



An Open Letter in Support of Universal School Choice in South Carolina

To the members of the South Carolina General Assembly, Executive Agency Leaders, and Fellow South Carolinians:

South Carolina stands at a pivotal moment in education policy. For generations, our state has affirmed the principle that parents—not bureaucracies—are best positioned to make decisions about their children’s education. Universal school choice represents the next, logical step in honoring that belief while strengthening—not weakening—the full spectrum of educational options available to families across the Palmetto State.

Universal school choice is not about favoring one sector over another. Rather, it is about empowering families, respecting parental rights, and creating an environment in which *all* students can succeed by attending schools best suited to their specific needs. When designed well, universal school choice is a policy framework that benefits all students by allowing attendance based on school model, whether public schools, public charter schools, independent schools, faith-based schools, or homeschools. It will also ensure fiscal responsibility, transparency, and accountability to taxpayers.

Key Elements of an Effective Universal School Choice Program

To succeed, a universal school choice program must be built on several core principles:

1. Universality and Simplicity

Student eligibility should be broad and straightforward. When school choice is limited by arbitrary income thresholds, zip codes, or complicated eligibility rules, it creates confusion, inequity, and unnecessary administrative burden. Universal eligibility ensures that all families—urban and rural, affluent and low-income—are treated fairly, and that participation is easy to administer and understand.

2. Portability of Funding

Education funding should follow the student, not systems. Directing tax dollars to the learning environment that best fits each child's unique needs incentivizes responsiveness and innovation across all sectors. Importantly, this funding should be structured to ensure adequate financial support for all students, regardless of the school model the student chooses. This means no school district, charter school, independent school or other school system should be without adequate resources to educate the students they serve.

3. Parental Control with Appropriate Accountability

Parents should control educational decisions for their students, while the state ensures that there are guardrails in place for academic integrity, financial transparency, and student safety. Accountability should be student-focused – recognizing that different educational models operate differently – without imposing one-size-fits-all regulations that stifle innovation, infringe on religious liberty or impose unnecessary or duplicative testing requirements.

4. Respect for Educational Pluralism

South Carolina's strength lies in its diversity of educational models. A well-designed universal school choice program affirms that no single approach works for

every child, and that a pluralistic system better serves students with varying needs, learning styles, and values.

How Universal School Choice Strengthens Every Sector

Public Schools

Contrary to common misconceptions, universal school choice can strengthen public schools that are the default choice for families that live in a specific attendance zone. By empowering families, public schools are encouraged to innovate, specialize, and focus resources on students who choose to attend. Many districts across the country have responded to choice by expanding magnet programs, improving customer service for families, and adopting new instructional models—benefiting both students and educators.

Public Charter Schools

Charter schools benefit from a choice environment that values flexibility, innovative instruction models, and grassroots community support. Universal school choice can ease enrollment barriers such as transportation, reduce funding inequities related to facilities, and prevent charters from being pitted unfairly against other choice options.

Independent Schools

Universal school choice makes private, independent education accessible to families who previously had no realistic option beyond their zoned public school. It allows independent schools to maintain their independence and unique missions while welcoming a broader cross-section of students without forcing them to become extensions of the state.

Religious Schools

Faith-based schools have long played a vital role in South Carolina's educational landscape. Universal school choice respects the constitutional principle that families may choose religious education without government interference, while preserving

religious liberty and institutional autonomy. A properly structured universal choice program will ensure that participation remains voluntary and parent-directed.

Homeschool Families


Homeschooling families benefit when choice programs recognize the legitimacy and value of home-based education. Universal school choice can provide access to curriculum materials, tutoring, hybrid programs, and specialized services without imposing unnecessary regulation or undermining parental authority.

A Call for Unity and Thoughtful Leadership

Universal school choice should be viewed as an opportunity—an opportunity to unite around shared values: a focus on individual student needs, parental rights, limited government, fiscal responsibility, and respect for civil society institutions. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate that school choice, when thoughtfully designed, expands opportunity for all students, drives innovation, and brings new educational opportunities to our communities.

We urge lawmakers and executive leaders to work collaboratively—across chambers, agencies, and stakeholder groups—to advance a universal school choice framework that reflects South Carolina values and puts students first. By doing so, our state can become a national leader in educational freedom while ensuring that every child has access to an education that meets their needs and reflects their family’s values.

Respectfully,



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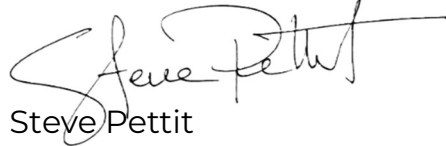
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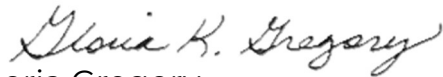
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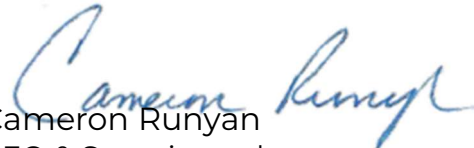
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