



Education Freedom Benefits Rural Students

The ***Educational Choice for Children Act (ECCA)*** was reintroduced in Congress in January 2023 (bill #s S.120 and H.R.531). This legislation would provide up to \$10 billion in annual federal tax credits for charitable donations by individuals and businesses to scholarship granting organizations (SGO). SGOs, in turn, would distribute these scholarships to parents for K-12 educational expenses, including private school tuition, books, fees, tutoring, special needs services, and educational technology and software.

School choice is not only supported by voters in rural areas, but it also has been an educational benefit to students in rural areas. In September 2022, Invest in Education commissioned an extensive poll conducted by OnMessage, Inc., which showed that rural voters supported school choice by 67 percent to 25, and the ECCA specifically by 64 percent to 22.

School choice accessible to rural students

School choice has been accessible to students in rural, more remote areas of a state, contrary to some concerns. In Florida, for example, its statewide scholarship tax credit program has reached students in all 30 of the state's rural counties, with increasing numbers during each year of the program, as described in this recent [report](#) by Step Up for Students entitled, *Rerouting the Myths of Rural Educational Choice*.

In addition, many existing scholarship granting organizations have a wide catchment area of students across urban, suburban and rural communities. For example, the BASIC Fund is based in Oakland, California, but serves a nine-county region and reaches students in rural areas of Contra Costa, Solano, and other counties. The BISON Fund is based in the city of Buffalo, New York, but serves students in an eight-county region, most of which are rural, including Allegany, Cattaraugus, and Wyoming Counties; that is, students in those counties have an equal opportunity to obtain scholarships from BISON as students residing in Buffalo and its suburbs.

Scholarships can fund variety of education expenses

The ECCA would benefit rural families, even if a viable private school option was not proximate or worthwhile since the legislation would allow SGOs to award scholarships for educational expenses other than private school tuition. Accordingly, parents who retain their child in the district public school can obtain a scholarship to access education supports including tutoring, computer technology and software, and on-line courses in similar fashion to eligible expenses covered by a section 529 account used for higher education.

Additional background on school choice and rural students is provided in the articles below:

- Dr. Corey DeAngelis, Senior Fellow at the American Federation for Children, December 2022 in the *Wall Street Journal* ([here](#)); and
- Jason Bedrick of the Heritage Foundation and Dr. Matthew Ladner of the Arizona Charter School Association on *Foxnews.com* ([here](#)), which references a report released by Heritage entitled, *Rustic Renaissance: Education Choice in Rural America* ([here](#)).

Key points, among several, made in these articles include the following:

- About seven in 10 rural families reside within 10 miles of a private elementary school.
- School choice programs have led to an increase in the supply of school options in rural areas, including in Florida and Arizona.
- A student exodus from public schools in rural areas has not occurred because of school choice;
- Twenty-five of 28 studies found that school choice has led to better outcomes in public schools.
- School choice is popular with rural voters, especially Republicans.