



SCHOOL  
CHOICE  
OHIO

2011 ANNUAL REPORT



I SUPPORT MORE  
SCHOOL CHOICE  
IN OHIO!

A Coalition to Empower Parents Through School Choice. [www.ohioschoolchoicerally.org](http://www.ohioschoolchoicerally.org)

**"WE ALL WANT  
OUR CHILDREN**

to have quality education and bright futures that offer them great opportunities for higher education."

*Lisa J., Mother of EdChoice Recipient in Cincinnati*

2011 was a year of great accomplishment for School Choice Ohio as we worked successfully to bring more opportunity to students and families all across Ohio.

Thanks to our growing number of supporters and advocates, SCO was able to make great strides in 2011. We toured the state to proclaim the need for education reform and the importance of Ohio's great school choice options. We reached record numbers for EdChoice Scholarship users. We worked with our supporters in the legislature and the Kasich Administration to achieve major gains in Ohio's budget to provide more educational options. We witnessed thousands of families finally have their voices heard as a brand new statewide scholarship for students with special needs was created.

We are excited about what this means for the students of Ohio. We are grateful for the tireless work of the dedicated coalitions that have

supported school choice initiatives for so many years. The efforts of 2011 were truly a win for Ohio families.

Our jobs are not done, though. In many ways, they are just beginning. SCO will continue to work aggressively to create new eligibility options and remove any artificial limitations on educational choice. The fight to ensure opportunity for all Ohio students and families continues.

Here's to another great year.



**Matthew Cox**  
*Executive Director*  
*School Choice Ohio*



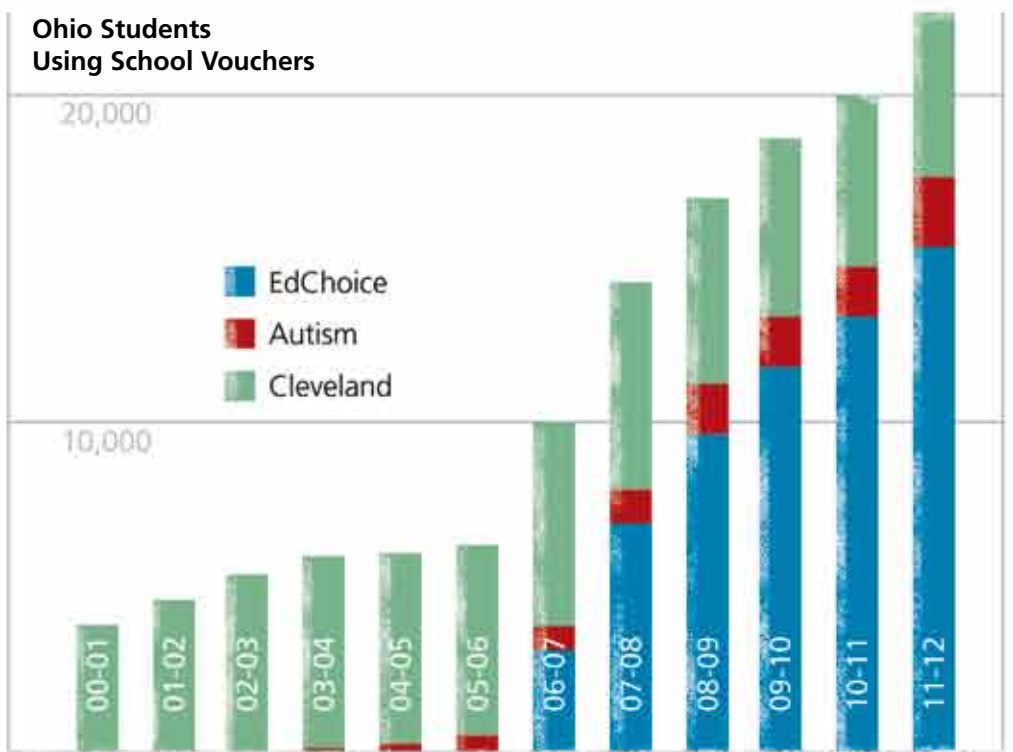
**John Mullaney**  
*Board Chair*  
*School Choice Ohio*

# About Us

School Choice Ohio champions the cause for choice by providing a broad range of education, outreach, and advocacy services, all designed to expand educational opportunities for Ohio's students. SCO is committed to protecting and expanding children's educational options through ensuring choice in quality schools and other places of learning, thereby supporting systemic reform of K-12 education across the state.

With the state's four scholarship programs—The EdChoice Scholarship Program, The Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, The Autism Scholarship Program, and the new Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship—Ohio's students now more than ever before are able to find an educational environment that best suits their needs.

