he or she is “a dedicated and articulate disciple of the free and open market economy (the Ludwig von Mises Austrian School of Economics).”

In an email revealed by the discovery process and quoted in the Hillsdale brief, Walker wrote, “The Austrian School of Economics is quite controversial. We didn’t want to wade into that controversy, so we focused on some Austrian tenets that are compatible with what we do in our business school.”

‘Cannot Be Trusted’
Hilldale sued the university, alleging school officials failed to comply with the donor’s intent and therefore Hilldale should receive the money.

The case will now proceed to trial, the Missouri Supreme Court having issued an opinion that the proper venue is a probate court in Boone County, location of the university’s main campus, instead of St. Louis County, where the lawsuit was originally filed, on June 25.

In its filing of the lawsuit, Hilldale’s attorneys, one of whom is former Missouri Governor Jay Nixon, allege the University of Missouri found the prospect of promoting Austrian economics “distasteful” and quote then-Provost (and later chancellor) Brady Deaton as saying the university and the business school were being “held hostage by a particular ideology.”

The actions of Missouri officials highlight the practice of ignoring benefactors’ instructions, says George Leef, director of editorial content at the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal.

“This case shows again that college officials cannot be trusted to follow the wishes of donors but prefer to spend their money on their own priorities if they can get away with it.”

GEORGE LEEF
DIRECTOR OF EDITORIAL CONTENT
JAMES G. MARTIN CENTER FOR ACADEMIC RENEWAL

“The problem with the case in Missouri is that you’ve got a large public institution and it’s not profit-driven,” Deist said. “It’s not donor-driven.

“It’s awfully hard to force them to use [his money] as he wanted,” Deist said. “In other words, public schools answer to a lot of other people.”

Another problem, Deist says, is that donor agreements are never watertight.

“No matter how creative you get with your legal documents, no matter how ironclad you try to write them, the enforcement is always a lawsuit,” Deist said. “Lawsuits generally are pretty inefficient in the sense that the lawyers eat up a lot of the money and neither side gets the outcome they really hoped for.”

Ignoring the Customers
Nonprofit organizations aren’t like competing commercial enterprises that must be responsive to the demands of their customers, Deist says.

“What makes [universities and nonprofit organizations] different is that they aren’t up against it with regard to profit and lose the way a private business is,” Deist said.

“You know, if Ford has mission creep and loses sight of buyers’ intent, then they sell fewer cars and they get in trouble,” Deist said. “But oftentimes, foundations and university departments and nonprofits, they sort of take on a life of their own.”

Harry Painter (harrypainter@gmail.com) writes from New York City, New York.
Ohio Adopts Controversial K–12 Social-Emotional Learning Standards

By Bonner R. Cohen

The Ohio State Board of Education has adopted K–12 standards that put social-emotional learning (SEL) on par with math, English, and other academic subjects.

The goal of SEL is to develop the "whole child" by helping students build "self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, and relationship and responsible decision-making skills," the Ohio Department of Education’s official description of the standards states.

In 2012, the state board adopted Early Learning and Development Standards for children from birth through "kindergarten entry" that included social and emotional development, the state’s Education Department states. In 2015, those standards were extended through the third grade.

The board adopted the full K–12 SEL standards, which are to be included in “In Each Child, Our Future,” Ohio’s strategic plan for education, on June 11 of this year.

As more states rush to adopt SEL without any buy-in from parents or teachers, the curriculum is raising controversy. Skeptics express concern about what the state will measure, who will have access to the data, and the prospect of putting teachers in the role of psychological diagnosticians and therapists.

Doubts About Effectiveness

SEL is of questionable value and scientific validity, says Karen Effrem, a pediatrician and president of Education Liberty Watch. "Evidence shows SEL’s definition, assessments, and research are all questionable, and experts admit there is no evidence of cost-effectiveness," Effrem said. "Ohio therefore should not be spending its state’s share of what national proponent groups estimate is $30 billion on SEL in this time of tight education budgets, teacher shortages, infrastructure issues, etc."

Use of the standards by local school districts is supposed to be voluntary, but national curriculum standards were also supposed to be optional, yet states were pushed into adopting them and local schools have had to comply, Effrem says.

"Most likely that means voluntary in the same way Common Core standards were for states and localities," Effrem said.

‘Collaborative’ Approach?

The state school board’s claim that children will not be evaluated for their SEL competency is dubious, says Robert Holland, a senior fellow for education policy at The Heartland Institute, which publishes School Reform News.

"The value of the no-assessment pledge is suspect, given Cleveland’s partnership with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), the huge foundation which openly declares development of social-emotional testing mechanisms to be one of its highest priorities," Holland said.

The Cleveland Metropolitan School District states it “established its SEL program, Humanware, in 2007.”

Potential ‘Collateral Damage’

SEL adds to the workloads of already overburdened teachers, says Jane Robbins, an attorney who has written on SEL.

"As if teachers didn’t have enough to do, now they’re supposed to take over the parents’ role in children’s social-emotional development," Robbins said.

Districts that adopt SEL standards could stigmatize children, Robbins says. “What happens when a mistaken evaluation turns up in the child’s long-term data dossier?” Robbins asked. “Guess we’ll have to see the collateral damage.”

Bonner R. Cohen, Ph.D. (bcohen@nationalcenter.org) is a senior fellow at the National Center for Public Policy Research.

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Pennsylvania Expands Tax Credit Scholarship Programs

By Vivian E. Jones

Pennsylvania’s tax credit scholarship programs will be able to serve up to 15,000 more students next year, thanks to a $30 million increase in the overall cap on the credits.

Gov. Tom Wolf signed H.B. 1615, which includes a $25 million increase in the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) cap to $135 million and a $5 million increase in the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) cap to $55 million, on June 28.

Roughly half of the student applications for tax credit scholarships for the 2017-18 school year—some 49,000—were rejected because the caps were reached, the Commonwealth Foundation of Pennsylvania reported on June 6, based on newly released data from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development.

Vetoed Larger Expansion

Wolf earlier vetoed a larger tax credit expansion bill, H.B. 800, which would have nearly doubled the cap for the EITC program and increased it automatically in the future, on June 18.

The $30 million expansion was included in the state budget package with the support of Pennsylvania House Speaker Mike Turzai (R-Allegheny).

“While these increases are robust and vitally important, please note that it was not the groundbreaking achievement we had hoped to attain with House Bill 800,” Turzai wrote in a letter to school choice supporters on July 22. “Still, H.B. 1615 represents a significant accomplishment, equaling the highest increase in any one year of EITC scholarship monies.”

Benefits Low-Income Children

Under the plan, Pennsylvania businesses receive a tax credit in return for making donations to organizations that provide scholarships to low- and middle-income families for private school tuition.

Corporations receive tax credits amounting to 75 percent of their donation, with an annual cap of $750,000 per business. If a business opts to make the same donation for two years in a row, it receives a tax credit for 90 percent of the donation. The state imposes a cap on the total of tax credits.

Despite the $30 million increase in the credits, the program will serve only about one-quarter of the applicants whose scholarships were denied last year.

“Unfortunately, Gov. Wolf chose to veto H.B. 800’s historic expansion of the EITC program, despite the obvious good it would have done for Pennsylvania’s students and families,” Turzai wrote in his letter. “I was immensely disappointed that Gov. Wolf did not seize the opportunity offered by H.B. 800 to literally transform the lives of thousands of families who are looking for private educational opportunities.”

Calls for Automatic Increases

The best way to address rising demand for scholarships is to automate the increases, says Lennie Jarratt, project manager of the Center for Transforming Education at The Heartland Institute, which publishes School Reform News.

