

GOP delivers more freedom for families

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More than 900,000 Wisconsin students are starting a new school year. Many are changing classrooms, teachers or even schools, which brings a mix of excitement and nerves for parents and student.

Wisconsin's education landscape also is changing. Thanks to Republican leadership at the statehouse, Wisconsin parents and families have more education options.

Most Wisconsin families will continue to send their kids to traditional public schools, and most of these schools offer great opportunities. They will continue to serve students with the help of unprecedented funding approved by the state Legislature in recent budgets.

But as every parent knows, one size does not fit all. That's why school choice matters. Nearly 80,000 students use open enrollment to attend a public school outside their district of residence, and almost 50,000 students attend charter schools that operate with more flexibility and autonomy.

Almost 60,000 students take part in Wisconsin's private school choice program that was pioneered in 1990 by the state of Wisconsin. For many low- and middle-income families, this program provides opportunities they never would have otherwise. Recent polling from Marquette University highlights the popularity of the program, with support widespread throughout the state.

Unfortunately, a few loud voices have decided to turn educational options for families into a political football to score political points. They have attempted to pit private choice schools vs. traditional public schools by claiming private choice schools unfairly siphon taxpayer dollars from public schools. Such claims ignore that public schools are not responsible for the cost of educating those students that choose to leave.

Republicans will continue to stand with families and defend their ability to make the choices that are best for their children, no matter their income or zip code. A new report from School Choice Wisconsin shows that the Department of Public Instruction gives private choice



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schools higher report card scores than traditional public schools. This is the case even though funding for students in private choice programs is lower than in public schools.

The report compares DPI report card scores and financial support for public schools with schools in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, the Racine Parental Choice Program and the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program. The results are clear: Choice schools outperform traditional public schools while receiving less taxpayer support. Giving parents options is the state's most cost-effective K-12 investment.

We still have work to do. We need to close the funding gap between school options, expand eligibility to more families and ensure all property taxpayers are treated fairly.

As kids head back to school, Wisconsin proudly leads the nation in education freedom. We have a system that gives parents real choices, and with continued conservative leadership, we can make it even stronger.

August, R-Walworth, is the Assembly majority leader representing parts of Walworth and Rock counties.