

Ohio: The State of School Choice

SPECIAL EDITION

Parents' Voices Make Huge Impact, School Choice Expands in Ohio

For the past six months, many Ohio parents made it their mission to demand more school choice for students in the state. They tirelessly wrote letters to legislators and newspapers, cheered at a March rally, gave powerful testimony, visited the offices of their local legislators, and took Ohio's leaders on tours of their private schools.

Finally, on June 30, when Governor Kasich signed the state budget bill into law, it was clear that Ohio's leaders listened to the voices of these parents. By signing the budget, Governor Kasich finalized many momentous changes and expansions to Ohio's school choice programs.

"Education can make or break our children's ability to do something great with their lives, but for too long, kids were trapped in failing schools where knowledge was wasted and they had no

way out," said Governor Kasich. "I'm proud of the reforms we've passed in our budget that will, in just two years, quadruple the number of vouchers available so parents are no longer told that their kids can't have better lives. Our future depends on the education of our children, and we need to do everything we can to give them the best opportunities possible."

The budget creates Ohio's fourth school voucher program, which will provide K-12 scholarships for students with special needs, and expands two of the state's existing voucher programs.

The special needs program will provide a scholarship



Governor Kasich signing the budget on June 30. Photo courtesy of Marc Kovac. Visit www.ohiocapitalblog.com for video from the signing.

to any child with a disability who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

In addition to the creation of the new program, the budget also made expansions to the EdChoice Scholarship Program and the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program. Learn about these changes on page three of this newsletter.

School Choice Ohio appreciates the work of the Ohio legislature and Governor Kasich on this budget. They listened to the needs of the many parents and students. As a result, many more Ohio families will now have the opportunity to find the best educational environment for their children, and our schools, communities, and state will be stronger for it.

| Budget Improvements to School Voucher Programs | | | | |
|--|-------------------|---------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| Voucher Program | Previous Capacity | New Capacity | Previous Eligibility | New Eligibility |
| EdChoice Scholarship | 14,000 | 60,000 | 85,000 | 90,000 |
| Special Needs | n/a | 13,000 | 15,000 | 260,000 |
| Cleveland Scholarship | 6,000 | 6,000 | 26,000 | 40,000 |
| Total | 20,000 | 79,000 | 121,000 | 390,000 |

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DID YOU KNOW?

Ohio is...

- One of seven states in the nation to offer scholarships to students with disabilities.
- The only state to offer scholarships specifically to students in low-performing public schools.
- The only state with four separate school voucher programs.

Ohio Creates Special Needs Scholarship

When Governor Kasich signed the state budget into law, so many parents who advocated for a special needs scholarship finally saw their hard work pay off. The special needs scholarship is now a reality in Ohio, and parents of students with special needs now have new options for their children's education. Any student with special needs who has an Individualized Education Program will have access to the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program when it begins in 2012.

It was not an easy road to make this program a reality.

A proposal for the Special Education Scholarship reached Governor Strickland's desk in 2007, but it was vetoed. The next year, Senator Kevin Coughlin led the fight to pass the bill in the State Senate. After securing passage in the Senate, the bill moved

to the House where it was championed by Representative Jon Peterson and Speaker Jon Husted. The House Education Committee recommended the scholarship for passage, but the bill failed on the House floor with 49 yes votes. It needed 50 to pass.

These were crushing blows to parents, but they continued to work behind the scenes and share their stories. They wrote letters, testified at public hearings at the Ohio Statehouse, and called key decision makers to urge their support.

Finally, this year, the scholarship became a reality thanks to the parents and supporters who didn't give up. Because of their efforts, many more children will now get the education that they deserve.

Approximately 13,000 scholarships will be available. The Special Education Scholarship is unique in Ohio in that it allows most families to access the same amount of funding that their child had in public school. The exception is students in categories 5 and 6 (see chart) whose scholarships will be capped at \$20,000.

The scholarship can be used to pay for tuition at a private school, additional services at a private provider, or at other public schools.

