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“Education means emancipation. It means light and liberty. It means the uplifting of the soul of man into the glorious light of truth, the light by which men can only be made free.”
Frederick Douglas

School Choice: Multiple States Considering School Choice Legislation

Legislatures in 29 states are considering 65 bills which would either create or expand school choice opportunities for families, according to the February report in the [EdChoice podcast](#). The most popular form of school choice program has quickly become the education savings account (ESA) model in which eligible families are given a specified amount of money to be used on a variety of educational methods, including curriculum, therapies, tutoring, and tuition. Of the 65 bills currently being considered, 50 propose a type of ESA program (77%), and these are being considered in 23 different states. Already this year, Utah and Iowa have passed universal ESA programs, making the scholarships available to every student in those states. The state legislature in [Idaho](#) is hoping to join the list of states with universal ESAs through a bill which is currently being considered in the state senate. After a lengthy debate and discussion this week, late Wednesday evening by a [vote of 6-3](#), the state senate education committee advanced the bill that would establish the Freedom in Education Savings Account program. Earlier this month, the [Wyoming](#) senate also passed a bill to establish a universal ESA program, the Wyoming Freedom Scholarship Act. In [Florida](#), the legislature is considering a bill which would expand the current voucher program into a universal ESA program, so every student in the state would be eligible to participate. The [South Carolina](#) state senate passed a bill that would establish an ESA program for families that qualify for Medicaid; and in [Indiana](#), a bill passed a senate committee which expands the eligibility of the current voucher program from only special education students to a broader eligibility based on the family’s income level.

Several governors are calling on their state legislatures to move in passing school choice programs. In [Arkansas](#), newly elected Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders announced her agenda to pass an ESA program, the Education Freedom Accounts, which would become available to every student over a period of three years. [Texas](#) Governor Greg Abbott has also stated his strong support for school choice, indicating his support to make the existing ESA program for special needs students available to all students. In [Oklahoma](#), Governor Kevin Stitt used his State of the State address to propose a \$130 million ESA program for Oklahoma families, and state legislators who support choice measure are [considering options](#) to make that a reality. The support among governors is growing beyond party lines with two Democrat governors also giving their support for certain types of school choice: Pennsylvania Democrat Governor Josh Shapiro has [indicated his support](#) for Lifeline Scholarships, a program that would provide choice for students in low-performing public schools, and New York’s Governor Kathy Hochul has proposed funding for the expansion of more charter schools in New York City, a move that has received criticism from teachers’ unions. Of this [fast-growing, bipartisan support](#) for school choice programs, Corey DeAngelis with the American Federation for Children noted, “A universal school choice revolution has ignited, and there’s no stopping it. The government school monopoly dominoes are falling, and there’s nothing the teachers’ unions can do about it.”

Pence Group Launches Initiative to Protect Parental Rights

Advancing American Freedom (AAF), an [organization](#) founded by former Vice President Mike Pence, [announced a campaign](#) in Iowa to “combat the Radical Left’s indoctrination of children in Iowa and to empower Iowa parents to make decisions that are best for their children.” This campaign is in response to a policy adopted in April 2022, by the Linn-Mar School Board located just north of Cedar Rapids, Iowa. [Policy 504.13-R](#) allows for students to have a “Gender Support Plan” to be put into effect without the parents’ knowledge or consent and punishes other students who do not use another student’s preferred pronouns. In a direct violation of parental rights, the policy also allows school districts to keep parents from being informed if their child affirms a different gender, if their child has been given a “Gender Support Plan,” or even whether or not the school has any information on the student’s “transgender status.” The campaign by AAF follows an amicus brief that was filed in November 2022 by AAF and 20 other pro-family organizations, asking the court to reverse the policy and put a preliminary injunction in the parents’ favor. The [brief argues](#) that the policy in question “flouts the freedom of parents to direct the upbringing, education, and care of their children Suppresses first amendment free speech and religious free exercise rights . . . [and] violates the protection of pupil rights amendment of 1978.” The arguments for this case, *Parents Defending Education v. Linn-Mar Community School District*, will begin at the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals on February 15, 2023. Mike Pence stated, “The strength of our nation is tied to the strength of our families, and we cannot stand idly by as the Radical Left attempts to indoctrinate our children behind parents’ backs.”

Standardized Testing Organization Exposed for Including Gender Ideology in Materials

The NWEA, an organization that provides standard testing and other educational resources, is facing criticism for their infusion of controversial issues and ideologies into their materials. A [recent report](#) by the Lepanto Institute gave evidence of multiple instances in which the NWEA, formerly known as the Northwest Evaluation Association, either promoted LGBTQ materials or worked to include references to gender ideology in their assessments and resources for teachers and students. A [second report](#) by the Lepanto Institute pointed out that the NWEA was recently bought by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) and gave several examples that show the extent to which HMH is also working to promote the LGBTQ agenda and critical race theory in its educational materials and resources. The Lepanto Institute, a research and education Catholic organization, expressed concern that not only are these social agendas contrary to the moral teachings of their faith but that the use of materials from the company provides financial support to an industry promoting these concerning ideologies in education. Following the release of the first report, representatives from the NWEA met with leaders of the National Catholic Educators Association to discuss these concerns, and the NWEA offered their assurance that their assessments “do not [include] any LGBT+ related test items” and that their assessments included “fiction and nonfiction passages written by authors of diverse backgrounds, informational passages by experts in their fields, and passages from various historical periods.” However, as the Lepanto Institute points out, the NWEA states on their “[policy and advocacy](#)” page, that they “fight for bold, courageous policy changes that will move the needle for students and educators.” Furthermore, the NWEA website [promotes materials](#) that advance false ideologies that are in direct contradiction to moral and faith-based teachings.

In Case You Missed It:

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

[Practical Legal Help for Christian Schools: ADF Ministry Alliance](#)

[Promise to America’s Children](#)

[ADF Video: Respect for Marriage Act: What Church and Ministry Leaders Should Know](#)