

## 15 School Choice Myths

### *Expelled by 46 Facts*

#### Introduction

Thousands of children from needy and working-class families are currently trapped in failing schools simply because of where they live. Despite spending nearly \$20,000 per student in some of Pennsylvania's chronically underperforming schools, academic achievement remains inadequate. In an attempt to thwart efforts to give children better educational opportunities, the public school establishment is trying to divert the attention of policymakers through a series of oft-repeated myths and half-truths. What follows are the top 15 school choice myths, expelled by 46 facts.

#### **MYTH #1: PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE DOING WELL AND IMPROVING, SO SCHOOL CHOICE IS UNNECESSARY.**

The underlying assumption in this argument seems to be that so long as some people are satisfied with their public schools, everyone should be. The point is not whether choice is "necessary" or not; the point is that it is everyone's right to choose based on their own measures of satisfaction. The needs of individual parents and students come before the maintenance of a system that, by many accounts, is not performing well for everyone.

#### **THE FACTS:**

- **Can the public schools really improve on their own?** According to Albert Shanker, former president of the American Federation of Teachers union, "It's time to admit that public education operates like a planned economy, a bureaucratic system in which everybody's role is spelled out in advance and there are few incentives for innovation and productivity. It's no surprise that our school system doesn't improve: It more resembles the communist economy than our own market economy." The worldwide failure of planned economies supports Shanker's contention that systemic change in our public school system is necessary for real improvement to occur. Only school choice will bring those necessary "incentives for innovation and productivity."
- **The failure of "more time and more money."** It's been 15 years since Gov. Tom Ridge first proposed school vouchers for children trapped in low-performing schools in Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania State Education Association labor union and Pennsylvania School Boards Association vehemently opposed school choice then as they do now, arguing they simply needed more money and more time to fix the problems. They got both. Since 1996, public school spending has doubled to \$26 billion per year. Today, Pennsylvania taxpayers spend more than \$13,000 per student—\$2,000 more than the national average and more than 39 other states. In some of our chronically underperforming public schools, taxpayers are paying nearly \$20,000 per student.
- **Stagnating performance.** Despite dramatic increases in spending and adding more personnel to "help students," Pennsylvania's academic performance on the National Assessment of Education Pro-

gress (NAEP) exam has remained relatively unchanged for years. Only 40% of Pennsylvania 8<sup>th</sup> graders score at or above proficiency on the NAEP reading and mathematics exams. Pennsylvania ranks among the worst performing states in SAT college entrance exam scores.

## **MYTH #2: PARENTS ARE TO BLAME FOR STUDENT FAILURE, NOT THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.**

To be fair, not all parents do a good job of preparing their children to learn and succeed in school. But the overwhelming majority of parents—including poor, minority, and under-educated moms and dads—understand that a good education is a child’s ticket to a better life. But to say, as the Pennsylvania School Board Association has, “If you want to go to a good school, move to a good school district,” ignores the daunting economic challenges facing many families.

### **THE FACTS:**

- **Failure of some parents shouldn’t condemn all.** Simply because there are some parents who neglect their parental responsibilities, doesn’t mean all parents should be forced to sacrifice their children’s education to schools not serving their needs.
- **Schools can make a big difference.** While family background has a large impact on student performance, it is outlandish to say schools cannot affect student outcomes because of poor parenting or socioeconomics. Indeed, many schools—private, charter, and even district-run—have overcome such challenges and been extremely successful in educating children coming from difficult situations. But one factor that has always aided school performance, regardless of demographics, is parental choice.
- **Choice encourages responsibility.** It is understandable why parents with children trapped in failing schools—lacking the financial ability to choose an alternative—would give up on the public school system. Just like “You can’t beat City Hall,” a parent in the Philadelphia, Pittsburgh or Harrisburg school district knows there’s little they can do. It’s not an excuse for their abdication of responsibility, but it’s an understandable outcome when government has deprived you of any real options. Empowering parents with school choices for their children is an important step toward encouraging and restoring responsibility.