The scholarship program is named for special education advocate and former Ohio

| Special Needs Scholarship | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Special Education Category | Scholarship Funding Per Student |
| 1: Speech | \$7,275 |
| 2: Learning Disability | \$7,687 |
| 3: Hearing or Vision Impaired | \$14,911 |
| 4: Major Health Impairments | \$17,981 |
| 5: Multi-handicapped | \$20,000 |
| 6: Autism, Traumatic Brain Injury, Hearing & Vision Impaired | \$20,000 |

Representative Jon Peterson, who also helped create the Autism Scholarship.

Because of this scholarship program, students with disabilities will now have access to options tailored to their special needs, and parents will have the chance to find the education setting that is most appropriate for their child.

Many of the program details are still being worked out, and School Choice Ohio will update its website, www.schoio.org, as new information becomes available.

Special Needs Scholarship Quick Facts

- Scholarships available in 2012
- Approximately 13,000 scholarships available
- Approximately 260,000 students eligible
- Scholarships worth up to 90% of students public school funding amount
- Scholarship cap of \$20,000

Thoughts from a parent...

"Being a parent is all about choices. We strive daily to make the best choices for our children knowing each one has the potential to positively or negatively affect our children's futures. As a parent with chronically ill children, the choices I make are even more critical to their futures. But, I have never been able to make the decision about which academic setting is best suited to provide my children the best education—until now. For my children, having the ability to make this choice means a brighter future. I can't possibly express how much this scholarship will change our lives and my children's futures."

—Angela Dawson, mother of two children with special needs

Thank You School Choice Families, Supporters, Advocates

School Choice Ohio is proud to work with families and supporters who were committed to seeing these changes to Ohio's school choice programs become a reality. Some of you worked for five years, others for five months, and every minute of your hard work paid off. We are proud to celebrate with you and the many parents who will now have the opportunity to see their children thrive in an educational environment that best fits their needs.



Students, parents, and school leaders gathered at the 2011 School Choice Celebration and Rally to demand more school choice in Ohio. Legislators listened and made many expansions in the new state budget.

EdChoice Program Expands, New Summer Application Window Opens

The number of EdChoice scholarships available in the state was significantly increased in the new budget from 14,000 to 30,000 this year and 60,000 next year. This means that parents will no longer have to rely on a lottery or a waiting list to determine their child's educational future.

Eligibility for the EdChoice Scholarship Program was also expanded to include students attending public schools rated consistently in the bottom 10 percent of the state, according to performance index scores.

It is estimated that 90,000 students will now be eligible for the EdChoice Scholarship Program.

Because of these expansions, a second EdChoice application period began on July 1. It will continue through Aug. 15, 2011.

"My husband and I are excited to know that because of the scholarship expansion our baby son will have the same opportunity like his older brother, to attend a quality private school," said Latisha McDougald, a Columbus mother.

To find out if your child is attending a school that meets the new eligibility requirements, visit www.scoho.org.

How Can Private Schools Get Involved?

- Send fliers and postcards advertising the new application window.
- Send information home with currently enrolled families and ask them to share it with friends.
- Post information about the new application window on your website.
- Send a press release to your local paper announcing that you are accepting applications.

Need help designing fliers and brochures? Not involved yet, but interested in learning more? School Choice Ohio is here to help. Contact us at 614-223-1555 or info@scoho.org.

Cleveland Scholarship Moves Toward Equity

For the past five years, Cleveland voucher students have received scholarships worth between \$800 and \$1,500 less than children in Ohio's statewide EdChoice program. In addition, area high school students have been excluded from applying to the program. The new state budget finally corrects these inequities.

Prior to this budget, only children in grades K-8 were eligible to apply for the Cleveland Scholarship and

Tutoring Program. Under the new budget, students in any grade who live in the Cleveland Public School District are eligible to apply.

In addition, the Cleveland Scholarship amount has now been raised to mirror the EdChoice Scholarships.

This increase in the scholarship amounts will relieve private schools from some of their intensive

fundraising efforts and allow them to focus on their primary mission.

"Prior to School Choice Ohio's involvement, it was a frustrating and lonely fight for championing equity in the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program," said Peggy Schauer, principal at Luther Memorial School in Cleveland. "I am so excited to use this increased funding to expand educational opportunities for our students."



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