

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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## REVIEW & OUTLOOK

# ‘I Don’t Believe That Anymore’

The Children’s Scholarship Fund has helped 166,000 poor kids in 20 years.

By *The Editorial Board*

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It is possible to argue that the greatest moral issue in America—and there are many—is the generations-long failure to give an adequate education to children in the country’s poorest neighborhoods. Failure begets failure in many urban school systems, and we at least have arrived at a shared admission of what happens. It is called falling behind.

Two wealthy Americans— John Walton of the Walmart fortune and New York investor Ted Forstmann —decided enough was enough. Each contributed \$50 million to create a new idea called the Children’s Scholarship Fund. The CSF is currently celebrating its 20th anniversary, and it is indeed an occasion for celebration. The Fund has raised \$741 million and provided scholarships to 166,000 students.



PHOTO: ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

This didn’t happen merely because two rich guys wanted to do something nice with their wealth. Both had thought a lot about the seemingly intractable problem of underachieving inner-city kids. On the day they announced the first scholarship awards, Forstmann said: “Some insist that if we would just keep doing more of what we have been doing—spend more money, hire more teachers and reduce class sizes—we will get different results. I don’t believe that anymore.”

Foreign Edition Podcast

### Italy's Populist Leap



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In the 20 years since, many others have come to the same conclusion. No longer willing to wait for the public schools to reform, they have used their individual wealth to underwrite alternatives.

The most well-known is the public charter-school system, though the teachers unions have fought relentlessly to thwart competition from charter schools. Walton and Forstmann chose to pull away altogether from the public model.

The Children’s Scholarship Fund subsidizes tuition at private schools or parochial schools run by the Catholic Church. It requires parents to contribute a few thousand dollars to the tuition cost, believing that commitment provides an incentive for active engagement in their children’s school life.

Over the years a remarkable network of schools has emerged across the country built around the basic idea of parent-driven performance. Examples include the Cristo Rey network, Partnership Schools in New York City, Milwaukee’s Seton Catholic Schools, and Independence Mission Schools in Philadelphia.