“The state could include an auto escalation provision,” Jarratt said. “If donations reach 90 percent of the capped giving for the year, the cap automatically grows by 25 percent the following year. Another potential auto escalation model could be to increase the cap by the number of applicants times the average per-student scholarship amount.”

H.B. 800 included an automatic escalation provision, and state Sen. Mike Regan (R-Cumberbnd) introduced S.B. 299, which would create an automatic escalator for both EITC and OSTC, on February 14.

Florida enacted tax credit scholarships in 2001, the same year as Pennsylvania, and in 2011, Florida added an escalator to the cap, writes Mark LeBlond, a senior policy analyst at the Commonwealth Foundation.

“Florida now awards twice as many student scholarships as Pennsylvania, and their average scholarship amount is significantly higher,” LeBlond wrote on the Commonwealth Foundation website on July 2.

Businesses’ Interest Exceeds Cap

The program is not forced to turn students away for lack of donations from businesses. The state’s Department of Community and Economic Development estimates businesses have applied for $180 million in EITC tax credits beyond the current cap. Were the cap to be raised to cover all contributions in these applications, as proposed in H.B. 800, the funding organizations would be able to double the number of scholarships.

Critics of the program, including Wolf, say the scholarship tax credits take away funding from the state’s public schools.

“Why would the Commonwealth allow for the expansion of the Educational Improvement Tax Credit that supports private institutions while our current public school system remains underfunded?” Wolf asked when vetoing H.B. 800.

“We have public schools that are structurally deteriorating, contaminated by lead, and staffed by teachers who are not appropriately paid and overstretched in their responsibilities,” Wolf said in his statement.

No Fund Diversion

Contrary to those claims, Pennsylvania has increased public education spending by 25 percent over the last five years, and the state spent a record $32 billion in state and local taxes on public education for the 2018-19 school year. None of those funds are diverted to the scholarship programs, Jarratt says.

“The EITC does not take money away from the public schools,” Jarratt said. “It is completely charitable donations that never go into the state treasury. The state can allocate whatever amounts they want from the state funds to the schools.”

School choice advocates will continue to push for expansion of the credit programs, says Turzai.

“We refused to allow the Governor’s veto to be the final word on EITC expansion this year,” Turzai wrote. “We will continue to fervently support school choice measures. Personally, I want to see the expansion of the EITC such that it can offer a scholarship to every child and family in want of one.”

Mike Turzai
Pennsylvania House Speaker (R-Allegheny)

“We refused to allow the Governor’s veto to be the final word on EITC expansion this year. We will continue to fervently support school choice measures. Personally, I want to see the expansion of the EITC such that it can offer a scholarship to every child and family in want of one.”

Vivian E. Jones (vivianejones@aol.com) writes from Murfreesboro, Tennessee.

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Pay for Meals or Lose Your Children, PA School District Warns

By Bonner R. Cohen

A Pennsylvania school district sent letters to parents telling them to pay their delinquent breakfast and lunch bills or their children could be placed in foster care.

The Wyoming West Valley School District in northeastern Pennsylvania near Scranton sent out about 1,000 of the letters in the week of July 14, CNN reported on July 21.

"Your child has been sent to school without money and without a breakfast and/or lunch," Joseph Muth, director of federal programs for the district, states in the fill-in-the-blank form letter.

"This is a failure to provide your child with proper nutrition and you can be sent to Dependency Court for neglecting your child's right to food," Muth states in the letter. "If you are taken to Dependency Court, the result may be your child being removed from your home and placed in foster care."

"It is shameful that a public school district would take a system designed to be a last resort for victims of child mistreatment and weaponize it to attack parents over a simple monetary debt," Ramey said. "How can a school district protect against bullying, or teach children not to be bullies, when the school district itself is willing to bully these families?"

County Officials Disagreed

Luzerne County officials say they would not remove children from their homes over unpaid school lunches. County Manager David Pedri told NPR county officials have asked the school district to stop using the language in the letter.

Bill Vinsko, a lawyer in northeastern Pennsylvania, says not being able to pay for meals in the school cafeteria would not meet the state's legal definition of neglect, so a prosecution over unpaid lunch bills is unlikely in any case.

In addition, local officials say the rising poverty rate in the district means it will soon receive enough federal nutrition assistance to cover meals for all students, regardless of their families' economic status.

As for the $22,000 shortfall, Mazur said some of it was paid off by parents after they received the threatening letter from the school district.

Calls for 'Quality Schooling Options'

The case shows the need for educational alternatives, says Don Soifer, president of Nevada Action for School Options.

"It would be understandable that reasonable parents would call into question the judgment of the officials responsible for this decision," Soifer said.

"In situations like this one, there is real value in having other, quality schooling options available for families to choose if they feel other options would be better for their children," Soifer said.

Bonner R. Cohen, Ph.D. (bcohen@nationalcenter.org) is a senior fellow at the National Center for Public Policy Research.

D.C. Groups Want Vacant Public School Buildings for Charter Schools

By Kenneth Artz

Washington, D.C. parents are being denied school choice because the district is preventing charters from using empty public school space.

Despite rising student demand, the D.C. Public Schools system won't release one million square feet of abandoned school buildings for use by charter schools, states a video published by the D.C. Association of Chartered Public Schools. Twelve thousand students are on waitlists for seats in high-performing public charter schools in the District, states the website of the D.C. Public Charter School Board (PCSBN), an independent agency within the D.C. government.

Making the vacant school buildings available for use by charter schools would benefit students and provide more revenue for the traditional government schools, states the PCSB, which oversees 123 public charter schools in the city.

The District is required by federal law to offer charter schools the right of first refusal on empty school buildings if it determines a property will not be needed in the future.

Poor Academic Quality

The quality of D.C. public schools is very poor, says Jude Schwalbach, a research assistant at The Heritage Foundation's Center for Education Policy.

"Traditional D.C. public schools suffer from dangerous environments and poor academics," Schwalbach said. "For example, 30 percent of students report being bullied, and one in 10 are threatened with a weapon on campus. Unsurprisingly, truancy is a regular problem."

"The National Assessment of Education Progress found only two in 10 D.C. [public school] eighth graders are proficient in math and reading," Schwalbach said. "In 2017, DCPS had the second-lowest attainment rates nationwide, which dropped even further to 68.5 percent in 2018."

"Voting with Their Feet"

Charter schools educate nearly half the students in D.C., Schwalbach says.

"In light of the appalling state of DCPS, parents are reticent to enroll their children," Schwalbach said. "This results in large waiting lists for charter schools and the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program [which pays for private school tuition expenses]."

Instead of trying to prop up drastically failing government schools, policymakers should allow families more choice, Schwalbach says.

"The vacancies in DCPS and the large waiting lists for alternative education options show that parents are voting with their feet," Schwalbach said. "Instead of hampering educational diversity, policymakers should let parents, not government officials, choose their children's schools."

Kenneth Artz (kenneth charlesartz@gmx.com) writes from Dallas, Texas.
Continued from page 1

Underutilized Option
Apprenticeships allow individuals to receive training in particular skills and for specific vocational or professional careers while earning money on the job. The credentials the trainees eventually receive allow them to work in that field by meeting industry or state occupational licensing requirements.

DOL figures show only 585,000 U.S. workers were in registered apprenticeship programs in 2018, out of a total national workforce of 128.6 million. Although the number of apprentices has been rising in recent years, this figure represents only 0.45 percent of the workforce.

The largest number of apprentices is in construction trades, where labor unions largely oversee training. The Trump administration argues dozens of other occupations are ripe for apprenticeships.

