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PA House of Representatives  
Republican Policy Committee

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414, Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120  
(717) 260-6144

**Rep. Joshua D. Kail**  
Chairman

**PA House Republican Policy Committee Hearing**  
**“Educational Opportunities for Our Children”**

**March 16, 2023, at 12:30 p.m.**

**Christian School of York**  
**907 Greenbriar Rd.**  
**York, PA 17404**

12:30 p.m.

Welcome and Pledge of Allegiance

**School Choice Panel**

12:45 p.m.

Martin Lueken, Ph.D.  
*Director of the Fiscal Research and Education Center, Ed Choice*

12:55 p.m.

Rev. Aaron J. Anderson  
*President and CEO, Logos Academy*

1:05 p.m.

Questions for School Choice Panel

**Parents and Students Panel**

1:35 p.m.

Anterria Graham  
*Parent at York Academy Regional Charter School*

1:45 p.m.

Carol Thomson  
*Parent at Christian School of York*

1:55 p.m.

Eden Turnow  
*Student at Christian School of York*

2:05 p.m.

Questions for Parents and Students Panel

2:35 p.m.

**Final Comments and Conclusion**

*Written testimony submitted by:*

Association of Christian Schools International



## Testifier Biographies

### PA House of Representatives Policy Committee Hearing *"Educational Opportunities for our Children"*



#### **Martin Lueken, Ph.D.**

#### **Director of the Fiscal Research and Education Center, Ed Choice**

Martin Lueken is director of EdChoice's Fiscal Research and Education Center (FREC), where he focuses on research and analysis of issues that pertain to school choice bills, current programs, and school funding. His work includes providing expert support and advice for policy makers in helping understand the fiscal impact of current school choice programs and potential fiscal effects of programs introduced in state legislatures. He also conducts data analysis and research on school choice.

His research work and interests include education finance in general and teacher pensions. He has provided expert testimony and advice about fiscal issues for numerous states that have introduced education choice legislation. His work has been mentioned in various media and education-specific outlets, including The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Education Next, Education Week, and The 74.

Marty previously studied in the Department of Education Reform and received his doctorate in Education Policy from the University of Arkansas. He also earned a master's degree in Economics from the University of Missouri. He received his bachelor's degree in Physical Education, with an emphasis in sports medicine, from Eastern Illinois University. After graduating, he moved to Yashio-Shi in Japan, where he taught English in public elementary and junior high schools for five years. That experience shifted his interests to education policy in the United States. Upon his return, he set out to pursue graduate work that would best equip him for effecting meaningful change in the education policy arena. His experiences in Japan ultimately led him to the education reform movement.

Marty is a native of St. Louis and currently lives in Indianapolis with his lovely wife and \*sometimes\* sassy daughter.

#### **Rev. Aaron J. Anderson**

#### **President and CEO, Logos Academy**

Aaron began serving as the CEO & Head of School at Logos Academy in 2014, and also serves as the CEO of LogosWorks, a social enterprise venture. He holds an M.Ed in Urban Educational Leadership from Lehigh University, a Master of Arts in Religion from Reformed Theological Seminary, and a Bachelor of Religion degree from Liberty University.

He currently serves on the boards of the York City Redevelopment Authority, LifePath Christian Ministries, Keystone Kidspace, and the Fortress Initiative. He formerly served on the boards of Prevent Child Abuse Pennsylvania, York County YMCA, York County Children Youth & Family, and Logos Academy.



**Aaron Anderson**  
**President and CEO, Logos Academy (cont.)**

Aaron was a recipient of Central Penn Business Journal's "Forty Under 40" in 2015, was awarded York's Unity Award from Mayor C. Kim Bracey in 2015, and received the Spirit of YoCo Community Service award from the York County Economic Alliance in 2020 for his leadership in facilitating a four-year partnership between York County chiefs of police and a racially diverse coalition of clergy.

Originally from Aurora, Illinois, Aaron is an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America, and founding Pastor of City Church in York, PA. Aaron and his wife Gail married in 1997 and have six children: Ellis, Emily, Luke, Amelia, David and Wesley.

**Anterria Graham**  
**Parent, York Academy Regional Charter School**

Anterria has three children who attend the York Academy Regional Charter School.

The York Academy Regional Charter School is a nonprofit, tuition-free public charter school that educates nearly 1,000 diverse students (K-12) via the rigorous, world-class International Baccalaureate (IB) framework.

**Carol Thomson**  
**Parent, Christian School of York**

**Eden Turnow**  
**Student, Christian School of York**

A senior at the Christian School of York, Eden would like to present her award-winning essay on how school choice has impacted her life.

Established in 1956, Christian School of York is a Pre-K -12th grade college-preparatory private Christian day school located on a 12.5-acre campus in York, Pennsylvania, serving Central PA families.





## Testimony for the Pennsylvania House Republican Policy Committee Hearing on School Choice

March 16, 2023

Martin F. Lueken, Ph.D., Director of the Fiscal Research and Education Center

Honorable members of the Pennsylvania House Republican Policy Committee, thank you for inviting me to speak today on the fiscal effects of educational choice. My name is Marty Lueken, and I am the director of the Fiscal Research and Education Center at EdChoice. **We are a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization of experts who are offering our expertise and endeavor to be a resource that provides data and information related to experiences by other states who already have choice programs. I am here to testify about the fiscal effects of these programs.**

A very common argument made by school choice critics is that these programs somehow “siphon” or “drain” resources from public schools and therefore harm students. You may also hear that choice weakens or even destroys public school systems. Based on research, data, and common fiscal sense, these arguments are demonstrably false.

