

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
CONGRESSMAN TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



NEWS RELEASE

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**Government Reform Committee Approves Landmark
D.C. School Choice Legislation
*'One Step Closer to Meeting Needs of More Students'***

Washington, D.C. – The House Government Reform Committee today approved legislation providing families and children in the District of Columbia with enhanced educational choices. *The D.C. Parental Choice Incentive Act of 2003*, introduced by Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) and Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-OH), will expand opportunities for students in under-performing D.C. elementary and secondary schools.

The District of Columbia has one of the most troubled public school systems in the United States. School choice offers hope to parents and students by giving them the opportunity to select a school that meets their educational needs, while the competition school choice brings *will improve the overall educational atmosphere* for the parents, teachers and administrators who continue to work to improve the public school system.

“With committee passage of this legislation we’re one step closer to meeting the needs of more students. Too many children in our Nation’s capital are not getting the education they need and fully deserve,” Davis said. “Lower-income families concerned about the quality and safety of their children in District of Columbia public schools should not have to resign themselves to sending their children to under-performing schools where students are not adequately motivated to perform. At the same time, a school should not take for granted that it will automatically enroll every child that lives within a given radius of the school.

“Instead, schools should be striving everyday to ensure that they provide a learning environment that will attract new students and parents. I have traditionally opposed federal dollars going to private schools because I think federal dollars ought to be targeted to public schools. But, for the District, I think we have to ask this question: wouldn’t more choices funded by new federal dollars provide a needed alternative for low-income children attending low-performing schools? The goal of school choice in D.C. is addition, not subtraction. We all want the District’s education system to improve, and this is at the very least a short-term effort to do something about it.”

The legislation approved today will offer parents **up to \$7,500** in scholarship funds for children to attend a private elementary or high school in Washington, D.C. Other details of the legislation include:

- All funding for the scholarship programs comes from new funds, therefore no public, private or charter school will be drained of any funds.
- As research has shown, the competition provided by school choice benefits both the private and public schools, by creating an atmosphere of high expectations and a climate of education achievement.
- The maximum amount of each scholarship is \$7,500. However, because the scholarships will be awarded based on need and the tuition and fees of the new school, not all students will receive the maximum amount.
- A total of \$15,000,000 is authorized for the program in the first year.
- Grant money is distributed to various non-profit organizations and D.C. government agencies that must apply to the U.S. Department of Education and demonstrate to the Secretary how they will recruit students, find participating schools and ensure that funds are used properly.
- Priority is given to low-income students in low-performing schools, as identified by the No Child Left Behind Act.
- Eligible students must be residents of the District of Columbia, and their family income cannot exceed 185 percent of the federal poverty level.
- Priority is also given to programs that provide the widest variety of educational options to children of various ages and grade levels.
- Scholarship funds can be used to cover the costs of tuition, fees and transportation.
- Participating schools may not discriminate based on race, color, national origin or gender. However, religious schools are allowed to maintain their character through their employment practices and schools that offer single-gender classes or programs may participate.
- The Secretary is required to conduct an evaluation of the program's progress and submit an annual and a final report to Congress. Each grantee must submit an annual report to the Secretary regarding its activities and the academic achievement of the students in the program. The Secretary will then prepare for Congress a report based on the information gathered from the grantees. Each grantee must ensure that the participating schools report to the parents to discuss their children's academic achievements at least once a year.

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