“Our economy has 7.4 million open jobs, and for 14 months in a row it has had more job openings than job seekers,” Ivanka Trump, the president’s daughter and adviser, and Labor Secretary Alexander Acosta stated in a June 25, 2019 op-ed in the Miami Herald. There are approximately 1.6 million more job openings than there are unemployed Americans. Even during the recent recession, some five million positions went unfilled because employers could not find skilled workers for them.

Comprehensive Plan
The administration is treating labor, education, and economic issues not in separate agency silos but as integrated issues demanding a government-wide approach to regulatory reform. The proposed DOL rule changes are based on recommendations of a Task Force on Apprenticeship Expansion appointed by President Donald Trump, which included business, labor, and education representatives and administration officials, in a report published on May 10, 2018.

“The American higher education system is churning out a pool of in-debt job seekers who are not equipped to meet the skills needs of many employers in the modern American economy,” the report observed.

The proposed DOL rule changes also cite a November 2017 Harvard Business School study, Room to Grow: Identifying New Frontiers for Apprenticeships, by Joseph B. Fuller and Matthew Sigelman.

“Parents and young people aspiring to enter the workforce need to overcome the widespread penchant for pursuing a four-year degree, instilled by the constant refrain of ‘college for all’ espoused by political leaders and the media,” the study stated.

‘Swiss Model’
A little over 40 percent of American high school students go on to some form of higher education, which can include a two-year college. About one-third of U.S. high school students go on to receive four-year degrees. Few enter apprenticeships.

This is in sharp contrast with the European experience. In Switzerland, 70 percent of young people go through apprenticeship programs, and 40 percent of Swiss companies offer apprenticeship opportunities, Ushi Backes-Gellner, a professor of business economics at the University of Zurich, stated in a December 17, 2018 presentation at the American Enterprise Institute.

Switzerland has apprenticeships in 230 occupations. Apprentices earn money from the enterprises that employ them, can combine apprenticeship work with classroom training, and can go on to higher education if it serves their careers.

Colorado’s Model Program
The Swiss model inspired an innovative apprenticeship program initiated in Colorado in 2016. CareerWise Colorado is a public-private partnership that works to match businesses seeking trained workers with high school students looking for productive career opportunities, says the program’s founder and CEO, Noel Ginsburg.

“The program works in conjunction with 17 school districts and over 100 business partners,” Ginsburg said. “We just launched our third cohort and have enrolled more than 400 students.

“Students accepted as apprentices—students are hired by businesses in a competitive process, just like any other employee—split their time between meaningful on-the-job training, for which they are paid, and classroom work,” Ginsburg said.

Apprenticeships under the Colorado program can require several years to complete, Ginsburg says.

“Most apprenticeships last three years,” Ginsburg said. “Students can earn a high school degree, an industry-recognized professional certification, and the option to earn about a semester’s worth of debt-free college credit that they can apply to a degree, if it serves their career needs.”

‘A Win-Win Situation’
CareerWise Colorado focuses on career pathways not typically associated with apprenticeship, Ginsburg says.

These include “business operations, health care, information technology, financial services, and advanced manufacturing,” Ginsberg said. “And we recently added apprenticeships in teaching.”

“This is a win-win situation all around,” Ginsburg said. “Apprentices gain career skills, income, and more options after high school, and businesses gain experienced workers. Society, overall, is better off.”

In 2019, CareerWise set up programs in New York State, which has 90 apprentices so far in its initial cohort, and in Elkhart County, Indiana, where it is currently recruiting its first cohort.

“Since January 2017, more than 500,000 people have entered apprenticeship programs registered with the Department of Labor or its state counterparts,” Trump and Acosta state in their op-ed. “The average starting salary for individuals who have completed apprenticeships is over $70,000.”

Apprenticeship programs “offer a pathway to a family-sustaining wages [sic] and fulfilling careers,” the op-ed stated.

Edward Hudgins (ehudgins@heartland.org) is research director of The Heartland Institute.

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University of Alaska Consolidates Campuses After Budget Cuts

By Jane Shaw Stroup

The Alaska public higher education system is consolidating its three separate universities into one in the wake of a $70 million cut in state taxpayer funding over three years.

Gov. Mike Dunleavy stunned the university world by cutting annual expenditures for the University of Alaska by $130 million, later reduced to $70 million.

Alaska spends $16,391 per higher-education student, more than double the national average of $7,642. Dunleavy noted in a June 29, 2019, budget memo. The state’s university system has “extensive duplicative programs,” including two engineering schools and two business schools, and more than half the university staff are “administrative or support in nature,” instead of teaching or conducting research, the budget document states.

Dunleavy made the cut to ensure substantial payouts from the Alaska Permanent Fund, which gives a stipend of teaching or conducting research, the administrative or support in nature,” instead of teaching or conducting research, the budget document states.

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“University mergers, whether public or private, are almost always driven by financial concerns. In some cases, it’s simply an effort to increase efficiency. In Alaska’s case, the merger was obviously born out of an acute financial crisis. But in both cases, decisions were driven by costs.”

JENNA ROBINSON
PRESIDENT, JAMES G. MARTIN CENTER FOR ACADEMIC RENEWAL

States Consolidating Colleges

Most state higher education systems do not have to deal with such severe budget cuts, but consolidations are occurring elsewhere among both public and private colleges and universities.

The University of Wisconsin System is merging 13 community colleges into seven of its regional four-year universities. In Kansas, Wichita Area Technical College, a two-year public college, became part of Wichita State University in 2018. In Georgia, Armstrong State University in Savannah has merged with Georgia Southern University, which is about 50 miles away. In Vermont, Johnson State College merged with Lyndon State College, about 55 miles distant.

The online newsletter Education Dive has compiled the number of closures and mergers of nonprofit private and public colleges and universities in the United States since 2016. As of August 2, 2019, 85 schools had closed, merged, or announced plans to do so. Fifty-three of these schools were private, and 32 were public. Ten of the public institutions were part of the consolidation in Wisconsin.

Declining Enrollment

Until recently, attention to potential closures has focused mostly on small schools where declining enrollment can hit hard. Such schools depend on tuition because they don’t have large endowments, significant state support, or federal research money. Similarly, cost concerns explain mergers and consolidations among public universities, says Jenna Robinson, president of the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal.

“University mergers, whether public or private, are almost always driven by financial concerns,” Robinson said. “In some cases, it’s simply an effort to increase efficiency,” Robinson said. “In Alaska’s case, the merger was obviously born out of an acute financial crisis. But in both cases, decisions were driven by costs.”

Shaky Financial Support

As illustrated by the Alaska experience, government support for universities may be much less secure than in the past. The State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO), which reports annually on financial support of state universities, says state legislatures have reached and now exceed the annual expenditures on universities in the pre-recession year of 2008, in current dollars. However, when measured in inflation-adjusted spending per student, on average state support is 11.2 percent less than in 2008, SHEEO says.

Declining enrollment is a factor. The number of students at Alaska’s three universities has shrunk by 19 percent since 2012, Dunleavy says. The number of students at Wisconsin’s community colleges fell by 32 percent between 2010 and 2017.

‘Empire-Building Incentive’

Although some of these consolidations might be necessary for fiscal reasons, some will not actually reduce expenditures, says Neal McCluskey, director of the Center for Educational Freedom at the Cato Institute.

“One motive may be achieving economies of scale due to tough fiscal times, or having overspent for too long,” McCluskey said.

“Outsourcing for Solvency”

Uniting institutions can cut costs if designed well, Robinson says.

“By combining, two small universities can offer students what they want and improve their per-student costs,” Robinson said. “Mergers within the University of Georgia system showed that if it’s done right, a merger can improve student outcomes and save money.”

There are other ways for colleges to make ends meet, Robinson says.