We released a national study on the fiscal effects of educational choice programs. In this study, I estimated the fiscal effects of 40 choice programs on state and local taxpayers from their inceptions through FY 2018.<sup>1</sup> The study also provides context to help inform discussions about how these programs affect states’ public K-12 school systems.

In general terms, the fiscal impact of an education choice program is the difference between savings accrued from students who use the choice program to switch from a public school to a nonpublic school setting and the total cost of the program.

Here are a few basic fiscal facts for your consideration in weighing the merits of arguments and concerns that choice harms public schools.

First, educational choice programs enroll just 2% of all publicly funded students in states where private educational choice programs operate (Figure 1). In terms of student enrollment, these programs have not led to a mass exodus of students leaving public schools.

Second, total funding for educational choice programs is 1% of total funding devoted to public schools (Figure 2). So, nationwide, 2% of students in choice programs have access to 1% of public funding devoted to K-12 education.

In Pennsylvania, 3% of K-12 students that receive public funding participate in the tax-credit scholarship programs and receive 0.4% of public funding for K-12.

The average cost per student for the Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program is 10% of the average per-student cost for Pennsylvania’s public school system (Figure 3). The average cost per student for the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit Program is 16% of the average per-student cost for Pennsylvania’s

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<sup>1</sup> Martin F. Lueken (2021), *Fiscal Effects of School Choice: Analyzing the costs and savings of private school choice programs in America*, Fiscal Research and Education Center, EdChoice, retrieved from: <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/The-Fiscal-Effects-of-School-Choice-WEB-reduced.pdf>

public school system (Figure 4). That’s like an 84% to 90% markdown for students who would otherwise enroll in the public school system.

Nationwide, ESA, voucher, and tax-credit scholarship programs generated between \$12 billion and \$28 billion in estimated cumulative net fiscal benefits for state and local taxpayers, or up to \$7,400 per student. Put another way, these programs generated between \$1.80 and \$2.85 in fiscal savings, on average, for each dollar spent on these programs.

For Pennsylvania, estimated cumulative net fiscal benefits from the program are at least \$4.0 billion and may be as high as \$8.1 billion, or up to \$12,500 per student. Given that the two programs have been in operation for 6 and 17 years, these fiscal effects estimates are likely higher than the lower-end estimate and even closer to the higher-end estimate.

An important question is: Can we expect this program to have a negative fiscal impact on Pennsylvania school districts, and will students be harmed? The answer I believe, based on the long history of experiences of current school choice programs, and informed by the substantial body of rigorous research, is “no.”

First, funding of K-12 public schools in Pennsylvania is largely not based on students – when students leave a district, the district loses just a small portion of total state funds and still retains most federal funds and all local funds, which are based on property wealth instead of students. Moreover, Pennsylvania has a strong “hold-harmless” provision in its school funding formula in which districts with enrollment decline are guaranteed the same level of state funding that it received in 2014-15.<sup>2</sup>

Second, when students leave, it costs less to educate fewer students. Costs go down. Some costs are fixed, and some costs are variable. In the short run, districts have fixed costs such as building maintenance, debt service, and utilities. Variable costs are costs that can be reduced. Variable costs might include textbooks, software licenses, and personnel costs. In the long run, all costs are variable, meaning that over time districts can fully adjust operations to a change in enrollment.

Third, choice programs in states that already have them (including the oldest and largest programs) have not led to an exodus of students, and the public system still remains the dominant provider to this day. Educational choice programs have been operating in more than 30 states, many for more than a decade. Participation in choice programs tend to start very small and grow at a slow, steady pace. This generally holds true for both targeted programs and broader eligibility programs.<sup>3</sup> For example, overall average participation rates for programs nationwide was 0.46% in their first year, 1.68% in their fifth year, and 2.62% in their tenth year (Table 1).

And research demonstrates that students benefit from these programs, both those who participate and those who remain in public schools. There are 28 studies that examine the effects of education choice programs on the outcomes of students who remain in public schools. Of these studies, 25 found positive and modest improvements in learning gains by public school students, 2 documented a negative program effect, and one could not detect any effect.<sup>4</sup> In addition, a recent meta-analysis on the competitive effects of choice programs concluded:

<sup>2</sup> Brandon, S. “PA’s Fair Funding Formula for Basic Education Explained.” *Pennsylvania House Appropriations Committee*, October 16, 2020. [https://www.houseappropriations.com/files/Documents/BEF\\_Primer\\_102820.pdf](https://www.houseappropriations.com/files/Documents/BEF_Primer_102820.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> “Participation in Private Education Choice Programs,” Fiscal Research and Education Center, EdChoice, <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Participation-in-Private-Education-Choice-Programs.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> EdChoice (2020), *The 123s of School Choice: What the Research Says about Private School Choice Programs in America*, retrieved from: <https://www.edchoice.org/research-library/?report=the-123s-of-school-choice-2>





*“In general, competition resulting from school-choice policies does have a small positive effect on student achievement. The lack of an overall negative impact on student outcomes might ease critics’ concerns that competition will hurt those students ‘left behind’ due to school-choice policies.” (Jabbar et al., 2019, Education Policy)<sup>5</sup>*

Another study examined the effects of scaling up a choice program in Florida and found that not only did the program increase learning for students who remained in public schools in response to competitive pressure, but it also led to lower absenteeism and lower suspension rates.<sup>6</sup>

These programs not only facilitate better matches between students and the education they receive, but they also result in arrangements that teachers and parents often care about, such as smaller class sizes.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify, I stand by to answer any questions.