## **MYTH #3: PENNSYLVANIANS DO NOT WANT MORE SCHOOL CHOICE, THEY ALREADY HAVE IT.**

It is true that many parents already have school choice: The wealthy buy expensive homes in good public school districts; middle-class families struggle and sacrifice to pay tuition at private schools; and many parents are choosing to educate their children at home at their own expense. But it’s the working-class and poor families that cannot afford such choices. They are trapped by their income and their zip code. They are forbidden to transfer to another public school outside their district boundaries and are even prosecuted for doing so.

### **THE FACTS:**

- **Pennsylvanians support school choice.** According to a Pulse Opinion Research poll on November 2010, 50% of Pennsylvanians support giving children “education vouchers, which help parents pay the costs at the school of their choice.” Strongest support comes from those with incomes under \$20,000 (64%) and African-Americans (69%).  
The PSBA cites their own poll—without publicly providing the methodology or supporting data—

claiming that Pennsylvanians oppose school choice. Analyses of polling data on vouchers have demonstrated how support for school choice, like all policy topics, depends greatly upon the wording of the question. Once the bias is taken out and those polled are aware of the issue, it is a fact that school choice has been growing in favor since the 1970s. To try to stop the movement towards choice, opponents have turned to asking leading questions.

- **Choices are few and demand is high.** It doesn't take a poll to see that parents are clamoring for more school choices for their children. Since the late 1990s, Pennsylvania lawmakers have created charter schools, cyber schools and private school scholarships through the Educational Improvement Tax Credit program. Yet, the supply of school choice options is not meeting parental demand as there are long waiting lists for these limited options. According to the Pennsylvania Coalition of Public Charter Schools, more than 25,000 children are on waiting lists to get into a charter school. A June 2010 Pew Study found that Philadelphia parents insist they need more educational options. Charter school enrollment is 170% higher than it was in 2000, and still 62% of parents surveyed said they want better choices.
- **The public school establishment opposes school choice.** The PSEA and PSBA claim to support school choice, but oppose and then try to hamstring every effort to give parents and children more educational options. The public school establishment's "support" for school choice is only in the context of maintaining their monopoly on funding and children, which provides no choice at all. This is akin to Henry Ford purportedly saying that customers could buy any color car they wanted—so long as it was black.

#### **MYTH #4: SCHOOL CHOICE WILL DIVERT SCARCE RESOURCES FROM THE ALREADY UNDERFUNDED PUBLIC SCHOOLS.**

Pennsylvania public schools spend nearly \$26 billion per year—that's more than \$13,000 per student or \$2,000 more than the national average and more than 39 other states. In our commonwealth's chronically underperforming public schools, taxpayers are paying upwards of \$19,000 per student. Just how much will the public schools "lose"?

#### **THE FACTS:**

- **Whose money is it anyway?** Taxpayers support the education of children. This money is not the property of the public school system, but of the child. School choice changes the paradigm to put children's interests ahead of "the system's" interests.
- **99.5% still goes to the public schools.** Senate Bill 1 would provide about \$50 million for vouchers to low-income students in chronically failing schools, and another \$75 million for scholarships through the Educational Improvement Tax Credit. In other words, the public school system would still receive more than \$25 billion, or 99.5% of all education funding, and children making school choices would receive a total of \$125 million, or 0.5% of all funding. Who again is truly being underfunded in this situation?
- **School choice increases per-student public school funding.** For example, the Pittsburgh School District spends approximately \$19,634 per student. Under Senate Bill 1, a low-income student trapped in a chronically underperforming school would be eligible to utilize a state-funded voucher estimated at \$8,498 to attend an alternative public or private school. Where does the remaining \$11,136 go? It stays in the district; effectively increasing the amount of money per student for the re-

maining children. Further, if the receiving public or private school charges less in tuition than the voucher amount, the difference is transferred to a fund to pay for future expansions of school choice to more children. When children transfer from high-cost public schools to lower-cost schools of choice, there will be sufficient money to both increase the per student expenditure in the home district while also giving low-income families with children already in private schools the financial ability to stay.

