

# Nebraska Needs School Choice

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## Introduction

Nebraska needs school choice, which empowers families to select what is best for them, creates pressure on all schools to improve, and fosters harmony among diverse people. To best serve Nebraskans, the amount of choice needs to be much greater than what the state has tried to date. First, because choice is something that *all* Nebraskans should have; freedom is simply right. Second, because more choosers yields more political support to defend programs from *status quo* attacks. Finally, if choice comes via tax credits, it provides more choice both for families and taxpayers.

This paper lays out the major reasons for adopting school choice, including upward academic pressure, family satisfaction, financial savings, fostering liberty, and more. It tackles common objections to choice. It then explains several ways that choice can be supplied. Finally, it discusses model states that have either been long-time choice leaders or have recently seen major expansions.

## What School Choice Provides

There are many reasons that funding students, not government schools, is right for Nebraska. The major ones are upward academic pressure and innovation; family satisfaction; financial savings, and fostering social harmony.

### Upward Academic Pressure and Innovation

The modern choice movement was spurred by a desire for greater academic effectiveness. This was a major rationale in economist Milton Friedman's 1955 essay "The Role of Government in Education," which advocated giving public money to families to choose schools rather than directly funding public institutions.<sup>1</sup> Friedman wrote that this "would bring a healthy increase in the variety of educational institutions available and in competition among them. Private initiative and enterprise would quicken the pace of progress in this area as it has in so many others."

*Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, by John Chubb and Terry Moe, published in 1990, argued that democratically controlled public schools are largely doomed to stagnate.<sup>2</sup> Rather than educators having the autonomy to efficiently respond to changing and diverse needs, when schools encounter problems, the response is typically political dictates and regulation. And the worse the performance, the more the red tape. Chubb and Moe prescribed the opposite—choice and school autonomy—subject only to state "graduation requirements, health and safety requirements, and teacher certification requirements."<sup>3</sup>

To assess academic effectiveness, the tendency has been to compare standardized test scores of choosing students and similar students not using choice, ideally through random selection of voucher recipients. Such research has typically found a small advantage for voucher winners, but positive studies tend to be older and of smaller programs.<sup>4</sup> Newer studies have found some negative impacts: Louisiana's highly regulated voucher program has repeatedly produced negative results, while a study of Washington, DC's, poorly funded and constantly embattled voucher program found negative math impacts for a chooser's first two years but no difference after three years on math or reading.<sup>5</sup>

Non-randomized studies of Indiana and Ohio voucher programs have also been negative, but both had significant limits. The authors of the Ohio study noted, "we are only able to focus on public schools that were among the highest performing of the voucher-eligible schools. Therefore, we cannot generalize these findings to those students coming from lower-performing public schools."<sup>6</sup> The Indiana study only looked at low-income students.<sup>7</sup> And all of these negative studies occurred under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which punished public schools for low test scores, giving them much greater incentive than privates to focus on math and reading tests, often at the expense of other subjects.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, a 2021 meta-analysis of random assignment studies worldwide has found generally positive math and reading effects.<sup>9</sup>

Arguably more important than comparing test scores is the effect of choice on system-wide performance. Here, 26 of 29 studies have found that competition spurs public schools to improve.<sup>10</sup> Of course, test scores do not capture everything families want from education. The tests themselves might be very narrow or look at tested subjects in specific ways—say, testing math via word problems rather than algorithms. And many people might believe education is much more about inculcating critical thinking or virtue.

Finally, what might be most important about choice is that it allows diverse education approaches to compete, spurring innovation. This can be seen in the rise of homeschooling, microschools, and other options.<sup>11</sup> Innovation drives improvement.

## Family Satisfaction

If standardized test scores are a poor way of assessing choice, what is better? Family satisfaction is a direct indicator that schools are providing an overall service—academics, discipline, after-school programming, and so on—that people want. Comparing satisfaction among parents selecting private schools through choice programs to satisfaction with their previous schools or across schooling sectors has repeatedly found a choice advantage: 31 of 33 studies have found positive effects, with 1 neutral and 2 negative (one study had two findings).<sup>12</sup>

Notably, surveys have also found high satisfaction with local public schools. For instance, Gallup found in 2024 that 70 percent of parents were either “completely” or “somewhat satisfied” with the education their oldest child was receiving.<sup>13</sup> With 78 percent of children attending non-charter public schools, many traditional public school parents must be satisfied. Which is fine as long as public schools do not have a monopoly on tax funds.

