

## Top 10 Reasons to Support School Choice Senate Bill 1 in Pennsylvania

State Senators Anthony Williams (D-Philadelphia) and Jeffrey Piccola (R-Dauphin) have introduced Senate Bill 1 the Opportunity Scholarship and Educational Improvement Tax Credit Act that would expand educational options for children.<sup>1</sup> Listed below are the top 10 reasons to support this school choice bill:

### 1. It Allows Parents to Choose Their Child's School.

During the first year of implementation, SB1 will give low-income students trapped in failing schools the opportunity to enroll in a better school that fits their individual needs. The voucher program is phased in over three years. By the third year, the bill would allow all low-income children whose family's income is at or below 1.30 percent of the federal poverty level. Using income data from 2009, more than 547,000 or 32 percent of Pennsylvania public school students are eligible to receive a voucher to attend the choice of their choice.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. It Will Save Taxpayers Money.

In reality, SB1 will actually help the state balance its budget. School vouchers will cost taxpayers a fraction of what they are paying now. In Harrisburg, taxpayers currently pay \$17,675 per student annually. SB1 would give low-income students a voucher for \$8,498 which is enough money to pay tuition at many Pennsylvania schools. Therefore, taxpayers are paying less than half the money so that a child can attend a better school of his or her choice.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. It Will Not Raise Property Taxes.

SB1 will not raise anyone's taxes. The bill does not involve any district property taxes. Instead of local taxes, the scholarships are fully financed through state funding. Property taxes should not be directly affected by the voucher program.

<sup>1</sup> "Senate Bill 1." Pennsylvania General Assembly.

<<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billinfo/billinfo.cfm?year=2011&sind=0&body=S&type=B&BN=0001>>

<sup>2</sup> "Senate Bill 1: Analysis and Recommendations." [Commonwealth Foundation](http://www.commonwealthfoundation.org).

<[http://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/doclib/20110207\\_POLICYPOINTSSenateBill1.pdf](http://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/doclib/20110207_POLICYPOINTSSenateBill1.pdf)>

<sup>3</sup> "Answering Tea Party Objections to SB1." [Citizens Alliance of Pennsylvania](http://www.empowerpa.org/TEA-Party-Objections-to-SB-1-Answered-02-16-11.php). <<http://www.empowerpa.org/TEA-Party-Objections-to-SB-1-Answered-02-16-11.php>>



#### **4. The Bill is Constitutional.**

The Pennsylvania Constitution reads “no money raised for the support of public schools of the Commonwealth shall be appropriated to or used for the support of any sectarian school.”<sup>4</sup> Since the money to fund the vouchers is taken out of the General Fund, it was not raised to support public schools. The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld similar school voucher programs across the nation since the money is not directly given to religious private schools. The scholarship is given to parents who have the choice whether to send their child to a non-religious or religious school.

#### **5. It Will Boost Student Test Scores.**

Pennsylvania school spending per pupil has skyrocketed with no signs of improvement. Just as competition and choice has improved every day products, it can have a positive effect on schools. As it currently stands, Pennsylvania has one of the worst SAT scores in the nation. On the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment only about half of 11<sup>th</sup> graders are proficient in math and reading.<sup>5</sup> Studies have confirmed that various school voucher programs similar to SB1 across the nation have noticeably boosted test scores.<sup>6</sup>

#### **6. The Bill is a First Step towards Ensuring School Choice for All.**

SB1 would expand opportunities to needy families that lack access to educational alternatives. This is just the first step to allowing all Pennsylvania families to have the same opportunities regardless of income and zip code. Sadly, there’s a lot of resistance against any school choice bill from powerful teachers unions that are well-funded. After we win this crucial battle to break the current education monopoly, we hope to see more comprehensive school choice bills.

#### **7. It Increases Funding for the Educational Improvement Tax Credit.**

SB1 will increase funding for the successful Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) to \$100 million which grants companies a 75 to 90 percent tax credits if they donate to a non-profit educational scholarship program.<sup>7</sup> These tax credits will encourage companies to give to a good cause. In 2010, the EITC saved Pennsylvania taxpayers \$500 million since student recipients left high-cost district schools. According to the Commonwealth Foundation, the average EITC scholarship educates students for \$12,160 less than school districts spend per pupil.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “School Choice and State Constitutions.” Institute for Justice and American Legislative Exchange Council. <<http://www.alec.org/am/pdf/IJ-ALEC-school-choice.pdf>>

<sup>5</sup> “Senate Bill 1: Analysis and Recommendations.” Commonwealth Foundation. <[http://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/doclib/20110207\\_POLICYPOINTSSenateBill1.pdf](http://www.commonwealthfoundation.org/doclib/20110207_POLICYPOINTSSenateBill1.pdf)>

<sup>6</sup> Lips, Dan. D.C. “Opportunity Scholarship Boost Reading Scores, Family Satisfaction.” Heritage Foundation. <<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2009/04/dc-opportunity-scholarships-boost-reading-scores-family-satisfaction>>

<sup>7</sup> “Senate Bill 1.” Pennsylvania General Assembly. <<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/billinfo/billinfo.cfm?year=2011&sind=0&body=S&type=B&BN=0001>>

<sup>8</sup> IBID.



## **8. It Will Help Children Rise From Poverty.**

In Pennsylvania's inner-cities, poverty is becoming a never-ending vicious cycle as local public schools fail to provide students with a quality education. School vouchers across the nation have allowed thousands of poor children to obtain a better education helping them become self-sufficient adults. A student who receives a voucher will be less likely to become dependent on government welfare programs.

## **9. It Does Not Regulate Private Schools.**

The bill does not force private schools to do anything. As the bill summary says "school districts will not be required to accept scholarship students, but instead will develop their own admission policies." Private schools are fully allowed to reject students if they wish. SB1 does not force private schools to adopt a certain curriculum.

## **10. It Helps Remove the Teacher Unions Grip on Our Schools.**

Special interest lobbyists are spending millions to defeat SB1.<sup>9</sup> Teachers unions oppose school vouchers mainly because they do not want to compete with other education options. This bill will move us in the right direction to break the teacher unions' monopoly of public school, teachers and students. With the vast amount of wealth and power that the unions have, it will be virtually impossible to this overnight. The most realistic way of achieving our ideal goal is to pass SB1 which will help to remove some of the teacher unions grip on our schools.

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<sup>9</sup> "Answering Tea Party Objections to SB1." Citizens Alliance of Pennsylvania. <<http://www.empowerpa.org/TEA-Party-Objections-to-SB-1-Answered-02-16-11.php>>