- **The “fixed costs” red herring.** School districts argue that because students don’t leave in neat groups of 22 they can’t adequately reduce costs. An analysis of the details demonstrates this is another false argument against choice. Consider the Harrisburg School District, which is costing taxpayers about \$17,700 per student—or approximately \$390,000 for a classroom of 22 students. If five students chose to use an \$8,800 voucher to attend a safer or better school, the school would “lose” \$44,000. Per-student spending goes up over \$20,300 for every child that chooses to stay because \$8,900 was left behind by the voucher students. It is true that some costs such as debt, building maintenance, utilities, and transportation can’t be immediately reduced because five children escaped for a better school. But analysis of Harrisburg School District suggests it has “fixed costs” of about 36%. But the unions have claimed “fixed costs” are as high as 60%. Taking the union’s number—which is over 50% more than what we’ve identified—the class of 22 kids has a fixed cost of \$234,000. So, even with the loss of five voucher kids, the classroom still has more than \$110,000 above their fixed costs. Indeed, this suggests that this classroom of 22 kids could lose as many as 17 students and still cover its “fixed costs”!

#### MYTH #5: SCHOOL CHOICE WILL INCREASE PROPERTY TAXES.

School choice doesn’t increase property taxes. To suggest that a “loss” of 0.5% of a nearly \$26 billion budget will force tax increases is a cop out. Indeed, an analysis of the so-called “fixed costs” problem (see Myth #8) demonstrates this is another false argument to prevent children from finding safer or better schools.

#### THE FACTS:

- **School districts must continually deal with fluctuations in student enrollment.** Giving a child a voucher to choose another school is no different. Furthermore, and more importantly, no child should be forcibly trapped in a school simply because some adults can’t figure out how to manage a budget when children come and go from a school district.
- **Focus on educating students, rather than the system.** Instead of trying to prevent parents from finding a safer or better performing school for their children, school administrators and labor unions ought to be more concerned about how they can improve their schools so they become the school-of-choice.
- **School choice can force more efficient and responsible public school spending.** In the last decade, while student enrollment has declined, the public school system has added *more than 30,000 new employees*. Instead of adding costly salaries, health care, and pension benefits to the taxpayers’ payrolls, public schools could be saving money by privatizing non-instructional support services such as janitorial, food, and transportation services. Competitive contracting can provide schools with the kind of expertise, flexibility, and cost efficiencies not always available with in-house service provision. Any savings in support services can be used to provide additional resources for the classroom or offset property tax increases. Properly designed and monitored, contracts between public

schools and private providers can help school administrators do more with less, if they are willing.

#### MYTH #6: SCHOOL CHOICE DOES NOT IMPROVE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE.

Nine of the 10 “gold standard” evaluations of voucher programs reported statistically significant gains in achievement for all or some voucher recipients. Students who remain in public schools also benefit from school choice.

#### THE FACTS:

- **School choice benefits kids.** Studies have shown that throughout the country, where families are offered a choice, student achievement and graduation rates improve in both sending and receiving school districts. Nine of the ten “gold standard” evaluations of voucher programs reported statistically significant gains in achievement for all or some voucher recipients. Students benefiting from school choice in Milwaukee, and Washington, D.C., post significantly higher graduation rates than conventional public schools. Children in Ohio’s school choice program, the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, showed a 7% increase in reading scores and a 15% increase in math scores over their conventional school peers. More importantly, there has *never been a single study* demonstrating that vouchers harmed either voucher students or public schools.
- **School choice improves public schools.** When parents can choose, public schools are forced to compete. This competition improves those affected public schools. In 18 out of 19 academically rigorous studies, vouchers had a positive impact on public school districts. There has never been a single study demonstrating that scholarships have a negative impact on district school performance or their ability to raise funds. In Milwaukee, schools facing the most competition—with two-thirds or more students eligible for vouchers—fourth-grade math test scores achieved an annual gain of 6.3 national percentile rank (NPR) points over four years. In contrast, the schools facing no competition saw an annual gain of only 3.5 points. In Pennsylvania, when the first K-12 cyber charter school opened in 2000, not a single public school district offered online classes. Forced to compete, at least 158 public school districts now offer online classes to retain or attract students. Competition works!