“Schools that don’t want to merge could explore outsourcing some services as a way to stay solvent,” Robinson said. “Outsourcing can decrease a school’s overhead costs considerably.”

“Other schools—like Belmont Abbey in North Carolina—have found that cutting tuition works to attract more students,” Robinson said.

‘Laboratories of Democracy’

Some states will decentralize schools to make them nimbler, McCluskey says. About 15 years ago, the Commonwealth of Virginia gave the University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, and William and Mary more autonomy.

“In other words, I suspect we will see laboratories of democracy continue to work as different states address a changing country and world in different ways,” McCluskey said.

Jane Shaw Stroup (janeshaw5966@gmail.com) is higher education editor of School Reform News and chair of the board of directors of the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal.
Oklahoma Pays to Educate ‘Ghost Students’ in Government Schools

By Ray Carter

Many government schools across Oklahoma are receiving funding to educate “ghost students” who no longer attend them.

“Politics is the reason Oklahoma public schools are receiving funding for that student is greater than what occurs when others move, states a study of Oklahoma’s school-funding formula by Byron Schlomach, director of the 1889 Institute.

“The enrollment of ghost students in online Epic Charter Schools put the spotlight on the issue when the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation executed a search warrant of an Epic teacher’s home on July 13.

Gaining Weight

Because Oklahoma’s school-funding formula provides “weights” based on a student’s grade level and demographics, the financial gain to government schools when some students leave can be even higher than what occurs when others move, states a study of Oklahoma’s school-funding formula by Byron Schlomach, director of the 1889 Institute.

“The funding formula needs to be modernized.”

Gary Stanislawski
Oklahoma State Senator (R-Tulsa)


Official Connections:

Byron Schlomach, director of the Center for Independent Policy

LEARN MORE
By Harry Painter

More than 60 colleges and universities across the nation have signed a statement affirming campus free-speech protections.

The statement was developed by the University of Chicago in 2014 after numerous national incidents on college and university campuses in which invited speakers were shouted down by protesters, and professors who took unpopular positions were verbally and physically assaulted by students and others, with college authorities failing to provide sufficient protection to ensure safety.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made headlines when she declined to speak at Rutgers University after weeks of protests against her.

Better known as the Chicago Statement or the Chicago Principles, the Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression was developed by the University of Chicago to set a standard for protecting freedom of speech.

The statement confirms the university “guarantees all members of the University community the broadest possible latitude to speak, write, listen, challenge, and learn.” The statement emphasizes “it is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.”

Free-Speech Support Spreads

Five years after its creation, the Chicago Statement is continuing to spread across the nation and even internationally. Sixty-six American higher education institutions have adopted or endorsed the Chicago Principles or a substantially similar statement, reports the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), a student rights advocacy group, as of July 12.

Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida called on the state’s 40 public universities and state colleges to sign a version of the Chicago Statement on April 15.

The movement has even reached Canada. The conservative premier of Alberta is requiring universities in the province to adopt a freedom of speech policy conforming to the Chicago Principles.

Protests Continue

Protests against speakers have continued despite the calls for protection of free speech rights. Usually, the speakers being harassed are conservative or libertarian. Among countless such incidents, writer Charles Murray was prevented by a mob from speaking at Middlebury College in 2017. Soon after, a talk by outspoken feminist Laura Kipnis at Wellesley College led faculty members to declare she shouldn’t have been allowed to speak there.

Violent protests prompted the University of California-Berkeley to cancel an appearance by commentator Milo Yiannopoulos just two hours before he was scheduled to begin a speech there. Later in 2017, syndicated columnist Ann Coulter canceled a scheduled appearance at Berkeley after threats of similar violence. St. Olaf College in Minnesota canceled a speech by conservative podcaster Ben Shapiro in 2018.

Speech Codes, Heckler’s Veto

Dre threats to freedom of expression today include “the heckler’s veto used by campus radicals” and “cAMPus speech codes” adopted by college administrations, says Lance Izumi, an education scholar at the Pacific Research Institute.

“Free speech at higher education institutions is being threatened from outside and within campuses,” Izumi said.

“Right now, it is often difficult to know the extent of free speech on college campuses,” Izumi said. “Policies are either murky or arbitrary. Adoption of the Chicago Principles would advertise in bold letters that free speech is the policy of the university.”

Calls Principled Stand ‘Vital’

FIRE, which annually rates colleges on their speech policies, endorses the Chicago Principles. Adoption of those principles is crucial to prevent outbreaks of harassment and violence, says Mary Zoeller, a FIRE program officer.

“It is vital an institution unequivocally endorses free expression before a campus controversy erupts,” Zoeller said.

Adopting the principles isn’t just good preparation for speeches; it also distances the university from provocative content, Zoeller says.

 “[It] allows administrators to avoid the criticism that they are somehow endorsing the message of the controversial speech,” Zoeller said.

Colgate University’s adoption of a version of the Chicago Statement in 2018 may have had just that effect. When students protested a scheduled speech by famed lawyer Alan Dershowitz—a liberal Hillary Clinton supporter who has publicly defended President Donald Trump—later that year, university President Brian Casey cited Colgate’s free speech statement in affirming Dershowitz’s right to speak.

Speech Codes Persist

Not all endorsements of the Chicago Principles have led to success stories. After Williams College professors signed a petition in support of the statement, about 20 left-wing student protestors—carrying signs proclaiming “Free speech is hate speech!”—disrupted a faculty meeting. Many of the professors withdrew support for the statement, and the protestors won.

Despite such instances of backsliding, schools are gradually removing restrictions on free speech. FIRE’s 2019 Speech Code Report, a survey of 466 public and private U.S. institutions of higher education, gave 89.7 percent of schools surveyed either a “red light” or “yellow light” rating. Those ratings indicate the schools restrict speech that is protected under the U.S. Constitution. However, the percentage of private schools with red light ratings fell below 50 percent for the first time in the 11 years the annual report has been published.

Public vs. Private

Statistics show public institutions of higher education have a better free speech record than private schools at present. Only 25 private institutions have adopted the Chicago Principles, compared to 41 public institutions. Forty-seven percent of the private schools of higher education surveyed for FIRE’s report earned a failing “red light” rating, versus 23 percent of the public institutions.

On March 21, President Donald Trump issued an executive order requiring higher education institutions to allow “free inquiry” in order to receive federal grants.

Harry Painter (jharrypainter@gmail.com) writes from New York City, New York.
State, Federal Lawmakers Propose Child Safety Accounts

By Cassidy Syftestad

In the wake of revelations of widespread sexual misconduct, violence, and bullying in public schools, parents, lawmakers, and education reformers are calling on states to allow children facing an unsafe school environment to transfer to the government school or private school of their choice.

In a prominent recent example of these problems, in July the Chicago Public Schools acknowledged it received more than 450 sexual misconduct complaints in nine months, totaling three per school day.

CPS fired two-dozen teachers and suspended nearly 100 employees as a result of these complaints over the past school year.

Sexual misconduct toward students in Chicago schools is not a new problem. In 2018, the Chicago Tribune published a 14-part series uncovering widespread sexual assault, abuse, and harassment in the Chicago Public Schools over the past decade.

Nor is sexual assault unique to CPS or Illinois, says Tim Benson, a policy analyst at The Heartland Institute, which publishes School Reform News.

“According to the U.S. Department of Education, [nationwide] there were 10,100 incidents of sexual assault and another 1,100 incidents of rape or attempted rape in public schools in the 2015-16 school year alone,” Benson said.

Immediate Solution

To help free children from unsafe schools, Benson and Vicki Alger, a senior fellow with the Independent Women’s Forum and a policy advisor to The Heartland Institute, propose a program called child safety accounts (CSA).

