

Parents Are Embracing School Choice

(NAPSA)—A record number of parents are using government programs to remove their children from the public schools to which they were assigned in favor of private educational options. The programs come in many shapes and sizes, but they are all commonly referred to as school choice.

More than 300,000 American students are receiving vouchers, tax-credit scholarships or education savings accounts to enroll in private schools or to pay for private schooling services. That represents an almost 16 percent increase from the prior year's enrollment, according to the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, a national nonprofit that studies and supports school choice.

The program types differ in their operation, but the intent, says the Friedman Foundation, is the same: empower parents to choose the learning environments, public or private, that work best for their children.

"The key point is that the money is strapped to the back of the child; it doesn't go to the school," Milton Friedman, the late Nobel laureate and Friedman Foundation founder, noted. "And the parent decides how that money shall be spent."

Vouchers have historically been the most well-known method for delivering Friedman's vision. Vouchers enable parents to receive a portion of their children's state funding, which they must use to pay tuition at an eligible private school. Voucher programs are operating in 13 states and Washington, D.C., serving more than 123,000 students.

Tax-credit scholarships are similar to vouchers in that funds are used to pay for private school



In Mississippi, Haley and Davis received a school choice scholarship for their son.

tuition; however, the funding comes from private contributions to scholarship-giving nonprofits. Those donors are reimbursed by the state via tax credits, reducing the amount of money that donors owe the government. Tax-credit scholarships are serving 178,000 students in 13 states.

Education savings accounts (ESAs) are the newest school choice model, in place only in Arizona. ESAs provide parents with debit cards loaded with a portion of their children's state education funding. ESA funds can go toward a combination of private school tuition, therapeutic services, tutors, online learning courses, home school needs or future college expenses. Unused funds can be rolled over year to year.

"Vouchers, tax-credit scholarships, and ESAs put the most important aspect of education front and center: the needs of the student," Robert Enlow, president and CEO of the Friedman Foundation, said. "And these programs are growing, because parents are seeing firsthand the value of having the freedom to choose in education."