



Brief: Education Choice

86th Regular Session, Policy Paper No. 18 of 40

February 22, 2019

Key Points:

1. Parents have the primary right & serious duty to educate their children.
2. Education choice helps parents find the best education for their child.
3. Data indicates education choice helps struggling & vulnerable students.

A Catholic perspective: Texas law recognizes that families are essential for children to achieve their maximum potential.^[1] This is in accord with Catholic teaching, but the Church adds:

[Parents'] role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure. It devolves on parents to create a family atmosphere so animated with love and reverence for God and others that a well-rounded personal and social development will be fostered among the children. Hence, the family is the first school of those social virtues which every society needs.^[2]

The family is the natural relationship that is most relevant to education because parents have the primary right and serious duty to educate their children.^[3] Fulfilling this duty is essential to parenthood, necessary to a family's happiness, and we seek to strengthen Texas families by supporting proposals aligned with the principle of *subsidiarity*, according to which it is wrong for the community to take from families the work they can accomplish by their own initiative.^[4] Pope Francis applied this principle to education to explain why we support educational choice:

The State offers educational programs in a subsidiary way, supporting the parents in their indeclinable role; parents themselves enjoy the right to choose freely the kind of education—accessible and of good quality—

which they wish to give their children in accordance with their convictions. Schools do not replace parents but complement them.^[5]

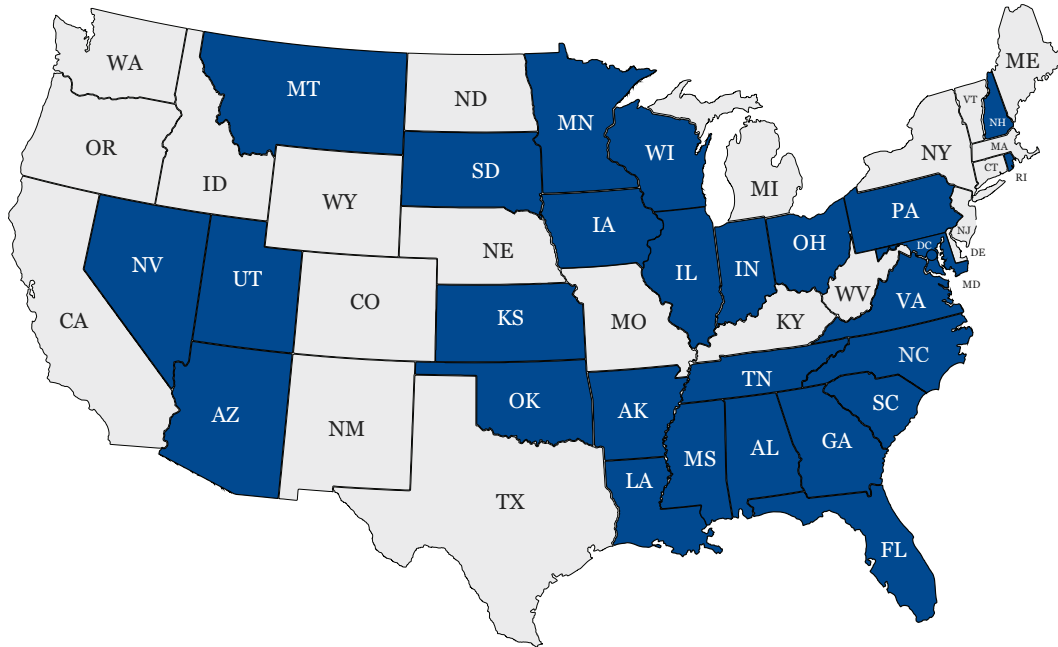
Civil law should maintain conditions in which citizens can exercise their rights and fulfill their duties. If law does not do so, equality decreases, rights are rendered ineffective, and the ability to fulfill duties is compromised.^[6] Such a situation has disproportionately negative effects upon poor and vulnerable parents.

Law and policy: Education choice allows public education funds to follow students to the education that fits their needs, including public, private, or charter schools, and tutoring or therapy as needed. Figure 1 (next page) illustrates the 27 states that have private education choice. This policy would help Texas achieve two goals:

Opportunity: Texas affirms the view that education is essential to self-governance.^[7] However, current educational outcomes indicate:

1. 60% of public school 3rd graders read on grade level,
2. 32% of low-income public school 3rd graders read on grade level,
3. 21% of public school 8th graders earn a higher education credential, and
4. 12% of low-income public school 8th graders earn a higher education credential.^[8]

Figure 1: School choice programs in the U.S. (2019)



Data from other states indicates that education choice helps students and struggling families:^[9]

- The average annual family income of choice participants in Florida is \$25,756, and program participants were 40 percent more likely to enroll in college than their peers.^[10]
- Milwaukee students' reading and math scores respectively improved by 6 and 11 percentile points.^[11]
- Washington D.C. students' graduation rate increased from 70 percent to 82 percent.^[12]
- College enrollment by African American students in New York increased by 25%; enrollment in selective colleges more than doubled.^[13]

Texas could provide such opportunity to its own low-income and vulnerable students.

Accountability: Accountability is the intentional movement of resources from less productive to more productive uses. State law can encourage accountability through public and private educational choice programs, though Texas only does

the former.^[14] Unfortunately, Texas law invites parents who want to enroll their child in private schools to pay twice for their child's education: once through taxes for district schools and again through tuition for their own child. Such laws are unjust and discourage accountability.

Key bill summary: SB 1906 would provide education choice to low-income and special needs students.^[15] Students would be eligible for the program from Kindergarten through high school, and students would receive a scholarship which could be used for eligible expenses, including tuition and fees at accredited private schools, textbooks, fees for public school services, tutoring, therapy, and standardized tests. Funds for the program would come from a tax credit on the state insurance premium tax.

Call to action: To support education choice proposals in the Texas legislature, please visit txcatholic.org/education to find and contact your lawmaker. Please also pray for Texas and for our legislators, that they may uphold laws which strengthen families and recognize that parents are their children's primary educators.

Endnotes

1. Texas Edu. Code § [4.001\(a\)](#).
2. John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio [On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World]* November 22, 1981. § 36.
3. Canon Law [#1136](#).
4. CSDC § [185-188](#); Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno [On Reconstruction of the Social Order]*, May 15, 1931. § 79.
5. Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia [On Love in the Family]*, March 19, 2016. § 83-84.
6. John XXIII, *Pacem In Terris [Peace on Earth]*, April 11, 1963. § 63.
7. Texas Supreme Court, *West Orange Cove II*, at 100-101. 176 S. W. 3d 746.
8. Texas Commission on Public School Finance, *Funding for Impact: Equitable Funding for Students Who Need It the Most*, December 31, 2018. 64-65, 11.
9. For a summary of all extant research, see: EdChoice, *Empirical Research Literature on the Effects of School Choice: Academic Outcomes of Participants*, Updated Jan. 31, 2019.
10. Step Up For Students, Email message to author, February 14, 2019; Matthew Chingos, et al., *The Effects of Statewide Private School Choice on College Enrollment and Graduation*, December 2017. Table A.2.
11. Greene, Jay P., et al., *Effectiveness of School Choice*, February 1999. 190-213.
12. Wolf, Patrick, et al., *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program*, June 2010. xv.
13. Chingos, Matthew, et al., *The Effects of School Vouchers on College Enrollment*, August 2012. 12, 14-18.
14. Texas Edu. Code § [12.001\(4\)](#).
15. A student would be eligible if they are eligible for the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program. [83 Fed. Reg. at 20789](#).