CSAs, a type of education savings account parents could use to pay for tuition, fees, and other education-related expenses at government schools, private schools, and for homeschooling, would bring much-needed relief, Alger and Benson argue in a policy brief titled “Protecting Students with Child Safety Accounts,” published by The Heartland Institute in April 2018.

“CSAs would allow parents to move their children immediately to a safer school—be it private, parochial, or public—as soon as they feel the public school their child is currently attending is too dangerous to their child’s physical or emotional health,” Alger said.

Bullying and physical violence are common problems facing parents today, Alger says.

“We mustn’t forget that school safety still remains a pressing issue for too many students today,” Alger said. “Around one in five middle- and high-school students report being bullied. Four out of five students report violent incidents at their schools.”

Florida Reform

Florida became the first state to enact a CSA-style program in 2017, Alger says.

“Florida’s Hope Scholarship program empowers parents to act without having to wait for permission from school officials,” Alger said. “Any student who’s been subjected to any of a wide range of school safety incidents is eligible for a scholarship to another public or private school of their parents’ choice.”

State Legislation Pending

Policymakers and state legislators are increasingly supportive of Child Safety Accounts, Alger says. At least 11 pieces of CSA-style legislation have been introduced in Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Kansas, Nevada, Oregon, Virginia, and West Virginia, and more are on the way.

“It’s likely several more states will be introducing CSA legislation in the coming year,” Alger said.

In Colorado, state Rep. Patrick Neville (R-Castle Rock) introduced a bill (H.B.19-1112) that would create an escape route for endangered students by providing CSAs for children who experience sexual misconduct, bullying, or violence, on February 5.

Neville’s bill would also create an income tax credit for parents of qualified students with child safety accounts for payment of eligible expenses above the amount of the CSA. Neville says his legislation is about more than distributing state education funds—it’s about giving families choice over their education.

“The freedom of choice in education that is afforded to wealthy families should be extended to all families,” Neville said.

Offering Congressional Action

U.S. Rep. Jim Banks (R-IN) introduced the Child Safety Account Act (H.R. 2538) to address unsafe school conditions in Washington, D.C., which the federal government oversees, on May 7, 2019.

“School safety and the wellbeing of children is every parent’s number one concern,” Banks said in a news release on May 7. “In today’s complex world, school safety problems have become more prevalent. ... This Child Safety Account program will give families choices to pursue educational opportunities that keep their children safe and secure.”

Under the Child Safety Accounts Act, a D.C. child would become eligible for a CSA if he or she is facing a “safety issue” at school, after the parents file a request with school administrators. These safety problems include bullying, sexual misconduct, harassment, abuse, fighting or physical assaults on the student, and concerns over gang activity or drug use at school.

An amount equal to 80 percent to 90 percent of the District’s uniform funding per student would be deposited in the CSA each year, depending on family income. To help ensure parents can afford to pay for any eligible expenses above their children’s CSA amounts, Banks’ bill would also create a tax-credit donation program.

The bill currently has two cosponsors: U.S. Rep. Doug LaMalfa (R-CA) and Rep. Ted S. Yoho (R-FL).

“It is my hope that the success of the program inspires more states to adopt similar policies and help children feel safe and free to learn at school,” Banks said in his press release.

Cassidy Syftestad (cassidysyftestad@gmail.com) writes from Washington, D.C.

Official Connections:


“School safety and the wellbeing of children is every parent’s number one concern. In today’s complex world, school safety problems have become more prevalent. ... This Child Safety Account program will give families choices to pursue educational opportunities that keep their children safe and secure.”

JIM BANKS
U.S. REPRESENTATIVE (R-IN)

LEARN MORE

Oregon is dramatically increasing the number of students from middle-income families fed at school at no cost to their parents. The state is expanding its free breakfast and lunch program to include students from households with incomes up to three times the federal poverty level (FPL). Sixty percent of the 580,000 children enrolled in the state’s public schools will qualify.

Oregon was already more generous in this regard than many other states, providing free food to students from households with incomes up to 185 percent of poverty. The federal subsidy for free meals is for children in households with incomes up to 130 percent of the poverty level, with a smaller federal subsidy for reduced-price meals for children at 130 percent to 185 percent of FPL. Oregon will now provide free meals to all students who qualify for reduced prices under the federal standard, and children from 185 percent to 300 percent of FPL.

The estimated $40 million cost of the feeding program expansion is part of a $1 billion increase in state spending on education that will be financed by a new gross receipts tax or “business activity tax” of 0.57 percent.

Gov. Kate Brown signed H.B. 3427 into law on May 16. The free lunch eligibility expansion is scheduled to take effect in July of 2020.

‘Incentivizes Waste’
It is good for states to experiment with their social programs, as long as other states’ taxpayers don’t have to pick up the tab, says Daniel Sutter, an affiliated senior scholar at the Mercatus Center.

“Incentivizes Waste’
It is good for states to experiment with their social programs, as long as other states’ taxpayers don’t have to pick up the tab, says Daniel Sutter, an affiliated senior scholar at the Mercatus Center.

“I’m always in favor of states paying for services and capital projects from local funds rather than national. Funding from the federal government is always perceived as ‘free money’ and therefore incentivizes waste.”

JOHN CHARLES, PRESIDENT, CASCADE POLICY INSTITUTE

‘Flush with Money’—for Now
Many states find themselves with a surplus of dollars in a booming economy, Sutter says, but they should be cautious about making sweeping policy changes based on temporary prosperity.

“Politicians are being particularly generous right now when states are flush with money, but when the economy wanes again, they’ll be hard-pressed to be able to fund programs like this,” Sutter said.

“Things will be different in a few years when inevitably we have another recession and state revenue drops,” Sutter said. “This will be one more program that Oregon will have to fund, making its deficit that much worse.”

‘Rely More on Voluntary Assistance’
A different approach to free meal programs would be to allow the private sector to step in to bridge the gap, Sutter says.

“I think Americans understand that education is part of having opportunity in society,” Sutter said. “We don’t like the idea that students aren’t able to study or learn because their family can’t afford a nutritious breakfast or lunch.

“But Americans are also incredibly charitable,” Sutter said. “Perhaps we need to have the government do less in this area and rely more on voluntary assistance.”

Madeline Peltzer (mpeltzer@hillsdale.edu) writes from Hillsdale, Michigan.
Student Debt Picture Varies Widely by State, Study Finds

By Shannon Watkins

Outstanding debt for private and public higher education student loans now exceeds $1.6 trillion nationally, and the cost of college has been rising dramatically, but the financial condition of borrowers varies widely by state, a new report says.

The states with the highest levels of student debt, on average, are all on the East Coast. In descending order, they are Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Delaware, reports the personal finance website WalletHub in an analysis published on July 10. The five are also among the top 12 states with the most expensive public colleges and universities.

The states with the lowest average student debt are all in the western half of the country, in ascending order: Utah, New Mexico, Nevada, Wyoming, and California.

Big Cost Variations

The average individual debt racked up by students at U.S. public colleges or universities was $26,900 in 2017, College Board data indicate. For public colleges nationally, the average cost of in-state tuition and fees for the 2018–19 academic year is $10,230.

College Board data affirm costs vary widely from state to state. The average public university student in Utah pays $5,400 a year in tuition and fees, while the average public university student in New Hampshire pays $16,460.

Which Students Default?

The study found high amounts of student debt are not strongly correlated with high default rates.

Even though New Hampshire has some of the most indebted students, for example, WalletHub rated it as one of the five states with the lowest default rates. New Mexico, among the five states with the lowest average student debt, is among the five states with the highest default rates.

