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Arizona Has Made Great Education Accessible And Sustainable

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The Arizona Governor has led the way on education as of late. DOUG DUCEY

For decades our nation has struggled to deliver great education for all students, something that my husband Jeff and I can never accept. While this, the wealthiest and best nation on earth, has tripled spending on education since 1971, its vast system and schools just do not deliver for most children. Mothers, in particular,

who we hear from, are so distraught when their children cannot read, or develop behavioral problems due to poor instruction, leaving school alone inadequate. Most parents have little opportunity to create the same kind of personalized education for their children that more economically advantaged parents do.

Despite contributing billions to solving the crisis, supporting schools through teacher development programs, after school and mentoring programs and more, philanthropists have been frustrated for years at the slow pace of change. This struggle is what led us to establish the ***STOP Awards*** – standing for **Sustainable, Transformational, Outstanding and Permissionless Education** – to reward exceptional education providers who outperformed for underserved kids during Covid, and after.

When we watched the dismay in Chicago's schools – staying closed during childish and unprofessional union strikes, we expanded our initiative to include a \$5 million rescue fund to help the city's students get into schools of choice, who were open for learning and ready to serve them.

But today, those efforts pale in comparison to the latest and most groundbreaking new law in Arizona, which now allows 1.1 million public school parents to use their state tax dollars to choose the educational pathway they believe best meets the needs of their children. This program is an expansion of what is called the Empowerment Scholarship Account that has traditionally helped only particular categories of students, and been a remarkable success. For years, Arizona has had the [highest rate of academic growth](#) among American states. Before the pandemic, Arizona public-school students learned more per year than students in any other state, thanks in large part to life-saving choice programs and

the increased accountability, higher achievement and competition that they created throughout the state.

So imagine the increases in student achievement that will occur now that every parent will be able to use their approximately \$7,000 education account to buy the education they best want for their kids, regardless of what kind of school education or home-based learning program. Governor Doug Ducey and the Arizona legislature have in one bold action forged a path that exemplifies all of the STOP principles at once.

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Arizona is not the first to do something unprecedented. Florida in May 2021 passed a law allowing a majority of students in the state to access the public or private school of their choice, increasing individual scholarship amounts to 100 percent of the state's per pupil funding – estimated to be between \$6,000-\$7,000 – and eliminating many barriers to educational access by no longer requiring students to attend a public school prior to applying for a scholarship. Indiana's Choice Scholarship Program in April 2021 doubled its income limit from from 150% to 300% of the federal free and reduced lunch program, making approximately 80 percent of the state's families eligible.

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When lawmakers ensure that state education dollars follow students to schools they choose, parents no longer have to hope and pray. Education choice programs like these make education excellence **Sustainable**, the first letter in our STOP principles.

They also allow unprecedented freedom for parents to decide for themselves which school, and what kind of learning suits their child best, a **Transformational** change for education everywhere.

An **Outstanding** education is the promise our schools make to every student and their families, and that's exactly what kids deserve – to learn what they need to know at every level, from reading and writing to history and science, to be able to achieve their goals and be successful in the world.

Bringing all the STOP facets together, **Permissionless** embodies Arizona's choice climate, from the universal ability of families to choose, to school leaders' new lease on freedom to innovate, equitably.

Not only are we on the hunt for innovators and educators who are working in permissionless settings that become sustainable, transformational and outstanding, but we are also investing additional resources to incentivize more participation in Arizona this year. We have to reward policymakers who break from the status quo. To that end, it's our hope the **\$1 million STOP For Arizona Education Awards** inspires a new cadre of exceptional leaders to do more for Arizona students and upholds the state's model school choice status.

We cannot afford to wait any longer to make transformational changes permanent for every child. Kudos to Arizona for doing so. We challenge every state to follow suit and will be there to support you every step of the way.



Janine Yass

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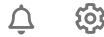
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