

# SCHOOL CHOICE WISCONSIN ACTION

## How to Talk About Educational Freedom for Families

### *Overview*

The pandemic has opened doors to major gains in parental freedom in Wisconsin. Families have had to grapple with the academic and social impact of school closings and have watched an education establishment that frequently has put its own interests ahead of those of students. Many have witnessed inadequate instruction in basics like reading and math at the same time that children are taught current theories about race and gender.

The widespread support for more parental choice gives us the opportunity to show that a robust educational marketplace benefits not just families but our economic and community strength as well.

To take advantage of that opportunity, we need to change the way we talk about parental options. We need to leave behind means-tested programs that exclude families and instead lend our support an array of options that provide more freedom to all families and educators.

### *Broad Themes*

#### Families want more control over their children's education.

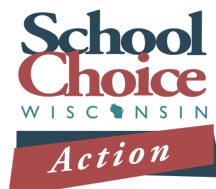
- The evidence is everywhere: stories; polling; and real-life experience of friends, parents and grandparents.
- Families should be able to choose the schools that are best for their children. We don't care whether they choose traditional public schools, charters, or private schools.
- One size does not fit all. Different children have different needs.

#### We trust parents.

- Parents know better than the education establishment what their children need.
- Families won't leave schools that work for their children. They need the freedom to leave schools that do not.

#### Student-based funding is critical.

- Right now, private and charter schools receive only about 60 percent of the funding that public schools receive.
- The value of a student should not be based on whether he or she walks in the door of a private, charter, or public school.



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Parents have rights. They deserve transparency regarding the schools their children attend.

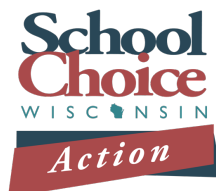
- Parents need to know what their children are being taught.
- Public schools should not be able to hide information from families.

Parents faced disruptions and setbacks.

- Fewer than half of Wisconsin students are proficient in key academic areas. See [link](#) from the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty.
- It is more than an urban problem. Students in rural/small town public schools perform worse than those in suburban schools and similar to those in larger cities. See [link](#) from the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty.
- Thousands admitted to UW campuses require remedial math and English instruction. See [link](#) from the University of Wisconsin System.
- These issues were exacerbated by lengthy pandemic shutdowns, coupled with often ineffective virtual instruction. Students across the state have been set back. See [link](#) from the Wisconsin Policy Forum.
- Education lockdowns disrupted many aspects of family life. See [link](#) from the CDC.
- Families were denied easy access to curriculum. See [link](#) from the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty.

Private school choice for all families and more charter schools

- All Wisconsin families should be permitted to participate in private school choice programs. Polling shows that 65 percent of likely voters agree with this statement.
- Only private school choice programs are limited by income. Other options are not. All families can choose traditional public schools or charters or apply for open enrollment.
- Support for allowing all families to participate is bipartisan and extends throughout the state.
- Students in Wisconsin's parental choice programs outperform their peers on state tests. *Citing performance increases support.*
- Private schools in these programs must meet health and safety standards and undergo independent audits by CPAs. Students in these programs must take state tests and results are reported publicly. *Indicators that private schools are regulated increases support.*



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- Charter authorizers are limited and under pressure to limit or stop new charter school creation. We need a robust charter authorizer network to respond to educational demands.

## Benefits of a Robust Marketplace

- A real educational marketplace will strengthen all sectors. A prerequisite is giving parents an array of tax-supported options.
- The fear that more options will weaken public schools is unfounded. Of 27 [scholarly studies](#) that examined the competitive effects of school choice programs, 25 found positive effects, one found no visible effect, and one found negative effects.
- More options for families mean more opportunities for educators.

## Language That Works

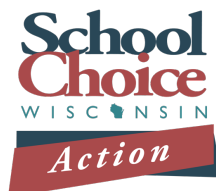
The following notes are based on a presentation of extensive national polling conducted recently.

### Talking about education

- Talk about *families rather than parents*
- Families want their children to be *successful in life*
- *Preparation for college, career, and real life* is a very powerful phrase
- *Back to the basics* is a term that really works — people hear it as kids knowing how to read, do math, etc.
- *Problem solving and critical skills* are other good descriptors of educational goals
- People want *results, not effort*
- The phrase “*a great country (state) has great schools*” is powerful

### Importance of teachers

- Children need teachers who are *inspiring, committed, passionate*
- Teachers are best messengers (not kids and not parents)
- Powerful ad concept — teachers talking about what they want to accomplish and how the education establishment frustrates them



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- Younger children are better messengers than older children who are viewed as almost finished
- Working *side-by-side with parents* is a powerful expression

## Interesting findings

- *Top-down standards* is an unpopular concept
- Nationally, 71 percent of all parents and 74 percent of low-income parents would send their child to another school if they could.
- Blaming the union does not work — people see it as blaming teachers

## Start with what families need, not what a school sector needs

- All students deserve inspiring, committed passionate teachers
- All families deserve a school setting that is responsive to their needs
- All families want their children to be ready for college, a career, and real life
- All families need effective, motivating, and challenging schools for their kids

## The governor/candidates/elected officials

- Want all students to be *inspired, encouraged, challenged*
- Do not care what kind of school they choose
- Know families want their kids to ready for college, career, and real life
- Trust families to know what is best for their kids