



LD 1860

An Act to Create the Educational Opportunity Account Program

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May 8, 2023

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

I am pleased to introduce LD 1860, "An Act to Create the Educational Opportunity Account Program."

Throughout Covid, I heard from parents whose kids were struggling with the hybrid model of education. They wanted to know what they could do to improve their child's education, and I had little to offer aside from homeschooling as an option. To be sure, I also knew of families who loved hybrid education, but that only serves to highlight what I believe we all know to be true: Education is simply not one size fits all.

Every parent knows that a one-size-fits-all approach doesn't work for raising kids. Parenting methods that worked for one child may be completely out of the question for another child because every child is unique. Thankfully, there's no shortage of data-driven resources available to help parents navigate the ever-changing journey of

parenthood. All too often we don't see the same striving for improvement when it comes to educating kids. With all the advancements, why are parents still expected to accept a one-size-fits-all "solution" for their child's education?

The U.S. public school system is designed to benefit politically-motivated bureaucrats¹, not parents, teachers, or students. Furthermore, parents are forced to pay taxes to fund public schools, which may not serve their children's unique needs. And while children of upper-income parents may have options, kids in lower-income households are generally stuck with the government-run school assigned to their zip code.

There is a solution that some states have already adopted: school choice². Rather than locking taxpayer money for education into government-run schools, school choice puts education funds where they belong: wherever they best serve the student.

The gold standard for school choice are the Empowerment Scholarship Accounts³ in Arizona. These are education savings accounts (ESAs) with about \$7,000 per student⁴ per year already earmarked for that child's education. Parents can decide how to spend the funds; including private school tuition, trade school or college classes, tutors, or even let it stay in the public school system, if it's working for them.

Parents, not unelected bureaucrats, know what's best for their kids. Many parents would seek alternative schooling options if they only had the opportunity, and school choice through ESAs gives it to them, as the evidence has proven in Arizona⁵ since the program's passage. A little closer to home, neighboring New Hampshire passed a school choice bill in 2021, and hundreds of children and their families are now enjoying the options that it has provided.

The U.S. system of federalism allows us to witness what works and what doesn't work across the states; Maine students deserve the same liberty as those in Arizona and New Hampshire, which is why I submitted LD 1860 to bring school choice to Maine. Just like in Arizona, Maine parents would be able to decide what type of education best fits their child, and fund it via an Educational Opportunity Account (EOA).

Even with universal EOAs, public schools would still receive funding, even if the parents of some students choose to send their kids elsewhere. And with an Arizona-style solution, all kids would be allotted the same tax-deductible funding, regardless of their parent's tax bracket or zip code.

Let's talk specifically about LD 1860. This bill establishes a program in the Department of Education to create Educational Opportunity Accounts for participating Maine students to be funded by a portion of the State funding and used to pay their educational expenses. The list of eligible expenses is itemized in the bill, but includes tuition and fees at private school, tuition and fees at nonpublic online learning programs, textbooks, computer hardware, fees for summer educational programs, and tuition and fees at postsecondary institutions of higher education, among others.

One important component of the bill is the Parent Review Commission. Made up of seven parents of participating students, the Parent Review Commission will have a voice in how to implement, administer, and improve the Educational Opportunity Account program. Maine parents deserve the opportunity to have a voice in their children's education, something that has been sorely lacking, particularly the last few years.

With the introduction of school choice, there would be abundant opportunities for lower-income parents to have many of the same educational resources for their children as wealthier parents. School choice would diminish the disparities currently inherent in the Maine education system, where families who can afford to often move to “better” school districts or enroll in private school, and allow all children the opportunity to get a quality education.

School choice would break up the educational monopoly of public schools that allows them to corner the market without much incentive to improve services or lower costs. And equal funding for students would show us which schooling options earn parental support and enable educators and administrators to innovate and give kids the quality education they deserve.

There's no time like the present to put Maine kids first by enacting school choice and funding students instead of systems.

1. <https://stanfordreview.org/bureaucrats-stole-the-public-education-system-parents-must-take-it-back/>
2. <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/what-is-school-choice/>
3. <https://www.azed.gov/esa>
4. <https://www.usnews.com/news/politics/articles/2022-09-30/huge-arizona-school-voucher-plan-in-effect-after-foes-fail>
5. https://finance.yahoo.com/news/empowerment-scholarship-accounts-growing-importance-153000359.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAHVxq5-75eiPBf6n8zumtBorriaXoYkyvsB-lccRCKM2Fc2f655oZtMh7WGN_H2NciFpz16691BOKMVQqGnEkEqJiuVF_o8uBLX1DndMdiJKrvNRB2tK5lptsZCJkKJq8BT3f-bkk4JyRpkdcLp8OkL4ezUjxW3odwYQyTEUqzh3