

# INPEA Legislative Toolkit

A Roadmap For Lending Your Voice In Support Of Non-Public Schools



# Table of Contents

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Indiana Non-Public  
Education Association

**INPEA**

Welcome .....	page 3
First, Set Two Goals .....	page 4
Appoint a Legislative Liaison .....	page 5
Engage Elected Officials .....	page 6
Say Thanks .....	page 7
Take Action .....	page 8
Know Your Representatives .....	page 9
Invite Legislators to Campus .....	page 10
Visit the Statehouse .....	page 11
Make Your Case: Media Relations 101 .....	pages 12-15
Issues Index .....	page 16
<b>Position Papers</b>	
Accountability .....	page 17
Accreditation .....	pages 18-19
Dual Enrollment .....	page 20
Religious Liberty .....	pages 21-22
School Choice .....	pages 23-24
<b>Appendix</b>	
Appendix A: Sample Letter to the Editor .....	page 26
Appendix B: Sample Op-Ed Essays on School Choice .....	pages 27-36

# Welcome

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## Thank You for Taking Action.

We appreciate your willingness to help us in our mission of serving as the voice for non-public schools in Indiana. This toolkit will serve as your guide in how to set goals, contact legislators, and work with the media. We appreciate all you do and thank you again for helping INPEA make the case for our non-public schools.

### *A Hoosier Voice for Quality Schools*

*As the voice for non-public schools in Indiana, INPEA is at the forefront of all topics affecting non-public education. We take an active part in public policy and societal issues that impact our member schools and their students and teachers. Hoosier parents want quality education for their children. We provide support and encouragement to member schools and organizations to ensure that non-public educational opportunities are competitive and comprehensive.*



# First, Set Two Goals

In any organization, plans and actions based on clear goals are more likely to succeed. For this reason, we ask each of our member schools to establish two public policy goals. You may choose to invite a legislator to campus, publish persuasive letters to the editor, or start a campaign to express thanks for school choice. This guidebook provides many ideas. Start today by selecting two goals for the current school year.

## GOAL 1

Project Title		Start Date	Due Date
Person Responsible	Phone	Email	
Desired Outcomes			
Project Description and Planning Notes			
		Completion Date (actual)	Signature

## GOAL 2

Project Title		Start Date	Due Date
Person Responsible	Phone	Email	
Desired Outcomes			
Project Description and Planning Notes			
		Completion Date (actual)	Signature



# Appoint a Legislative Liaison

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A legislative liaison serves as a conduit between INPEA's policy initiative and your school's community. That's the technical definition. But that doesn't really describe what goes into this vital role. Legislative liaisons are advocates, organizers, grassroots coordinators and cheerleaders. They are passionate about non-public schools and believe in everything these schools offer. They want what is best for their schools, educators, communities, families, and most importantly, students.

Liaisons work with administrators and INPEA to stay up-to-date about legislation that could impact non-public schools. Then, they help keep parents, teachers and other school and community members informed about the legislation itself and what they can do to advocate on behalf of non-public schools. They help lead the charge for their schools to reach out to elected representatives about the impact of potential legislation. As a liaison, you are vital to helping serve, protect and strengthen our schools.

## Responsibilities

The legislative liaison for a school is first and foremost an organizer, of information, resources and people. You are never in it alone!

**Educate** - Help educate your parent community about particular public policy issues at parents meetings, through school newsletters, emails chains, etc.

**Encourage** - When necessary and possible, inspire involvement from parents, educators, even students, in Statehouse rallies or legislative committee hearings.

**Communicate** - Share the non-public school perspective on issues with your elected representatives or public school representatives (write/call/attend hearings) and encourage others to do the same.

**Establish** - Set school goals for public policy engagement.

**Develop** - Create a communication plan for public policy issues and alerts, so action is easy.

**Delegate** - Get help from parents, teacher and students. You are the organizer, but you don't have to do it all.

# Engage Elected Officials

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There are many ways for you to engage with state elected officials. Remember, they are working for us, so don't be apprehensive about approaching them or asking for help.

**Here are a few suggestions on opportunities to engage with your elected officials:**

- Contact committee members (*especially if they are your local/district representatives*\*).
- Testify in committee hearings.
- Be aware of timing. It's best to contact your representative when amendments are being proposed and the full House or Senate is voting on a bill.\*
- Visit the Statehouse to talk to your representative.
- Talk to your representative when they are back in their home districts.
- Encourage other to engage\* (*numbers count*).
- Tell a story. Personal experience is very powerful. (*See examples on page 5*)

\*Use INPEA's Legislative Action Center

## Other Ways to Engage

**Every school sets TWO public policy goals. Here are some great ideas for yours:**

- Invite a legislator to your school
- Increase parent contacts with legislators
- Encourage students write thank you cards at Thanksgiving
- Organize or participate in a legislator "Reach Out" event, where parents and educators work together to write letters/send emails
- Participate in an event or rally – at the Statehouse or locally



# Say Thanks

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## Example 1: A letter of Appreciation from...



**Marcie B.**

**2017**

Forest Hills Elementary

**Home address**

272 S. Aspen Ave.  
Oakland City, IN 47660

*Thank you from an Indiana Choice Scholarship Recipient*

*My family has always struggled financially. My Choice Scholarship gave me the opportunity to go to a better school and not have to worry about how my parents would pay for it. Forest Hills Elementary has been a blessing to me and I am so thankful to go there. I learn more here than I did at my old school. Thank you for the opportunity to learn from great teachers!*

— Marcie

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## Example 2: A letter of Appreciation from...



