**Chapter 2 - Data and Information**

*Chapter Goals - After reading this chapter, you will be able to:*

* Define key terms and concepts associated with school choice and education advocacy
* Navigate the [EdChoice website](https://www.edchoice.org/) and locate critical information for your school choice campaign

Part I - Introduction

In the introduction to this curriculum, we said that no knowledge or experience was required to access this curriculum. All you need is an interest in using school choice to improve the education for kids in your community and in our country.

We are thus starting with a conversation around language. This chapter will go over some important terms in school choice and education advocacy. Even if you are an experienced education advocate, who has worked on school choice issues previously, we recommend reading this chapter - it could be a helpful review and provide some new perspective.

During this chapter, we will also point you to some important parts of the EdChoice website that provides critical information on school choice. We will walk you through the most important parts of the website so that you can use this website as a resource in your own advocacy campaign for school choice.

Part II - Definition and Types of School Choice

You might be starting with the question, “What is school choice?”. While a Google Search of the term will provide different answers and different opinions, we at EdChoice define **school choice** as **a term that represents the many ways students access their K-12 education**. Many students and families still choose their schools by buying a home in their desired district, but today’s parents engage in school choice in more diverse and ever-evolving ways.

*School choice allows public education funds to follow students to the schools or services that best fit their needs-whether that’s to a public school, private school, charter school, home school or any other learning environment that the student and family chooses.*

Check out [this video](https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/what-is-school-choice/) to get a visual of the idea of school choice.

There are a number of different kinds of school choices. You might have heard of charter schools or school vouchers, but there are many more types of school choice options for students and families.

The first category of school choice options that we will discuss will be **Private School Choice**. With private school choice, parents and families are opting to take their resources and enroll in private school.

With each different type of private school choice, resources are allocated to students and families in a different manner. Some of the private school choice options that we want to highlight include:

* **Education Savings Accounts** - ESAs allow parents to withdraw their children from public district or charter schools and receive a deposit of public funds into government-authorized savings accounts with restricted, but multiple, uses. Those funds—often distributed to families via debit card—can cover private school tuition and fees, online learning programs, private tutoring, community college costs, higher education expenses and other approved customized learning services and materials. Some ESAs, but not all, even allow students to use their funds to pay for a combination of public school courses and private services. Learn more about [Education Savings Accounts](https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/types-of-school-choice/education-savings-account/).
* **School Vouchers** - Vouchers give parents the freedom to choose a private school for their children, using all or part of the public funding set aside for their children’s education. Under such a program, funds typically expended by a school district would be allocated to a participating family in the form of a voucher to pay partial or full tuition for their child’s private school, including both religious and non-religious options. Learn more about [School Vouchers](https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/types-of-school-choice/what-are-school-vouchers-2/).
* **Tax Credit Education Savings Accounts** - Tax-credit ESAs allow taxpayers to receive full or partial tax credits when they donate to nonprofit organizations that fund and manage parent-directed K-12 education savings accounts. Families may use those funds to pay for multiple education-related expenses, including private school tuition and fees, online learning programs, private tutoring, community college costs, higher education expenses and other approved customized learning services and materials, and roll over unused funds from year to year to save for future educational expenses. Some tax-credit ESAs, but not all, even allow students to use their funds to pay for a combination of public school courses and private services. Learn more about [Tax Credit Education Savings Accounts](https://www.edchoice.org/what-is-a-tax-credit-education-savings-account/).
* **Tax Credit Scholarships** - Tax-credit scholarships allow taxpayers to receive full or partial tax credits when they donate to nonprofits that provide private school scholarships. Eligible taxpayers can include both individuals and businesses. In some states, scholarship-giving nonprofits also provide innovation grants to public schools and/or transportation assistance to students choosing alternative public schools. Learn more about [Tax Credit Scholarships](https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/types-of-school-choice/tax-credit-scholarship/).
* **Individual Tax Credits and Deductions** - Individual tax credits and deductions allow parents to receive state income tax relief for approved educational expenses, which can include private school tuition, books, supplies, computers, tutors and transportation. Learn more about Individual [Tax Credits and Deductions](https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/types-of-school-choice/how-do-k-12-education-tax-credits-deductions-work/).

In addition to the private school choice options that we highlighted above, we also wanted to go over a few different types of school choice:

* **Charter Schools**: Charter schools are independently run public schools exempt from many rules and regulations in exchange for increased accountability. Typically, if charters receive more applications than they have open seats, they must accept students based on a lottery. Families do not need to use ESAs, vouchers or tax-credit scholarships to pay to enroll their children in charter schools as these schools are already publicly funded. Learn more about [Charter Schools](https://www.publiccharters.org/).
* **Magnet Schools**: A magnet school is a public school that offers specialized curricula and programs not available in traditional neighborhood public schools. Magnets are designed to attract students with a common interest or skillset, and students must apply and be accepted to enroll. Families do not need to use ESAs, vouchers or tax-credit scholarships to pay to enroll their children in magnet schools as these schools are already publicly funded. Learn more about [Magnet Schools](https://magnet.edu/).
* **Inter/Intra-District Public Schools:** Sometimes referred to as open enrollment, inter- and intra-district choice laws allow families to choose traditional public schools other than the ones the government assigned based on their ZIP Codes. Intra-district choice allows families to choose from among more than one public school within their assigned district. Inter-district choice allows families to send their children to any traditional public school in their resident state or a defined region. Typically, these open enrollment options still allow public schools to give enrollment preference to students within their assigned district lines.
* **Homeschooling**: Homeschooling is an alternative form of education for children outside of public or private schools, typically within their own homes. Homeschooling is regulated differently from state to state. Learn more about [Homeschooling](https://hslda.org/).
* **Hybrid Homeschooling:** Hybrid homeschooling is an educational model where students split their time between homeschooling and a traditional classroom setting. Learn more about [Hybrid Homeschooling](https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikemcshane/2018/05/21/is-hybrid-homeschooling-the-wave-of-the-future/?sh=633c353b6bf7).
* **Online Learning:** Online learning allows students to work with their curriculum and teachers over the internet—in combination with, or in place of, traditional classroom learning. Online schools can be public or private. Families may also use some educational choice options, such as ESAs and vouchers, to pay for online and virtual schooling.
* **Microschooling**: Microschooling is the reimagining of the one-room schoolhouse, where class sizes are usually fewer than 15 students of varying ages, and the schedule and curriculum is tailored to fit the needs of each class. This model of schooling can operate in either public, private or charter schools or separately on its own. Learn more about [Microschooling](https://www.heritage.org/education/report/lets-get-small-microschools-pandemic-pods-and-the-future-education-america).
* **Town Tuitioning:** Generally speaking, town tuitioning allows students who live in towns that don’t have district public schools to receive their per-pupil education tax dollars to pay tuition at a neighboring town’s public school or a private school of their choice—sometimes even across state lines for families who live close to state borders. This type of school choice functions much like a school voucher, and only a handful of rural states in the northeast use it.
* **Personalized Learning & Learning Pods:** Personalized learning is unique to every child. As an example, some students might use ESA or course choice programs to mix courses from public schools with privately tutored classes at home, online courses, special education therapies and a work-study internship. Some families have formed pods where small groups of children are taught a tailored curriculum at home by parents, tutors or hired teachers. For some, learning pods can be used to supplement their public school education, too. The possibilities are endless, especially as new innovations in learning continue to emerge.

[Here](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1f-ZPZ-SIqjaRqEq_E1xxvAgn0DEc2cpT6g1QCYhoOoM/edit?usp=sharing) is a full list of glossary terms.

Part III - School Choice Landscapes

Education, like many public policy issues in America, is primarily a local and state issue. Because of this, the school choice landscape looks a little different in each state and community in this country.

**Activity**: Using [EdChoice’s School Choice Dashboard](https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice-in-america-dashboard-scia/), explore the School Choice Landscape in your state. Select your state on the map then toggle between the different program types. You should be able to find information like the number of students participating in that choice option and the average amount of funding awarded to a family (if it is a scholarship program). If your state doesn’t have any school choice options, pick a nearby state or another state that you are interested in.

Another great introductory resource is the EdChoice [Fast Facts](https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/fast-facts/) resource. This will provide you some quick and accessible information about different school choice options and the EdChoice organization.

**Tips and Tricks**: These first two resources have led us to our first tip and trick of the curriculum. **Make sure you are staying current on education news and trends in your community**. This could start with using the Dashboard above to get a general sense of what the school choice landscape looks like in your community. You should continue to get updates on the developing education news in your community. You can start with your local paper. If the paper has an education reporter, they could be a great person to follow on Twitter. Oftentimes, even more localized papers, community newsletters, and blogs will cover education issues - make sure you start following these publications.

As you start understanding who the big local players are in education, we recommend following them on Twitter. While this isn’t the same quality of journalism as a local newspaper, it can still be helpful to understand the opinions of those making decisions in your community. They also might repost important articles that you can then review. Staying current on education news in your community will make you feel prepared entering conversations with others. Regardless if you are speaking to other parents or to a member of the school board, you will demonstrate your commitment and interest to the issue of education with your strong background knowledge.

Part IV - Remaining Questions

So far, we’ve defined school choice, gone over some of the common types of school choice, and had you research school choice in your community. It’s very likely that you still have some questions about school choice - and that’s totally fine!

Check out the [EdChoice School Choice FAQ](https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/faqs/) to potentially get some of your remaining questions answered.

Even the most experienced education advocates don’t have all the answers. It can be helpful to write your list of questions down. You can add to this list as you learn more about school choice and education advocacy.

In [Chapter 4](https://docs.google.com/document/d/12KioWOra0HA2LNiDnd7SDF51t4uZS3LjA-nkFoewkGM/edit), we will discuss building relationships with different stakeholders. Depending on what stakeholder you are meeting, you can get some of your questions answered. If the stakeholder is an expert in a particular type of school choice policy, getting your questions answered is a great way to form a relationship with someone.

Now that we’ve defined some important education terms and you’ve done some thinking about school choice in your community, we will start discussing education advocacy. We will begin our discussion around goal setting. In the next chapter, we will talk about the importance of goal setting and give you a step-by-step guide for setting goals.

*In this chapter, we started by defining school choice and then discussed some common types of school choice. We highly recommend researching school choice in your state and exploring some of the links for the types of school choice that you are most interested in.*