

Parents for Choice in Education say that the Carson Smith Special Needs Scholarship Program Works

By Mel Anderson / Parents for Choice in Education

Dated: Sep 10, 2008

Parents for Choice in Education claims that the Woodland Hills incident proves that the Carson Smith Scholarship program holds private schools accountable through mechanisms of free market principles.

Woodland Hills, a private school previously dedicated to serving students with Asperger's syndrome and other special needs, has come under scrutiny due to allegations of grave mismanagement. Several recipients of the Carson Smith Scholarship attended the school last year. The Carson Smith Special Needs Scholarship provides limited tuition assistance to students that have a disability and gives parents the opportunity to choose an educational setting that they believe will best fit their child's specific needs.

The results of a mandatory audit released in 2008 by the Office of the Utah Legislative Auditor General found that 100% of the parents involved with the Carson Smith Scholarship program think that the program should continue to exist for eligible students and 91% felt that their child's academic performance increased while at a private school. The Carson Smith Scholarship for Students with Special Needs was signed into law in 2005. It has served 700 children. Forty-six private schools within 13 school districts are currently eligible to participate in the program. http://www.le.state.ut.us/audit/08_02rpt.pdf

Travis Rawlings, the Utah State Office of Education Specialist over the program, states, "Fifty-one Carson Smith Scholarship recipients were enrolled at Woodland Hills for the 2007-2008 school year. By the end of the last term, just thirty-three of these students were still enrolled. Only four scholarship recipients returned this fall and three of these students are planning to transfer soon."

Judi Clark, director of Parents for Choice in Education, remarked, "Parents of these students recognized problems and the majority had already transferred their children before the school's mismanagement was even exposed. From this unfortunate situation, comes proof that parent empowerment really works. The Carson Smith Special Needs Scholarship empowers parents by providing them with the flexibility to act on a situation quickly and without unnecessary bureaucratic red tape. When parents determined that this particular school was no longer meeting their child's needs, they were able to end payments and chose a school that would. The Woodland Hills situation is an isolated incident that the parents were able to assess and resolve on their own, demonstrating that market principles work. Simply put, if you aren't serving the needs of your customers, you will lose them."

For real stories about how the Carson Smith Scholarship has positively affected the lives of special needs children, contact Ms. Mel Anderson at (801) 532-1448, email mel@choiceineducation.org or visit www.ChoiceInEducation.org.

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Parents for Choice in Education is a grassroots organization dedicated to ensuring that every child has equal access to a quality education by empowering parents, increasing choice, and promoting innovative solutions to Utah's educational challenges.

Category Non Profit

Tags parents for choice, carson smith, disabled, utah, scholarship, Education, auditor general, office of

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