#### MYTH #7: SCHOOL CHOICE IS UNCONSTITUTIONAL.

School choice is about providing children with the best education available, not supporting one school or religion over another. The current public school system compels religious citizens to support schools that often do not reflect their values and beliefs. School choice will allow parents to exercise their right and responsibility to direct the educational development of their children according to their own values, whether religious or secular.

#### THE FACTS:

- **Senate Bill 1 is constitutional.** The Pennsylvania State Constitution states, “No money raised for the support of the public schools of the Commonwealth shall be appropriated to or used for the support of any sectarian school.” General Fund revenue does not meet this definition as it is not raised for the purposes of funding public education. School district property taxes are raised for this purpose, and it is why Senate Bill 1 involves only state funding for private schools, and not local tax revenue. Furthermore, the transfer of funds to parents for the purpose of exercising school choice would be consistent with current U.S. and Pennsylvania precedent because scholarships would be given to parents who then make school choices, rather than money being given by the state to private



schools.

- **Other well established, government-funded voucher programs are constitutional.** Food stamps and Medicaid are examples of voucher programs through which recipients can use taxpayer money at the grocery stores or hospitals of their choice. Social Security recipients are also constitutionally protected to put their entire check in the offering plate at a house of worship. Likewise, taxpayer money already flows to private and religious colleges and universities through various government loans and grants to students. In 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Zelman v Simmons-Harris* declared the Cleveland voucher program constitutional because it gave money to parents of elementary and secondary schoolchildren rather than to specific institutions.

#### MYTH #8: PRIVATE SCHOOLS ARE UNACCOUNTABLE TO THE PUBLIC.

Competition ensures that all schools are ultimately accountable to those who matter most—parents and students. Parents who have choices in education can “vote with their feet” by sending their children to another, better school when their current one is not serving their children’s needs. Private schools are also subject to many of the same regulations as are public schools and are routinely held to the same or higher standards of performance than are the public schools because parents are customers rather than captive audiences.

#### THE FACTS:

- **Public schools lack real accountability.** Many people, particularly policymakers, confuse rules and regulations with accountability. While it is true that public schools must adhere to many laws, this fact has failed to make schools answerable to the public. Simply forcing students to take state tests does not create accountability. In fact, the “underperforming schools” defined in SB 1 force students to take the PSSA—and a majority of students fail. As long as children are unable to escape a school that is failing to meet their needs, real accountability will never exist in the public school system. Giving parents choices in how and where their children are educated creates a level of accountability that no law will ever generate. It is this fundamental component that prevents public schools from being truly accountable to taxpayers, parents, and children.
- **Private schools already comply with essential government regulations.** There is no basis in educational experience or research to suggest that regulation creates better schools; even so, private schools already meet the requirements of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, provide essential fire and safety protection, observe compulsory attendance requirements, and cover core mandated subjects such as history, English, math and science.
- **Private schools are transparent because it’s good customer service.** Unlike the public schools, private schools have to persuade parents to choose, and keep choosing, to put their children in their care. For this reason alone, private schools publicly communicate graduation rates, test scores, and other information demonstrating school performance. While many private schools choose not to participate in the Pennsylvania School System of Assessment because it is not an achievement test nor is it a test that assesses aptitude, they frequently utilize assessments such as the Stanford Achievement Test, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, Metropolitan Achievement Test, and the like.

