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Summary:

Oregon should join the states which have enacted education choice laws, enabling students to benefit from schools and resources that will serve them best. New statewide leadership in 2023 provides opportunities to expand options for all Oregon students.

Word Count: 553

“...73% of Oregon voters support school choice, including 60% of Democrats.”

2023 Should Be Oregon’s Year of Opportunity in K-12 Education

By Kathryn Hickok

[A June poll of Oregonians](#) conducted by Nelson Research and sponsored by the Oregon Moms Union (an education advocacy group) found that most Oregonians are unhappy with the K-12 education system. It also showed that [73% of Oregon voters](#) support school choice, including 60% of Democrats. This shouldn’t be a surprise, as [national polls](#) consistently demonstrate overwhelming [support for school choice](#) across all demographics and political affiliations.

Families increasingly believe one-size-fits-all public schools don’t work for all students and think parents should be able to choose among the schools and resources that best meet their children’s academic and developmental needs. Last year, more than 20 states created or expanded school choice laws. Thirty-two states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico all have enacted programs that empower students to get what they need to succeed in school.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many parents saw their children were not well served by their district schools. A lot of them are now “voting with their feet” for other education options. Private school, charter school, and homeschool enrollments have increased in Oregon and nationwide since 2020. In Portland Public Schools, this year’s district enrollment was [projected to be down a cumulative 14%](#) from pre-pandemic levels, due to a number of factors including enrollment choices. Public schools have lost 30,000 students statewide since 2019-20.

Oregonians have elected a new governor and state legislators to work together in Salem in January. Fresh leadership provides opportunities for Oregon lawmakers to respond to parents’ demand for choice in K-12 education. Here are three ways state leaders can expand options for students in the next legislative session:

- 1) Assure a “money-back guarantee” for Oregon parents. State-level education funding is allocated per child and paid directly to district schools, regardless of outcomes or parent satisfaction. Converting a portion of this funding to portable accounts for students would empower parents to find the best fit for their students to succeed.

Last summer, the Arizona legislature expanded the nation’s first Education Savings Account (ESA) program so that every child in Arizona will be eligible to exercise the state’s ESA option. [Arizona’s law allows 90%](#) of the state-level, per-pupil funding per year (about \$7,000 per child) to



follow the student to private school, homeschooling, learning pod, tutoring, or other educational services chosen by the student's family.

An Oregon ESA program like Arizona's would expand students' options, reduce burdens on struggling schools and districts, and make schools accountable to the parents and students they serve.

- 2) Support Oregon's thriving public charter schools by raising the legislative cap on charter enrollment, currently 3% of students in each district. Removing the cap would allow successful and popular charters to meet demonstrated student demand.
- 3) Expand public school district transfer policies so parents can choose among public options that already exist. This would help create incentives for schools to respond to parents' needs and concerns, and reward public schools that achieve better outcomes.

A shift in mentality from top-down, bureaucratic, one-size-fits-all education mandates to expanding options for parents would work miracles for students and promote improvement in schools. Oregon's education landscape has become more diverse and innovative. It's time for Oregon parents to take full advantage of the opportunities available for children and match their students' needs and goals with teachers, schools, and resources that will serve them best.

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