**Heather C.**

**2016**

Ridgewood High School

**Home address**

2001 N. Kirkwood Dr.  
Evansville, IN 47715

*Thank you from an Indiana Choice Scholarship Recipient*

*I would like to take the time to thank you for supporting school choice in Indiana. This school, Ridgewood High School, is the best place for me to succeed and I would not be able to attend here without the help I receive from my Choice Scholarship.*

— Heather

# Take Action

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At INPEA, we want to make it as easy as possible for you to find, contact and engage the elected officials who can help you most. To that end, we created an extremely helpful tool that not only identifies these individuals, but also provides useful information about them, as well as contact information.

## Use Our Legislative Action Center:

1. Visit our website, [inpea.org](http://inpea.org)
2. On the top menu, select “For Advocates” then choose “Legislative Action Center.
3. Click and you’ll be led to a page where you can sign up for email notifications about important school issues. Enter your address or zip code to find your elected officials.
4. For a full list of local legislators and elected officials, enter your complete street address. You will find lots of valuable information, including contact numbers, responsibilities, websites and much more.
5. Click the “Take Action” links on this page to send messages to your state legislators.

From time to time, when issues arise, INPEA will send you action alerts with links to the legislative action center. Follow the simple, step-by-step instructions to let your voice be heard at the Statehouse.



# Know Your Representatives

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You can find all of Indiana's elected officials online at the state's official website, [iga.in.gov](http://iga.in.gov). You can use this site to contact your legislator, view live streams, check schedules, or track the progress of bills through the General Assembly.

You can also use **INPEA's Legislative Action Center** for quick, easy communication.

## How to Approach a Legislator Concerning an Issue

The most important thing to remember is to be professional and polite. It may sound simple, but it will get you much further than you may think. Also, doing a bit of homework before even contacting a legislator is extremely helpful. Our INPEA Legislative Action Center is the perfect place to start.

**Be prepared** – Know the current law and what is being proposed. Look up the their voting record and how they seem to react to similar issues.

**Choose an appropriate format** – There are many ways to speak with legislators. You can send an email, call, schedule a meeting or testify at a committee hearing. Choose the format that will best convey your message.

**Be respectful** – Address them with their title: Representative, Senator, Speaker, etc. If you are testifying at a committee hearing, follow the committee rules and only speak when allowed.

**Plan your words** – If you are testifying, write up your speech. If you are meeting with the legislator or making a phone call, have a few talking points outlined. If you are emailing, remember to be clear and concise.

**Stay focused** – Address one issue at a time. Have a few main points to stick with and return to as needed.

**Be ready for questions** – Have facts to back up your opinion and have clear reasoning for why you support or oppose an issue.

**Be courteous** – The legislator may disagree with you, or may have a counterargument to your issue. Please stay respectful and further discuss why you both disagree, as you may be able to seek common ground.

**Thank them** – Whether it was a call, email, meeting or testifying at a committee hearing, thank them for their time and willingness to listen to your issue.



# Invite Legislators to Campus

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The best way to emphasize the importance of non-public schools is to show them off. You know how great your school is and how amazing the students, faculty and overall community are. Make your case to protect it by bringing a legislator to your school.

A visit from a legislator will often generate its own publicity, putting a favorable spotlight on your school, as well as issues facing non-public schools throughout Indiana. A visit from a state legislature can be a great educational opportunity for the entire school. Follow these helpful tips and remember to include students and others in the planning.

## How to Host a Legislator School Visit

**Be prepared** – Know who your legislator is, background, voting record and length of service.

**Make a plan** – Give a tour. If time permits, have the legislator meet with students, staff and/or board members (without reporters present). Invite parents of Choice Scholarship recipients to meet with legislators for an informal Q & A. This helps officials understand the lived experience of education legislation. Let parents tell how the school-choice program has impacted their lives.

**Look at the little details** – Make sure your school is clean and the day is organized well so the visit runs smoothly.

**Capture the moment** – Have a photographer on hand, whether it's a parent or a professional, to capture the occasion. If students are in the photos, make sure the school has the correct permissions to take and share the photos.

**Know your school facts** – Review information such as current and historic enrollment, student to teacher ratio, cost per pupil, funding sources, Choice and SGO participation numbers, test scores or other measures of success and accountability.

**Brag a little** – Talk about what makes your school special.

**Create publicity** – Share the visit on social media, send out a newsletter and inform the local news outlets. If sharing student photos, be sure to have correct permissions.

**Provide takeaways** – Give visitors a small reminder of your school. Keep it inexpensive, such as a small item with your school logo, student artwork, etc., as legislators have gift guidelines.

**Follow-up** – Don't forget to send a thank you note after the visit.

# Visit the Statehouse

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An effective strategy to making your voice heard with state legislators is to plan a visit to the Statehouse. There are several tours available, including school tours. You can request a visit from your area legislator while there, providing you with direct access. This would provide an interesting and educational field trip opportunity for students, while also providing a platform to reach your legislator about issues relating to non-public schools. Visit <http://www.in.gov/idoa/2371.htm> to find all the information about a visit to the Statehouse.

INPEA can help you set up a meetings with your legislators. Contact us for assistance.

