

**July 22, 2010**

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**Send a Letter to the Editor**

The Platte Institute strongly believes in the importance of citizens participating in the public dialogue on issues important to Nebraska. Writing a letter to the editor is an outstanding way to partake in the discussion and have your

# PLATTE CHAT

## The Status of Educational Choice in Nebraska

By Alex West  
Platte Institute

The school choice movement promotes the idea that competition amongst schools driven by parent discretion will bring vitality to the educational system in America, and is now one of the greatest vessels for educational reform in the United States. Supporters advocate solutions as diverse as tax credits, charter schools, and school voucher programs, but each aims at enabling families with the autonomy required to select the school of their choice. They argue that this independence will force schools to perform well or risk losing their discontent constituency.

Of course, with the advent of any reform movement, opponents arise. Sometimes they're those who are comfortably situated within the status quo and have no intention of rocking the boat, some honestly believe "school choice" solutions will do more harm than good, and sometimes opponents are both. In any case, if the only source for information about school choice comes from the opposition's perspective one's view of school choice solutions and their proponents may not be too flattering. Take for instance the Anti-Defamation League's stance towards school voucher reforms as presented on their

voice heard by thousands of people. To make the process easier, the Platte Institute has assembled a list of links which allow you to submit a letter to the editor to nearly all Nebraska newspapers. Simply [CLICK HERE](#) for a listing of the newspapers and follow the appropriate link to submit your letter.

## Contact Us

If you would like to contact someone at the Platte Institute, you are always welcome to give us a call, drop us an email or stop by the office. Our telephone number is 402.452.3737. We are located at 10050 Regency Circle – Suite 120 – in Omaha. Below is a list of staff email address:

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official website. The picture they paint for a world with school vouchers is very bleak. The best and the brightest are siphoned off from public schools,[\[1\]](#) the KKK and other hate groups will operate schools with public funds,[\[2\]](#) and the partition erected between church and state will crumble to the ground.[\[3\]](#) As they put it, "vouchers pose a serious threat to values that are vital to the health of American democracy."[\[4\]](#)

Ironically, one of Nebraska's most well known school choice proponents is also one of the state's devoted humanitarians. Her name is Rhonda Stuberg, and her efforts as Education Director at Apollos Preparatory School and the Principal of Omaha Street School fly in the face of this mischaracterization of these forward thinking and innovative individuals. In her efforts at each school, Rhonda works to provide Pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup> grade education for low-income children at Apollos and at the Omaha Street School to matriculate high school students who have fallen through the cracks of the Omaha Public School system. Nonetheless, despite her credentials and leadership, in Nebraska school choice proponents have had few victories. Most notably, the last two measures to go before the unicameral to expand school choice, one through tax credits and the other through rural charter schools, failed. As a result, Nebraska is now one of only ten states without a charter school law.[\[5\]](#)

Disappointingly, this policy direction is not reflective of electorate opinion here in Nebraska. According to a 2009 statistically representative survey of 1,200 likely Nebraskan voters, Nebraska's voters are far more likely to favor a tax-credit scholarship system (55%) than oppose it (41%).[\[6\]](#) In addition, there is partisan agreement on the issue with 52% of Democrats supporting the idea of a *tax-credit scholarship* as well as the support of 59% of Republicans and 53% of Independents.[\[7\]](#) Indeed, public attitudes toward school vouchers, typically considered the more radical of the three school choice alternatives thus far mentioned, are similarly received by Nebraskans. The percentage breakdown of support along partisan lines is 53% of Democrats, 54% of Republicans, and 63% of Independents.[\[8\]](#)

In spite of public opinion, educational choice in Nebraska is limited. Charter schools are illegal, tax credits were recently stymied in the unicameral, and vouchers are no where in sight. When pressed for explanations about the lack of school choice in Nebraska some politicians object to the notion. They point to focus schools, magnate schools, and an upcoming expansion of open enrollment facilitated by the recently created Learning Community as adequate equivalents to any benefits projected from a charter school program.<sup>[9]</sup> Sadly, if history has any predictive power, these changes are not comparable to the magnitude of the problems before Nebraskan public school systems.

There are, however, numerous people and groups that persevere in their efforts to provide quality, innovative education in the state of Nebraska right now despite the obstacles to their success, and coming up on July 30<sup>th</sup> at the Storz Mansion in Omaha, Nebraska the Platte Institute will be holding an event highlighting the efforts of just a few of these courageous institutions. Speakers will give their perspective on educational choice here in Nebraska, and detail their plans and hopes for encouraging its acceptance at the legislative level.

You are cordially invited to a birthday  
celebration in remembrance of economist

John Milton Friedman...

Sponsored by the Foundation of Educational Choice

Time: 6-8:00pm.

Date: Friday, July 30, 2010

Location: The Historic Storz Mansion

3708 Farnam St, Omaha NE

Please RSVP by July 26, 2010 to:

[rsvp@platteinstitute.org](mailto:rsvp@platteinstitute.org); 402-452-3737

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[1] 2001. "School Vouchers: The Wrong Choice for Public Education - Vouchers Undermine Public Schools." *The Anti-Defamation League*. [http://www.adl.org/vouchers/vouchers\\_public\\_schools.asp](http://www.adl.org/vouchers/vouchers_public_schools.asp) (June 11, 2010).

[2] 2001. "School Vouchers: The Wrong Choice for Public Education - Vouchers Undermine Public Schools." *The Anti-Defamation League*. [http://www.adl.org/vouchers/vouchers\\_public\\_schools.asp](http://www.adl.org/vouchers/vouchers_public_schools.asp) (June 11, 2010).

[3] 2001. "School Vouchers: The Wrong Choice for Public Education - Vouchers Are Constitutionally Suspect." *The Anti-Defamation League*. [http://www.adl.org/vouchers/vouchers\\_constit\\_suspect.asp](http://www.adl.org/vouchers/vouchers_constit_suspect.asp) (June 11, 2010).

[4] 2001. "School Vouchers: The Wrong Choice for Public Education - Introduction." *The Anti-Defamation League*. [http://www.adl.org/vouchers/vouchers\\_main.asp](http://www.adl.org/vouchers/vouchers_main.asp) (June 11, 2010).

[5] "State Profiles: State Laws." *US Charter Schools*. [http://www.uscharterschools.org/pub/uscs\\_docs/sp/index.htm](http://www.uscharterschools.org/pub/uscs_docs/sp/index.htm) (June 11, 2010).

[6] DiPerna, Paul. 2009. "School Choice Survey in the States: Nebraska's Opinion on K-12 Education and School Choice." Released by The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, et al. September: 9.

[7] DiPerna, Paul. 2009. "School Choice Survey in the States: Nebraska's Opinion on K-12 Education and School Choice." Released by The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, et al. September: 21.

[8] DiPerna, Paul. 2009. "School Choice Survey in the States: Nebraska's Opinion on K-12 Education and School Choice." Released by The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, et al. September: 22.

[9] Dejka, Joe. 2010. "Report calls for charter schools - A

conservative think tank presents an unflattering look at Nebraska schools..." *Omaha World-Herald*. January 13. Sunrise, News: 03B.

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