#### MYTH #9: SCHOOL CHOICE IS ANTI-TEACHER.

The “anti-teacher” argument against school choice seems to assume that the public school system is nothing more than a big jobs program with education ranking second in importance. School choice makes the education of children the top priority. Indeed, many public school teachers themselves choose to place their children in private schools. So as long as demand for education exists, there will always be jobs for teachers.

#### THE FACTS:

- **More choices for parents also mean more choices for teachers.** Today, if a teacher believes he or she is underpaid, overburdened by red tape, not respected as a professional, or otherwise treated poorly by administrators, the only real option is to leave town and move to another school district. When parents are allowed to choose, schools not only will have to compete for students, they will have to compete for teachers. As a result, there will be increased pressure on school administrators to treat teachers well or risk losing them to other schools.
- **Teachers win, forced unionism and union bosses lose.** Labor unions like the PSEA and Pennsylvania Federation of Teachers vehemently oppose school choice out of their financial self-interest. They will claim to oppose choice “for the children,” but the economic reality is that unions stand to lose millions of dollars of compulsory dues income as school choice grows. Why? The overwhelming majority of teachers in Pennsylvania are forced to pay hundreds of dollars in union dues every year as a condition of employment. However, most schools-of-choice are not unionized. Therefore, if enrollment increases at schools in which unions have been unable to gain a foothold, more teaching jobs in union-free schools will be available where teachers are not forced to give hundreds of dollars every year to a union so they can teach children.

#### MYTH #10: PRIVATE SCHOOLS WILL REJECT CERTAIN STUDENTS AND RECRUIT OTHERS.

This argument assumes two things: First, that private schools discriminate more in selecting students than do public schools and second, that public schools are open to all students. But neither of these assumptions is necessarily true. Public schools do not accept every student, and many private schools in fact accept a wide range of students. In addition, parents empowered with choice can select from all types of schools, private or public. Choice provides children with more educational opportunities, not fewer.

#### THE FACTS:

- **The current “assignment” system already makes choices for parents.** Public schools generally accept only those students who live in their districts. Wealthy suburban areas, for example, do not accept poor minority students from the inner city. Some public schools—particularly “magnet schools”—routinely screen students based on academic ability or whether or not they live in the “right” district.
- **Private schools are not characterized by exclusivity.** Although some private schools are exclusive, either by high tuition or selective entrance standards, the same can be said of public schools that enroll students only from exclusive or wealthy neighborhoods within their “districts” and reject students from other neighborhoods on the “wrong side” of a district boundary. On the other hand, the vast majority private schools are not exclusive. On average, Pennsylvania Catholic schools charge tuition of \$3,500 for elementary children and \$6,500 for high school students. Many of these schools,

particularly those in urban areas, serve predominately low-income students and a large number of non-Catholics.

- School choice does not “cream” the best students from the public schools and leave the worst behind. The experience of charter schools and publicly funded voucher programs demonstrates that students who are behind or not being served in their assigned public school are the ones most likely to exercise choice, not the “best” students. Indeed, students who are falling through the cracks in the public school system—not the “cream of the crop”—are most likely to seek alternative educational opportunities. Why would the “best” students want to leave a school that is already serving their needs?
- **School choice provides greater opportunity for *all* parents and children.** School choice allows *all* parents to select the best schools for their children, not just the wealthy parents that can afford to move to better districts or pay tuition at an alternative school. Under the current system, the one-school-fits-all approach precludes equal opportunity and greater options for the majority of children. Greater school choice will allow poor parents the same choices already available to wealthier parents. Choice allows parents to select from a variety of schools—if one school does not work, there are others that may.
- **Experience: The evidence that really matters.** For the last 10 years, thousands of students have left traditional public schools to attend private schools all across the commonwealth thanks to scholarships provided by the Educational Improvement Tax Credit program. For 10 years, families have been seeking other educational options for their children in the state’s private religious and non-sectarian schools. For 10 years there has been no evidence of widespread cases of families being refused admittance. Why? Because when parents have control, they seek the school that is going to best meet their child’s individual educational needs. And as a result, there are all sorts of schools serving the diversity of student needs.

