

From: Oran P. Smith <oran@palmettopromise.org>
To: Danny Varat DannyVarat@scstatehouse.gov
Date: 6/19/2017 11:06:06 AM
Subject: School Choice Info & Talkers
Attachments: The Equal Opportunity Education Scholarship Act SUMMARY2.docx

Just making sure you received this, Danny.

I think it might have gone to an old email address for you.

It is a gold mine of information. Let us know if we can provide more.

Oran

Oran P. Smith, PhD
Senior Fellow | Palmetto Promise Institute | [803-708-0673](tel:803-708-0673) | palmettopromise.org

From: Ellen Weaver
Sent: Thursday, June 8, 2017 12:04 PM
To: 'dannyvarat@att.net' <dannyvarat@att.net>
Subject: School Choice Info & Talkers

Danny,

I'm sorry to do a #SchoolChoice "data dump" on you, but here are some things that will hopefully make writing a piece about school choice in Lt. Gov. Bryant's voice easy for your team!

From our perspective, we would be absolutely thrilled if he were willing to promote three key things in whatever he writes:

1. My SC Education site (www.MySCEducation.org) – encourage parents and community leaders to learn more about all the choices offered to them in South Carolina. They can search the interactive database to see options in their area, read stories about families that are using SC's different options, sign up to receive emails that will empower them to be effective advocates for the students in their life and communities and join the My SC Education community discussion on Facebook. Btwn you and me, this is our initial foray into building a long-term, sustainable group of advocates for school choice – genuine grassroots stakeholders (esp. parents of all political persuasions) in addition to GOP grassstops.

2. Exceptional SC – continues to strengthen and expand, growing from \$10M to \$11M in this year's budget. But there are far more students waiting to be served and families deserve the confidence and stability of permanent law.

3. ESA concept – this idea does not change or replace the Exceptional SC scholarship or those who currently receive it in any way. It simply is one more way – the newest innovation – to give parents with children still in public schools or entering kindergarten access to further ability to customize an education that fits the unique needs of their child. There are currently SC-specific bills in the House (bi-partisan) and Senate (led by Massey) – this will be a big push for us next year. We plan to do a big roll-out w/ Massey/Erickson in the Fall, so don't want to step on that, but would love to start the drumbeat on the concept. Attached you'll find summary that explains features of the SC bills. Additional helpful information we've written (anticipating crazy Jeff and Olga Davis' J):

a. Fast Facts: [Education Scholarship Accounts](#)

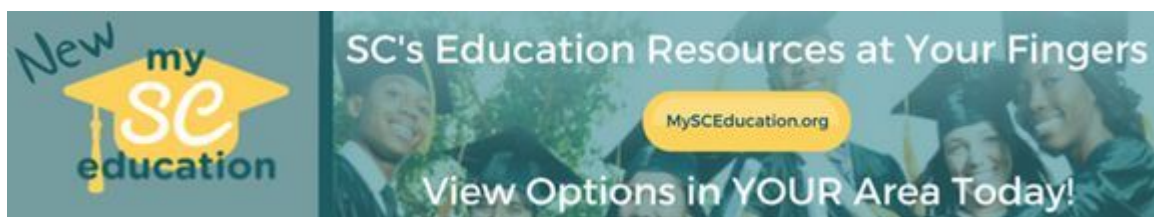
b. Fast Facts: [Common Questions about Education Scholarship Accounts](#)

We are also pivoting to talking more about "education options" than "school choice." In the 21st century, it really is much more about customizing your education across many platforms than just choosing one school or another. That's what makes ESA's so powerful – they permit that flexibility and customization. We've also been very deliberate about not making our rhetoric anti-public school. We are for all quality options that are helping children learn – and some public schools do a good job – parents should have the choice of whatever option best suits their student. That's an education revolution that puts students back at the heart of education instead of systems.

Hope this all helps!

E

Ellen E. Weaver | President | Palmetto Promise Institute | [\(803\) 708-0673](#) | [PalmettoPromise.org](#)



Sampling of PPI articles on School Choice – feel free to borrow/rework anything that's helpful:

- Greenville News OpEd (2014): [School Choice Unites & Empowers](#)
 - Greenville News NSCW OpEd (2016): [Choice Week Celebrates School Options](#)
 - Post & Courier LTE (2016): [Expand Access to School Choice](#)
 - The State LTE introducing My SC Education Website (2017): [Knowledge is Power for Parents and Communities](#)
-

Language from OpEd's that were written earlier this year for NSCW, but never published – feel free to use any of it verbatim:

Unfortunately, too many children—both in South Carolina and across the country—still do not receive quality schooling. Our state's **average test scores** remain below national averages in important categories like reading and math. This poor performance plagues communities of color the hardest.

By eighth grade, only about one in ten (11 percent) African-Americans have achieved proficiency in **reading**, and an even smaller percentage (8 percent) achieve proficiency in **math**. These performance gaps have largely remained unimproved for more than 15 years—and that must change.

Thankfully, school choice can help improve student performance outcomes, and often at less cost to taxpayers than traditional public education. Take for instance the District of Columbia's Opportunity Scholarship Program. That program spends about \$8,500 per pupil on scholarships for students to attend a private school of their choice—far less than the **\$21,000 per student** cost of the Washington, D.C. public school system. Yet Opportunity Scholarship recipients graduate at a 97 percent rate, compared to a graduation rate of 56 percent for the District as a whole.

