



# School Choice: Missouri's Students and Parents Deserve More

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*By: Susan Pendergrass*

It is one of the most important decisions for parents to make—where to send their children to school. Some parents even pick up and move to the school district they desire, but of course this is impossible for many middle and low-income families. This week is National School Choice Week, which celebrates programs that offer parents and students options and trust them to tailor their education to suit their needs. It stands as a stark reminder of how far Missouri lags behind other states in offering real educational choice to our families, many of whom live in poor urban neighborhoods or isolated rural communities.

There are nearly one million public school students in Missouri. And, with the exception of the 50,000 students who attend public charter schools or magnet schools, a vast majority of them have exactly one choice for where they will get their education. That “choice” is based on the address on their mailbox. Imagine if that were the case for every child’s medical care – a doctor assigned to them based on where they live.

Missouri does have charter schools—but only in two cities and as punishment for low test scores. In most states, charter schools can open wherever there are teachers, school leaders, parents or community organizers with an innovative vision and a willingness to be held accountable for results. Parents in these states can choose charter schools with unique approaches, from personalized learning to a focus on the classics, and many others in between. In a 2014 survey, 15 percent of Missouri parents responded that they would choose a charter

school if they could select any type of school, including private schools. By comparison, charter schools in Missouri currently enroll less than two percent of our public school students.

Beyond charter schools, eighteen states have organizations that grant tax-credit funded scholarships for low-income students to attend private schools. Six states directly give parents a portion of their child's state funding to purchase educational services, such as tuition or tutoring. And sixteen states provide scholarship money for parents to choose a private school. Missouri does not offer parents any of these choices.

Children are unique, and parents should be able to chart the right course for their children to reach their potential. This week there will be more than 32,000 celebrations of school choice across America. Isn't it time for Missouri to step up and expand the options available to parents, so that our state has a real reason to celebrate?

## About the Author



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Advancing liberty with responsibility by promoting market solutions for Missouri public policy.

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