#### MYTH #11: PARENTS WILL MAKE BAD DECISIONS FOR THEIR KIDS.

Implicit in this argument are the assumptions that parents—particularly poor and minority parents—are not smart enough to know what is best for their children, and that government will make better school selection choices than parents. Common sense and experience, however, tell us that most parents in fact do make good decisions with their children’s best interests in mind.

#### THE FACTS:

- **Freedom to choose.** Although some parents may make poor decisions, this is no argument for denying the freedom of choice to everyone. Freedom does not come without inherent risks, but freedom is certainly better than being forced to accept the poor choices of others.
- **Minority and lower-income parents can be trusted to make good choices.** Opponents of school choice often presume that minority and lower income parents do not know the difference between good and bad schools and therefore will often choose bad schools. This condescending assumption ignores the evidence that poor or uneducated parents are just as capable as higher income, better educated parents of distinguishing between good and bad schools. The problem is that poor parents are rarely given the opportunity to do so. When given full information regarding their choices and the opportunity to make them, they choose well and there is no doubt that they will continue to do so.
- **Parents, who understand their children’s needs best, should determine the criteria by which to**



**judge schools.** School choice has been criticized because some parents may decide that a school with an emphasis on team sports is better for their child than one that excels in, say, science. Others may disagree with such criteria for choosing a school, but the disapproval of others is no reason to deny all parents the right to make their own choices. If the government was the best decision maker, how did we get here in the first place?

- **Information will help parents choose the best school.** Competition among schools will cause an information market to arise. Schools themselves will generate informational material, appealing to parents on the basis of positive features their particular school has to offer and educating parents in the process. Many schools—even public schools—already promote themselves with marketing and advertising campaigns. Parents will have help determining which school will best serve their children’s needs, just as consumers today have help (in the form of *Consumer Reports* and similar publications) understanding which automotive repair shop, restaurant, or grocery store best serves their needs.

#### MYTH #12: SCHOOL CHOICE LEAVES OUT THE MIDDLE CLASS.

Middle and working-class families are frequently too “rich” to access free government benefits and too “poor” to buy better products or services, including education for their children. But even with Pennsylvania’s limited educational options, more choices exist and are increasing for children in these families.

#### THE FACTS:

- **Charter schools.** Charter schools are tuition-free, independent public schools that are given greater educational and operational freedom in exchange for fewer tax dollars. Pennsylvania’s charter school law was passed in 1997; today there are 144 schools serving more than 61,000 students. A number of reforms, however, could make these educational options even more available to more parents—if not for PSEA and PSBA opposition.
- **Public Cyber Schools.** Cyber schools are statewide charter schools authorized by the Department of Education that provide an online individualized curriculum that students can access from anywhere in Pennsylvania. Cyber schools first opened in 2001; in 2009, there were 11 schools serving 24,000 students. Few policymakers knew at the time how popular and effective online learning would become with parents across Pennsylvania, but this is a great example of what happens when you begin to allow for an education marketplace to blossom.
- **Educational Improvement Tax Credit Scholarships.** EITC scholarships help parents pay tuition at their school of choice with private money from the taxable profits of Pennsylvania corporations. Scholarships are available to families with annual household incomes up to \$50,000 + \$10,000 for each child. The average scholarship amount is \$1,100, and the average family income of those receiving a scholarship is \$29,000. The EITC law passed in 2001; more than 38,000 students received EITC scholarships last year.
- **More educational options to come?** State Sens. Jeff Piccola and Tony Williams have introduced legislation (Senate Bill 1 of 2011) that would further expand eligibility for the EITC program and increase the amount of tax credits available for scholarships to \$75 million. SB 1 would also provide vouchers for children in low-income families; combined with the expansion of the EITC scholarship program, this will provide even more educational options to middle class families.