## Tips for Planning a Statehouse Visit

- Coordinate your visit with the Statehouse staff and your legislators. Don't just show up.
- Let your legislators know what issues matter to you. Rehearse your talking points, and make certain your teachers, parents, adult volunteers and students can speak to the issues as is appropriate.
- Consider leaving behind message cards for each of your legislators with stories by parents and students. Personal experience is very powerful. *(see samples on page 11)*
- Make the trip an opportunity for publicity. Send out a press release before and after your visit. Include photos.
- Send personalized thank you notes from students following your visit.
- Follow up with your legislator, thanking them for their time and reminding them of the issues.

# Make Your Case: Media Relations 101

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In the next few pages, we give you a crash course on how to engage the media to your advantage. You'll find tips on writing letters to the editor, press releases, planning events and finding a spokesperson.

At INPEA, we want to serve as a valuable tool for you to help further the agenda we set to keep our non-public schools strong. Please feel free to contact us at any point for further assistance in media matters.

## How to Write a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor of local or regional newspapers are an effective way to reach a large audience and your legislators at the same time. Legislative staffers at every level keep an eye on this forum as it gives them insight into what their constituents are thinking. Letters to the editor also have the power to inform readers and inspire action.

### Tips to getting your letter published:

- Follow specific instructions from the publication, usually found on the Letters to the Editor section or on the paper's website.
- Respond to an article in the paper and reference the article in your letter, by article name, date and author. Be timely, write your letter within two days.
- Keep it brief: 250 words or less is a good target.
- Get to the point. Start with a compelling opening sentence then follow with short, clear factual points.
- Include your contact information. The paper may contact you before publication.
- Relate it to the local community. After publication, share your letter via social media.

### Tips for an effective letter:

- Be professional and interesting.
- Share powerful, personal stories. (see example at:  
<http://www.journalgazette.net/news/local/schools/20171008/many-local-families-find-success-stories>)

*Please see the appendices (on page 25) for sample op-ed essays and letters to the editor.*



# Make Your Case: Media Relations 101 *(Continued)*

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- Personalize the issue. Identify yourself and share your expertise. Use your own words, don't simply copy information from INPEA.
- Don't make statements you can't back up with facts. Don't get lost in the weeds. Focus on the big issue.
- If you disagree with an article, refute claims made. If you agree, explain why.
- Refer to the legislator you are trying to influence by name.
- End with a call to action. Provide a sense of urgency.
- Follow-up with your legislator. If your article is printed, clip it out and send it to your legislator with a brief cover note.

## How to Write a Press Release

Press releases are an effective and inexpensive way to get information out about an upcoming event or school milestone. When done well, a press release can attract coverage of your cause, get attention for your school and inform your community about non-public education. Press releases may result in multiple published articles. A simple Google search will reveal countless templates and examples.

**Here are a few cardinal rules to follow:**

- Provide contact information for follow-up questions.
- Write a short, catchy headline.
- Get to the point in the first paragraph.
- Include facts and numbers.
- Proofread, proofread, proofread.
- Include quotes.
- Make it relevant.
- Keep it to a single page.
- Describe why this event or issue matters to people outside your school.



# Make Your Case: Media Relations 101 *(Continued)*

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## How to Get Coverage for a Your Event

A media event can generate great coverage and give your school lots of public exposure. Whether you have a legislator visiting your school, created a class project about upcoming legislation or simply want to advocate action for upcoming legislation, you need to remember that the key to the entire event is actually getting the media to show up. Follow these helpful tips to help get reporters' attention and make them want to cover your event.

**Write first** - Start by writing a good press release, see the prior page for how-to tips.

**Keep calling** - Send out the press release as soon as possible, up to two weeks before. Then, three days prior to your event, call the news room to confirm they received it. This will give you the opportunity to send it again, if necessary. Call again after you resend it and pitch your event. Then call again the morning of the event.

**Don't go overboard** - While you may have to call multiple times, remain professional at all times. You want them to be informed, but not annoyed by your information.

**Timing is everything** - Newsrooms run on their own schedules with deadlines. So, call at slower times, for example - 10 a.m. and between 1:00-2:30 p.m.

**Make it easy** - Little things make a reporters job much easier:

- Easy to find location, include an address with link to Google Maps or MapQuest.
- Make it easy to get in and out (*parking, school security, etc.*).
- Consider visuals - have something for the cameras.
- Make a press kit - a simple hand out of vital information, including contact information.
- Have spokesperson, school leaders and other involved in the event available for questions.
- The station/paper may only send a videographer or photographer. Do not treat them as less than a reporter.



# Make Your Case: Media Relations 101 *(Continued)*

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## Choose a Spokesperson

Choosing a spokesperson for a school is an administrative responsibility. Legislative liaisons do not necessarily have to also serve as your school's spokesperson. Organizing people and information is a different skillset from speaking on behalf of your school.

If you do need to choose a spokesperson to speak on behalf of legislative issues, here are a few key aspects to look for in a spokesperson.

**Smart** - First and foremost, choose someone with excellent communication skills who knows your key messages. A spokesperson must be able to answer questions with simple, easy to understand responses.

**Sincere** - Personality matters, so look for someone who can demonstrate sincerity and is able to connect with people.

**Respectable** - Choose someone who commands respect. This may be someone with authority in your school, such as a principal, vice principals or other administrators. However, a respected parent who is well-known in the community may also be a great choice.

**Professional** - Keep the topic in mind. You want someone who is passionate about non-public schools, but who can match the right tone for serious discussions about legislation.

