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## Summary:

National School Choice Week shines the spotlight on the variety of education options for K-12 schooling. There are now 32 states that provide School Choice. Oregon needs to recapture its pioneer spirit and join the states opening the doors of opportunity to the next generation.

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***“Post-pandemic, families increasingly say they want to choose schools and resources that best meet their children’s academic and developmental needs.”***

## In 2024, Will Universal School Choice Become the “New Normal?”

By Kathryn Hickok

January 21-27 is National School Choice Week, the world’s largest annual celebration of parental choice and effective education options for all children. This month, [183 participating Oregon schools and organizations](#) will raise awareness about K-12 education options in our state. Oregon students today benefit from district public schools, public charter schools, private and parochial schools, homeschooling, magnet schools, online learning, and more.

It’s not an exaggeration: Nationwide, 2023 was the Year of Universal Education Choice. In one year, eight states passed universal (or nearly universal) school choice programs for their K-12 students, meaning all children are eligible to opt in if their parents choose.

Each child is unique, with different talents, interests, and learning needs. A school that works well for one student may not be the right fit for another. Post-pandemic, families increasingly say they want to choose schools and resources that best meet their children’s academic and developmental needs. According to a [RealClear Opinion Research poll](#) conducted last summer, 71% percent of voters agreed that parents should “have the right to use tax dollars designated for their child’s education to send their child to the public or private school which best serves their needs.”

State policymakers of all parties are realizing that opportunity and choice in education are important to parents who live and vote in their states, regardless of political affiliation. Ten states now offer education choice programs to all (or almost all) K-12 students. Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Utah, and West Virginia have universal Education Savings Account (ESA) programs. Oklahoma recently passed the nation’s first universal education tax credit program, available to all Oklahoma parents. North Carolina and Ohio made their voucher programs universal. As of 2023, about 98% of Indiana’s school-aged children are now eligible to participate in its Choice Scholarship Program.

[Education tax credits, ESAs, and vouchers](#) are different policy approaches with the same goal—empowering parents to find the best learning options for their children by putting education funding directly into their hands. States can learn valuable lessons from each other’s approaches to craft programs that suit the needs of their families and voters. Briefly, this is how some of the common education choice programs work:



*Individual education tax credits* give parents state income tax relief for approved educational expenses. Oklahoma’s Parental Choice Tax Credit is a refundable tax credit. Refundable tax credits help families with lower tax liabilities to benefit.

*Education Savings Accounts*, also called “Scholarship Accounts,” are publicly funded, government-authorized savings accounts that have restricted but multiple uses. They are often funded by some or all of the state-level, per-pupil education spending allocation. Parents can use ESAs to pay for education expenses like tuition, tutoring, online programs, therapies for students with special needs, instructional materials, and home education. Some ESA programs allow funding to roll over from year to year and to pay for post-secondary education if unused funds remain after 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

*Vouchers* allow parents to direct part of the public funding set aside for their children’s education for use at tuition-based schools. Under voucher programs, education funding is allocated to a participating family to pay tuition at the child’s private school. In June 2020, the Supreme Court held in *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue* that states that enact private educational choice programs (including vouchers and ESAs) cannot exclude their use at religiously affiliated schools.

Education choice is becoming the “new normal” for students in 32 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. [Approximately 20 million American children](#) are eligible to participate in an education choice program. States that help parents find the right fit for their children’s needs are opening doors of opportunity for generations of students. Oregon was a modern pioneer in expanding options in education through charter schools in 1999, and now [more than 130 Oregon charter schools](#) serve approximately [46,000 students](#). It’s time Oregon let education funding follow the child, because all children deserve a quality education and the best opportunities to succeed.

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*Kathryn Hickok is Executive Vice President at the Portland-based Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research organization, and Director of Cascade’s Children’s Scholarship Fund-Oregon program.*

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Please contact:

Cascade Policy Institute  
4850 SW Scholls Ferry Rd.  
Suite 103  
Portland, Oregon 97225

Phone: (503) 242-0900  
Fax: (503) 242-3822

[www.cascadepolicy.org](http://www.cascadepolicy.org)  
[info@cascadepolicy.org](mailto:info@cascadepolicy.org)

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