Cordially,

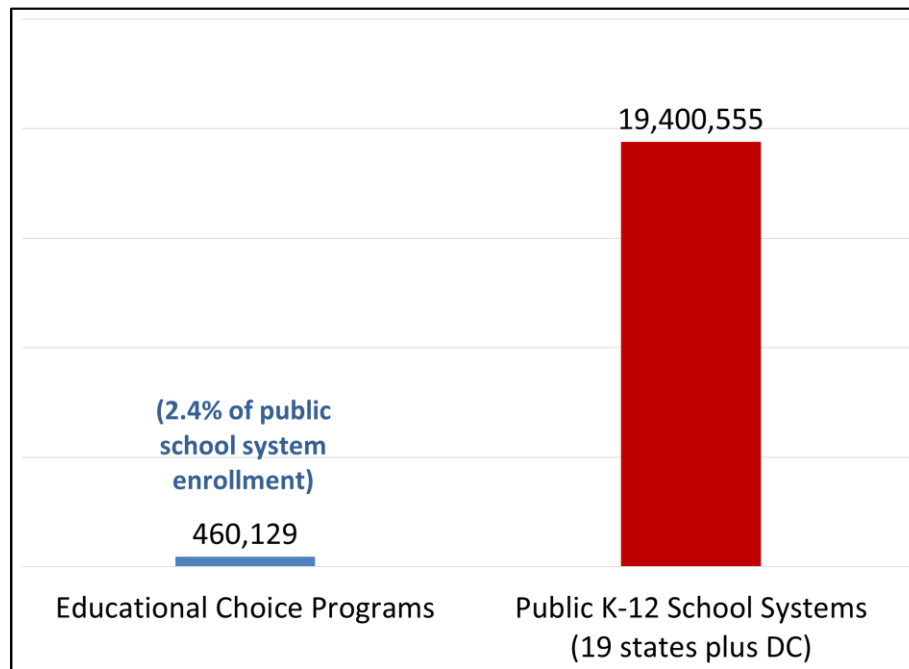
Marty Lueken

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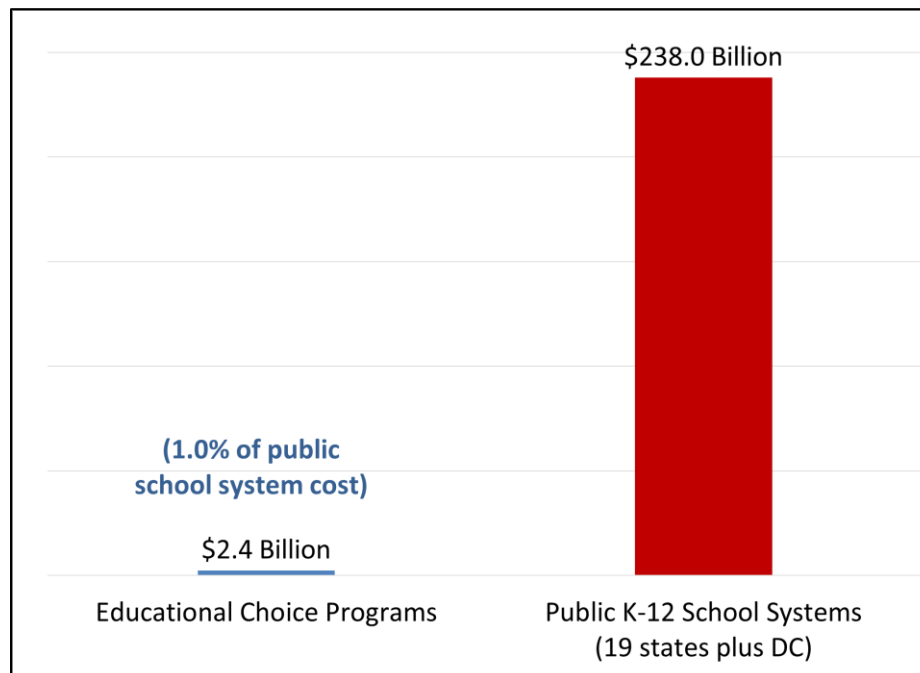
<sup>5</sup> Huriya Jabbar, Carlton J. Fong, Emily Germain, Dongmei Li, Joanna Sanchez, Wei-Ling Sun, and Michelle Devall (2019). The competitive effects of school choice on student achievement: A systematic review. *Educational Policy*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904819874756>

<sup>6</sup> David N. Figlio, Cassandra M.D. Hart, and Krzysztof Karbownik (2020), *Effects of Scaling Up Private School Choice Programs on Public School Students*, Working Paper 26758, National Bureau of Economic Research, February, retrieved from: [https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w26758/w26758.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w26758/w26758.pdf)