Borrowing larger amounts may indicate students are likelier to attain a degree and better able to pay off their loans, says Preston Cooper, a research analyst in higher education policy at the American Enterprise Institute.

“Paradoxically, students who borrow more are often more likely to pay down their loans, or at least stay out of default,” Cooper said. “This is because one of the strongest predictors of student loan nonpayment is whether the borrower actually finishes college.”

Individuals with smaller outstanding loans are less likely to have persisted in their studies for four or more years, Cooper says.

“Students who attend college for a couple of semesters and drops out might have less than $10,000 in debt, but she also doesn’t have a degree to help her find a good job and pay down that debt,” Cooper said.

“Meanwhile, a student who finishes college probably has closer to $30,000 in debt,” Cooper said. “However, the college completer’s prospects in the job market are much brighter, so she’ll probably be able to pay down what she owes.”

Unemployment Factor

WalletHub’s analysis found a correlation between unemployment rates and student loan default.

The states with the highest levels of unemployment, in descending order, are Alaska, West Virginia, Mississippi, and New Mexico, and they are among the five states with the highest percentages of student-loan balances past due or in default, WalletHub reports.

In Alaska, student debt as a percentage of income is low, but the state’s unemployment rate of people aged 25–34 is the highest in the country.

‘Look at Actual Programs’

Although the WalletHub report provides useful information, lawmakers should take care in attempting to draw policy recommendations from it, says Jay Schalin, director of policy analysis at the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal. Many factors could explain why some states fare better in student debt than others, Schalin says.

“It may be that looking to get a handle on student debt on a state-by-state basis is the wrong way to go,” Schalin said. “It might be better to look at actual programs than trying to glean understanding through ranking states by aggregating disparate data.”

Shannon Watkins (swatkins@jamesgmartin.center) is senior writer at The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal.

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Iowa Increases Scholarship Tax Credit Cap by $2 million

By Cassidy Syftestad

More Iowa children will be able to attend private schools of their choosing next year, as the state has increased its tax credit cap for donations to groups that provide scholarships.

Trish Wilger, executive director of the Iowa Alliance for Choice in Education, says she welcomes the 15 percent increase in tax credits for donations to school tuition organizations (STOs).

“We are thrilled that the legislature passed—and the governor signed—a tax bill containing an increase to the School Tuition Tax Credit program, which will now be capped at $15 million beginning in 2020,” Wilger said.

Gov. Kim Reynolds signed the bill, H.F. 779, into law on May 16.

Providing Tuition Grants

STOs are charitable organizations that receive donations from individuals and businesses to provide scholarships for students from low- and middle-income households to attend accredited private schools.

Taxpayers that donate to STOs are eligible to receive a credit against state income tax owed for up to 65 percent of their total contribution. Contributions may also be deductible on federal income tax returns.

A participating STO must represent more than one school and put 90 percent or more of its total revenue into tuition grants for eligible children. A student’s family income must be no more than 400 percent of the federal poverty level. The average scholarship amount in 2019 is $1,614, which may be used at any one of 145 participating schools.

Making ‘Significant Progress’

The additional credits will enable STOs to fund more scholarships, Wilger says.

“In 2018 and years prior, where we had a $12 million cap, the STO program was able to serve just under 11,000 students,” Wilger said.

“Based on that history, with a cap of $15 million in 2020, we project that the STO program could serve approximately an additional 2,000 to 3,000 students, which makes significant progress in meeting the needs of those waiting for assistance,” Wilger said.

Expanding Options

The tuition tax credit budget expansion could influence school choice policies elsewhere, Wilger says.

“Iowa’s successful school tuition organization program could encourage other states to follow suit in creating this option for parents,” Wilger said.

Iowa legislators are proposing additional choice programs. Iowa Senate President Pro Tem Jerry Behn (R-Boone) introduced a bill (S.F. 372) that would establish a state fund to make “education savings grants for pupils attending a nonpublic school or receiving competent private instruction,” on February 25.

The bill was approved by the Senate Education Committee on March 7, but no further action was taken before this year’s session of the General Assembly adjourned. K-12 students who have an Individualized Education Program or a disability would be eligible for the grants.

Advocating ESAs

Other types of choice programs could have an even wider impact, Wilger says.

“Education savings accounts would have the greatest potential to create broad-based, transformative change in the school choice arena while putting parents in the driver’s seat,” Wilger said.

“Depending on program design, parents would have the greatest access to all educational options and total freedom of choice when it comes to their child’s education provider,” Wilger said.

Offering ‘The Perfect Complement’

An ESA program would provide more options to more Iowa families, says Tim Benson, a policy analyst at The Heartland Institute, which publishes School Reform News.

“Education savings grants would be the perfect complement to Iowa’s other school choice program, the School Tuition Organization Tax Credit, which was designed specifically for low-income families,” Benson said.

These more expansive choice programs are politically more difficult to enact, Wilger says.

“Tax credit programs traditionally garner more bipartisan support than programs like vouchers or education savings accounts, and they are easier to budget for, from the state legislature’s perspective,” Wilger said.

Cassidy Syftestad (cassidysyftestad@gmail.com) writes from Washington, D.C.
Wisconsin Charter and Private Choice Schools Outperform Public Schools, Study Finds

By Kenneth Artz

Wisconsin’s charter schools and private schools in the state’s choice program are outperforming traditional public schools on measures of student proficiency, a new study reports.

Will Flanders, research director of the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL), conducted a sophisticated statistical analysis to compare how Wisconsin schools would perform if every school had a similar student body. Flanders examined English language arts (ELA) and mathematics test data from Wisconsin’s Forward Exam, given to students in the third through eighth grades, and scores on the ACT college entrance exam, in public, charter, and private choice schools.

Flanders found many of the best schools in Wisconsin are private and charter schools. Five of the top 20 schools in the state are private voucher schools, and four of the top 20 are charters. Fourteen of the 20 schools with the greatest improvement in Hispanic student test proficiency—that is, the annual ‘value added’ measured by test scores—in the state are choice or charter schools, Flanders found.

The findings are reported in Apples to Apples 2019, published by WILL on June 6.

Charter and choice schools perform better than district public schools in Milwaukee, the report states. For example, charter schools that have some independence from school districts, which are called non-instrumentality charters, have student proficiency rates exceeding those in traditional Milwaukee public schools (MPS) by 13.0 percent in math and 12.1 percent in English language arts, on average.

Choice Schools’ High Achievement

Among independent charters, which aren’t supervised by a public school district, proficiency in math exceeds that of MPS schools by 8.2 percent. Milwaukee’s Parental Choice Program also has proficiency rates above those in MPS, by 3.9 percent in math and 4.6 percent in English, on average.

Annual improvements in student test proficiency in choice, non-instrumentality charters, and independent charters are all higher than in MPS, Flanders found.

Wisconsin’s parental choice programs outside of Milwaukee (Racine and statewide) are also doing better academically than traditional public schools. Proficiency in the Racine and statewide voucher programs exceeds that of traditional public schools by 3.05 percent.

Lower Costs, Better Results

The evidence consistently shows charter and choice programs are better for students, says Jim Bender, president of School Choice Wisconsin.

“We’ve seen over the past few years that it’s just undeniable that any time we’re comparing the independent charters and vouchers with the public schools, their peers in the charter schools outperformed their peers in the public schools,” Bender said.

Choice and charter schools get better results than public schools with 27 percent less funding, says Bender, citing an analysis by Corey DeAngelis, an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom.

“Both choice and charter schools are getting only about two-thirds of the funding of public schools, and they’re still getting better results,” Bender said. “They’re getting higher results at dramatically lower costs.”

