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Parents should have say in where kids go to school in Missouri, expert says

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JEFFERSON CITY • Rich or poor, parents should have a choice in where their child goes to school.

At least, that's what James Shuls, the Show-Me Institute's Education Policy director, believes.

And that choice would contribute to prosperity in Missouri, Shuls said today at a presentation in the Capitol building.

"When (a state) has school choice programs, it leads to better outcome for students," Shuls said. "With a better education, more students graduate high school ... more go to college or trade school. This leads to better outcomes for our state."

Shuls' presentation was part of National School Choice Week, which began Sunday and runs until Saturday. The week highlights a variety of school choice options for parents, such as public schools, private schools, online learning and homeschooling, according to the week's website.

Across the country, about 5,500 events like Shuls' presentation are planned for this week.

Shuls said the problem with schools in Missouri and other states is that some students are stuck in failing schools, with teachers who are not meeting their needs.

School choice would eliminate this problem.

"School choice really is the pathway to prosperity, the way we improve our education system," he said.

One way Shuls suggests creating more choice for parents is through a voucher system. Through this system, the state would pay an established amount for a child to attend a private school.

This idea, if implemented, could be taken to court because of issues regarding separation of church and state. However, Shuls said a ruling has never been made in Missouri on a matter such as this.

Another way to create school choice is through a state-sponsored education savings account. Through this account, parents could receive money to pay for things such as tutoring, books or private school education, he said.

Rachel Payton, Americans for Prosperity's Missouri state policy director, said the main focus of this week is the importance of parents having a choice in their child's education.

"Education is one of the key planks (to creating prosperity for Missouri)," Payton said.

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