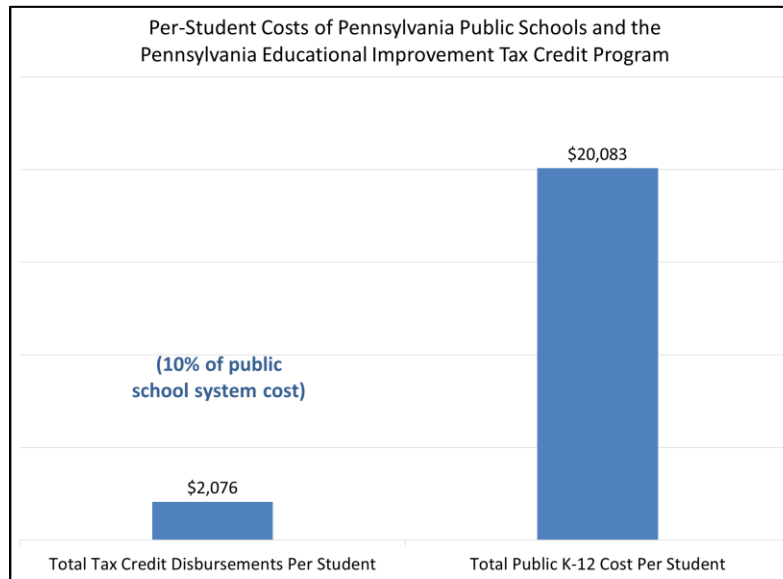
**Figure 1: Total number of students enrolled in educational choice programs and public K–12 school systems in 19 states plus DC, FY 2018**



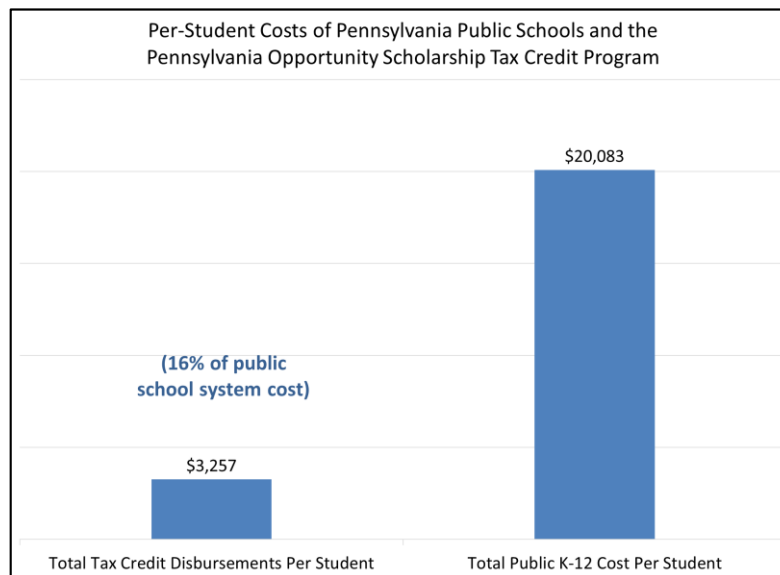
**Figure 2: Total funding for educational choice programs and public K–12 school systems in 19 states plus DC, FY 2018**



**Figure 3: Per-student costs of PA EITC program and per-student cost of PA public school system**



**Figure 4: Per-student costs of PA OSTC program and per-student cost of PA public school system**



**Table 1: Participation rates for educational choice programs by program type by year in operation**

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
all programs	0.46%	0.86%	1.12%	1.44%	1.68%	1.92%	2.13%	2.18%	2.05%	2.62%
ESA	0.25%	0.66%	1.07%	1.72%	2.16%	3.03%	4.33%	4.54%	7.33%	6.58%
Tax Credit	0.35%	0.59%	0.87%	1.10%	1.23%	1.32%	1.44%	1.48%	1.29%	1.86%
Voucher	0.70%	1.36%	1.77%	2.12%	2.51%	3.07%	3.37%	3.87%	4.52%	4.40%



Good afternoon. My name is Aaron Anderson and I serve as the CEO of Logos Academy, located in downtown York, PA. We also have a Logos Academy affiliate school located in Harrisburg, PA.

I am convinced that most Americans are fans of school choice whether they voice that approval or not. Don't believe me? Ask the parents of children who are looking to move or relocate if they investigated the quality of the local schools.

The sad reality is that school choice in America is largely exercised through real estate transactions. This means choice is not an option for families who can't afford to pick up and move to a better district. These families shouldn't have to move to achieve school choice. They need high-quality school options right in their own neighborhoods.

The target populations of our schools are some of the most challenging places to serve in our Commonwealth. A recent national economic study cited York, PA as the fourth most under-resourced city in America. These geographies have a high density of students who live in poverty. The current data has long suggested that less than 70% will graduate from high school. Of those who go on to college, only 11% of those first-generation, low-income students will graduate with a degree.

Low expectations and failure have become the status quo. We expend a lot of energy creating excuses for student failure. Human capital is being wasted. The critical urban cores of our communities are riddled with multiplying economic and community development needs, hopelessness, and skyrocketing youth violence.

Our cities are not approaching a crisis point. We passed that marker long ago. The economic development needed to produce jobs to lift our citizens out of poverty is not happening at the pace needed. If those economic opportunities ever arrive, we will not have the local human capital to fill critical roles.

It was intolerance of this apathy that led the founders of Logos Academy to challenge the status quo. In 1998, two Christian women launched Logos Academy as a school grounded in the love of Christ for these local students to give them education, opportunity, and hope.

Private schools are often accused of being havens for middle and upper-class wealthy families.

Logos Academy's bylaws guarantee that 65% of our student population will always come from families living near or below the federal poverty line. We exist because exasperated families deserve a chance for their children to thrive.

In 2023, Logos Academy has grown to be an independently funded, accredited, Classical, K-12 school that serves over 250 students in York and Harrisburg.

A recent \$11M campus expansion increases our previously-capped enrollment capacity of 225 students to 450.

Logos Academy is a very different type of private school for families who cannot afford private options. Enrollment demographics mirror public and charter schools without access to public funding sources.