Resistance from the Status Quo

All the evidence affirms the superiority of choice schools, says Bender.

“No matter how you measure it, the kids on vouchers and going to private schools are doing better than the kids in the public schools,” Bender said.

Despite the success of charter and choice schools, some industry groups remain unmoved, says Bender.

“Whether it’s the unions or just the establishment, we’re kind of down to the last argument you hear here and everywhere else, which is, ‘We don’t like education reform because it pulls money from traditional public schools,’” Bender said.

Opposition to school choice is not based on evidence, Bender says.

“It’s just resistance from the status quo that doesn’t want change, but for everybody else who’s looking at performance measures, the resistance fades quickly,” Bender said.

Make Them Completely Open

School choice does not damage public district funding, because both are based on student enrollment and attendance, not the institution, Bender says.

“We don’t fund the schools on a systemic level; we fund them on a per-student level,” Bender said. “So, when a family moves to Arkansas, or a student moves to a charter school or moves to a voucher, it’s the same impact upon a local school, which gets the same exact funding you got for all the students attending your school.”

Wisconsin’s charter and school choice programs are expanding further, says Timothy Benson, a policy analyst at The Heartland Institute, which publishes School Reform News.

“Based on what we know from this study and countless others about the educational, fiscal, and societal benefits of Wisconsin’s school choice programs, it is not out of bounds to say an expansion of these programs that would make them completely open to all students is well-deserved and should be acted upon as quickly as possible,” Benson said.

Access for all students could be accomplished by universal education savings accounts, Benson says.

“Every Wisconsin family should have the opportunity to send their children to the school of their choice,” Benson said. “That should be the true goal of public education in the Badger State.”

Kenneth Artz (kennethcharlesartz@gmx.com) writes from Dallas, Texas.

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“Based on what we know from this study and countless others about the educational, fiscal, and societal benefits of Wisconsin’s school choice programs, it is not out of bounds to say an expansion of these programs that would make them completely open to all students is well-deserved and should be acted upon as quickly as possible,” Benson said.

Access for all students could be accomplished by universal education savings accounts, Benson says.

“Every Wisconsin family should have the opportunity to send their children to the school of their choice,” Benson said. “That should be the true goal of public education in the Badger State.”

Kenneth Artz (kennethcharlesartz@gmx.com) writes from Dallas, Texas.
By Teresa Mull

Any lingering fantasy about the National Education Association (NEA) having anything to do with education can now be extinguished finally and completely.

At the NEA convention in July, thousands of the teachers union’s members gathered to debate and vote on policies and priorities for the organization. One “New Business Item” proposed the NEA “re-dedicate itself to the pursuit of increased student learning in every public school in America by putting a renewed emphasis on quality education.”

“NEA will make student learning the priority of the Association,” the item read.

It seems odd, astounding even, to consider a teaching organization with “education” in its very name needing to “re-educate” itself to student learning. What, after all, was the priority of the NEA up to this point, if not “student learning”?

What’s even more shocking is that the members of the NEA actually rejected the proposal to refocus on student learning. Yes, you read that right. A motion to put “a renewed emphasis on quality education” was shot down by the nation’s largest teachers union.

NEA’s Priorities

What then, you may well wonder, does the NEA prioritize over student learning?

“White Fragility,” for starters. An item passed by delegates states, “NEA will incorporate the concept of ‘White Fragility’ into NEA trainings/staff development, literature, and other existing communications on social, gender, LGBTQIA, and racial justice whenever and wherever context and expense allows. White supremacy culture has fashioned a social norm insulating white people from the impact of racial stress, which consequentially constructs a social atmosphere that depresses the ability of society, in general, to tolerate racial stress, also known as ‘White Fragility,'” the NEA states.

Other resolutions passed include supporting “reparations for descendants of enslaved Africans in the United States,” emphasizing “human’s [sic] involvement in climate change,” and promoting “attitudes, values, and goals of unionism, solidarity, justice, fairness, and the search for the common good.”

Forced Unionism

If only educators more interested in education than social justice could simply leave the NEA. In states without right-to-work laws, teachers are forced to pay union dues and have the NEA represent them. That adds up to more than $363 million—let that number sink in for a second—of union dues the NEA uses to promote every radical leftwing cause you can think of.

What’s more, the74million.org reminds us, “[The NEA] is exempt from antitrust laws, and in 22 states it can compel payments from customers who never asked for its services. Oh, and almost all of its income is tax-exempt.” NEA members in right-to-work states who oppose abortion, the concept of “white fragility,” and other core principles of the NEA do technically have the option of leaving the organization, but what about taxpayers who are against these things? It is we, after all, who pay the salaries of public school teachers, and in non-right-to-work states, our tax dollars are forcibly sent right into the coffers of the NEA to spend on things many of us find morally reprehensible.

How is this constitutional?

Lobbying Politicians

Why is something so innocuous-sounding as an “education association” involving itself at all in issues such as abortion and racism, anyway? And how did the NEA, which OpenSecrets.com reports “lobbies elected and government officials on everything from government funding of education to school safety to teacher pay,” become so well-funded and so powerful?

InfluenceWatch.org states, “The NEA is a major political player, with its associated political action committees contributing nearly $143.5 million to federal candidates and committees—97% of which supported Democrats and liberals—from 1989 through February 2019.”

In other words, the NEA buys the support of politicians, almost all of whom are leftists. Consider it was the likes of Joe Biden, Bill de Blasio, Kamala Harris, Beto O’Rourke, Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, and other Democratic presidential hopefuls who pandered to the union delegates at this year’s NEA convention.

NEA Supports Big Government

“The NEA is also deeply entangled in state and local politics and is a major political player, with its associates and political action committees contributing nearly $143.5 million to federal candidates and committees—97% of which supported Democrats and liberals—from 1989 through February 2019.”

The NEA has a long history of supporting big-government initiatives, regardless of how or even whether they affect the straightforward instruction of reading, writing, and arithmetic with which public school teachers are charged.

The NEA has abandoned any pretense of educating and is shamelessly showing its true objectives: to increase its wealth and power and advance the most extreme liberal policies—teachers, students, and taxpayers be damned.

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Here’s What Other Universities Can Learn from Purdue’s Tuition Freeze

By Jenna A. Robinson

Tuition freezes are gaining popularity across the country. Earlier this year, university systems in Virginia and Pennsylvania announced tuition would not rise in the next academic year, saving students and parents millions of dollars.

Purdue University, a public institution in Indiana, started the tuition-freeze trend in 2013. Under the leadership of its president, Mitch Daniels, Purdue instituted a freeze on all tuition and fees at its flagship campus in West Lafayette, Indiana. Tuition has stayed flat ever since—more than half a decade. Since then, enrollment has increased, students have a more affordable education, and Purdue continues to thrive.

The accompanying table shows per-student spending at Purdue in 2012, the year before the freeze began, and 2017, the most recent year for which data are available.

University administrators, governing boards, and state lawmakers across the country are learning a lot from Purdue’s success.

Cut Wasteful Spending

To hold the line on tuition, Daniels increased revenue from other sources while cutting wasteful spending. Many of Daniels’ cost-cutting measures have been well-publicized.

“The changes range from the mundane, such as selling off ten of its automobiles, to the path-breaking, such as forgone merit increases by all personnel at high administrative levels,” Stephanie Keaveney and I noted in a Martin Center article in 2016. “The school has also streamlined purchasing, cut rental storage costs in half, and repurposed used office furniture instead of buying new.”

Daniels also axed the university’s $185,000 lobbying budget, fired several highly paid administrators, and eliminated low-enrollment academic programs.

Purdue’s per-student costs show these small changes add up.

