

## The Catholic Church Supports School Choice Public Policy – And So Should You



Catholic social teaching is clear on the shared responsibility of parents' rights over the education of their children and government aid to support that parental right – the very essence of school choice public policies.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, "Parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own personal convictions. This right is fundamental," and "public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and ensuring concrete conditions for its exercise." (CCC #2229)

The 1965 Vatican II Declaration on Christian Education, "*Gravissimum Educationis*," rededicated the Church to the rights of parents and children in education. Among these enumerated rights include parents roles as their children's first educators and therefore their right to

choose an education for their children that fits their conscience – with assistance from the state:

"Parents who have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children must enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools. Consequently, the public power, which has the obligation to protect and defend the rights of citizens, must see to it, in its concern for distributive justice, that public subsidies are paid out in such a way that parents are truly free to choose according to their conscience the schools they want for their children." (GE 20)

Furthermore, Vatican II reinforced the duty of the state to not impose a public monopoly on schooling, but allow for schools to adopt diverse education models and pedagogical approaches, as long as they have

some measure of accountability. The guiding doctrine of *subsidiarity* is very similar to American *federalism*, as it asserts that the smallest, least centralized authority should handle all public concerns.

"[The state] must always keep in mind the principle of subsidiarity so that there is no kind of school monopoly, for this is opposed to the native rights of the human person, to the development and spread of culture, to the peaceful association of citizens and to the pluralism that exists today in ever so many societies." (GE 21)



America is such a pluralistic society, with public schools, non-religious and religious private schools, online education, blended learning, and even customizable education models. But parents are still fighting for their right to choose an education option for their children with the tax dollars they pay into the state public education system for their children's use.

School choice, also called education choice or more accurately, parental choice in education, refers to public policies that allow families to choose the best learning option for their children regardless of race, income, background or zip code. Policies that promote education choice most often have at least one of four distinct funding and delivery mechanisms: vouchers, tax credit scholarships, individual tax credit deductions, or education savings accounts.

- Vouchers: a portion of the state funding allocated for the child's public education is given to the family to use as a voucher for private education options.
- Tax Credit Scholarships: individuals and/or corporations give donations to scholarship granting organizations (SGO) nonprofits in return for state tax credits. The SGOs then give families scholarships to attend private education options.
- Individual Tax Credit Deductions: families receive income tax relief for their approved education expenses, which can include private school tuition, textbooks, tutors, supplies, etc.
- Education Savings Accounts (ESA): families

receive a portion of their child's state education funding into a government authorized "savings" account that they can use toward a variety of approved education expenses, including private school tuition, online learning, tutoring, AP classes, textbooks, etc. Some ESAs even allow for combination courses with public and private schools and unused-funds-rollover for college tuition.

Today over 500,000 students across America in 29 states, Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico are enjoying state supported school choice. Catholic Education Partners' data show that about 40 percent of all students on school choice programs choose to attend Catholic schools with their portion of state education funding.

In partnership with the NCEA and USCCB, Catholic Education Partners is dedicated to serving the Catholic community by advancing policies – like school choice – that empower families and children to enjoy the benefits of a Catholic education. But we need the Catholic community across the country to respond by supporting their home state policies that reinforce the mission of the Catholic Church in education; making sure the Church is fulfilling the Vatican II declaration to reclaim the right of families to "enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools."

*Contributed by Brittany Vessely, executive director, Catholic Education Partners*