## Financial Savings

School choice is typically a money saver, with less money following students than is spent on them in public

schools.<sup>14</sup> Often, scholarships are pegged to state public school per-pupil funding. For Nebraska, the most recent federal data show \$16,667 spent per public school pupil, with less than 10 percent coming from federal taxpayers, 31 percent from state taxpayers, and the remainder from local sources.<sup>15</sup> Were just the state’s share—\$5,167—to follow students, Nebraska would save \$11,500 per child, which it could return to taxpayers or leave with students remaining in public schools.

To illustrate the funding effect, imagine a school of ten students, each educated at the state average cost, and two leave with a state-level scholarship:

Total spent per public-school student,  
pre-voucher: \$16,667

Total spent on the school, pre-voucher: \$166,670

Total spent on the school, post voucher:  
 $\$166,670 - (\$5,167 * 2) = \$156,336$

Total spent per student in the school,  
post voucher:  $\$156,336/8 = \$19,542$

Total saved if leftover money is not returned to  
the school:  $(\$16,667 - \$5,167)*2 = \$23,000$

Whether taxpayers save money depends on who uses the scholarships. If all users are switchers from public to private, every chooser saves money. But some students might have been educated privately regardless of scholarship availability. That makes them a “cost,” in that they would have paid for their own education. Of course, their families also paid taxes.

The tipping point of taxpayers saving or losing money is the ratio of savings per switcher and spending per chooser. In the above scenario, Nebraskans would save \$11,500 per switcher and spend \$5,167 per chooser, a ratio of 2.23 to 1. There would have to be more than twice as many “non-switchers” as “switchers” to not save money.

## Liberty and Harmony

The final reason to ground education in choice is liberty, including for the harmony it fosters. The United States is centered on the ability of citizens to live and believe as they see fit, and government control of education is inherently at odds with that. As the Declaration of Independence states, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”<sup>16</sup> Nebraska’s Constitution repeats this: “All persons are by nature free and independent, and have certain inherent and inalienable rights; among these are life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness...”<sup>17</sup>

If government can dictate what children learn, freedom can be just “one generation away from extinction,” as Ronald Reagan observed.<sup>18</sup> Standardize thinking, and you crowd out ideas and communities not in step with what government deems “right.” Religion is most directly marginalized by public schooling—if you want religion you have to pay once for secular public schools, again for religious—but any beliefs or desires held by political minorities is threatened with squelching.

The basic nature of public schooling—people with diverse values and desires must all fund a single system of government schools—not only curbs liberty, it is inherently inclined toward divisive conflict. It is a zero-sum game when two groups cannot agree: for one to get their way, the other must not. This is at its worst when it comes to deeply held values, as the country has felt acutely over the last few years with intense battles over books in school curricula or libraries, how history is taught, and more.<sup>19</sup>

Choice averts wrenching conflict by allowing diverse families to pursue the education they think is right without having to impose it on anyone else. Likewise, educators are empowered to teach as they see fit, subject to the ability to attract enough families that they are financially viable.

Choice is also better geared toward building bridges across different groups than public schooling. Children

are typically assigned to a public school based on their home address, and human beings tend to live with people like themselves—ethnically, economically, and so on.<sup>20</sup> Choice decouples education from one’s home address and enables people to attend schools that offer specific things: arts-based curricula, religion, and more. Those things attract people from different groups and can help to build new identities that transcend differences such as race.<sup>21</sup>

Evidence supports choice fostering harmony. First, choice is the norm worldwide. According to UNESCO, “Governments financially support non-state schools in 171 out of 204 countries: these include private schools in 115 countries, faith-based schools in 120 countries; and non-governmental organization and community schools in 81 countries.”<sup>22</sup>

Importantly, children’s education is different from many issues on which liberty should reign. While adults are presumed capable of reasoned, informed decisions, children are not. Someone must make decisions for them. Liberty is best supported in K-12 education via free choices of parents and educators, with public funding following. But government intervention is justified if children are not provided the basic skills—reading, writing, and arithmetic—they need to become self-governing adults, and are not taught to deal peacefully with diverse people.

## Objections to Choice

People oppose school choice for many reasons. Each is important.

### 9 in 10 Nebraska students attend public schools

That the large majority of children attend public schools is a common objection to choice, asserting that it will hurt the many to share funding with the few.

