

Good morning, everyone and thank you so much for being here today to celebrate school choice in Kentucky. I want to give an extra special shout out to the students of St. Joseph School in Bowling Green, Kentucky. My own kids go to St. Joe's, my nephew Caden is right over there. I'm just thrilled to have my own school represented here this morning, along with all of the rest of you students who made the journey to be here today and stand up for school choice.

When many people hear us ask for education choices for all families, they think we're criticizing our public schools. But that's not what we're doing. I wouldn't be standing here in front of you today as a graduate of public schools, as a career-long defender and supporter of public schools, if I thought school choice would mean that some students will wind up hurting because we want all families to have education options.

We have many outstanding district schools in Kentucky, filled with hard-working teachers and high-achieving students. My work as an education professor and my service on the Kentucky Board of Education regularly take me into terrific public schools where I see progress and success taking place. But one thing I've learned in my 20 years in education is that no school, no matter how good, can meet the needs of every single family. The needs of our students, just like the students here today, are just simply too diverse. We put an unfair burden on our great public school teachers by asking them to be all things to all students.

Almost all of you students here today attend schools of choice just like St. Joe's. Think about what that means for a minute. It means your parents are making big sacrifices so you can attend a very special school that your parents believe is the best fit for YOU. Your parents didn't choose your school because they don't like the other schools in your community. It's because you are precious to them in ways that makes the school they chose perfect for you. Maybe it's the faith-based environment they wanted for you. Or maybe you have a special learning need or skill or interest that is met best in your school. Whatever the reason, your parents made a choice for you.

I am very blessed to live in a community with many outstanding schools, both public and private. I live down the street from one of the most

highly-regarded public schools in the region. I would be proud for my children to attend it. But my wife and I made a different choice for our family, just like the parents of many of these students here today, not because there was something wrong with that school, but because the unique needs of our family – our values and goals, our own educational philosophy, and especially the unique needs and personalities of our children – meant that St. Joseph was the best choice for US. Not for every family or every child, but for US.

I say we are blessed to have many education options in our community, but we are doubly blessed because, even though it is a big sacrifice, my wife and I have the resources to choose a different school for our kids. But many, many families don't have the resources to make those kinds of choices for their own kids.

So we are here to celebrate school choice because EVERY family deserves the same kind of choice your I got to make for my family, the kind of choice your parents made for you - every family, regardless of how much money they make or the neighborhood where they live.

By letting families choose the school setting that can best fit their child's needs, we allow all schools to be more innovative, creative, and specialized in the kinds of learning experiences they offer students.

Nothing is quite as personal as who educates our children and how. Every child is so special and unique. Every family's needs are so different. But schooling as we know it has always – and sometimes for good reasons – tended to be a kind of “one size fits all” endeavor.

That's not the way the world works anymore, is it? One size does not fit all.

We customize our entertainment, don't we? Raise your hand if you have Netflix at your house, or Hulu or Sling or some other app that lets you choose what you want to watch and when you want to watch it. I know I sound like your parents, but students, when I was a kid we got three channels, maybe four on a good day. And you just had to watch whatever was on. My kids today don't even know what a commercial is.

Raise your hand if you or someone at your house has a Fit Bit? See, we now expect real-time, personal health data that we can use to set fitness goals and track our progress and improve our lives. We've rightly come to expect this kind of individualization.

Many of these forms of personalization just reflect the things we WANT to have. But education is even more important – and more personal – because it reflects something we MUST obtain to have the skills and virtues needed for success in life. Expecting a single school to deliver that kind of personalization to every family is unrealistic and unfair to educators.

So we say give every family a chance to choose from a wide variety of educational philosophies, curricula, and learning models – which is something that affluent families already get to do – increases the chances that every child can find the school that best fits his or her needs as well as foster innovation and creativity for teachers and school leaders.

We need to be sympathetic and compassionate to public school supporters who are afraid of school choice. Public schools are facing a horrible budget situation and unprecedented funding cuts. They rightly feel vulnerable and unappreciated. But the truth is, school choice is never a threat to great public schools, contrary to what you might hear. Research shows choice policies actually save taxpayers money and lead to better education outcomes for all students, regardless of the kinds of schools they attend. With smart policy and a strong commitment from state leaders, we can and should have a deep commitment to education in Kentucky, and that commitment can and should include giving every family an option among great, well-funded schools.

So we need great schools in Kentucky of all kinds from which every family gets to choose. We need great traditional public schools, charter schools, scholarship tax credits for private school students, and supports for homeschooling families to make sure that school choice is not just for the affluent or the lucky, but is the right of every Kentucky family. And we can provide those options while supporting and encouraging the excellent work of great district-run schools as well.

So let's stand up for ALL Kentucky kids, in ALL our schools, and finally bring education choice to the Commonwealth! Thank you!