

From: Jaryn Emhof, Foundation for Excellence in Education
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To: Haley, Nikki
Cc:
Subject: State Actions - Turning Reform Into Reality

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State leaders across the nation continue to make improving the quality of education a priority. Below is a summary of state actions that occurred in the past month to advance reform.

Florida

On September 24th, a Leon County Circuit Court Judge dismissed a lawsuit filed by the Florida Education Association (the state's teachers union) [challenging Senate Bill 850](http://excelined.us4.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=e2be307755ae03b2828711386&id=e5cec4a495&e=beba06e75f) <http://excelined.us4.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=e2be307755ae03b2828711386&id=e5cec4a495&e=beba06e75f>. The court dismissed the plaintiffs' attempt to stop the Personal Learning Scholarship Account (PLSA) program and other policies that give students choices in their education. The judge ruled that the plaintiffs did not have standing to file the lawsuit and gave them 15 days to amend their complaint. Since the scholarship application process opened in mid-July, more than 3,800 families have started applications in hope that their children will benefit from this new educational choice option and over 1,050 families have been awarded a scholarship.

ExcelinEd CEO, Patricia Levesque, [commented](http://excelined.us4.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e2be307755ae03b2828711386&id=e7e311206b&e=beba06e75f) <http://excelined.us4.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e2be307755ae03b2828711386&id=e7e311206b&e=beba06e75f> on the ruling saying: "I am thankful for the dismissal of the teachers union's lawsuit. It's important to recognize the FEA's motivation in this case was really about self-interest rather than Florida students. Personal Learning Scholarships can be a lifeline for families of students with disabilities who need customized therapy and educational supports. Families applying for these scholarships can breathe a little easier at the moment. But the case is not over – the union still has time to re-file its lawsuit and continue its attack on children with special needs."

Indiana

Last month, the Indiana Department of Education released data indicating that 29,437 students -- 10,000 more than last year -- have applied for vouchers for the 2014-2015 school year. Though the data is preliminary and these applications must still be approved by the department, the figures would place the state among the nation's leaders in both overall size and growth rate of choice programs. The Foundation commends Indiana for its continued commitment to providing quality options for families so that all children have a chance at success.

North Carolina

On September 19th, the North Carolina Court of Appeals removed an injunction on the state's Opportunity Scholarship program, allowing nearly 2,000 low-income students to receive funding for tuition this year at high quality schools. In August, a Superior Court declared the program to be unconstitutional and forbade the distribution of any scholarship money for families of students already enrolled in the program. The September ruling gives these children the opportunity to continue learning at the school of their choice, uninterrupted by the ongoing legal battle. ExcelinEd CEO, Patricia Levesque, [commented](http://excelined.us4.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e2be307755ae03b2828711386&id=ea8e657a55&e=beba06e75f) [on the ruling](http://excelined.us4.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e2be307755ae03b2828711386&id=ea8e657a55&e=beba06e75f) saying: "The Opportunity Scholarship program provides quality education options for low-income families. We have a moral obligation to ensure that every child has access to an education that prepares them for success, regardless of their family's income. Special interest groups that continue to fight the Opportunity Scholarship program are simply putting their own motives ahead of children's needs. With today's ruling, North Carolina is keeping the promise it made to low-income students for this year: that their economic status will not keep them from enjoying the educational benefits that so many of us take for granted. In the words of Governor Bush, the world doesn't come to end when you empower people and choices, it gets a lot better."

Oklahoma

Last month, Oklahoma released their third round of A-F school grades. The A-F school accountability system was adopted in 2011, and the first round of grades was released in 2012. ExcelinEd CEO, Patricia Levesque, [commented](http://excelined.us4.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e2be307755ae03b2828711386&id=22f8aec983&e=beba06e75f) [on the A-F grades](http://excelined.us4.list-manage.com/track/click?u=e2be307755ae03b2828711386&id=22f8aec983&e=beba06e75f) saying: "The Oklahoma Board of Education has been steadfast in making student learning the top policy priority. Parents deserve transparency and accountability when it comes to their child's school and Oklahoma leaders are fulfilling these responsibilities through A-F school grades. There's no silver bullet that will drive student achievement in Oklahoma schools, and no substitute for an engaged community. But successful implementation of A-F school grades plays a critical role in developing a command focus on learning across the state. Utilized correctly, these easy-to-understand grades are a guiding light to focus