The first problem is that the 9-in-10 figure understates private education a bit.<sup>23</sup> In Nebraska, about 89 percent of students enrolled in schools are in public institutions

and 11 percent in private, excluding homeschoolers.<sup>24</sup> The Nebraska Department of Education reported an estimated 13,627 children homeschooled in the 2021-22 school year.<sup>25</sup> Including homeschoolers, Nebraska public schools educate about 86 percent of children, meaning 14 percent are private.

But that is not the primary problem with the 9-in-10 objection. The main problem is that *of course a high percentage of people are going to use the public schools when they must pay for them*. That 14 percent go private is a powerful point *for* choice. And a recent survey suggests that only 48 percent of Nebraska parents would choose public schools if they had an equal ability to select other options.<sup>26</sup>

## Nebraskans Have Voted against Choice

Choice opponents have noted that “Nebraskans...have voted to reject public funds for private schools at the ballot box on three separate occasions.”<sup>27</sup> As of November 2024, that is up to four.

Choice-loses-electorally is a majoritarian argument: the majority opposes something, so it should not be created. There are huge dangers with that, especially tyranny of the majority. Avoiding that is a major reason the United States is not a simple democracy or republic—rule by a majority or their representatives. The purpose of government is to secure “unalienable Rights,” including “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” not simply to implement majority will.<sup>28</sup>

Majority rule is especially concerning in education, which deals with nothing less than the shaping of human hearts and minds. Since *Meyer v. Nebraska* and *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, the U.S. Supreme Court has recognized the right of parents to control their children’s education, even against popular referenda, such as the law struck down in *Pierce*.<sup>29</sup>

Not only is the right of private education protected against popular opposition, there are powerful arguments that public schooling, absent publicly funded choice, violates the Constitution. Legal scholars Steven

Calabresi and Abe Salander have argued that public schooling, because it must be secular, unconstitutionally discriminates against religious people in the absence of choice.<sup>30</sup> Philip Hamburger has argued that public schooling, without choice, unconstitutionally replaces parental speech with state speech.<sup>31</sup>

## Choice Defunds Public Schools

Fear of losing something is a more powerful emotion than desire to gain.<sup>32</sup> That is one reason that asserting choice will “defund public schools” is effective at fighting it, even when polling shows people want choice.<sup>33</sup> But choice would almost certainly not defund public schools.

First, public schools would lose no money were a choice program to use a separate source of funding, as Nebraska’s recent voucher program did.<sup>34</sup> Not a dime is removed from the public-school funding stream, though the new expense could reduce money available for overall state expenses. And as shown above, even when public education money follows students, the result is often more funding per-public school student.

It is also important to have the full spending picture. If all 54,937 Nebraska private school students got a \$5,167 voucher, it would cost \$283,859,479. Total K-12 revenue in Nebraska in the 2020-21 school year was \$5.1 billion.<sup>35</sup> Full voucher use would only be 5.6 percent of that.

But use typically does not hit 100 percent of eligibility. An examination of New Hampshire’s education savings account (ESA) program found that about 27 percent of eligible students already in non-public education used ESAs.<sup>36</sup> Applying that rate to Nebraska would reduce choice enrollment by students not previously in public schools to 14,850 students, at a cost of roughly \$77 million, or 1.5 percent of K-12 revenue.

Finally, the only way that public schools could get fully defunded is if all families elected to remove their children. In that case, as long as choice funding is no greater than per-pupil public school spending, the public schools should be defunded—*no one* prefers them.

## Public Schools Take Everyone, Private School Do Not

“Unlike public schools, private schools can pick and choose the students they want to enroll, and these private schools can remove students at any time without providing an alternative education option,” write choice opponents.<sup>37</sup> The message is that public funding should not follow kids to chosen schools because those schools can turn students away. It is problematic based on reality, educational reasoning, and principle.

First, reality: While the public school system might have to take all students, no given school does. Most basically, kids are assigned to schools based on their home address, so choice is constrained by a family’s ability to afford housing in the district and school zone they want.

Nebraska has intradistrict choice and a statewide open enrollment program, so this might be mitigated. But if your district is unsatisfactory, it is likely most schools in it will be unsatisfactory. Some districts might also have just one elementary, middle, or high school.

