

School Choice News Conference – June 20, 2011

Bishop Mark Bartchak's Comments

I would like to start by thanking the speakers you just heard, the business leaders, educators and other supporters here this morning, and members of the media.

You just listened to four individuals speak very eloquently about the benefits of school choice legislation and the impact it has on students, families and communities. Today, I would like to publicly add my voice to the growing chorus of support for Senate Bill 1.

By passing this long-overdue legislation, lawmakers in Pennsylvania will make a real and lasting difference in the lives of children and parents throughout the state.

School choice is not simply an issue of public schools versus non-public schools. It is a matter of doing what is fair, what is right, and what is best for every child. By giving parents the power to choose where their son or daughter is educated, we are giving them a license to help their child succeed. By giving parents the power to choose, we are getting the parents more directly involved in the education of their children, and everyone knows that we need to have parents involved in educating our young people.

No one will argue that there are good public schools here in the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown and throughout Pennsylvania. But not every student has the option of being educated in the school in which he or she can succeed.

Families with financial resources have options. But hard-working, tax-paying parents without the same means find themselves limited in a system that is not serving their child well. It is time for Pennsylvania lawmakers to right this wrong. As a society, we must support parents as they strive to provide the best education for their child.

Allow me to share with you a story about a boy who came to this very high school several years ago. His education began in a public school, and he found himself getting into trouble a lot. The system placed him in an alternative school for behavioral problems and passed him to the eleventh grade, despite having a sixth grade reading level. The boy's family could not

afford to send him to a non-public school, but a friend of the family saw potential in the boy and helped cover the tuition at Bishop McCort Catholic High School. The boy repeated his sophomore year here at McCort and graduated with a 12th grade reading level and a scholarship to college. Clearly, the environment of this school made a difference in the boy's life.

It was a story with a happy ending. But one has to ask, 'where would this boy be today if it were not for that family friend who made it possible for him to receive a non-public education?'

And one must also ask, 'what about all those other students in our neighborhoods and communities who do not have a family friend to come to the rescue?'

Senate Bill 1 is a step toward making sure those boys and girls and their families have a choice.

The business leaders joining us today realize this. They know that in order to have strong communities and a well-trained work force, we must first provide students with every educational opportunity available.

I thank them for their support, and I call on other business leaders to join them in this effort. And I urge everyone to make their voices heard on this issue. Your state senator and representative are elected to serve you. Let them know you support Senate Bill 1, and let them know you want them to vote for Senate Bill 1. It is a vote for students. It is a vote for families. It is a vote for the future of your children and grandchildren. It is a vote for a better future for Pennsylvania.