There is still skepticism from some local philanthropists around our financial model all these years later. Logos Academy has proven to be innovative, strategic, and resilient. Over half of the publicly-funded charter schools in York City have opened and closed since Logos Academy's founding. Clearly, sustainability is not just about access to public funding.

The success of Logos Academy is grounded in our Christian mission to make high-quality education accessible while engaging families with the hopeful expectation that their children will be successful with the right inputs.

Every family who sends a student to Logos Academy has skin in the game: financial, time, and energy as we partner together, academy and family, to help students achieve their full God-given potential.

We have a near 100% graduation rate due to a holistic approach to education that assesses students academically, socially, and spiritually.

It annually costs us around \$12,000 to educate each student. The average tuition per student for a Logos Academy education is around \$2,000. We fund that \$10,000 gap through generous local philanthropy and PA's educational tax credit program.

Logos Academy is grateful to be a small part of providing high-quality education for families and students who need it the most in PA's underresourced cities. We humbly urge this committee to do all in its power to make sure every child in our Commonwealth has access to an education that gives them opportunity and fills them with hope.

March 13, 2023

I am here to briefly speak with you about the importance and the appreciation of school choice from a parents perspective. I am a wife and mother of three children, whom all attend York Academy Regional Charter school. They have all attended York Academy Regional Charter school since Kindergarten. Before I get started I want to mention I am not for York City. So I don't have anything negative experience with the school system here. I grew up most of my life in New England.

As we parent our children, it is common for us to draw from the experiences of our own childhood. We remember things our parents did when raising us. Things we liked and things that we disliked. We take those experiences and combined them with new parenting information we learn along the way. Growing up due to circumstance beyond my mothers control. Education was something that had to take a back seat. We moved around a lot, and I went to a total of 5 elementary schools in 3 different states.

From that experience I learned that not all schools are the same. Even within the same school district. There were even disconnects in the transitions from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school. Teachers, administrators, school board and parents were not on the same page as to what the educational development and expectations for the students should be. In some schools I would be academical ahead and others I would be behind. I learned that each school and sometimes classrooms had there own curriculum, pace, expectations and quality of staff. As a child I could tell you which of those schools had it together and which ones didn't. I made a mental note to myself when I was in elementary school. I want better for my children when I become a mom.

Some years later after I was done with school, I stumbled upon an all girls school in Connecticut called Miss Porters. I fell in love with the setting, the teachers and the curriculum. I didn't know that education could look so different. The institutionalizes method I was exposed to was not the only way. I said to my 20 year old self. When I get married and have children I was going to send my daughters there. Well fast forward. I no longer live in Connecticut and I have all boys. So Miss Posters school for girls was out of the question, but I held onto the idea of wanting my children to have unique educational experience. Not just a place where they will learn to read and

write but a school that would provide them with traditional and out of the box learning experiences.

I have found that in York Academy. They are so out of the box at times, they've had this mama, who is not one for being out in nature. Knee deep in the creek clean up trash and putting up bird house the kids made. Third grader's building water filtration systems and raising money to send to pen pals in the third world countries who rely on filtration systems for clean water.

There our children are taught **how** and **why** they learn, is just as important as **what** they are learning. Built into the International Baccalaureate curriculum are a set of ten core values that are taught to help shape children into better people and life long learners. For the sake of time I will not go through all of them but here are a few that have impacted my family.

**Principled.** Are you being honest. Most parents pet peeve – lying children. Being principled has taught my boys even in the hard moments it's important to take ownership of their own actions.

**Risk taker.** My oldest son was the most cautious kid you would ever want to meet. He over thought everything he was not a risk taker. We never left the playground with booboos because if it didn't look safe to him he was not messing with it. I never thought of how they would play into his leaning. It take courage to raise your hand and ask questions if you don't understand something or if you need help. Children are taking a risk when sounding out a new word when your first learning to read out loud in class. My son is now 15 and we no longer have this problem. However we have had to remind him of the value of being principled. Lol

The last one I want to mention is **Communicator**. Communicating is not just being a good speaker. It is also being a person who listens to understand. Even if that means learning a new language to communicate. Starting in Kindergarten all the way to 12<sup>th</sup> grade students at York Academy have Spanish class.

I am grateful that York academy was an options for our family. They encourage family involvement. Expectations are reinforced in the home and in school, which leads to a much better learning environment. I believe that when the parents and teachers create a partnership. Children are less likely to fall through the cracks. My second son Riley is extremely shy and quiet. In a large over populated school system a kid like him could have easily fell

through the cracks. The smaller class room setting along with having two teachers in the room prevented that from happening. They have partnered with us in building his confidence and creating a space for him to blossom. I wish each of you could have seen my Riley take the stage last Friday to sing a song for the modern band concert. The beauty of that night was that his kindergarten teacher was there and without saying a word to each other I knew she was astonished at Riley's personal growth.

Having a choice has been a blessing for my children. It has also helped me keep a promise to my children. A promise that I made way before they were born. To provide them with a better educational experience then I received. Thank you for your time.

Anterria Graham.

Carol Thomson – Parent at Christian School of York

I would like to thank you for devoting your time and efforts to this important matter of school choice.

The Bible says "For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul." (Mark 8:36)

That was the standard my husband and I used to discern if we should send our children to public school. They might gain an education but the toxic anti-God indoctrination would do irreparable damage to their souls.

Benjamin Rush, the father of the American public school system said, "The great enemy of the salvation of man, in my opinion, never invented a more effective means of limiting Christianity from the world than by persuading mankind that it was improper to read the Bible at schools."

We chose not to send our children to public schools and therefore have never received the benefits of our tax dollars. We have paid for each of our children's education two times.