With statewide open enrollment you can choose among numerous districts, but families can only apply three times: once in elementary, middle, and high school.<sup>38</sup> Districts also do not have to take applicants if they claim to be at capacity in requested programs, classes, grade levels, or buildings.<sup>39</sup> And the state’s open enrollment law says that students with disabilities, “shall be evaluated by the director of special education services...or the director’s designee who shall determine if the school district and the appropriate class, grade level, or school building...has the capacity to provide the applicant the appropriate services and accommodations.”<sup>40</sup>

Public schools also do not have to take, or keep, all students in their catchment areas. If a child is very poorly behaved, a district can expel them, at least for a semester. This is generally for dangerous behavior such as violent or intimidating acts, but also, vaguely, repeated actions that “constitute a substantial interference with school purposes.”<sup>41</sup> In Texas, such a law forced a student to attend an alternative school because he would not change his hairstyle.<sup>42</sup> A district can also refuse enrollment to

any student expelled from any school, public or private, in any state or district, during the period of their expulsion.<sup>43</sup>

Finally, a district can tell parents or guardians of disabled students that it cannot provide the services the child needs in the school to which they are zoned.<sup>44</sup> A district and family can also differ on what services a child needs, at which point legal proceedings determine placement.<sup>45</sup> And the state, not districts, funds students in residential facilities.<sup>46</sup>

Educationally, there are compelling reasons that schools should not have to take all students. Most obviously, they should not have to take students who are so disruptive they rob other students of their education. Then there is specialization: Some children are better overall students than others. Some excel in art or science. Some might desire education in a skilled trade. Fundamentally, children are individuals, and it makes sense to allow schools to specialize in the needs and desires of different groups and refuse admission to students who do not want the school’s specialty.

Finally, a truly pluralist society requires that people be able to freely associate, including on shared beliefs. If educators cannot establish schools built on, say, specific religious teachings, and deny entry to families that will undermine them, choice is rendered largely moot.

## Public Schools are “Accountable”

A common objection to choice is that private schools are not “accountable” but public schools are. This largely comes down to mandates that public schools give state standardized tests and face ramifications if scores are low. They are also theoretically accountable to district residents via school boards. Both are problematic forms of accountability.

Test-centric accountability was largely driven by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which required that all states have uniform standards in reading, math, and science, and that kids in grades 3 through 8, and once

## Best Approaches to Choice

There are many ways to deliver private choice. But while all are improvements over the status quo, all are not equal. The following examines choice mechanisms from least desirable to most.

### Vouchers

Vouchers are the most intuitive choice vehicle, and the oldest of the modern programs. “Modern” refers to programs beginning with the 1990 Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Choice as an idea, and in various forms, dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>52</sup> Milton Friedman specifically used “voucher” for the system he described in his 1955 essay, and Milwaukee’s program, Cleveland’s which soon followed, and the early Washington, DC, initiative were all vouchers.<sup>53</sup>

Vouchers are relatively easy to understand and execute. The state specifies an amount of money to provide per student, possibly with additional funds for students with disabilities or other obstacles, and the money goes wherever families choose.

A downside is that vouchers attract greater regulation than scholarship tax credits and education savings accounts. As of 2018, 63 percent of programs using government funds—overwhelmingly vouchers—required schools to administer state standardized tests, versus only 5 percent of tax credits.<sup>54</sup> Because vouchers use money taken from taxpayers, they are vulnerable to the common complaint, “I don’t want my money going to” a school that teaches math poorly, is religious, or myriad other things to which a taxpayer might object. This drives regulation.

The forced-funding concern is mitigated if families with school-aged children have the same spread of desires and values as taxpayers overall, resulting in a distribution of choices proportionate to what taxpayers in the aggregate would approve. But the distribution is almost certainly not proportionate. For instance, as a proxy for LGBTQ issues, while 78 percent of Americans ages 30 to 49—those most likely to have school-aged kids—believe gay marriage is as valid as traditional marriage, only 60 percent of Americans 65 and older do.<sup>55</sup>

in high school, take aligned state tests.<sup>47</sup> Schools were required to make “adequate yearly progress” toward 100 percent proficiency in math and reading by 2014. Support for NCLB disintegrated as parents and educators rejected education reduced to standardized test scores. In 2015, Congress replaced NCLB with the Every Student Succeeds Act, which ended adequate yearly progress and loosened other federal dictates.<sup>48</sup>

While many people value information from standardized tests, few likely want them to be the primary focus of education. Americans also value creativity, critical thinking, virtue, and more that cannot be reduced to a test score.<sup>49</sup>

Interestingly, while the United States under NCLB was seeking to be more like such top international exam performers as South Korea and parts of China, educators from those countries were trying to understand how our system seemed so successful at producing creative thinkers.<sup>50</sup>

Of course, some children might do well in test-centric models while others might thrive with arts-based curricula or exploratory learning. Some, as they get older, might not want to pursue careers requiring much academic schooling. Finally, innovation requires that people be able to try new ideas and take them to scale. A test-based education funding monopoly stifles that.

