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School Choice Models and Public School Reform

Event to feature former District of Columbia Mayor Anthony Williams and a Roundtable Discussion among Education Leaders

BOSTON – Former District of Columbia Mayor Anthony Williams, a nationally recognized leader in education reform, will address a forum on “School Choice Models and Public School Reform,” taking place on Wednesday, October 20th. The event is sponsored by Pioneer Institute, the Black Alliance for Educational Options, Democrats for Education Reform, and Harvard’s Program on Education Policy and Governance.

Mayor Williams implement D.C.’s successful Opportunity Scholarship Program, a popular initiative which enabled low-income students to attend private and parochial schools but which lost its funding earlier this year. In a further blow to education reform efforts, D.C. recently saw the electoral defeat of Williams’ successor and fellow reformer, Adrian Fenty, which prompted the departure of schools chancellor and leading choice advocate, Michelle Rhee. Despite these setbacks for expanded choice, the popularity of the critically acclaimed film, *Waiting for ‘Superman’*, indicates renewed interest in alternatives for families trapped in failing public schools.

“All parents in Massachusetts want to be able to have a say in where and how their children are educated,” says Jim Stergios, executive director of Pioneer Institute. “Some are wealthy and can move or pay for high-priced private schools. Others depend on charter schools, inter-district choice, and vocational-technical schools. The fact is we need to make sure all parents have that freedom—and have that say in the formation of their children.”

Pioneer Board member and former Massachusetts Lt. Governor Kerry Healey will introduce Williams, whose keynote address will be followed by a presentation on the Rhode Island tax credit program by Harvard Professor Martin West and Pioneer’s Director of the Center for School Reform, Jamie Gass. Paul Peterson, Director of Harvard’s Program on Education Policy and Governance, will then moderate a roundtable discussion on school choice. The panel will present a diverse set of views and will include

- Seth Andrew, Superintendent and Founder of Democracy Prep Public Schools
- Paul Dakin, Superintendent of Revere Public Schools
- Tom Gosnell, President of the Massachusetts chapter of the American Federation of Teachers, and
- Alan Safran, Executive Director of MATCH Charter Public School.

At the event, Pioneer Institute will release its latest white paper, “Education Tax Credits: A Review of the Rhode Island Program and Assessment of Possibilities in Massachusetts” (http://www.pioneerinstitute.org/pdf/101019_ri_tax_credits.pdf), which continues the school

choice conversation. The paper evaluates a New England model for the expansion of educational opportunities on behalf of largely poor and urban students through the use of tax benefits for corporations. It also analyzes the legal and political barriers to the successful adoption of such a program in Massachusetts.



[Pioneer Institute](#) is an independent, non-partisan, privately funded research organization that seeks to change the intellectual climate in the Commonwealth by supporting scholarship that tests market solutions against the conventional wisdom of more governmental involvement in Massachusetts public policy issues.