School Choice Option	Scholarship Amount	2011-2012 Enrollment
<b>EdChoice Scholarship</b> Available to any public school student who attends a school rated Academic Watch/Academic Emergency for 2 out of 3 years or is in a district building with Performance Index score in the lowest 10%, and to incoming kindergartners and community school students who would be assigned to those schools	Up to \$4,250 for grades K-8 and up to \$5,000 for grades 9-12 per year	15,403
<b>Cleveland Scholarship &amp; Tutoring Program</b> Available to students in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District	Up to \$4,250 for grades K-8 and up to \$5,000 for grades 9-12 per year	5,345
<b>Autism Scholarship Program</b> Available to any student age 3-21, identified by the resident public district as autistic and residing in Ohio	\$20,000	2,000
<b>Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship</b> Available to any student age 3-21, identified by the resident public district as having a disability and residing in Ohio	Up to \$20,000 depending on IEP	Beginning 2012-2013



# By the Numbers

## Grassroots

**1,016:**

School choice supporters who flooded the Ohio Statehouse lawn during the School Choice Rally

**47:**

People who provided public testimony in support of voucher expansion bills

**1,300:**

Letters and emails sent to legislators by ambassadors requesting bold voucher expansions

**422:**

Parents and supporters across Ohio who are active as school voucher community ambassadors

**95:**

Private schools that partner as ambassador schools to showcase school voucher successes

**4:**

Cities that hosted community events in support of the first National School Choice Week

**67:**

Parent ambassadors who were interviewed in the media or submitted letters to the editor

**6:**

Democrats who have sponsored or cosponsored school voucher expansion proposals this year

**11:**

School tours in the past six months for legislators to see state scholarships in action firsthand

## Media

**249:**

Published media pieces generated by School Choice Ohio efforts

**102:**

Media outlets that mentioned School Choice Ohio

**37:**

Ohio cities and counties where media coverage mentioned School Choice Ohio

**38:**

Radio interviews performed by School Choice Ohio

**1,457:**

Fans of the School Choice Ohio Facebook page

**7,800:**

Quarterly unique visitors to the School Choice Ohio website

**7,410:**

Unique visitors to the School Choice Ohio blog in 2011

**591:**

Followers of the School Choice Ohio Twitter feed

## Fundraising

**\$100,000:**

Money received in matching grants

**2:**

National funders with multi-year commitments to School Choice Ohio

**\$14,596:**

Contributions in 24 hours through The Columbus Foundation's "Big Give" day

**41:**

Unique donations resulting in more than \$500,000 in contributions to School Choice Ohio

# In the News



School Choice Ohio hit the road in May on a statewide tour to visit schools located in six cities across Ohio: Cleveland, Akron, Columbus, Lima, Cincinnati, and Dayton.

We invited media to each school to speak with school leaders, families, students, and SCO staff about Ohio's school choice programs. SCO stressed the need for bold school

choice expansion language to be included in the state budget. School leaders spoke about the importance of the state scholarship programs, and parents shared their compelling personal stories.

State Representatives Matt Huffman and Lynn Wachtmann attended the Lima tour stop at Temple Christian School. Rep. Huffman

talked to the crowd about the major voucher expansion proposal that he sponsored with bipartisan support.

In total, seventeen media outlets attended the three-day tour events, which resulted in three front page stories, coverage on 12 major television stations, and overall exposure to more than 2,000,000 households.

# Legislative Accomplishments

## Budget Improvements to School Voucher Programs

Voucher Program	Previous Capacity	New Capacity	Previous Eligibility	New Eligibility
EdChoice Scholarship	14,000	60,000	85,000	100,000
Special Needs	n/a	11,750	15,000	235,000
Cleveland Scholarship	6,000	6,000	26,000	40,000
<b>Total Scholarships</b>	<b>20,000</b>	<b>77,750</b>	<b>126,000</b>	<b>375,000</b>

2011 brought momentous changes and expansions to Ohio's school choice programs as Governor Kasich signed the Ohio budget bill into law. The budget created Ohio's fourth school voucher program and expanded two of the state's existing voucher programs. As a result, eligibility for vouchers in the Buckeye State will jump from 126,000 to almost 375,000 eligible students. The number of scholarships available to Ohio's families will also quadruple to nearly 80,000 spots.

The budget created Ohio's fourth school voucher program to provide scholarships for K-12 students with special needs. Named for a former

state representative who advocated for the scholarship during his tenure in the Statehouse, the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship will provide a scholarship to any child with special needs who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

In addition to the creation of the new scholarship program, the budget expanded two existing scholarship programs. The EdChoice Scholarship Program will quadruple the number of scholarships available during the next two years to allow 60,000 scholarships by the 2012-13 school year. Eligibility for EdChoice also expanded to include students who attend schools in the bottom 10 percent of the state, according to Performance Index scores.

The Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program saw long-awaited improvements, including an \$800-\$1,550 per student increase in the scholarship amount to mirror the EdChoice Scholarship. Previously limited to students entering grades K-8, the program is now open to students in any grade.

School Choice Ohio applauds the work of the Ohio legislature and Governor Kasich on this budget. Many more Ohio families will now have the chance to find the best learning environment for their child. These changes are a move in the right direction for Ohio.



## SCHOOL CHOICE RALLY

Ohio Statehouse, March 22, 2011

State Rep. Matt Huffman addresses the more than 1,000 legislators, state leaders, parents, advocates, school leaders, and students who packed the Statehouse lawn for the School Choice Rally and Celebration. Supporters waved signs, cheered and shared their stories with the goal of encouraging lawmakers to expand school choice opportunities to more Ohio students.



# The Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program

When Governor John Kasich signed the state budget into law on June 30, 2011, he finalized the creation of the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program. Now, any student with special needs who has an IEP will be able to access a scholarship like those already available to students with autism.

Approximately 12,000 scholarships will be available, and each scholarship will be worth up to \$20,000. The scholarship can be used to pay for tuition at a private school, additional services at a private provider, or at other public schools. The importance of this scholarship for Ohio's families and students with special needs cannot be overstated. Parents will now have the chance to find the education setting that is most appropriate

for their children. Students with disabilities will now have access to options tailored to their special needs—either mainstream environments or specialized schools. And, rather than having to fight through a lengthy legal process to secure the services their children need when their public school isn't working, families will now be able to direct part of the tax dollars already set aside for their children's education to the school of their choice.

We are so happy to celebrate with families across the state who have worked hard for so many years to make this scholarship a reality. Their vision of a scholarship that places students' needs at the center of their education and empowers parents with options led them to write letters sharing their stories, testify at public hearings at the Ohio Statehouse, call key decision

makers and urge their support, and meet individually with legislators time after time to show why this scholarship is so important to so many families.

In honor of these families, SCO hosted a dinner in November 2011 to celebrate the monumental achievements and dedicated work of the scholarship's namesake, former Ohio Representative Jon Peterson. Parents and advocates talked about the difference the Autism Scholarship has already made in their children's lives. They also shared their excitement for the Special Needs Scholarship, because it will allow more families to access the education they know is best for their children.



**This new Special Needs Scholarship Program will open up doors for our children,** let us make the school choices and reduce the anxieties we feel as parents to find the best school to address the special needs and learning styles of our children. Our thank you to all, especially to former Representative Jon Peterson, for persevering and making this important program work for our children.

- Fati Fuchs, mother of two children with special needs

## A PARENT'S DREAM COME TRUE

**For my children having the ability to make this choice means a brighter future.** It means finally being able to be surrounded by a team of teachers who see past their disability to their full potential. It means being able to dream big and have the assurance that they will acquire the tools to reach their goals. It means having the stability of a positive learning environment and a strong social network. And it means finally being able to live

without the stress our family's 4 year battle with our home district has caused and being able to get back all their mother's attention that has been divided for so long. We can begin to focus on tomorrow instead of mourn over the time we've lost as a result of this fight.

I can't possibly express how much this scholarship will change our lives and my children's futures. I can sleep easier knowing that I have finally been able to place my children in

a school that is willing and able to provide the education in which my children are entitled. I can focus on encouraging their dreams, teaching them to care for their health and can start sharing once again in their laughter while looking forward to what they might now become, as a result of this gift of choice, with much excitement and anticipation.

- Angela Dawson, mother of two children with special needs



# In the Works

## Income-based Scholarships

School choice is limited by families' ZIP codes and incomes. When they can't afford to move to a neighborhood with better schools or pay private school tuition, families are stuck with an education option that isn't working well for their child.

In Ohio, we're fortunate to have the EdChoice Scholarship that allows students assigned to the very lowest-rated public schools to access a private school scholarship.

But what about students who aren't thriving in their school even though it's not rated in the absolute bottom? Or maybe the school is even highly rated, but it is still not a good fit for whatever reason? Perhaps it's a gifted student attending one of the many Excellent-rated schools that have no students taking Advanced Placement courses. Perhaps it's a student who's struggling to catch up but isn't getting the help he or she needs. Or maybe it's a student who is being bullied.

Introduced by Representative Matt Huffman of Lima, the Parental Choice and Taxpayer Savings Scholarship (PACT), seeks to broaden the base of students eligible for statewide scholarships. With the newest adjustments, PACT vouchers will be available at an equal or lesser value than state aid per pupil spending in each district. The number of scholarships will be limited to 1 percent of district enrollment, and students from families with yearly salaries up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$67,050 for families of four, are eligible.