Elected governing bodies also are prone to disproportionate control by special interests over residents or families. Teacher unions have especially high influence, because teachers are easier to organize than parents and have greater incentives to engage in district politics—their livelihoods.<sup>51</sup>

Choice avoids these pitfalls by changing accountability from top-down to bottom-up. If most families want schools to focus on testing, schools with such a focus will proliferate, but without imposing on others. If most want Montessori schools, families will choose them, and they will grow. And government will not be able to constrain these decisions.

## Tax Credits

Tax credits come in two basic varieties: individual use and scholarship. The former is straightforward: If a family uses private education, it can claim a credit, reducing its state tax bill for some amount of tuition. For instance, a \$5,000 credit would allow a family to reduce what it owes in taxes by \$5,000 as long as its tuition bill is at least \$5,000.

This can be complicated by “refundability,” by which someone without a tax liability as high as the credit can get the remainder in a payment from the state. A family paying \$5,000 in tuition, but with only a \$2,000 tax liability, would pay no taxes *and* receive \$3,000 from the state. The goal is for people who do not earn enough to owe sufficient taxes to still get full choice, but it detracts from a major benefit of tax credits: no compulsion to fund someone else’s choice.

The second variety of credit is more powerful than the first and helps address the low-income concern. A scholarship tax credit is typically available to both individuals and corporations who donate to groups that provide scholarships, and usually allows donors to choose to what kinds of schools they donate—Catholic, arts-based, and so on. Nebraska had such a credit before moving to a voucher. The primary benefit is funder freedom: a taxpayer decides whether to donate and, ideally, to whom. This eliminates the concern that one’s tax dollars are funding education to which one objects, reducing the incentive to demand regulations.

Complexity is the downside of credits. Nebraska’s law capped total credits at \$25 million and required that would-be donors get pre-approved, lest too many people make credit-eligible donations. Another common complication is credits often cover less than 100 percent of a donation. For example, with a 60 percent credit, a donation of \$1,000 would only result in a \$600 credit. Nebraska’s law had a different wrinkle, allowing a 100 percent credit but that could equal no more than 50 percent of one’s tax liability. A \$4,000 donation would have earned a \$4,000 credit, but the credit on a tax liability of \$4,000 would have only been \$2,000.

## Education Savings Accounts

ESAs have proliferated over the last few years, after starting in Arizona in 2011. In such programs, states put money into accounts for children that families can use to pay for tuition, but also tutoring, therapies, science equipment, and more. Depending on the law, families can also roll over money not used for K-12 to help pay for college, incentivizing judicious use of funds.

ESAs share a basic problem with vouchers: they use money taken from taxpayers. That limits freedom and could make them more regulation-prone. But they might be more resistant to regulation than vouchers because they allow multiple uses, and it is difficult to peg which is responsible for outcomes. Thirteen states had ESAs as of November 2023, and two had state testing requirements.<sup>56</sup> ESAs can also have complications processing purchases, especially if a state or contracted administrator must approve them.<sup>57</sup>

## Tax Credit Education Savings Accounts

Tax credit ESAs are the newest vehicle, designed to combine the taxpayer liberty of a credit with the user freedom of an ESA.<sup>58</sup> Individuals or corporations that donate to groups that bundle funds into ESAs receive credits for their donations. Ideally, donors can choose among multiple groups with specific focuses, just as with ordinary tax credits, to maximize donor freedom.

This is the most complicated way to deliver choice, combining the diverse options of an ESA with the extra steps of a tax credit. It is also not immune from regulation: Both existing tax credit ESA programs—Florida and Missouri—require students to participate in standardized testing, but not state tests. Still, this is the best choice vehicle from the most important perspective: freedom. Users and donors can maximize choice.

