



CENTER FOR AN EDUCATED GEORGIA
at Georgia Family Council

NEWS RELEASE

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PARENTS OVERWHELMINGLY SATISFIED WITH GEORGIA SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOLARSHIP

Survey finds families who transfer special needs children to private school very happy with results; many unhappy with previous public school experience

ATLANTA – Parents with students using the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship are overwhelmingly satisfied with their child’s new private school, according to a survey released Wednesday by the Center for an Educated Georgia.

The report, titled “Education Choice Works: Survey Results of Families Receiving the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship,” also reveals that parents rate their child’s experience at a private school significantly higher than their previous public school experience.

“These survey results show that the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship is accomplishing its purpose of helping parents enroll their students in the school environment that best fits their unique needs,” said Ben Scafidi, director of the Center for an Educated Georgia and director of the Economics of Education Policy Center at Georgia College & State University.

“These scholarships are helping more than 1,500 special needs children in Georgia get the attention they need to learn in a safe, nurturing environment. And parents are satisfied with the results,” Scafidi said.

All families surveyed rated their child’s private school as a “7” or better, on a scale of 1 to 10. In fact, more than 83 percent rated their child’s private school as a “9” or a “10.”

Only 25.5 percent of families rated their former public school as a “7” or better. Public schools averaged a 4.4 in terms of satisfaction, while private schools averaged a 9.2.

The report also gives insight into why parents chose to transfer their child to a private school. Most families revealed they were unhappy with the Individualized Education



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Program (IEP) process and 40 percent were not happy with the services their child's public school provided. In addition, many families had concerns for the safety of their special needs child. Fifty-six percent reported that their child was often bothered or taunted at the public school because of his or her disability. Twenty-six percent of families reported that their child was physically assaulted at public school because of his or her disability.

The report also reveals that the majority of scholarship recipients come from middle and working class families. Most of them make out-of-pocket tuition payments because the scholarship does not cover all the private school costs.

"It is interesting that so many middle class families are making significant financial sacrifices to ensure that their special needs child is educated in an environment right for them," said David Pusey, education policy specialist at the Center for an Educated Georgia. "This report illustrates what proponents of school choice have said all along – that vouchers break down financial barriers to private education that have prevented working and middle class families from accessing better options for their kids."

Given these findings, the report suggests that, while successful in aiding predominantly middle and working class families in finding the right environment for their special needs student, the program could be made more accessible to more students with a few changes.

Additional state funds (such as equalization, transportation, etc.) and local education funds (property taxes) used to educate all children could be included in the scholarship amount. Federal officials could also take an interest in requiring that federal dollars devoted to these children with disabilities follow them to the school of their choice. If all state, local and federal education monies were included in the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship, it would significantly increase the voucher amount and make it more appealing for frustrated families interested in transferring their students to other schools – especially those who cannot afford to pay the difference between the current scholarship and current tuition costs.

More information about the report and the Center for an Educated Georgia is available at www.educatedgeorgia.org.

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