

American for Prosperity North Dakota – IN SUPPORT SB 2241

Americans for Prosperity strongly supports educational choice.

We are in support of charter schools, we urge you to support SB 2241.

Educational choice refers to policies that allow families the freedom to select the best educational options for their children, including public charter schools, private schools, homeschooling, and education savings account programs. These options are seen as a mechanism to promote competition, empower parents, and improve educational outcomes. From a conservative perspective, the expansion of educational choice is viewed as essential for fostering accountability, improving public schools, and promoting individual freedom. The positive impact educational choice can have on public schools, highlighting the ways in which it can drive reform, enhance student achievement, and ensure a more effective use of taxpayer dollars.

Key Points:

1. Increased Competition Improves Quality

Educational choice introduces competition into the education system, compelling public schools to improve their performance in order to retain students. Just as competition in any market drives businesses to innovate and offer better services, competition in education pushes public schools to become more responsive to the needs of students and parents. When families are empowered with the choice to select the best educational fit for their children, public schools are incentivized to improve curriculum, teaching quality, and overall student experience.

- **Evidence:** Studies have shown that areas with robust school choice programs see improvements in public schools. A report by the *Cato Institute* found that in cities with strong charter school options, traditional public schools showed significant gains in reading and math scores.

2. Increased Parental Engagement and Empowerment

Educational choice fosters greater parental involvement in education by allowing parents to choose a school that best meets their child's needs. When parents have the power to select schools, they are more likely to take an active role in their child's education, creating a stronger partnership between families and schools. This engagement has been linked to higher academic achievement and better outcomes for students.

- **Evidence:** A study by the *Heritage Foundation* demonstrated that when parents are given school choice options, such as education savings accounts or charter

schools, they are more likely to engage in their children's educational decisions, leading to improved student behavior and performance.

3. Financial Efficiency and Resource Allocation

Educational choice programs allow students to access private education at a lower cost to taxpayers than the per-student spending required in public schools. By allowing parents to choose private education, the government can often reduce per-pupil funding expenditures. Public schools are still funded based on the number of students they serve, but by allowing all children to access the best environment for their learning styles-school systems are better able to allocate resources to the students who remain in the public school system.

- **Evidence:** Research from the *Institute for Justice* suggests that choice-programs lead to cost savings in the long term by promoting educational efficiency, with some studies showing savings of \$1,000 or more per student compared to traditional public school funding.

4. Addressing Inequities in Education

Educational choice offers low-income families access to quality education options that may otherwise be inaccessible. By enabling students to attend schools outside of their designated district or neighborhood, choice empowers families to bypass poorly performing schools in low-income areas, which often struggle with limited resources, overcrowded classrooms, and underqualified teachers. This ensures that all children, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to a quality education.

- **Evidence:** The *Brookings Institution* has highlighted how school choice can provide disadvantaged students with access to better educational opportunities, helping close the achievement gap between low-income and more affluent students.

5. Promotes Innovation and Diverse Educational Options

Educational choice nurtures a diverse array of schooling options that can better meet the needs of individual students. Charter schools, private schools, and homeschooling allow for different teaching methods, specialized curriculums, and learning environments that may be more effective for certain students. The presence of diverse educational institutions encourages innovation within the public education system, as public schools are incentivized to adopt new teaching techniques and methodologies to compete with nontraditional schools.

- **Evidence:** Research has found that charter schools, in particular, have led to innovative instructional models and specialized curricula, especially for students with unique learning needs. Many charter schools focus on STEM, the arts, or

college preparatory programs, giving families access to educational opportunities that public schools may not offer.

6. Safeguarding Constitutional Freedoms

Educational choice supports fundamental freedoms by empowering parents to make decisions that are in the best interests of their children. The government should not have a monopoly on education. By expanding educational choice, we affirm the principle of parental rights and responsibility in shaping their children's futures. Alternatives like tutoring, micro-schools, and charter schools allow families to exercise greater control over their children's education, ensuring that government institutions do not become the sole gatekeepers of knowledge and values.

- **Evidence:** In *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (2002), the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of school vouchers, reaffirming the principle that parents have the right to choose the education that best suits their children, including private and religious schools.

7. Public Schools Benefit from the Reform Agenda

Rather than threatening the existence of public schools, educational choice helps reform and strengthen them. By introducing a market-driven approach to education, public schools are forced to become more accountable to the families they serve. Schools that are ineffective or inefficient may lose students to better-performing options, which acts as a direct motivator for public schools to improve.

- **Evidence:** Studies in cities with school choice policies (e.g., New Orleans post-Katrina) have shown that public school systems can thrive and even improve when they are subjected to market forces and competition.

Conclusion: Educational choice is a powerful tool that can drive improvement in the public education system while promoting parental rights, student achievement, and fiscal responsibility. The expansion of educational choice is vital to ensuring that all students receive a quality education, regardless of their background or zip code. By fostering competition, empowering parents, and promoting innovation, educational choice enhances the quality of education for all students, both within the public and private sectors. Lawmakers should consider expanding educational choice to create a more effective, accountable, and equitable education system that serves the best interests of all American children.

Recommendations for Legislators:

1. Expand school choice programs, including tutoring, education savings accounts, tax-credit scholarships, and charter schools.
2. Ensure accountability in all forms of school choice, including monitoring academic outcomes and financial transparency while maintaining and prioritizing parental autonomy and freedom in academic decision making.
3. Support policies that promote competition and innovation in the public school sector, allowing for greater flexibility and autonomy for educators and administrators.
4. Ensure that low-income families have access to school choice options to help bridge the achievement gap.

Sources:

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- Heritage Foundation. (2019). *School Choice: A Parent's Right*.
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