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“Driven from every other corner of the earth, freedom of thought and the right of private judgment in matters of conscience direct their course to this happy country as their last asylum.”

Samuel Adams

New Research Shows Support for School Choice Among Military Families

Results of a recent [survey](#) show that military families are in favor of having more opportunities for school choice. This topic has been of particular interest to school choice advocates who are wary of a new federal choice program that could bring with it increased and entangling regulations for states, schools, and students. As discussions take place regarding the best path forward for a national school choice program, one option that is often offered is a program providing school choice for military families. The federal government already provides funding to public schools located near military bases through a program called Impact Aid. Lindsey Burke, director of the Center for Education Policy at the Heritage Foundation, has advocated that these funds would be best used if directed to the parents through education savings accounts to use for the educational environment that best helps their children. She argues that by redirecting funds that are already designated for education, the federal government can expand and support school choice—and also support military families as they serve our country—without creating a new program or increasing government funding. Ms. Burke recently teamed up with Paul DiPerna of EdChoice in conducting research which questioned 1,200 active-duty military members, veterans, and their spouses regarding their views on education, their satisfaction with military life, and their support of school choice options. The results were recently released in a study titled, “Surveying the Military: What America’s Servicemembers, Veterans, and Their Spouses Think About K–12 Education and the Profession.” Findings show that while military families were generally satisfied with the district schooling their children received, only 34% indicated that would be their choice if they were given options. Findings also showed that military families generally were willing to invest more than the national average (i.e. work a second job, move to a different location) in order to gain better educational options for their children. When details of an ESA program were explained, a strong majority of 72% supported making this available for military families. The authors [point out](#) that the results are important not only to school choice but also to national security as “the schooling options available to military-connected children can play a role in whether a family accepts an assignment or even factor into decisions to leave military service altogether.” The Trump administration is reportedly in favor of offering school choice to military families. One [source reports](#) that a White House wish list includes \$1 billion for an educational savings account program for military families.

Maryland Excludes Religious School from School Choice on Charges of Discrimination

Trinity Lutheran Christian School in Joppa, Maryland, may need to [repay the state](#) close to \$65,000 for violating a non-discrimination requirement that is part of BOOST, the state’s school choice program and one of three programs in Maryland open to private school participation. The other two programs, the [aging schools and textbook programs](#), allow for grants to private schools in order to help provide computers and textbooks to eligible students. All three programs require participating schools to comply with a policy that prohibits participating schools from discriminating “in student admissions on the basis of race, color, national origin, or sexual orientation.” The policy then seems to contradict itself, stating, “Nothing herein shall require any school

or institution to adopt any rule, regulation, or policy that conflicts with its religious or moral teachings. However, all participating schools must agree that they will not discriminate in student admissions on the basis of race, color, national origin, or sexual orientation.” The board of the BOOST program told Trinity Lutheran that their policy as stated in their handbook regarding the students in a “homosexual lifestyle or alternative gender identity” is discriminatory; and therefore, the school must pay back the \$64,284 they received last year through the program. The school also participated in the textbook program and will likely have to return those funds as well. Many believe the goal of the policy was to eliminate religious schools from participating in the programs, as most religious schools are finding it impossible to comply with the policy while staying true to their faith-based mission.

Countering the Criticism of Florida School Choice With Facts

The [Orlando Sentinel](#) recently completed a controversial three-part study in which the news site attempted to prove the ineffectiveness and identify the faults of Florida’s state school choice program. The study argued that “Florida private schools rake in nearly \$1 billion in state scholarships with little oversight” and that it is “the most loosely operated school choice program in the country.” However, in response to the study, [Step Up For Students](#) conducted its own research to counter the claims made by the *Sentinel*. Not surprisingly, the counter report presented quite a different result. The study showed that not only has every serious examination of Florida’s tax credit scholarship program ranked the program one of the best in the nation, but reviews have also found it to be the most heavily regulated. Even the *New York Times* ran a story in 2012 praising the program as a positive example to other less-regulated programs. The study also affirmed the effectiveness of the program, pointing to research done by The Urban Institute which shows that students who participate in the scholarship program are 40 percent more likely to attend college. Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, a stalwart champion for the choice programs in the state, also recently published an [article](#) praising Florida’s choice programs and the thousands of students they have helped. He noted, “There is no conflict among the programs. None begrudges the expansion of the others. We have worked out accountability systems that do not infringe on private providers. And, ultimately, schools in Florida are now held more accountable to families via their ability to vote with their feet.”

In Case You Missed It:

[Weekly Market Update](#) provided by Jeff Beach of the [AACCS Investment Team at Merrill Lynch](#)

[6 Things Trump's Religious Liberty Memo Does \(and Doesn't\) Do](#)

[A Colorado Local School Board Election Could Change Nation](#)