School choice would put things in the right order. Returning the authority of the educational funds back to the parents.

The federal government already gives money to college students in the form of pell grants. The student decides what college he or she wants to attend, not the government.

The same is true with the GI bill. The veteran decides what school he wants to give his scholarship money too, not the government.

Tax payer funded preschool programs such as Head Start follow the same model. Parents decide which preschool they want their child to attend, not their zip code, not their government.

We don't force low income families to spend their food stamp dollars at a government run grocery store. They can go anywhere they want: Walmart, Target or other similar stores.



It would be so beneficial to our children if we would apply this same logic to our K-12 education. We would fund children not buildings.

In almost every area of life parents choose how to spend money even when it comes from the government. Choice is the norm for pre-K and higher education. Why not K-12?

School choice initiatives return the money to the intended beneficiaries of the funding: students and their parents.

When faced with competition public schools do, in fact, up their game. 20 out of 21 studies reported by American Federation for Children found that school choice improved public school academic outcomes.

In a recent interview on CBN news with Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds shared that a superintendent was expressing his dislike over the recently passed "Expanded Open Enrollment" law but that same superintendent vowed and determined that he will make sure his school district is the school of choice! This is a very desirable outcome!

Prager University cited a study published in May 2021 reveals that increased competition from expanding private school choices in Florida improved academic and behavioral outcomes in nearby public schools.

In every area of commerce, competition invariably leads to a better product. Satisfied customers return. Unsatisfied go elsewhere.

According to American Federation for Children, the vast majority of credible evidence shows that school choice programs improve academic outcomes for not only the program participants but also the students in public schools; save taxpayers money; and reduce racial segregation.

The Bible says "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction." Proverbs 1:7

In 1963 public schools became foolish systems by banning prayer and public Bible reading. That is what has brought us to the current condition of our public school today described in James 3:16 "For where envy and self-seeking exist confusion and every evil thing are there."

Let us through this venture of school choice provide a means of escape from the deplorable agenda of the public schools and to embark upon the desired havens of those schools that are congruent with the value system of the parents and students.

Good afternoon. I'm Eden Turnow, and I came to Christian School of York as a freshman, and I'm now a senior. Becoming a student at CSY has impacted my life in so many positive ways.

I've been passionate about music for as long as I can remember. I started playing piano when I was four, and learned other instruments along the way. I started singing and playing keyboard on the worship team at my church in fifth grade. Now at CSY, I sing and play piano for the choir and get to lead worship on the praise team for our school chapels.

Another big part of my life is volleyball. I started playing about seven years ago at college camps, on different club teams, and I've spent summers playing beach volleyball. I've been on the varsity team at CSY for the last three years and it's been an incredible experience.

Besides my faith, music and volleyball have always been a huge part of who I am. Coming to Christian School of York has helped me realize new things about my two passions and I'm starting to see how much that's impacted me. At the end of my sophomore year, one of my teachers, Mrs. Kemper, told me that God put it on her heart to encourage me to start to step into leadership roles. I wasn't too excited about that. It made me kind of nervous, and I didn't intend to pursue it. But, I found out that you can't ignore God or Mrs. Kemper. She suggested I apply to join student council, so reluctantly, I did. I was worried that it was going to put my already demanding schedule over the top, and my schedule is crazy, but it's been so worth it. I am now the vice president of the student council. This year I've learned so much about leadership, teamwork, and recognizing others' gifts and encouraging them to use them. And I have to admit, I'm loving it. Growing in my leadership skills has spilled over into all aspects of my life. I applied and became one of the captains of the volleyball team for the past two years.

As a captain, I implemented a weekly devotional time for the team. I'm so grateful to be at a school where I am encouraged and challenged, and where I can feel myself growing in my confidence and in my leadership skills. I haven't decided on a career path yet, but I know that the impact of these experiences will positively influence my upcoming years at Messiah University and the rest of my life.

One of my favorite verses, Colossians 3:23 says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as if working for the Lord, not for human masters," I am no longer afraid of new opportunities. I'm excited to go all in with everything I do without hesitation, and not just for the people around me, but for God. Putting God first in my life is my main goal, and will ultimately lead me down the best path. Thank you.

## **GOP Policy Committee Hearing Testimony**

March 16, 2023

Christian School of York, York, PA

In February, the Commonwealth Court ruled that Pennsylvania fails to adequately fund its K-12 schools. Policymakers now have the critical task of reimagining school funding and implementing a more equitable school funding model. This moment of re-examination and re-configuration should introduce a new era of educational choice—where students and families can choose between traditional public schools, vocational schools, charter schools, specialty schools, faith-based schools, private schools, cyber schools, and homeschools. Such freedom enhances individual student lives, raises the overall achievement of students, and positively impacts our communities. Having weathered the storm of COVID and being confronted with student academic and socio-emotional challenges as a result, there is no better time than now to modernize our education system, to offer a diverse set of educational options, and to provide greater freedom of education.

### Individual School Choice Success Stories

Nermeen and her family came to the United States after experiencing a great deal of persecution for their Christian faith in their native country of Egypt. Unfortunately, when they enrolled in a public school in Harrisburg, they were confronted with lingering post-9/11 bullying because of their Arab descent. Confronted with a hostile educational environment and already being two grade levels behind, Nermeen and her brothers enrolled in Harrisburg Christian School. Nermeen and her brothers had access to private, faith-based education because they were able to receive EITC/OSTC scholarships. But money alone wasn't going to bridge the gap in Nermeen's learning loss. The individual support Nermeen received from teachers, along with the partnership between her parents and her teachers, led to her completing her high school diploma with honors and enrolling in medical school. Educational freedom worked for Nermeen, and it's working for students across the country.

