

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## OP: HOW TRUMP CAN EXPAND SCHOOL CHOICE

*A scholarship tax credit would put poor kids in good private schools – and relieve packed public ones.*

By Timothy Michael Dolan  
March 8, 2017

While addressing Congress last week, President Trump called for passage of “an education bill that funds school choice for disadvantaged youth.” He added that families should be able to choose “public, private, charter, magnet, religious or home” schooling. These comments, and his subsequent visit to St. Andrew Catholic School in Orlando, Fla., are encouraging. I hope Mr. Trump will push Congress to make scholarship tax credits available to working-class families nationwide.

These programs provide tax credits for individuals or corporations that donate to nonprofit scholarship organizations. St. Andrew’s is a classic example of how students benefit. Some 300 students at the school receive scholarships through the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship program. Statewide, nearly 98,000 low-income children attend parochial or private schools thanks to this program.

I have seen firsthand why Catholic families and leaders support scholarship tax credits. They help advance educational and economic justice. They strengthen society by creating opportunity for those who might not otherwise have it. Recipients of the credits aren’t the only ones who benefit. Last year the Peabody Journal of Education reviewed 21 studies on how school choice affects test scores of nonparticipating students. Twenty concluded that competition led to improvements in affected public schools.

The taxpayer also saves money. Providing alternatives reduces both school overcrowding and costs. Public-school classrooms would not be able to handle the considerable influx of children if Catholic and other religious schools closed. We save the public money, and we educate children just as well, if not better, for half the cost when you compare Catholic school tuition with public school spending per pupil.

I have fought for scholarship tax credits in New York since 2012 and have seen the difficulty of winning passage – despite broad and bipartisan support, including, in the past, from Gov. Andrew Cuomo, Democratic and Republican legislators and more than 30 labor unions. We came close to winning passage in 2015 but were blocked in the state Assembly at the behest of teachers unions.

That’s why a national solution is needed to bring relief to families who need it. Since a federal scholarship tax credit program would enact sweeping change swiftly, it needs to be done right.

First, the program should cover all 50 states. Seventeen states, including Vice President Mike Pence’s Indiana, already have robust scholarship tax credits. Children in the other 33 deserve the same opportunities.

The program should allow donors to choose from a broad array of scholarship organizations, such as Inner City Scholarship Fund in the Archdiocese of New York, the national Children's Scholarship Fund, and the Bison Fund in Buffalo, N.Y.

Finally, a federal scholarship tax credit program must not infringe on religious liberty. The Catholic Church has always stood in solidarity with the poor and vulnerable, and our most effective charitable ministry is our schools. A high-quality, values-based education is simply the surest path out of poverty.

For more than 200 years, and preceding the existence of public schools, Catholic schools have been educating children in New York. There are 200,000 Catholic school students in New York state, nearly half in New York City. Adding funds for scholarships for lower- and middle-income families would benefit even more students.

Ninety-seven percent of Catholic high-school students in the Archdiocese of New York graduate in four years, and 95% go on to college. Students in our inner city schools, where 65% of students are at or below the poverty line, match the overall graduation rate.

President Trump's visit to St. Andrew could not come at a better time. I hope he has taken to heart the value our schools provide in educating young minds and strengthening families. Let's encourage him to take the next step in ensuring that more parents across the U.S. have a choice in their children's education.