



## **The Impact of Advocacy Funding on the School Choice Debate**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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### *Executive Summary*

A contentious movement for school choice has advanced to the forefront of education debates in the past few decades. Broadly speaking, the movement promises to expand education alternatives in both private and public schools to allow parents to choose the type of schooling they believe appropriate for their children. Prominent forms of school choice include vouchers, charter schools, home schooling, interdistrict choice, and intradistrict choice. Each type of school choice has its own set of advocates and opponents, but also shares some of the same key players.

This policy brief examines some of the major funding sources of this movement and their potential impact on policy. While some data—such as contributions from individuals and local unions—are not included because of the lack of access to information, this snapshot of major grants and contributors is revealing. Funding sources for both advocates and opposing forces are examined. Data were drawn from several sources, including individual websites of foundations and other organizations; informational databases of foundations and of grant recipients; and foundations' tax filings, which list their dispersals. This policy brief also explores strategies funders use to reach the media, policy makers, and the public in their efforts to promote or impede the school choice movement.

Key findings include the following:

- *A small number of funders provides the majority of the funding for the school choice debate.* In the past two decades, more than half of the total amount granted to think tanks promoting school choice came from only three foundations. In 2005, among funds provided for activities relative to K-12 education, 84% of the amount funded for school choice came from only two foundations.
- *There are more school choice supporters than opponents making generous donations.* At least six foundations have made notable contributions supporting school choice. In comparison, only two key funders have supported oppositional efforts.
- *The funding of school choice supporters is higher than the funding of those against school choice.* In 2005, for example, the top two funders supporting school choice efforts provided \$87,782,260 more than the top two funders opposing school choice, or 21 times as much.

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Therefore, it is recommended that:

- Policy makers, media, and the public become aware of relationships between donors and recipients—of who receives money from whom, and for what purposes.
- Policy analysts and other stakeholders be proactive in educating their general audiences about research quality issues, including potential sources of bias and the importance of peer review—or its absence.