

Break poverty cycle for low-income students, families

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We all know that children living in poverty are less likely do well in school. We also know that a good education is a ticket out of poverty. It is a vicious cycle and one that can be broken by helping children from poor families get a good education.

Having spent most of my adult life in the field of education and being familiar with current research, I can tell you that poverty and lack of success in school are closely related statistically. Also, from personal and professional experience, I can tell you that a good education is a ticket out of poverty.

The "Equal Opportunity Scholarship Act" would help break this cycle of children in poverty dropping out of school to have more children in poverty. My bill would give individuals and companies a tax break to provide scholarships to low-income students. Those funds, which are donated to nonprofits, would then provide scholarships for low-income children so they could attend a school of their choice.

To be eligible for the program, students must qualify for the federal reduced-price lunch program, attend a New Mexico public school for the semester before first receiving a scholarship and reside in New Mexico while receiving a scholarship under the act.

If this bill passes, it would provide a win-win situation for all of its participants. Whether it is because they are stuck in low-performing schools or they have difficult family situations, low-income students face many special challenges that children from more financially stable families do not face. Low-income parents who are dissatisfied with their children's school have no choice but to send their children to their neighborhood school. These scholarships would give low-income parents an opportunity to send their children to a different public school or a private school and to provide them the same opportunities that other New Mexico children have.

The tax credits provided in the bill give individuals and companies a tax break.

In addition, these scholarships would not cost the state anything because the amount the state would forgo in tax breaks would be made up by a requirement in the bill that school districts give back all or part of the district's state funding for students who leave their schools.

This plan is working in three surrounding states and has been found constitutional by the United States Supreme Court.

My bill, Senate Bill 88, would allow the parents of students who are likely to drop out to have a choice -- a choice that benefits the student, his or her family and state taxpayers.

Pete Campos is an educator who represents District 8 in the New Mexico Senate.

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