

Hello, my name is Nathan Smith and I am here today because I want you to know the impact the EdChoice program has made in my family's life. My wife and I live on the east side of Columbus and have two children. Eliza is 8 and Micah is 11. Both of them attend Tree of Life Christian School and Micah has been a part of the edchoice program since kindergarten.

Let me tell you a little bit about Tree of Life. I believe the school has a very rigorous academic program and quality education, but that is not why I choose to send my kids there. At Tree of Life kids learn things that are not taught in textbooks and are nearly impossible to find in media or politics. They learn to love and respect everyone regardless of who they are. At Tree of Life, we don't simply do lip service, we practice what we preach. I knew from day one at our school there was something different. At our school, the positive attitudes are infectious, the compassion is abundant, and acceptance is freely given to all.

Another reason I am happy to send my kids to Tree of Life is the school's diversity. Too many schools today are lacking diversity. I haven't always felt this way. In fact, I usually get annoyed at constantly hearing every issue framed in racial or ethnic terms. But after spending time at our school I came to realize another benefit I never would have thought of. My son has grown up with kids from every racial background. His best friend Samuel is African American and neither of them think of each other's skin color as defining the other person. To Micah, he's simply "my best friend Samuel" and to Samuel it's just "my best friend Micah".

This is a benefit I did not have growing up and neither did my parents. To some people Martin Luther King's vision of a color blind society is a fantasy but to me it's real because I see it everyday in my kids.

Finally, to illustrate why Tree of Life means so much to us simply look to the teachers that work there. Every year the school raises money to help defray the cost of tuition for those in need. Do you know who some of the biggest contributors are? The teachers themselves. The same teachers that make a fraction of what their public counterparts do, also help to support their place of employment. When is the last time one of us decided to donate some of our paycheck to help our employer? Probably never. Nobody is motivated to donate money to profitable businesses, why would we? We donate our hard earned money to a good cause, something we believe in. I believe in my school.

Without EdChoice we never would have been able to afford sending my son to Tree of Life and without it many hundreds of other kids will never benefit the same way we have.