

A review of the article—No decision is more local than parents choosing a school for their children—by Matt Daniels, Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati published August 21 in the Dayton Daily News.

Superintendent Daniels begins his article stating that parents must be free to choose the school for their children. To support that view, Superintendent Daniels uses a 1929 quote from Pope Pius XI that the family “holds directly from the Creator the mission and hence the right to educate the offspring (para. 32).” Further, Superintendent Daniels quotes Pope John Paul II—“The rights of parents to choose an education in conformity with their faith must absolutely be granted.”

I totally agree with these statements made by these Popes. Ohio law has always allowed parents to choose either public or private education. However, the issue is—who pays if parents choose private education.

In Ohio, the state is required by the Constitution to secure, by taxation, a thorough and efficient system of common schools and forbids any sect, religious or secular, to control any part of the public school funds of the state.

Superintendent Daniels also argues, in error, that the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 “affirmed that faith, values, and education are inseparable.” As a matter of general principle that could be true, but not as a matter of Ohio law. The Ohio Constitution is crystal clear regarding the state’s responsibility for education. Article VI, section 2 states:

The General Assembly shall make such provisions, by taxation, or otherwise, as, with the income arising from the school trust fund, will secure a thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the State; but, no religious or other sect, or sects, shall ever have any exclusive right to, or control of, any part of the school funds of this State.

The state is in violation of the Ohio Constitution by funding private education. The Court of Common Pleas in Franklin County recently declared EdChoice vouchers unconstitutional.

VOICES: No decision is more local than parents choosing a school for their children

[Ideas & Voices](#)

By Matt Daniels

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In the conversation regarding education reform, school choice is often concocted as a divisive political issue. For Catholics, it is a matter of justice rooted in the dignity of the human person and the vocation of parents. The Catholic Church has consistently taught that parents are the primary educators of their children, and they must be free to choose the school — public, charter, religious, or homeschooling — that best serves their desires to form their children and to meet their children’s needs.

Nearly a century ago, Pope Pius XI wrote in *Divini Illius Magistri* (1929) that the family “holds directly from the Creator the mission and hence the right to educate the offspring” (para. 32). The state, he said, is called to support—not supplant—the role of parents. This principle has been reiterated in nearly every papal era since. Pope John Paul II, in *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), reinforced the point: “The rights of parents to choose an education in conformity with their religious faith must absolutely be granted” (para. 40).

The philosophy of Catholic education is what allows our schools to perform extraordinarily well as compared with other educational options. While college and career readiness are good and noble endeavors, necessary for a productive society, Catholic schools are inspired by a supernatural vision

which goes beyond by preparing good citizens for the world and good citizens for heaven, the next generation of saints! Catholic schools create strong, familial communities that recognize each student as made in the image of God.

From a boarder vantage point, people of goodwill can reason that a values-neutral school option, which has been used as a counterargument to the school choice movement, is itself an embrace of a certain set of values. The reality is that educators and administrators make decisions every day about how children should learn, what should be taught, and which behaviors and attitudes should be corrected and which should be affirmed. Ideological impartiality is a myth in an educational setting.

Families of modest means are too often trapped in the school assigned by their zip code, even if it contradicts their values. If a family believes truth is objective, they should have access to a school that teaches it. Without equitable funding, we deny the poor and working-class the fundamental freedom of directing their children's education—a freedom the wealthy take for granted.

To be clear, this is not a debate between public and private schools. Our communities thrive when we have a diverse educational marketplace, one that fosters innovation and measures success by more than just standardized test scores. From the earliest days of Ohio's expansion, this vision was embedded in our foundation. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 affirmed that faith, values, and education are inseparable: "Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged" (Art. 3).

Nor is the debate on education reform between political opponents. In a December 2023 RealClear Option Research poll, 76% of voters polled say they are more likely to vote for a candidate who supports school choice, including 77% of Democrats, 86% of Republicans, and 67% of Independents. It is clear that most parents, from an array of beliefs and backgrounds, value the benefits of their voices being part of the educational system.

Ohioans have long valued educational subsidiarity, where decisions are best made close to home. No decision is more local than parents choosing a school for their children at their own dining room table. Moreover, supporting parental choice does not undermine any educational institution; it affirms a fundamental truth: parents are their children's first and most important teachers, and they deserve the freedom and resources to fulfill that sacred role.

Matt Daniels is the Superintendent of Schools for the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.