

Statement of Diana Lopez
“The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program: A Pioneer for School Choice Programs Nationwide”
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Hello. I am Diana Yvette Lopez and I attended Saint Anthony’s School of Milwaukee, another Choice school, from the third grade all the way up to my high school graduation. My whole life has been a series of causes and effects and I know this very well. Since I was a little girl, I always thought about what kind of consequences would come from my actions. For example, if I wanted to watch Toy Story a couple more times, I needed to clean my room. If I wanted to help the teacher hand back papers, I needed to be the first to finish the math worksheet.

With this in mind, I knew that in order to do well in life and do what I wanted to do when I “grew up”, I needed to do well in school. I knew that my dream of becoming an archeologist in Egypt, inspired by the movie The Mummy, would only be done if I planned it out meticulously. So, at the age of about nine, I started googling universities that specialized in Egyptology and I knew that from then on I would have work as hard as I could to be the best in middle school and high school.

But which middle school would prepare me the best for my future? Before going to Saint Anthony’s, I went to a nearby public school. Despite being less than ten minutes apart from each other, it felt like a completely different world. At public school, I had always questioned why Christmas had to be called Xmas and why I couldn’t sing Christmas songs. It felt weird that when I was in my community, a largely Hispanic community, everything seemed to revolve around going to Church but, when I went to school, it was nonexistent. When I asked about, I was gently told to let it go. I was frustrated. Then, one day, my grandma took me to pick up my uncle, only four years older than me, from his school: St. Anthony’s. There, I saw a multitude of kids my age dressed in fancy uniforms and a bunch of artwork on the wall, like the prep schools I had seen in all the movies. On the overhead as I walked in, there were prayers and announcements blasting and it just clicked. I called my mom from the school office while my grandma was with my uncle and I told her to switch my schools. In my mind, I knew that if I went to St. Anthony’s, I would get to dress up in the uniforms. By dressing in the business-like uniforms they had, I would be better prepared for when I had to interview for colleges because they would know I was a professional.

Middle school was great. I got to learn about so many things and this time I could ask as many questions about any religion, not just Catholicism, as I wanted. However, I never knew how valuable going to a private school with the Choice program was until I started looking for high schools. I had my sights on a school in Bay View here in Milwaukee. It was perfect: they taught French, much needed by archeologists, and they had computer programming classes, something I thought was cool. I wanted to go so badly but the problem was the \$12,000 tuition a year. I did everything I could: I applied for scholarships and got them all, I started saving my money, and I started promising my parents I would pay them back my tuition once I was rich and famous. It just was not meant to be for me. My mom lost her job and my little brother was born. My dad was about to lose his job and we were all living paycheck to paycheck. One day they sat me down and told me the reality and, in my mind, my whole future just crumbled. After I cried for days, I looked at alternatives. In the end, I chose to go to Saint Anthony High

School and, because they had the Choice program, I was able to go at no cost. In the end, I am happy I graduated from there because not only did I receive a valuable and wholesome education, but it let my parents have some breathing and not panic over paying tuition.

Again, actions have consequences. Since I went to Saint Anthony's, I was able to talk about religion freely. Many think that going to a Catholic schools means being oppressed and kept thinking "inside the box". However, that is not the case. Naturally curious, I was able to ask my religion teacher about the differences between the major religions of the world and I became very interested in how the Christian and Muslim ideals interacted with each other. Suddenly, my dream of becoming an Egyptologist dissipated and I became interested in Global Affairs. What if I had never been able to ask about religion? Would I have ever discovered my passion? Also, because my parents didn't have to pay tuition for me to go to Saint Anthony's, I was able to go to a summer program my junior year that revolved around International Relations. I fell in love and to this day and I haven't wavered. During the summer program, there was a representative from Yale who gave a speech and I got in contact with her. Never once did I think about going to an Ivy League school. However, after talking to her, I was convinced I would try as hard as I could to get in. A few months ago, after weeks of grueling applications, I discovered that I got into Yale and every other school I applied to. Now I am going to Yale next fall to study Global Affairs and Arabic. But, the point is, what if I had never gone to the summer program and met the woman from Yale because my parents had to pay for tuition?

Going to a Choice school has opened up so much for me. I was able to go to the March for Life in Washington D.C. this past winter and I got to see firsthand a political movement. I have met so many people of the Church who have lived all over the world and taught me how to speak phrases in different languages and who have, time after time, reinforced in me the idea of curiosity. My teachers care about me and they are incredibly knowledgeable in their fields. I hear horror stories about neighboring schools having fights every day and teachers that don't care about their students. I was never afraid of that happening at Saint Anthony's. I was able to get the same quality education as someone of a higher socioeconomic standing without burdening my parents and sacrificing their peace of mind. So to those who are thinking about signing your kids up for a Choice school, think about the consequences of your actions. You are sending your child to a school where they don't have to worry about negligent teachers or fights every day, where they can ask the questions they want, and where you can rest assured that they are receiving a quality education. To the School Choice Program, I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to ask my questions, for giving low income families like my own a chance to receive a peace of mind, and for being that one step in the road towards my future. I hope to make you proud. Thank you all very much.