

## **Winning Edge #49 – School Choice Messaging: One Statistic, One Story, One Solution**

This is Trevor Bragdon with Commonwealth Partners' *The Winning Edge*: Tips to help conservatives persuade and win.



In [Winning Edge #47](#), we looked at how to build a message around education reform using a simple formula: One statistic. One story. One solution.

That works well for a general audience. But how do you tweak that message when you're speaking to different parts of a state?

For example, how do you talk about school choice in a rural, conservative county versus a more moderate, suburban county versus a city?

### **Start by asking: What emotion are we trying to create?**

#### **In suburban areas:**

You want to highlight that while there are many good schools, students are unique, and a one-size-fits-all system doesn't work for every family.

#### **In rural areas:**

The approach is different. People often have deep pride in their local schools because they attended, their kids went there, and often even their parents went there. But they also want more options. They know that pride and quality aren't always the same.

#### **In urban areas:**

Some schools are dramatically underperforming, and parents are desperate for a way out. Here, you can talk about how providing options can lift families out of dangerous and failing schools, and put them on a path to success. You can also add urgency: these students face the toughest conditions and need help now.

#### **Across all areas:**

You can point out that many states have passed education savings accounts and school choice programs in the past few years and they're working.

### **Step One: Use a Strong Statistic**

Pennsylvania is incredibly generous in how it funds education. We rank in the top 10 nationally in per-pupil spending at nearly \$22,000 per student.

But here's the problem: test scores keep going down.

### **Step Two: Make It a Story**

Once you've shared the stat, you need to make it stick with a story. Even when you don't have a specific example, tell the details like a story to make it more memorable and help listeners empathize with parents and kids stuck in failing schools.

### **Step Three: Offer a Clear Solution**

The goal is to help voters shift their thinking — away from trying to fix the broken system and toward funding students directly.

The good news? Pennsylvania already has a solution on the table with Lifeline Scholarships.

In **suburban areas** (Moderate/Suburban):

*Pennsylvania spends nearly \$22,000 per student, more than almost every other state. But even with all that spending, too many students are stuck in a system that does not fit their needs. Families deserve real choices, not just one-size-fits-all options.*

*We have tried every system-wide fix: more funding, more programs, more staff. And still, outcomes are slipping. That is why so many families are choosing something different. Parents talk about how their child just wasn't doing well, or how they were falling behind and no one seemed to notice. So they turned to charter schools, homeschooling, or private schools. These are not political decisions. They're families trying to find what works, because the system is not working for their kids.*

*Lifeline Scholarships give families options when a school is not the right fit. That might be another public school, a private school, a charter, or something else that better meets their child's needs.*

*This is about giving every student the chance to succeed and learn in a school that fits them, not trapping them in a system based on their ZIP code.*

In **rural areas** (Conservative/Rural):

*We keep spending more on public schools, now almost \$22,000 per student, more than 40 other states. But outcomes are getting worse. Many parents have no other option, even when the system is not working for their kids.*

*We have great rural schools in some areas with excellent teachers and strong outcomes. But in other places, the only option is a school where students are falling further behind. There are districts in Pennsylvania where not a single student is reading at grade level.*

*Think about what it is like to be a parent in these communities. You want what every parent wants: a good education for your child. But if you cannot afford to move, you are stuck watching your child struggle year after year, trying everything you can to find a better, safer option. Because of where you live, your child has only one choice.*

*Lifeline Scholarships give families in these situations a way out, without taking anything away from strong local schools. Many rural schools are doing a great job, and that should continue. But not every student in Pennsylvania is that fortunate.*

*Many other states have passed similar plans and have given parents trapped in broken systems the freedom to choose a better path, whether that is a nearby public school, a charter school, a private school, or another option that works.*

*We should pass Lifeline Scholarships and trust parents to decide what is best for their kids and give every child a shot at a better future no matter where they live.*

In **urban areas** (City Schools):

*We are spending more than ever, \$22,000 per student, and still getting the same results from the same system. Unsafe and failing schools are leaving our kids behind.*

*Meanwhile, parents want out of these schools, and charter schools have waitlists with thousands of students. Families are desperate for scholarships to private and parochial schools that deliver better outcomes. Their future should not depend on a waitlist or a lottery.*

*Every child deserves access to a great school. That is why we must give families the ability to send their child to a safe, high-performing school, whether that is public, private, charter, or something else.*

*For too many students trapped in an unsafe school, this is not just about opportunity. It is about survival.*

*Lifeline Scholarships would give every child in a failing school the ability to choose an education that fits their needs.*

*With so many students struggling in violent, dangerous, and failing schools, we must act now. Let's pass Lifeline Scholarships and give parents and students immediate relief and the ability to choose a safe school for their kids.*

## **The Bottom Line**

When you're crafting a message, keep it simple but make it resonate with your specific audience. Use one statistic that frames the problem. Tell it like a story to make it real. And use one solution that makes it actionable. Pennsylvania students shouldn't be trapped in a failing system.