It's results like these—giving students access to the best education possible, while saving taxpayers money—that make choice such a powerful force for our education future.

Imagine the difference an education makes in a child's life. Think for a moment about the difference between being able to read, write and do math well, and handling those tasks poorly—or not at all. It's the difference between having the doors of opportunity opened or slammed shut in your face.

In South Carolina, we must do more to expand those opportunities—to open wide the doors of hope and promise—to all the Palmetto State's children.

South Carolina has several important forms of school choice available to families: magnet, charter, online, private and home schools. But one of the most effective forms of school choice—scholarships allowing parents to place their child in a school of their choosing, whether public or private—remains limited.

In recent years, the General Assembly has created both a **scholarship program** and a **refundable tax credit**. Since the first scholarships were awarded in 2014, over 1,400 South Carolina children with special needs have benefited from scholarships that help them access the education best suited to their child's unique needs and talents.

However, these options remain open only to parents of children with a diagnosed physical or developmental disability. As a result, only about one in eight South Carolina children qualify for school choice. And a budgetary cap on the total amount of money available through the programs limits participation even further.

The unique circumstances faced by these children with special needs and their families merit the personalized education options that only school choice can provide. But all South Carolina students, regardless of the color of their skin or the size of their family's income, deserve the benefits of school choice—to receive the best education possible, one that will allow them to attain their hopes and dreams.

Unfortunately, too many children—both in South Carolina and across the country—still do not receive quality schooling. Our state's **average test scores** remain below national averages in important categories like reading and math. This poor performance plagues communities of color the hardest.

By eighth grade, only about one in ten (11 percent) African-Americans have achieved proficiency in **reading**, and an even smaller percentage (8 percent) achieve proficiency in **math**. These performance gaps have largely remained unimproved for more than 15 years—and that must change.

While some critics may argue that school choice undermines public education, actual results from studies and tests indicate the opposite. In all but two of 33 **studies**, researchers found that private school choice actually improves student outcomes for public school students. In other words, reforming education raises performance at all types of schools, both private and public. And giving parents the power to choose their child's school represents the best form of education reform I can think of.

No child should remain stuck in a situation that's not meeting their needs. South Carolina should work to strengthen and support our charter schools, dramatically expand our current Exceptional SC scholarship program and consider other cutting-edge innovations like Education Scholarship Accounts that are growing around the country and could unlock huge opportunity for even more students in South Carolina.

It's time for us to help every student in the Palmetto State reach their full potential by providing them and their family with the hope that having robust access to school choice brings.

My SC Education Guiding Principles:

Student Success is What Matters

We must prepare all our students for success in school, life and as citizens of the 21st century. Whether they are from Bennettsville or Greenville, every student in our state deserves the opportunity of an education that will allow them to reach their highest potential.

Give Parents Options

All parents should be empowered to choose the education environment that best fits the individual needs of their child – whether that is traditional public, private, public charter, public magnet, online, home school or blended learning. All South Carolina students should have access to a high-quality education, and all parents – regardless of income or zip code – should have a menu of excellent education options for their student.

Empower Teachers and Principals

Local school leaders must be empowered to make the decisions needed to create the environment and programs best suited to improving each child's academic performance. Education leaders must be treated as professionals and entrepreneurs, empowered to make decisions and encouraged to dream and innovate on behalf of the children in their care. Principals should be CEO's of their schools and teachers should be CEO's of their classrooms.

Create a Fair and Open Marketplace for Innovation

New and innovative education models and ideas to help boost individual student achievement must be encouraged – not discouraged – and must be provided the same opportunities for success as traditional school models. All students deserve great schools and great teachers. Public tax dollars

should be spent where they are proven to have the greatest effect – in the classroom on teaching and learning – whatever form that classroom takes.

Miscellaneous SC #SchoolChoice Talking Points

- School choice is founded on the belief that every parent, regardless of race, class or zip code, should be empowered to choose the best school environment to help their child reach their full, God-given potential.
- National School Choice Week
 - o In 2017 over 21,000 events were held around the country to celebrate National School Choice Week – with over 300 of them happening right here in South Carolina!
 - o South Carolina's flagship event, the 4th Annual My SC Education Rally was sponsored by a diverse array of stakeholders from every education option. Since 2014 the My SC Education Rally has grown from 250 to 3,000 participants – a 1100% increase! The purpose of this annual event (which will again be held again in Columbia, January 2018) is to:
 - § Raise parent awareness of existing school choice options.
 - § Start conversations across our state about the need for – and benefits of – education opportunity for every child.
 - § Thank elected officials for their support of expanding school choice.
- Exceptional SC, South Carolina's tax credit scholarship program for students with special needs raised \$10M to support students in the 2016-2017 school year. This is the largest amount ever raised in the program's history. However, the cost to fully fund current students and those on the wait list is \$25M. The state should make this important program permanent and raise the cap!
- South Carolina's public charter school law recently turned 20 years old and these special public schools are steadily growing. However, without equitable transportation and facilities funding, too many children still don't have access to this important option.
- At least 1 in 5 South Carolina students current exercise some form of option outside a traditional classroom:

Type of Option % of Students*

Traditional Public School Only 71%
Public Magnet School or Program 8%
Public Charter Schools 5%
Public Virtual Education 5%
Private Schools 8%
Home Schools 3%

* Numbers from the SC Office of Revenue and Fiscal Affairs, South Carolina Department of Education, Public Charter School

