

Agudath Israel Celebrates National School Choice Week

Some came for the free yellow scarves. Others came to highlight their school. In many states they came out to thank legislators for supporting existing school choice programs and in some states they gathered to ask lawmakers to enact new school choice legislation. By the end of the week, more than 32,000 events were scheduled to take place to celebrate National School Choice Week (NSCW). Agudath Israel and the school communities it represents participated in many of the NSCW events across the country.

“National School Choice Week (January 26-Feb 1, 2018) is a positive and enthusiastic celebration of all educational options,” said Rabbi A. D. Motzen Agudath Israel’s national director of state relations, “including private, religious education. We have co-sponsored many NSCW events over the years and encouraged Jewish schools and community members to participate in events organized by our coalition partners.”

In advance of NSCW, Agudath Israel’s mid-Atlantic director Rabbi Ariel Sadwin attended an event held in the US Capitol which featured guest appearances by US Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and several members of Congress.



A few days later, Rabbi Sadwin, as part of the Pennsylvania chapter of the Council for American Private Education, presented the Speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives Mike Turzai with the School Choice Champion of the Year award. Speaker Turzai, a longtime supporter of nonpublic schools and leader on school choice legislation, was recognized for his contributions to the children of the Commonwealth throughout his career in the Legislature.



To watch a Fox news report of the presentation click [here](#)

In Jersey City at a School Choice Special Needs and Education Technology Conference on Wednesday morning, Mrs. Leah Steinberg, director of Agudath Israel of America's Project LEARN, moderated a discussion on special education opportunities for nonpublic school students in New Jersey. The panelists included Brenda Considine and Barbara De Marco. The event, hosted by the New Jersey School Choice and Education Reform Alliance, was attended by private school leaders, parents, advocates, and educators.

Mrs. Steinberg highlighted how, in New York, children with

special needs have access to the full range of IEP services in nonsectarian and religious schools and the government pays for their placements in those schools. In New Jersey, however, nonsectarian schools often have a full menu of services, but religious schools don't. As a first step towards the goal of school choice, Mrs. Steinberg recommended that New Jersey should address this grave injustice and help students with special needs access the necessary support services in all schools, including religious institutions.



Rabbi Simcha Snaid of Louisville was one of several religious leaders to address the 1000 attendees on the steps of the statehouse in Kentucky. The enthusiastic crowd made it clear that they wanted legislators to pass a proposed scholarship tax credit program which Agudath Israel proudly supports.



In Colorado, Agudath Israel's chairman Rabbi Yossi Kaplan, along with several community leaders, used the opportunity of a different event held at the statehouse to meet with legislators and educate them about NSCW.



Like Kentucky and Colorado, Texas is one of a few states without a private scholarship program, but organizers of a gala dinner in Dallas honored several school choice legislative champions who tried to pass a scholarship bill last year. The awardees included Governor Greg Abbott, Lt. Governor Dan Patrick, Senator Larry Taylor, Rep. Ron Simmons, Senator Don Huffines and others. Several parents and staff of Torah Day School of Dallas attended the event.



Nevada enacted a scholarship tax credit program in 2015 and it has since generated hundreds of thousands of dollars for students attending Yeshiva Day School of Las Vegas and other Jewish schools. Rabbi Mendy Levine of YDLV, who has served as the local point person in the Jewish community on this issue, took a group of middle school girls to the annual NSCW event in Las Vegas. The leading proponent of school choice in the Legislature, Senator Scott Hammond, later commented that the YDLV students “are lucky to have Rabbi Levine fighting for them!”



Indiana already has the largest voucher programs in the country, but the Jewish community in South Bend doesn't take it for granted. At least once a year, day school parents and staff visit the statehouse to say thank you to the legislators and coalition partners who turned that dream into a reality and this year was no exception.



National School Choice Week may be ending shortly, but the celebration and promotion of school choice continues. Agudath Israel has been at the forefront of the school choice battle for decades and has fought in statehouses, courthouses, and the media. In the last decade alone, nearly 40 new school choice programs have been passed in legislatures across the country giving educational options to hundreds of thousands of students, including families choosing Jewish schools. To find out more about school choice programs proposed or already existing in your state, and what you can do to advance this issue contact Agudath Israel at staterelations@agudathisrael.com.