**Poised** - Look for someone with media experience if possible. He or she must be able to react under pressure with poise and patience.





# Issues Index

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**Position Papers**

Accountability ..... page 17

Accreditation ..... pages 18-19

Dual Enrollment ..... page 20

Religious Liberty ..... pages 21-22

School Choice ..... pages 23-24

# Accountability

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## Indiana Non-Public Education Association Position Statement

The Indiana Non-Public Education Association (INPEA) supports the concept that schools should be accountable. Accountability though, does not equate to regulation or testing. INPEA believes a school's accountability is defined by its obligations to its primary stakeholders, the parents.

INPEA affirms that a non-public school is first accountable to its parents. If parents choose to enroll their student in a non-public school, they have the expectation that their children will receive a high quality and well-rounded education that fits into and is in accordance with the school's mission. INPEA believes that education starts at home. Parents should be actively involved with the school in their child's education.

Schools may also choose to participate in programs that require additional accountability which could include state and federal programs, or accreditation. In Indiana, many non-public schools choose to participate in Indiana Choice programs. While INPEA recognizes that the Indiana Department of Education may require accountability measures from these participating schools, we defend our schools' independence and strive to balance accountability and autonomy.

Accountability is a critical component of ensuring that students are educated and prepared after they complete schooling, and INPEA believes non-public schools can achieve that by providing the best possible quality education to its students while protecting its own mission and independence.

# Accreditation

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## Indiana Non-Public Education Association Position Statement

The Indiana Non-Public Education Association (INPEA) is committed to strengthening student learning through continuous school improvement. Accreditation can provide focus for schools on quality standards and strengthen the pursuit of continuous improvement. INPEA believes that schools should engage in an accreditation process with a recognized accrediting agency.

INPEA recognizes that each of our member schools has autonomy to define and pursue its own unique mission. Therefore, each member school also must have the liberty to select an appropriate accrediting agency. Our schools may choose to pursue accreditation with any of the recognized regional or national accrediting agencies (e.g. AdvancED, ACSI, CSI, ISACS, NLSA, etc.) or with the Indiana Department of Education.

Accreditation has a number of benefits, including access to state funding and programs, fostering collaboration and dialogue between non-public and public schools, and providing a common “measure” for parents. Accreditation or recognition is a criterion for participation in Indiana High School Athletic Association events. Accreditation is also a requirement for participation in Indiana’s exemplary school choice programs, like vouchers from the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program and scholarships from the Tax Credit Scholarship Program

The state accreditation process must not hinder a non-public school in defining and pursuing its mission. However, the process does require several legal standards that all schools must satisfy, including the state assessments and information reporting.

Any school, whether a public school or a non-public school, seeking accreditation by the Indiana Department of Education, must meet the same set of requirements: compliance with legal standards, completion of a school improvement plan, and review of student achievement indicators. It was established by statute more than 18 years ago, and since that time the procedures and process have undergone modifications by the Indiana State Board of Education. Non-public schools are able to use their own evaluation model and process if those models are approved in advance by the Indiana Department of Education.



## Accreditation *(Continued)*

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The Freeway School Program is an alternative to regular accreditation. This program allows a school to contract with the State Board of Education to achieve high levels of student achievement, attendance, and graduation rate. The program offers greater flexibility for schools to determine the curricula and staffing needs by waiving some state regulations.

INPEA will continue to work with IDOE representatives to ensure that state accreditation reporting processes, both traditional and Freeway, are not overly burdensome to non-public schools, especially smaller schools with limited administrative personnel resources.

In conclusion, INPEA Board of Directors encourages and supports efforts by non-public schools to pursue accreditation as a pathway toward ongoing school improvement.



# Dual Enrollment

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## Indiana Non-Public Education Association Position Statement

The Indiana Non-Public Education Association (INPEA) supports the concept of “dual enrollment” and does not see a legal impediment in either the Indiana Constitution, U.S. Constitution or Indiana law. It is in the State’s interest to ensure that its citizens are afforded a broad range of educational opportunities.

INPEA affirms that cooperation and collaboration between public and non-public school officials to provide for the “common good” of children is positive and should be the norm.

INPEA recognizes that there are cautions one must observe in public/non-public partnerships. The integrity and mission of the public and non-public schools must not be compromised in the agreements or implementation of cooperative programs or during collaboration on mutual areas of interest. Local school officials should determine legal and practical matters relating to where, when, and how cooperative ventures are implemented.

INPEA believes that motivation for dual enrollment programs should be the common good and assistance of the students involved.

INPEA supports fair and equitable compensation for the providers of educational services. Reimbursement for courses or services should be proportional to the costs.

# Religious Liberty

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## Indiana Non-Public Education Association Position Statement

**The Indiana Non-Public Education Association (INPEA) supports the religious diversity and religious liberties of our member school communities.**

Every child is an individual, and every student arrives at school with a unique set of abilities, needs, and goals. That's why the diversity of Indiana's schools is one of our state's greatest strengths. Hoosier families choose from a broad range of school types, academic settings, and educational programs. The choices available in Indiana help ensure that every child's individual needs are met.

Schools are not all the same, but all contribute to an educated citizenry. All of Indiana's schools — public and non-public, secular and faith-based — serve the common good. This is no less true of religious and parochial schools. The first schools in our state were founded by religious communities long before public schools were organized, and many continue to serve students today.