In his first two years at the university, Daniels cut the budget by $40 million. After accounting for inflation, Purdue’s per-student expenses fell in almost every category, including those that generally fall under “administration”: academic support, institutional support, and student services.

Donations Increased

At the same time, Daniels increased revenue from out-of-state tuition and fees, private fundraising, and other sources.

Purdue’s tuition revenue per student increased modestly between 2012 and 2017, despite the freeze, partly because the number of foreign and out-of-state students increased from just under 20,000 in fall 2012 to 22,738 in 2017. The total number of in-state students decreased by 4 percent during the same period, from 19,689 to 18,835. In-state students pay significantly lower tuition than these others.

A much more significant contributor to Purdue’s increased revenue has been private fundraising. This year, Purdue’s Day of Giving raised $41.6 million, setting the fifth-straight record for a 24-hour higher education fundraising campaign.

Over the past six years, Purdue’s Day of Giving has raised $146.9 million in gifts. The value of the Purdue system’s endowment now stands at more than $2.5 billion—up from $2 billion in 2012. Officials at Purdue say market volatility is responsible for some of the change in endowment revenue.

Virginia Hits Taxpayers Harder

In May, Virginia public colleges announced a tuition freeze. Although it’s certain to help many students and parents who pay the bills, the costs will be borne by Virginia’s taxpayers. The freeze was a result of $57.5 million of “incentivized funding” being added to the state budget for colleges to freeze their tuition for in-state students.

Purdue managed its tuition freeze without additional state funds. That’s despite the fact that—as universities go—Purdue was lean even before Mitch Daniels arrived. Now, it spends significantly less than its peers. In 2017, the average annual per-student expenditure among large, high-research land-grant universities was $42,779. Purdue’s was $38,747.

Nationally, public universities receive an average of 28 percent of their core operating revenues from the legislature. For Purdue, it’s less than 20 percent. And during the freeze, Purdue’s revenue from state and local appropriations decreased, after adjusting for inflation, from $8,267 to $7,551 per student.

Cut Budgets, Not Quality

Throughout the changes, Purdue has maintained its academic quality. Since the tuition freeze and budget cuts, student retention rates have held steady. In every year since the cuts, more than 90 percent of Purdue freshmen have returned to campus for their sophomore year. Purdue’s graduation rate increased in the three years for which data are available. Just 55.9 percent of students who began at Purdue in 2012 graduated within four years. For students who began in 2014, that figure rose to 60.3 percent. Data on more recent cohorts are not yet available.

Purdue has also maintained its performance in national and international university rankings. In 2018, U.S. News & World Report rated Purdue the 17th-best public university in the United States. Purdue ranked 13th for undergraduate teaching and tied at ninth for innovation.

That’s because Daniels has cut carefully.

“This place was not built to be efficient,” Daniels told The Wall Street Journal. “You’re not going to find many places where you just take a cleaver and hack off a big piece of fat. Just like a cow, it’s marbled through the whole enterprise.”

Wise Spending Increases

In Daniels’ first two years at Purdue, he gave faculty members raises and increased the school’s minimum wage to $10 per hour. Instructional expenses for teaching a student increased from an average of $15,605 to $19,065 per year. Daniels was careful to improve the school’s core instructional functions while cutting auxiliary and administrative expenses.

These lessons can help university administrators, governing boards, and state lawmakers across the country to replicate Purdue’s success. Using Daniels’ methods, it’s possible to freeze tuition and cut costs while maintaining high academic standards, improving the value of public higher education to students, citizens, and taxpayers.

Jenna A. Robinson (jarobinson@jamesmartin.center) is president of the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal. This article originally appeared on the Martin Center’s website and is reprinted with permission.
Military Families Overwhelmingly Support School Choice, Survey Finds

By Timothy Benson

A ctive-duty military service members and their spouses overwhelmingly support school choice options such as education savings accounts (ESA), a recent survey found.

Seventy-two percent of respondents favored ESAs. Only 34 percent said they would prefer to send their children to a traditional government school.

In an ESA program, state education funds allocated for a child are placed in a parent-controlled savings account. The ESA can be used to pay for tuition and fees at private and parochial schools, textbooks and curriculum materials, online courses, tutoring services, educational therapies, computer hardware, and transportation costs.

ESAs can also be used to cover fees for national standardized achievement tests, such as the SAT or ACT, as well as tuition, fees, and textbooks at post-secondary institutions.

The survey of 1,295 active-duty service members and their spouses, released on June 25 by the nonprofit research group EdChoice, asked military families for their opinions of the education system and how it affects their decision on whether to continue serving in the armed forces.

Safety Concerns

A primary reason these families are so interested in school choice is safety concerns, the study found. One out of five respondents listed the safety of their children as the highest priority for them in picking a school.

This is not an unreasonable concern. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there were an estimated 827,000 incidents of theft and nonfatal violent victimization on school property, based on 2017 National Crime Victimization Surveys, amounting to 33 incidents for every 1,000 students.

“Violent victimization” includes simple assault, aggravated assault, robbery, sexual assault, and rape. A little more than one in five students ages 12 to 18 years reported being bullied at school in 2017, and 69 percent of those students reported being bullied multiple days of the school year. Another 15 percent reported being “electronically” bullied in 2017.

‘Real Challenges’

Military parents go above and beyond when it comes to supporting the education of their children, the report says.

“In certain ways, this is especially true when compared to the national average,” states the survey. “Active-duty military parents are much more likely to say they have taken out a new loan or moved closer to school to support their child’s education.

“Military parents also are more likely to say they have paid for tutoring, before/after care services, or school transportation,” the report states. “Military families are making big sacrifices and going to great lengths to give their kids a quality education. These activities point to real challenges for families in terms of time and resources, and federal reform could amplify those positive supports even further.”

Affecting Enlistment Decisions

The best way to make life easier for these families is to provide them with easy access to ESAs, which would allow them to send their children to the school that best suits the child’s and family’s education needs.

“Military families are making choices about whether to accept a particular duty station or depart the Armed Forces based in part on the quality of surrounding schools,” a 2017 survey of Military Times readers states. “The men and women who wear the uniform are at risk of voting with their feet if the education of their children suffers because of their choice to serve the nation.

“Elected officials at the state and federal levels must focus on providing the nearly one million military-connected children with high education standards that are consistent from school district to school district and state to state, and that properly prepare a child for career or college.”

Child Safety Account Alternative

If a full ESA program for all military families is not an option, a Child Safety Account (CSA) program should be made available to military parents who have safety concerns for their children in school. CSAs are a type of ESA program for parents who believe, for whatever reason, their child is unsafe at school.

A CSA would empower parents to transfer their children immediately to a safe school of their choice within or beyond their local public school district, including public district, charter, and virtual schools as well as private and parochial schools. CSA funds could also be used to pay for homeschooling expenses.

Students at private schools are less likely than their public school peers to experience problems such as alcohol abuse, bullying, drug use, fighting, gang activity, racial tension, theft, vandalism, and weapon-based threats. There is also a strong causal link suggesting private school choice programs such as ESAs improve the mental health of participating students.

“Greater Access to Options’

“Our survey findings indicate policy influencers and policymakers have a real opportunity to address military families’ preferences for personalized student learning and greater access to options in K–12 education. There also is an opportunity to give real schooling power to military families, who have already sacrificed so much for their country and—as reported in this survey—for the education and wellbeing of their children.”

The authors are correct. There is no time like the present to help ease the burdens on these courageous men and women.

ESAs, CSAs, school vouchers, and tax-credit scholarships should be easily available to these families. For those serving our nation, it is the least we can do.

Timothy Benson (TBenson@heartland.org) is a policy analyst at The Heartland Institute.
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