**MYTH #13: SCHOOL CHOICE WILL LEAD TO SEGREGATION.**

It is a fallacy to think that the public school system brings together students from diverse backgrounds and that school choice will somehow disrupt this. The truth is that public schools are the most segregated schools in America.

**THE FACTS:**

- **Public schools are the most segregated schools in America.** The current system—whereby government assigns students to schools based on the neighborhoods in which they live—already has created a stratified school environment in which children are segregated by race and income. School choice removes or reduces the importance of geographic and political boundaries, thereby encouraging greater social, racial, and economic integration of students.
- **Private schools are more racially, economically, and socially diversified.** Many inner-city private schools already reflect greater diversity than their government counterparts because their student bodies are not determined by arbitrary political boundaries, but rather by parents of every background seeking the best education for their children. In fact, seven empirical studies on voucher programs in Milwaukee, Cleveland and Washington, D.C., found that participating private schools were much *less segregated* than public school districts.

**MYTH #14: SCHOOL CHOICE DOES NOT ADDRESS SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS.**

This argument again assumes that *everyone* should be denied the right to choose because only *some* might not be able to get exactly what they want in a particular school. School choice does not create an educational utopia, but it does give *all* families—including those with special education needs—more options than they are currently given.

**THE FACTS:**

- **Private schools already serve special education students.** In fact, public schools often turn to private schools to serve children with severe disabilities and behavioral problems. There is no reason to believe that private schools would not continue to serve these and other special-needs students in an increasing number under a school choice program.
- **School choice only adds options for special needs students.** If a family with a special needs child is unsatisfied with the current services they are receiving from their assigned school district, school choice offers them another option. It certainly wouldn't take away the choice to stay put.
- **Experience: The evidence that matters most.** Special needs children in Florida have benefited from the McKay Scholarship for Students with Disabilities Program for years. Today, more than 21,000 special needs students are being served in 985 private schools, nearly two-thirds of which are religious. Every year since the beginning of the program, more and more private schools are serving special needs students. What reason is there to believe that private schools in Pennsylvania will not also serve the needs of special education students?
- **Many private schools tailor to special needs students.** The Center School, for example, is

a private school focused on serving student with dyslexia and related learning disabilities through language-based special education. Pennsylvania also has 30 Approved Private Schools which serve more than 4,000 students with severe disabilities. In fact, many school choice programs are exclusively for special needs students. Nationwide, seven of the 20 school choice programs are specifically tailored to serve children with special needs, benefiting more than 26,000 students.

**MYTH #15: PARENTAL SATISFACTION IS NOT AN ADEQUATE MEASURE OF STUDENT OR SCHOOL SUCCESS OR ACCOUNTABILITY.**

Many people, particularly policymakers, confuse rules and regulations with accountability. While it is true that public schools must adhere to many laws, this fact has failed to make schools answerable to the public. As long as children are unable to escape a school that is failing to meet their needs, real accountability will never exist in the public school system. Giving parents choices in how and where their children are educated creates a level of accountability that no law will ever generate. It is this fundamental component that prevents public schools from being truly accountable to taxpayers, parents and children.

**THE FACTS:**

- **Nobody cares more about children than their parents.** In general, parents have their children's best interests in mind more so than does the government or even a caring teacher. Under the current system, parents lack control and influence over the education of their children. With choice, parents have the opportunity to remove their children from a poorly performing or otherwise unsatisfactory school and to place them in other schools. Schools that fail to respond to parental concerns will constantly face the prospect of losing students to other schools that do.
- **School choice is a powerful incentive.** Private schools survive and thrive only because they attract and retain parents who are willing to pay for their children's education twice—once in taxes for schools they don't use, and again in tuition for the school that is actually educating their children. Parents who are paying for their children's education expect a return on their investment. So it is unnecessary to impose the government-run model on private schools as each school will supply the demands of parents—or they will eventually go out of business. On the other hand, public schools continue to get more tax dollars and never go out of business, regardless of test results or parental dissatisfaction.

### ABOUT THE COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION

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