This proposal would give many parents the opportunity to choose an educational environment that best meets their needs rather than conforming to a one-size-fits-all model. SCO looks forward to working with legislative supporters in 2012 to provide greater options for Ohio's students.



2011 brought momentous changes and expansions to Ohio's school choice programs as Governor Kasich signed the Ohio budget bill into law.

# Looking Ahead

In addition to the very important PACT scholarship, SCO hopes to make even greater strides toward school choice and educational freedom for Ohio in 2012.

## 1. Access: Create Statewide Income-based Scholarship Program

Income-based scholarships would allow families in either private or public school who meet low income criteria to apply. All families throughout Ohio should have access to an income-based scholarship.

## 2. Funding: Address critical voucher funding disparities affecting student access

- Increase high school amount for Cleveland and EdChoice vouchers
- Increase Autism and Special Education Scholarship to parity with public school amount
- Remove the parent co-pay in the Cleveland Voucher Program

## 3. Flexibility: Allow on-site/online "hybrid" school models to operate in Ohio

Exciting models of hybrid schools are operating successfully around the world to offer a more personalized, targeted education to students. Ohio families should have these same options.

## 4. Financing: Develop student-centered school funding model

A student-centered funding model develops per-pupil funding amounts that are based on individual student needs. Student-centered funding allows true parent choice by giving families full portability of their children's education funds.

## 5. Quality: Ensure more state-published school choice information for parents and the public

- Increase information available to parents, policymakers, and the general public about the range of available options
- The State of Ohio should track and report graduation rates and value-added data for voucher recipients and require school choice data to be made available for third-party research.

# The Work of Many

An organization is only as strong as those who stand with it to ensure its success. We are grateful to our board members, staff members, donors, interns, partners, fans, followers, and many volunteers across the state. Their combined efforts are dramatically expanding opportunities for Ohio students to access the school that is the best fit for them.

This year, we amplified our focus on advocacy and broadened the public role of SCO. We engaged in direct advocacy with legislative leaders, presenting testimony on multiple legislative proposals, participating in an increasing number of radio and newspaper interviews, and taking advantage of opportunities to deliver public presentations to community organizations on the benefits of and need for school choice. Each of these activities served to raise public awareness of school choice and to increase the impact of the organization as a whole.

**100%:**

Increase in the number of community ambassadors during the past year

**2,000:**

Separate activities done by local community ambassadors to support and promote school choice

**1,300:**

Letters and emails sent to legislators by ambassadors requesting bold voucher expansions

**118:**

Legislators who have received personal communication from community advocates

The timing of SCO's stepped-up and focused efforts coincided with a favorable change in political climate, and there is growing evidence that this confluence contributed to what has been a very successful year for school choice in Ohio. SCO learned a number of valuable lessons during this year that will not only benefit us moving forward but have the potential to benefit school choice organizations in other states.

## Volunteers

More than 400 parents and school leaders are active across the state as volunteer community ambassadors with School Choice Ohio. This

important coalition works tirelessly, sharing their stories with legislators, asking for bolder voucher proposals, inviting legislators to their schools to see the impacts of vouchers firsthand, testifying in legislative hearings at the Statehouse, and meeting with legislators one-on-one and in small groups. These volunteers are crucial to the on-the-ground work of SCO and played a pivotal role in our 2011 accomplishments.

Our volunteer Board of Directors continues to provide active, critical leadership and has been crucial in building goodwill for the efforts of SCO.

## Donors

School Choice Ohio is also lucky to have the help of very dedicated financial supporters. In 2011, SCO was given \$100,000 in matching grants, a goal that we successfully reached. We operate with assistance from many valuable foundation supporters. In addition, SCO received numerous individual contributions from dedicated individual givers throughout the year.

## Board and staff

SCO has seven staffers located in our central Columbus office and five regional staff members based in Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, and Toledo that focus on local community outreach and grassroots mobilization.

The addition of a communications coordinator, Kaleigh Frazier, and the resulting increase in capacity paid dividends with a dramatic expansion of media attention to important issues related to school choice. Our new legislative director, Jason

Warner, educates legislative leaders on the need for expanded options for families and has become an important resource for policymakers.

With more and more families looking for new ways to help their children find the path to academic and social success, school choice is growing as a vital issue. We are grateful for the continued support of all those standing beside us in this ever-important cause. It is because of this that we are able to uphold our mission and continue our work for Ohio's students and families.

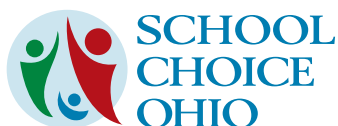




"Now my children come home every day smiling.

They can't wait to tell me all about their day. We are very thankful to be blessed with the opportunity to utilize a program like EdChoice."

*Nichole, Mother of EdChoice Recipient*



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