Like Nermeen, the story of Jordan, and his family's ability to choose his education, compels many beyond his home state of Arizona: "Jordan was the son of Kathy, a former public-school teacher and Army veteran. Jordan was born with cerebral palsy and diagnosed with autism. His struggles in the classroom led to Jordan suffering panic attacks as his school struggled to meet his unique needs. That changed when the State of Arizona established the Empowerment Scholarship Account Program giving Kathy the ability to customize Jordan's education.<sup>1</sup> Kathy now had the educational freedom and the 'power to make [educational] decisions for [her] child.'<sup>2</sup> Kathy would further state, 'As a former public-school teacher, army veteran, special needs mom, and now an ESA parent . . . having access to this incredible program has literally saved my special needs son and my family.'"<sup>2</sup>

If Pennsylvania moves to funding a more pluralistic educational system, including faith-based schools, more individual students will experience life-changing success like Nermeen and Jordan.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.federationforchildren.org/voices-for-choice/kathy-visser/](http://www.federationforchildren.org/voices-for-choice/kathy-visser/)

<sup>2</sup> [www.dailycaller.com/2019/08/14/beienburg-arizona-schools/](http://www.dailycaller.com/2019/08/14/beienburg-arizona-schools/)

### Stark Contrast Between Public and Private Schools' COVID Responses

In light of the recent challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic, we can discern the catastrophic effect that public school educational decisions made during COVID had on student learning and emotional health. There is a stark difference in how public school students fared versus their private school counterparts.

What schools chose to do in response to COVID made a world of difference in student academic success and socio-emotional health. Large public schools, hindered by size and inflexible systems, limited children's education to virtual or blended learning. Private schools, many of them faith-based, insisted on returning to in-person instruction, and the difference in reported achievement and mental health indicators could not be more stark. (According to a report by the Wall Street Journal, 85% of ACSI Schools and 92% of Catholic schools returned to in-person education in the Fall of 2020 compared to 43% of traditional public schools and 34% of charter schools.<sup>3</sup> )

On September 1, 2022, the New York Times cited that for the first time since the National Assessment of Educational Progress Test began tracking student achievement in the 1970s, nine-year-olds lost ground in math and reading, falling by the largest margin in over 30 years, erasing two decades of progress in math and reading.<sup>4</sup>

It should not surprise anyone that shuttered schools and sudden, unplanned remote learning led to poor student performance. In the Fall of 2020, after just three months of virtual learning, Stanford University's Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO) produced a [report](#) stating that students had already experienced a loss of "57 to 183 days of learning in reading and from 136 to 232 days in mathematics."<sup>5</sup> Learning loss was evident nearly immediately.

Not only were students devastated academically, they were also significantly impacted emotionally. According to the National Center for Education Statistics in July of 2020, 80 percent of public schools reported that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted students' socio-emotional development. Furthermore, there was a 56% increase in classroom disruption due to student misconduct, 48% increase in acts of disrespect toward teachers and staff, and a 72% increase in chronic absenteeism.<sup>6</sup> And according to a Center for Disease Control (CDC) report published in July of 2020, 37% of high school students reported they experienced poor mental health, 44% reported they persistently felt sad and hopeless (up 20% from 2019), and 18.8% seriously considered suicide (up 36% over the past 10 years). Sadly, America's youth have entered a new era of hopelessness.<sup>7</sup>

According to an October 2020 ACSI Research Report, ACSI schools maintained high levels of academic achievement during the pandemic, consistently exceeding pre-pandemic norms. According to the report, the "average ACSI student exceeded pre-pandemic national norms by roughly 20 scale points in reading

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<sup>3</sup>[www.wsj.com/articles/amid-the-pandemic-progress-in-catholic-schools-partnership-naep-report-card-math-reading-public-charter-black-hispanic-11666902117](https://www.wsj.com/articles/amid-the-pandemic-progress-in-catholic-schools-partnership-naep-report-card-math-reading-public-charter-black-hispanic-11666902117)

<sup>4</sup> [www.nytimes.com/2022/09/01/us/national-test-scores-math-reading-pandemic.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/01/us/national-test-scores-math-reading-pandemic.html)

<sup>5</sup> [www.credo.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/press\\_release\\_learning\\_loss.pdf](https://www.credo.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/press_release_learning_loss.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [www.nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press\\_releases/07\\_06\\_2022.asp](https://www.nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/07_06_2022.asp)

<sup>7</sup>[www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/features/school-aged-mental-health-in-communities.html#:~:text=A%20CDC%20study%20examined%20mental%20health%20symptoms%20in,mental%20disorder%3B%20rates%20varied%20among%20the%20different%20sites.](https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/features/school-aged-mental-health-in-communities.html#:~:text=A%20CDC%20study%20examined%20mental%20health%20symptoms%20in,mental%20disorder%3B%20rates%20varied%20among%20the%20different%20sites.)



and over 10 scale points in math each year of the pandemic," as measured by the Terra Nova 3, a nationally norm-referenced exam.<sup>8</sup>

ACSI schools demonstrated that they were able to balance care for students' physical health through reasonable COVID mitigations; socio-emotional well-being through in-person instruction and continued interaction with teachers and friends; and academic progress through the continuity of education. As a result, ACSI schools averaged a 35% increase in enrollment during the pandemic and 28% during the following 2022-23 school year. The report goes on to say that the enrollment growth is attributed to an influx of students from other educational sectors seeking learning alternatives not available to them in their public district. In Pennsylvania, that enrollment growth was enabled, in part, by the additional 1,200+ student scholarships that ACSI Children's Tuition Fund (CTF) was able to give after the State increased the amount of EITC funding for the 2022-23 academic year.