Many Indiana families voluntarily choose to enroll their children in faith-based schools. This choice is protected by Indiana law. Among INPEA's 400 members there are schools affiliated with Catholic, Lutheran, Christian, Jewish, Adventist, Muslim, or independent and non-denominational religions.

Religious faith and expression are not a purely private matters to be confined to the four walls of a church, synagogue, or mosque; rather, faith is something to be lived out in community. Therefore, every faith-based school has the right and the responsibility to define its mission, programs, and practices according to the sincerely held religious beliefs and traditions of its faith community.

Hoosier families and students participating in the income-based Indiana choice programs do not, and should not give up their right to select a faith-based school. In 2013, the Indiana Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the Choice Scholarship Program does not violate the Indiana Constitution. In 1925, the United States Supreme Court, in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, affirmed as a fundamental principle of liberty that the child is not the



# Religious Liberty *(Continued)*

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Indiana Non-Public  
Education Association

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“mere creature of the state.” This landmark decision excluded any general power of the state to force children to attend only public schools, consequently upholding the natural right of parents to choose the means of educating their children.

Likewise, non-public schools choosing to participate in state accreditation or choice programs do not forfeit the right to define their missions, programs, and practices according to sincerely held religious beliefs and faith traditions.

INPEA encourages its members to disclose information about school mission, religious beliefs and practices, curriculum, and expectations of students, parents, employees, and guests. Our faith-based schools should share detailed information about religious beliefs and practices, school mission, admissions procedures, religious instruction, employment criteria, facility use policies, expectations of student conduct, disciplinary procedures, and handbooks for students, parents, and personnel. These resources must be clear, consistent, and affirmed by all associated with the school.

Religious belief and expression are the first liberties guaranteed by the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution. INPEA supports the religious diversity and the religious freedoms of our member school communities, and their ability to educate all students who choose to attend.





# School Choice

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## Indiana Non-Public Education Association Position Statement

**School choice programs must respect the integrity and identity of non-public schools. Participation in such programs should not result in a sacrifice of schools' educational mission, philosophy, creed, or governance.**

The Indiana Non-Public Education Association (INPEA) supports the natural and constitutional right of parents to choose the school that they believe is best suited to meet the needs of their children. Since its founding, Indiana's education system has included religious, independent, home, and other privately funded schools as well as public schools. This broad range of school types and curriculum approaches serves the public interest by fostering innovation in education and accommodating the widely varying needs of Hoosier children and families.

In 1925, the United States Supreme Court, in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, affirmed as a fundamental principle of liberty that the child is not the "mere creature of the state." This landmark decision excluded any general power of the state to force children to attend only public schools, consequently upholding the natural right of parents to choose the means of educating their children. In doing so, the Court soundly rejected the public school prejudice of the times and affirmed that non-public schools also serve the common good. Furthermore, in 2013 the Indiana Supreme Court ruled unanimously that the Choice Scholarship Program does not violate the Indiana Constitution. Today, non-public schools continue to provide a quality education that is responsive to the rights of parents as the primary educators of their children.

One in four of Indiana's elementary and secondary schools are privately funded; ten percent of all K-12 students attend them. Strong statements of mission and purpose define these non-public schools. These schools encompass the values and needs of the families they serve and they are accountable directly to their families and sponsoring communities. They are religious and secular, large and small, urban and rural. They serve diverse economic populations and are multi-ethnic and multi-cultural.



# School Choice *(Continued)*

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Most parents who currently choose non-public schools for their children exercise their constitutional right at significant cost and personal sacrifice; they bear a dual burden of paying school tuition while also contributing their share of taxes to support government-funded schools. The education of children in Indiana's non-public schools provides substantial annual tax savings to the people of this state.

INPEA affirms all parents' ability to choose a school that best fits their child's needs. Attainment of full and equitable parental choice in education as well as the protection of each school's mission and integrity is one of our primary public policy objectives. We advocate the enactment of legislation and policies which will maximize the quality of educational opportunities for all of Indiana's children – particularly the children of the financially disadvantaged – by ensuring that all parents have access to the financial capability to exercise the right to choose the school they believe is best for their children.

**To this end, we believe that:**

- Any legislation and policy to improve Indiana's schools must include a commitment to provide all parents true, full, and equitable educational choice.
- True choice exists when all parents have strong, quality options in more than one system.
- Educational choice programs must respect the integrity and identity of non-public schools. Participation in such programs should not result in a sacrifice of their educational mission, philosophy, creed, or governance.
- Non-public schools serve the public good. Therefore, as the Indiana Supreme Court has held, it is legitimate to use public funds in support of children and families' choice of non-public schools.

INPEA provides a voice for the thousands of families who depend on school choice programs to secure the best possible education for their children. It is imperative that we all continue to actively support the rights of parents to educate their children in the schools of their choice, while protecting the rights of non-public schools to fulfill their unique missions.



# Appendix

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## Appendix A

Sample letter to the editor ..... page 26

## Appendix B

Sample Op-Ed Essays on School Choice ..... pages 27-36

# Appendix A:

## Sample Letter to the Editor

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Indiana Non-Public  
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Dear Editor,

School choice seems to have come under fire recently with the election and the upcoming session approaching, with many discussing how the state has been financially impacted by the program. But, I want to take a quick moment and inform you about how the program has financially impacted my family and many families like mine.

I am a single mother with three children, and I work very hard to provide them with the best quality life and education that I can. Though, due to being a single income family, my means are limited. We live where I can afford housing, and unfortunately that places my family in a school district that has an overcrowded public school with minimal resources. My kids did not flourish in that environment. I know the teachers there were doing the best they could with what they had, but my children needed a better alternative. So I did my research and found out that I qualified for the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program.

