



Parental Choice in Education

A public opinion survey of more than 1,000 Alaskans (Braun Research, 2011) showed that 64 percent support a voucher system that would give parents greater choice for how their children are educated, including both public and private school options. Across the nation, programs that promote greater parental choice in education are growing in popularity. As of June 2014, 23 states plus the District of Columbia have adopted some mechanism for allowing greater school choice, whether through the use of vouchers, tax credit scholarships, individual tax deductions, or educational savings accounts.

The part of the Alaska Constitution that mandates the creation of a system of public schools (Article VII, Section 1) also contains the following sentence: "No money shall be paid from public funds for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution." Unfortunately, previous state court rulings have interpreted this ban to apply even to state funds being allotted to the parents/student, who would in turn make the decision to use the funds at a private institution.

Alaska Family Council believes there is an obvious public interest in promoting an educated populace – but ironically, that interest is not well served by a system of laws and taxation that encourages a government monopoly in the provision of educational services. Monopolies have never encouraged excellence and innovation – that comes from competition.

Passage of legislation such as SJR 9 / HJR 1 would not by itself create school choice in Alaska. Rather, SJR 9 & HJR 1 would place before voters a proposed constitutional amendment that would allow the use of public money for the benefit of all Alaskans seeking educational aid, regardless of whether the individual chooses to receive these educational services at a public or private school

Voter approval of the constitutional amendment proposed by SJR 9 / HJR 1 would remove the legal roadblock that prevents the Legislature from crafting a school choice program that works for the parents and students of Alaska.