### A Successful Educational Model in Florida

Across the country there are numerous examples of how providing greater access to a variety of educational options and fostering more education freedom positively impacts the overall academic achievement of students. According to Doug Tuthill, President of Step Up For Children—the leading scholarship organization in the state of Florida—providing families with education choice, via a pluralistic education system, leads to an increase in student success in both public and private schools. Fueled by educational tax credits and education investment accounts (a portion of state dollars follow the child), a new age of educational innovation and academic achievement was born. Public schools became more innovative, creating STEM academies, culinary schools, and schools for the arts. By becoming increasingly attentive to parents and students, graduation rates increased from 50% to 92% while academic achievement scores (when controlled for demographics) shifted Florida from the bottom 10% (when compared to all other states) to the top 5% among states. And the myth of "fleeing public schools" never materialized. Public schools currently remain the preferred educational option for 67% of Floridians while private schools saw a 10% increase. (Charter schools made up 14% and homeschoolers 9%.) When students are provided the freedom to choose their education, new heights in academic achievement are experienced by all students.

### Education Choice Leads to Higher Academic Achievement

When examining the [compilation of research](#) compiled by EdChoice, we find the overwhelming benefits for public and private school students when a pluralistic educational system exists:

- Of the 28 studies that examined public school student test scores, 25 found positive effects, one found no visible effect and two found any negative effects;
- Of the 7 studies that examined educational attainment, 5 found positive effects, while 2 found no visible effect; and
- Of the 32 studies that examined public and private school satisfaction, 30 found positive effects, one found no visible effect and two found any negative effects.<sup>9</sup>

As Pennsylvania moves to a more pluralistic educational system, including faith-based schools, both public and private school students will experience higher academic achievement.

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<sup>8</sup> [www.acsi.org/docs/default-source/website-publishing/research/acsi-schools-weather-pandemic-storm.pdf](http://www.acsi.org/docs/default-source/website-publishing/research/acsi-schools-weather-pandemic-storm.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/123-of-School-Choice.pdf](http://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/123-of-School-Choice.pdf)

### Education Choice Creates Positive Community Impact

While educational freedom as seen in a pluralistic educational system leads to individual student success and overall higher achievement of students as a whole, we also find that it makes a positive impact on local communities and generates significant fiscal savings.

Cardus is a non-partisan, faith-based think tank promoting a flourishing society through independent research. In 2011, they conducted their first of several landmark studies to explore the societal impact of different educational models – public schools, charter schools, private schools, and private religious schools. They studied 2,054 Canadian adults aged 24 to 39 (controlled for socioeconomic and religious background) measuring how their education impacted their work, family life, and daily life. *(Note: The relevance of a Canadian study is that the Canadian education system, made up of provincial, catholic, protestant, and private schools, creates a “more level playing field” from which to ask, “With everything being equal, what type of education is best?”)* What they found was significant. Students who attended faith-based schools expressed (1) a greater sense of life’s purpose and were more hopeful about the future, (2) an attitude that caused them to express greater appreciation, (3) stronger marital relationships with more stable families, (4) more involved in and more financial generosity to churches, charities, and their community, and (5) brought an overall greater stability to their community. Graduates—like the ones that come from ACSI schools—were said to be, “Uniquely complaint, generous, outwardly-focused individuals who stabilize their communities by their uncommon commitment to their families, their churches, and communities, and by their unique hope and optimism about their lives and the future.”<sup>10</sup>

When we review studies conducted to explore the fiscal effects of school choice programs on communities and states, we find that states with more pluralistic educational systems generate an increase in revenue and experience meaningful budget savings. Dr. Martin F. Lueken, in his November 2021 [Report](#) states that “through FY 2018, the 40 educational choice programs under study generated an estimated \$12.4 billion to \$28.3 billion in cumulative net fiscal savings for state and local taxpayers.”<sup>11</sup> In addition, as previously referenced, [compilation of research](#) compiled by EdChoice examined the fiscal effects upon states where pluralistic educational systems exist. Of the 73 studies, 68 found positive effects, four found no visible effect, and five found any negative effects.

### In Conclusion

Establishing a pluralistic education system and granting educational freedom to families to personalize their child’s schooling will lead to greater impact on individual students, higher achievement for students overall, and a positive impact on our communities. The future of our students’ and our communities’ success depends on it.

**WHO IS ACSIPA?** ACSIPA, is a state specific group of Christian School administrators who are a part of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). ACSI seeks to strengthen Christian schools and equip Christian educators worldwide as they prepare students academically and inspire them to become devoted followers of Jesus Christ. ACSI consists of over 2,200 member schools. In Pennsylvania, ACSI represents over 18,000 students being served in over 110 private Christian Schools throughout the Commonwealth.

<sup>10</sup> [www.cardus.ca/research/education/reports/cardus-education-survey-2014-private-schools-for-the-public-good/](http://www.cardus.ca/research/education/reports/cardus-education-survey-2014-private-schools-for-the-public-good/)

<sup>11</sup> [www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/The-Fiscal-Effects-of-School-Choice-WEB-reduced.pdf](http://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/The-Fiscal-Effects-of-School-Choice-WEB-reduced.pdf)