All three of my children are now enrolled in a private school, which I would not have been able to afford otherwise without the voucher assistance. They are all thriving. They look forward to going to school and their after school involvement has sky rocketed. Their school also takes priority in parent involvement. I know what my children are learning every day and have frequent conversations with their teachers. Private school was the best fit for my kids.

Vouchers provide my family the best quality education that fits our needs, regardless of where I live or the zip code I reside in. A private school was the best fit for my family, and many families like mine. I know I am not the only family who has limited means, but wanted a better chance for my kids, and the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program provides that for my family. I hope many can see the great benefits vouchers give families, and I hope the Choice Program is here to stay in Indiana!



# Appendix B: Sample Op-Eds Essays on School Choice

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## Seven Op-Eds Defending School Choice Based on the 7 Myths of School Choice

### Myth 1: Vouchers hurt public-school budgets

**In fact, since vouchers were introduced, public-school funding has gone up.**

*Step 1. Write a Local Headline about Your Students' Experience with School Choice*

*Step 2. Customize the lead paragraph: In this section, open with a local story about a local family benefiting from school choice. With parents' permission, describe a student who overcame challenges and found success in your school.*

*Step 3. Then paraphrase the following, making it your own:*

It's important to focus on the actual experience of students when considering Indiana's school choice program -- especially when there are so many popular myths about vouchers.

One of the myths of school choice is that Choice Scholarships, or "vouchers," hurt public-school budgets by unfairly channeling money away from public schools. But in fact, since vouchers were first introduced in Indiana in 2011, most public schools have received funding increases.

Between 2011 and 2016, Indiana's public schools received an 8 percent boost in per-pupil funding. Per student funding increased from \$10,969 per student in 2011 to \$11,843 in 2016. While some school corporations have experienced budget fluctuations, most of these challenges are due to funding-formula changes having nothing to do with school choice.

The average cost to educate a child in a private school in Indiana is about \$6,600. Under state law, Choice Scholarships, or vouchers, can cover 50 to 90 percent of that amount, depending on

the household income of the participating child. The average Choice Scholarship value in 2016–17 for 90 percent was \$5,618 and for 50 percent was \$3,032, far less than the cost per pupil in a public school. It's easy to see why Indiana taxpayers see value in choice scholarships. It's easy to see why Indiana taxpayers see value in vouchers.

In all our public debate over these programs, it's important to remember that our children are more than line items in government budgets. First and foremost, they are students who deserve the best education possible. Indiana's voucher program empowers low- and middle-income parents to make choices about where their children are educated—and how some of their state education dollars are spent.

We can all agree that the real argument isn't about budgets and buildings. Hoosier kids deserve the best education possible. Parents deserve the opportunity to choose the best schools for their kids—public or private.



# Appendix B: Sample Op-Eds Essays *(Continued)*

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## Myth 2: Vouchers are too expensive for taxpayers

In fact, vouchers are a good deal for Indiana taxpayers.

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*Step 2. Customize the lead paragraph: In this section, open with a local story about a local family benefiting from school choice. With parents' permission, describe a student who overcame challenges and found success in your school.*

*Step 3. Then paraphrase the following, making it your own:*

Opponents of school choice argue that vouchers are too expensive for taxpayers. But the fact is public schools use more tax dollars per student than private schools, making the School Choice Scholarship a better use of taxpayer money.

Public-school costs are on the rise, increasing from an average of \$10,969 per student in 2011 to \$11,843 per student in 2016. Because the average cost to educate a child in a private school in Indiana is around \$6,600, and because vouchers never pay that full cost, school choice saves tax dollars.

Each Indiana Choice Scholarship, or voucher, covers only 50 to 90 percent of the average cost of private school tuition in Indiana, costing much less per student than public schools.

The average Choice Scholarship value in 2016–17 for 90 percent was \$5,618 and for 50 percent was \$3,032, far less than the \$11,843\_ average cost per student in our public schools.

The math still works even when a student receives the maximum voucher amount.

Students from lower-income families—those who are eligible for 100 percent free or reduced lunches—can receive a voucher for no more than 90 percent of their public school's per-pupil funding. Indiana Choice Scholarships are always less than public-school costs. Vouchers return high value for the taxpayer's dollar.

Studies in other states have also shown that vouchers save money when compared with costs to educate the same child in a public school. In the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, Robert Costrell studied the financial results of using Choice Scholarships and found that in 2008, vouchers are providing an estimated benefit of \$32 million.

To this equation, we must also add the value of giving parents a choice. Indiana's Choice Scholarship Program lets parents decide where their child will attend school—and where the child's educational dollars go.

Without vouchers, low-income families wouldn't have any other choice than their assigned public school. Indiana's School Choice Program offers



## Appendix B: Sample Op-Eds Essays *(Continued)*

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these families an opportunity once available only to wealthy households. School choice empowers lower-income families to have a voice and make a decision about where their children attend school. For parents, that option is priceless. For our state, it's a matter of social justice.

Shouldn't all Hoosier families, including the most needy, have the opportunity to choose the school that best fits their child's needs—whether it's a public school, charter school, or private school? School choice levels the playing field by making educational choice available to all parents, regardless of income.

