

65,000 Students threatened by a lawsuit that would rip them from their schools



What a year of contrasts! In June, School Choice Wisconsin helped secure the most significant funding increase in the history of Wisconsin's parental choice programs. Just a few months later, a lawsuit was filed with the Wisconsin Supreme Court to eliminate the programs entirely.

On the school front, enrollment in parental choice programs continued to grow at the same time our member schools faced a shortage of teachers.

But as we take stock of all that has happened in the last 12 months and set our sights on what lies ahead, I'm confident of one thing: our best days are still ahead of us. Whatever challenges we face, we will emerge stronger than ever. I believe this because we've done it again and again.

Big goal, big victory

At the start of this year, we had lofty aspirations to secure increased funding in the state budget for all four school choice programs and for independent charters.

That, we were told, was never going to happen. In fact, a state legislative leader – an ally of ours – admitted recently that he thought our goals would be “impossible” to achieve.

But we pursued our goal – an increase in per-pupil funding for private school choice and charter programs more closely in line with public school funding. After all, “a child is a child” as a School Choice Wisconsin Action board member said, and should be valued the same way regardless of what type of school he or she attends.

So instead of setting our sights lower and listening to people who had doubts, we dug in. We stayed united and our choice community rallied.

SCW worked relentlessly to make the voices of schools and parents heard at legislative hearings and listening sessions across the state. We brought legislators to our schools to show the impact we make, and we gathered data that demonstrated our successes.

Together, SCW, our member schools, and our allies did the impossible. We made history!

We made our dream into a reality and won the largest per-pupil funding increase for school choice in the state's history – and we did so with bipartisan support.

Most importantly, we changed the future for our families and kids!

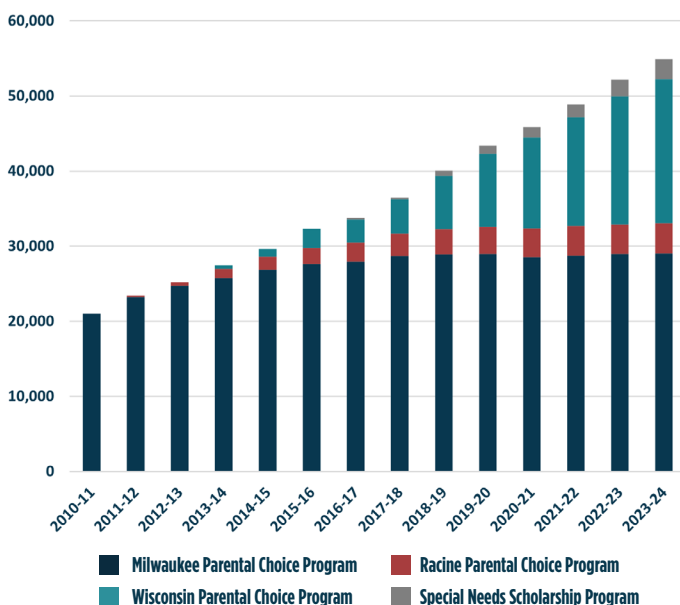


More families are using educational options

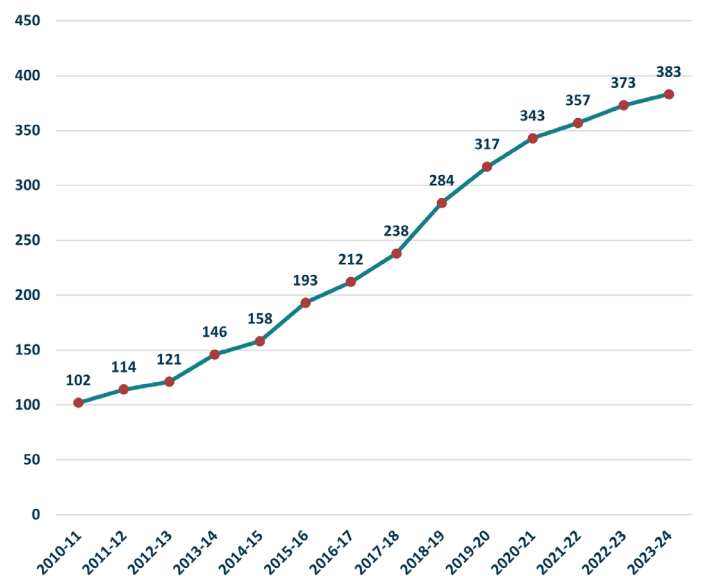
It's not only legislators and the governor who realize the importance of school choice. More and more parents do, too. That's why participation in Wisconsin's four parental choice programs continues to grow.