## Growth Models

School choice has grown markedly since 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in many public schools closing for extended periods, and instituting mask and vaccination requirements upon reopening. The country

has also been in the grips of heated culture war. As of the end of 2023, there were 80 private school choice programs nationwide, versus only 65 in 2020.<sup>59</sup> The number of states with such programs rose from 31, including Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico, in 2020, to 35 as of November 2023.<sup>60</sup> In 2024, enrollment in choice programs surpassed one million students, up from around 530,000 in the 2019-20 school year.<sup>61</sup> This boom occurred not only because new programs were added, but eleven featured universal student eligibility.

There are some exemplar states for long-term growth, and new, big programs, to which Nebraska can look as it seeks to firmly establish choice.

## Long-term

No states have had as sustained a commitment to choice as Arizona and Florida. Arizona launched its tax credit scholarship program in 1997, and now has four tax credits and a universal ESA. One tax credit program has the distinction of being the test case for constitutionality of such programs, with the U.S. Supreme Court finding in *Arizona Christian School Tuition Organization v. Winn* (2011) that a tax credit does not involve state funds.<sup>62</sup> Arizona has coupled this with charter schools and interdistrict choice, making it the most choice-friendly state in the country. As of November 2023, 169,060 Arizona students were using a private choice program, out of a school-aged population of almost 1.2 million.<sup>63</sup> That is more than 14 percent of school-aged kids, which exceeds the national share of private education, including homeschooling, of about 13 percent in the 2020-21 school year.<sup>64</sup>

Florida has also long offered choice. Its oldest current program, the Tax Credit Scholarship Program, started in 2001, though it has been modified somewhat since.<sup>65</sup> Florida has had so many programs that in 2021 it merged two into the Family Empowerment Scholarship Program to simplify its offerings.<sup>66</sup> Florida also has charter schools and public-school open enrollment. As of November 2023, 345,781 state students were using a private choice program out of a school-aged population of nearly 3.3

million.<sup>67</sup> That is nearly 11 percent, which approaches the national share of private schooling, including homeschooling.<sup>68</sup>

## New, Big Programs

As noted, many states recently created universal programs. Nebraska's neighbor Iowa might be the best example, given its proximity. Iowa is not new to choice, having enacted a small tuition and textbook tax credit decades ago, and a scholarship tax credit in 2006.<sup>69</sup> But the state went big in 2023 with a universal ESA.<sup>70</sup>

Iowa's program is not perfect. It has a state testing mandate, which is the worst kind because it ties private education to state standards. It also requires that participating private schools be accredited. But it is still a leap toward large-scale choice.

Arkansas has also passed universal choice with its Children's Educational Freedom Accounts Program, enacted in 2023. It joins two older, smaller programs: the Succeeds Scholarship Program, a voucher enacted in 2015, and the Philanthropic Investment in Arkansas Kids Scholarship Program, a scholarship tax credit enacted in 2021.<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately, this program includes a testing mandate and requires that ESA recipients enroll in private schools before being able to use the flexibility to pay for other educational expenses.<sup>72</sup>

## Recommendations

Nebraska should not sit still. It needs school choice and can pursue several options.

### Scholarship Tax Credit

The program could cap credits at \$25 million or more, with credits worth 100 percent of a donation, up to a taxpayer's total state income tax liability. Scholarship-granting organizations should be able to determine their own scholarship sizes. First priority for TCS-funded scholarships should be families making 250 percent or less of the federal poverty level (\$78,000 for a family of

four in 2024). If money remains after that, all families should be eligible.<sup>73</sup>

## Voucher

The state could have a voucher program capped at \$25 million or more. The voucher could be equal to the state's share of per-pupil public school funding, around \$6,200. First priority for a voucher should be families making 250 percent or less of the federal poverty level. If money remains after that, all families should be eligible.

## Tax Credit ESA

A tax credit ESA could be capped at \$25 million or more, with an amount equal to the state's share of per-pupil public school funding going into each student's account. Credits should be worth 100 percent of a donation, up to a taxpayer's total state income tax liability. First priority for a tax credit ESA should be families making 250 percent or less of the federal poverty level. If money remains after that, all families should be eligible.

## Conclusion

Unfortunately, Nebraska has been unable to create a sustainable school choice program and has been left behind by most of the country. It is missing out on the many benefits of choice, including upward academic pressure, family satisfaction, financial savings, and an education system consistent with a free, harmonious society. Fortunately, there are numerous states it can look to as models for progress.

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