There are some special interests that want to take away that choice, and turn back the clock on Indiana's voter-approved and court-tested voucher program. We must not let that happen. Indiana voters must zealously guard the freedom of parents to direct the education of their children.

Let's keep a level playing field for all families. The Indiana Choice Scholarship Program benefits students because they give all families, regardless of ZIP code or income level, the opportunity to choose their school.





# Appendix B: Sample Op-Eds Essays *(Continued)*

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## Myth 3: School Choice only helps the wealthy

In fact, School Choice levels the playing field.

*Step 1. Write a Local Headline about Your Students' Experience with School Choice*

*Step 2. Customize the lead paragraph: In this section, open with a local story about a local family benefiting from school choice. With parents' permission, describe a student who overcame challenges and found success in your school.*

*Step 3. Then paraphrase the following, making it your own:*

Years ago, students from low-income families didn't have much of a choice when it came to education. Some were stuck in poor-performing schools and unable to move to a better district. Private schools were out of the question, only available to the affluent.

Indiana's Choice Scholarships ushered in a new era—one where all families, regardless of economic status, could choose the school they wanted, not the one they were forced into by circumstances.

Opponents of school choice would have us overlook those needy families. They claim that expansions to Indiana's voucher program have made it an "entitlement program for the wealthy." However, data from the Department of Education simply doesn't support their claim. The families benefiting most from the maximum Choice Scholarships are those who have the greatest need.

Almost 68 percent of students who received the Choice Scholarship came from families whose annual income qualified them for the federal free or reduced lunch program. These are the students who received the maximum voucher

amount—90 percent of the local public school's per-student cost—and they are the clear majority of students who received vouchers.

The remaining 32 percent are those who received a 50 percent scholarship. These are middle-income families whose annual income was equal to or less than 150 to 200 percent free or reduced lunch eligibility.

When school-choice opponents say vouchers only benefit the elite, they are clearly ignoring the data. They also forget that the wealthy can already afford any school of their choice. Affluence gives them a freedom that low-income families did not have before vouchers. When Indiana voters gave low-income families the power of school choice, it leveled the playing field. It empowered all Hoosier families—regardless of wealth or ZIP code—an opportunity to choose the school that best fit their child's needs.

School choice should not just be for a privileged few. Indiana's Choice Scholarship Program gives all Hoosier families the freedom to direct the education of their children, and that's precisely how it should be.



# Appendix B: Sample Op-Eds Essays *(Continued)*

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## Myth 4: Vouchers cause discrimination and segregation, and disproportionately helps white students

**In fact, School Choice levels the playing field.**

*Step 1. Write a Local Headline about Your Students' Experience with School Choice*

*Step 2. Customize the lead paragraph: In this section, open with a local story about a local family benefiting from school choice. With parents' permission, describe a student who overcame challenges and found success in your school.*

*Step 3. Then paraphrase the following, making it your own:*

This year more than 34,000 students will head to their school of choice, made possible by the Indiana School Choice Scholarship. With more students than ever participating in the voucher program, and 81 percent of parents saying they're "overwhelmingly satisfied\_" with their school of choice, there's plenty of evidence this program is benefitting children across the state. Judging by consumer satisfaction, school choice is a clear winner in Indiana.

Opponents, however, don't agree. They believe school choice is causing discrimination and segregation. For example, in op-eds in the Journal Gazette, two public-school advocates argued against vouchers by pointing out that private schools are not as diverse as public schools. One went so far as to deny that vouchers are enabling thousands of minority students to attend the school of their choice. Another incredibly suggested that vouchers are enabling "white flight." To support these positions, however, these "friends of public education" must ignore the increasingly diverse student populations of Indiana private schools since the School Choice Program began in 2011.

It's undeniable that Choice Scholarships have opened doors of opportunity to thousands of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. According to Indiana Department of Education data, the number of African-American students participating in the Choice Scholarships program grew from 943 to 4,252 over the past six years. Similarly, in the same period, the number of multiracial students grew from 287 to 2,081, and the number of Hispanic students grew from 794 to 6,644.

Statewide, 12.4 percent of Choice Scholarship recipients are African-American (compared with 9 percent of all Hoosiers) and 19.4 percent of Choice Scholarship recipients are Hispanic or Latino (compared with 6 percent of all Hoosiers). In total, the percentage of Choice Scholarship recipients who are non-white is 39.7. When given the choice, these Indiana families are opting in to the Choice Scholarship Program.

Eliminating vouchers would not help the public schools, but it would take away important opportunities from these students of color.



# Appendix B: Sample Op-Eds Essays *(Continued)*

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## Myth 5: Non-public schools are not held accountable

In fact, private schools are accountable for voucher dollars.

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*Step 2. Customize the lead paragraph: In this section, open with a local story about a local family benefiting from school choice. With parents' permission, describe a student who overcame challenges and found success in your school.*

*Step 3. Then paraphrase the following, making it your own:*

Opponents of Indiana's Choice Scholarships often argue that vouchers are unfair because private schools are not held accountable to the same standards as public schools. What the public may not realize is that private schools are actually held to a higher standard of accountability than public schools.

Private schools that accept Choice Scholarships and receive a letter grade of D or F for two consecutive years must face immediate consequences. By contrast, public schools only receive consequences after four years of an F grade.

In other words, state rules for private schools are stricter than for public schools when it comes to a school's letter grade. Private schools are held to a higher standard of accountability.