This year, a record number of students – more than 55,000 – are using school choice to attend the school that best suits them. For the first time ever, more students in Milwaukee attend a school through a choice program than through Milwaukee Public Schools!

Students Participating in Choice Programs



Schools Participating in Choice Programs



School choice is growing because school choice works. All parents deserve the right to find the best education for their children, and students deserve the opportunity to attend a school where they are safe and will learn the tools needed to succeed in the classroom and in life.

Getting creative to address teacher shortage

One of the biggest challenges facing schools today – both public and private – is a shortage of high quality educators. During recent years, we've heard from school leaders that they have limited or even reduced the number of students they serve to deal with this teacher shortage. That's not acceptable, so we set out to find a solution.



The result: SCW and Concordia University teamed up to develop and launch the Concordia Teaching and Learning Academy, an 18-month program to provide professionals from a variety of backgrounds with the tools needed to succeed in the classroom. The program takes less time and costs less money than conventional teaching training programs.

CTLA has been a hit. We have more than 70 students in the pipeline – that means potentially 70 new teachers that can bring their unique perspectives and skill sets to help hundreds of students succeed. It is a true win-win and we're excited to see the partnership move forward.

Expanding our reach

One of our goals at the start of this year was to expand our reach and deepen our relationships in the Hispanic community across the state. This hasn't been a cursory effort – we've gotten creative and found ways to spread awareness of school choice and opportunities available to families through a wide variety of means, including:

- Partnering with the Mexican Consulate in Milwaukee to regularly staff their education office with a Spanish-speaking staff member to provide information and help families understand the options available to them.
- Conducting a Spanish-language media campaign, including interviews on TV, radio and in newspapers.
- Hosting four backpack drives in different regions across the state, including partnering with the Latina-run Mercadera Market for an event in Milwaukee.
- Deepening ties throughout the community as a member of different boards, organizations and events.
- Coaching individual families to help them navigate school choice step by step.

We can't wait to continue these efforts next year!

The numbers don't lie

Data and information are critical not only to understand our opportunities and challenges, but to shape the narrative and help change public policy.

We devoted significant resources to developing studies and scholarly reports that cut through anti-choice misinformation to reveal the truth: that school choice provides a tremendous bang for the buck for taxpayers and a critical lifeline for families that want something different than the public school status quo for their students.



In August, we released a study that took a fresh look at the cost-effectiveness of public schools and private schools in Wisconsin's private school choice programs. The verdict: across the board private schools in Wisconsin's choice programs were more productive on a dollar-for-dollar basis than the state's public schools:

- Private schools in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program are 89% more productive than schools in the Milwaukee Public Schools.
- Private schools in the Racine Parental Choice Program are 92% more productive than public schools in the Racine Unified School District.
- Private schools in the statewide Wisconsin Parental Choice Program are 42% more productive than public schools outside of Milwaukee and Racine.

Our research was highlighted in media outlets across the state and around the country, including the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, the Wall Street Journal, and National Review as part of an overall aggressive strategy that continues to raise the profile of SCW.

Winning in the courtroom – and the court of public opinion

In October, opponents of school choice brought a lawsuit seeking to have Wisconsin's choice programs ruled unconstitutional. We take this threat seriously, but we have a plan to fight and win in court, and we have a plan to fight and win in the court of public opinion.

School Choice Wisconsin's sister organization, School Choice Wisconsin Action, has sought to intervene on behalf of schools through its legal representatives at the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty. Just days ago, the state Supreme Court decided not to take the lawsuit directly, setting the stage for lengthier legal proceedings.

But I see this lawsuit as less a threat – though it is one – and more of an opportunity.

Without intending to help us make our case, our opponents have given us an opportunity to spread the message of the impact our schools make every day. We have conducted hours of interviews with students, parents, and community and school leaders for an ad campaign that has already been seen millions of times.

The bottom line is this: It has been a year of successes, but to keep the momentum we need your help. Your support will help us continue and grow the efforts described in this letter and further our mission as the go-to resource for parents, schools and lawmakers when it comes to all issues school choice. Our great work is only possible with the support of generous people like you, so please consider SCW in your year end giving.

Thank you for your support this year and in years past. With your help we will continue to change lives across Wisconsin for generations to come!

Nic Kelly

President, School Choice Wisconsin



Join us in the fight to achieve educational freedom for Wisconsin's children.

Make a gift to School Choice Wisconsin today!

Visit schoolchoicewi.org/donate or scan the QR code.



School Choice Wisconsin is a 501(c)3 that works to advance and defend parent choice. It works in tandem with its 501(c)4 affiliate, School Choice Wisconsin Action. Advocates also support the Fund for Parent Choice, a conduit that provides direct contributions to political candidates.