

## A Liberty Alternative to the PPIC Act

by John Cobin, Ph.D. for *The Times Examiner*  
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In my last column, I argued that the pragmatic, confused, and unprincipled “Put Parents in Charge Act” (PPIC) promoted by South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford and *South Carolinians for Responsible Government* ought to be rejected by true conservatives and libertarians. Instead of truly helping parents of home or private schooled children, PPIC opens a door for expanded government regulation of home and private education. It aims to aid and abet our chief social enemy (the “public” school), and it would also foster wayward proactive public policies of redistribution (the collaborator of socialism).

PPIC bestows neither more parental control nor betterment of parental choice. Parents already have academic hegemony and can choose from public, private, Christian, or home school options for their children. The big benefit of PPIC is the tax credit—and certainly we all favor reducing extortion by lowering taxes. There is also a possible ancillary benefit of PPIC (according to its opponents), which would occur if PPIC succeeds in draining money from public education or further eroding public opinion about the public school system. (Both of these outcomes, if veritable, would be laudable and desirable.) Nevertheless, just how willing are we to trade liberty for tax breaks and a few potshots at the enemy? Is greater government regulation over our children’s education worth the money and gore?

The hard Left has failed to defeat us home and private school enthusiasts in the courts. Yet it seems that the Left’s next best strategy is to win indirectly by regulating our private endeavors. Tempting neoconservatives to support bills like PPIC is part of that strategy. Although PPIC provides a tantalizing lure, it would gradually undermine the educational freedom movement by opening the door for increased state regulation.

Think about the money issue from another perspective. How much would you be willing to pay, for instance, to guarantee that the state will not meddle with your home or Christian school? Is it worth \$1,000 per year to you? I hope so! For that reason, just think of property taxes as a bribe to ensure your family’s liberty. Yes, such taxes are extortion, but at least you are left alone by buying-off state agents. Perhaps you don’t like paying-off the Mafia, but doing so is far better than having your knee caps broken.

If we are going to support a public policy change, why not back a better alternative? Let’s rally around a public policy that will *truly* put parents in charge of their children’s education. Consider the following six key objectives that form the basis for a liberty-enhancing policy alternative to PPIC. I would call it the “South Carolina Educational Freedom Act” (SCEFA). SCEFA proposes to:

- Provide a flat credit (*not* a voucher) equal to 80% of the real property taxes due of custodial parents or guardians who send their children to private schools or who homeschool, simply by demonstrating that their kids are in such a school situation full time;
- Provide the same flat credit equal to 80% of the real property taxes due for other relatives of such children (e.g., a grandparent, an uncle, etc.) if they can show receipts for expenses paid (on a dollar-for-dollar basis) for at least one child’s private or home school education;
- Provide a refundable credit against state income taxes on a per capita basis (\$2,000 per child), up to \$10,000 per parent, regardless of annual earnings. The credit is refundable up to a maximum of \$500 per year and the remainder (unused portion of the credit) may be applied against future taxes;
- Decree that the state will in no way attempt to regulate the curriculum, methods, hours of instruction, or the credentialing of any homeschooling parent—or establish any testing requirement for home or private schooled kids—by declaring such actions to be against the public interest;
- Exempt home and private schooled children from truancy legislation, completely severing any tie between such students and the public school, and forcing the public school to compete for students on the basis of its performance in teaching children basic skills and knowledge;
- Provide a non-refundable credit to any individual, business, trust, foundation, or other entity that contributes to a merit-based or need-based scholarship fund to encourage home or private schooling. The credit would be equal to 50% of the amount contributed, up to a maximum of \$10 mil-

lion, and could be used to reduce both real property taxes due and/or state income taxes due. Credits may be carried forward.

The lost tax revenue due to these credits would be commensurate with the expected saving in public school expenditures. Given the average cost of educating a student in the South Carolina public school system (\$9,260 annually), the credits might even produce a windfall for budget-constrained South Carolina. Nevertheless, SCEFA is not primarily intended to help improve the public school or to bolster fiscal relief. Its primary purposes are to protect and affirm parental control over the education of their children, and to alleviate the egregious tax burden shackling parents who use alternatives to the public school system. And what true conservative or libertarian can argue with these purposes? Therefore, instead of supporting tainted policy like PPIC, let's rally around a new proposal like SCEFA. Let's join forces to enhance liberty rather than bring more government regulation over our lives.