Keep in mind, of course, that most private schools score very high in Indiana's school grading system, with an overwhelming majority of state-accredited non-public schools scoring

an A or a B. And students in these schools frequently outperform their public-school neighbors on standardized tests.

But opponents of school choice would have you believe that private schools are not as trustworthy as public schools because of differences in accreditation. The reality is that most non-public schools are accredited by the State of Indiana, using the traditional or Freeway model. Others are accredited by a variety of regional and national accrediting bodies, including but not limited to, AdvancED (North Central), ISACS, ACSI, NLSA, and CSI. Many non-public schools hold multiple accreditations.

Accountability and accreditation are important factors to consider when selecting a school. The Indiana Non-Public Education Association encourages parents to research each school's academic performance including accreditation status, test scores, and graduation rates. These facts can help parents make informed decisions regarding the education of their children.



## Appendix B: Sample Op-Eds Essays *(Continued)*

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Parents' opportunity to make such decisions should not be limited to the wealthy few. Indiana's Choice Scholarship Program empowers families of limited means to exercise real choices about the education of their children.

All families should have the opportunity to choose their children's education, and not

simply be corralled into a ZIP-code-assigned school. School choice puts opportunity and responsibility into parents' hands—parents who best know the educational needs of their children, and who are best able to hold schools accountable.



# Appendix B: Sample Op-Eds Essays *(Continued)*

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## Myth 6: Non-public schools do not use standardized tests and are academically inferior

**In fact, parents make good choices for their children's education.**

*Step 1. Write a Local Headline about Your Students' Experience with School Choice*

*Step 2. Customize the lead paragraph: In this section, open with a local story about a local family benefiting from school choice. With parents' permission, describe a student who overcame challenges and found success in your school.*

*Step 3. Then paraphrase the following, making it your own:*

There's little mystery about why Hoosier parents are opting their children out of struggling public schools and into Indiana's Choice Scholarship Program.

According to the published data, non-public schools consistently outperform public schools on standardized tests, including the much-maligned ISTEP test. During 2016–2017, for example, public schools had a 52 percent ISTEP passing rate, while public schools had a passing rate of 67 percent.

Non-public schools also score quite well in the state's school accountability system, with an overwhelming majority of state-accredited non-public schools scoring an A or a B. In addition, non-public schools boast high graduation rates and high college acceptance rates.

Thanks to the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program, children who were once stuck in poor-

performing schools now have the option to move to better schools. Vouchers mean students from low-and middle-income families can now access the same opportunity that was once available only to wealthy families.

According to a recent survey, 20 percent of parents who opted for a Choice Scholarship said the most important reason for choosing their new school was better academics. Of those surveyed, 15 percent said a lack of academic quality in their former school was their most important reason.

Of course, not all public schools struggle academically; most are very good. But for those Hoosier students assigned by their ZIP codes to a struggling public school, vouchers offer a path to a better education.



# Appendix B: Sample Op-Eds Essays *(Continued)*

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## Myth 7: Vouchers are unconstitutional because tax dollars are paying for religious education

**In fact, the law is settled. Vouchers are constitutional.**

*Step 1. Write a Local Headline about Your Students' Experience with School Choice*

*Step 2. Customize the lead paragraph: In this section, open with a local story about a local family benefiting from school choice. With parents' permission, describe a student who overcame challenges and found success in your school.*

*Step 3. Then paraphrase the following, making it your own:*

Opponents of school choice see no public good coming from private schools. They'd have you believe that there's something downright un-American about Indiana's voucher program, which allows tax dollars to follow students to non-public schools—including religious schools.

But these opponents of school choice have already had their day in court, and lost. In 2013, the Indiana Supreme Court ruled unanimously that vouchers are constitutional, and that Indiana tax dollars can be used to fund students' education at private schools.

In their 5-0 decision, the justices wrote, "We hold that the Indiana school voucher program, the Choice Scholarship program, is within the legislature's power under Article 8, Section 1, and that the enacted program does not violate either Section 4 or Section 6 of Article 1 of the Indiana Constitution."

This ruling ended the legal challenge by opponents of the School Choice Program. The Indiana high court's ruling echoed a 2002 U.S.

Supreme Court decision upholding a similar program in Ohio.

The Indiana Supreme Court recognized what school choice opponents would rather forget: Parents should have the power to decide where their child attend school, and where a portion of that child's state education dollars should go—whether to a public, private, or charter school. Opponents of school choice believe that the voucher program gives tax money to families who would have paid for private school anyway. That's certainly not true for families living in poverty. Indiana's School Choice Program has opened doors of educational opportunity to all Hoosier families—opportunities once available only to the rich.

Some say students should be forced to attend a public school first, before having the option of a school-choice voucher. But how much practical sense does that really make, especially for families with several children? Should younger children be denied the opportunities of their older siblings, merely because of their age or



## Appendix B: Sample Op-Eds Essays *(Continued)*

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birth order? Do parents have a duty to send their children to a public school first—even a failing public school—before taking advantage of Indiana’s voter-approved and court-tested voucher program?

Indiana’s Choice Scholarship Program boasts a high rate of participation because it is less restrictive than other state voucher programs. It

offers more parents the opportunity to choose their child’s school. Any family who meets the income guidelines can participate.

As the Indiana Supreme Court has held, the primary beneficiaries of the voucher program are not private schools, but Hoosier families and children. That is exactly how it should be.



One Voice!

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Every School Must Own  
Its Responsibility To Engage.

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Our Kids  
Are Depending  
On It!

