



Written by [John Stossel](#) on September 23, 2021

## Charity That Changes Lives

Government-run schools fail kids.

Teachers unions and education bureaucrats say, “We need more money!”

But America already spends a fortune on public schools.

My town, New York City, spends \$28,000 per student — half-a-million dollars per classroom! Think about what you could do with that money: Hire five teachers? Pay for private tutors?

Where does the \$28,000 go? No one really knows. When governments run things, money vanishes into bureaucracy. NYC spends \$3 million per year on “executive superintendents” and \$10 million on consultants.

Some charter schools offer better educations for less. But NYC politicians limit the number of charter schools. As a result, 48,000 kids wait on waitlists.

Fortunately, some charities have stepped in to help.

My video this week features Student Sponsor Partners, or SSP, a nonprofit that helps low-income students go to Catholic schools.

Jeniffer Gutierrez, a parent in the Bronx, was ecstatic to get SSP’s acceptance letter. “I cried so hard when I received that letter because I knew it was an opportunity for my son.... High schools in the Bronx are violent. There’s no discipline. There’s no education.”

Her son Tyler didn’t feel safe in public school. “One of my best friends was shot and killed right next to me,” he recalls.

Many Catholic schools, even though they spend *much* less per student than government-run schools, do better. SSP sent Tyler to Cardinal Hayes High School, where, says Gutierrez, teachers helped her son “excel in life.”

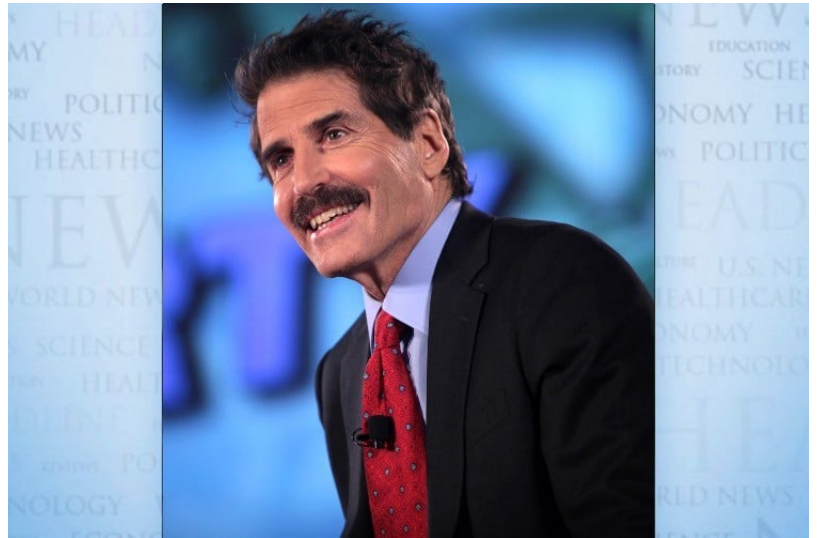
Tyler now attends St. John’s University on scholarship. He and thousands of other SSP students are on a path to success.

That’s why I support SSP. I’m not Catholic, but I’ve paid Catholic school tuition for dozens of kids and personally mentored five.

That *mentoring* makes SSP different. SSP assigns an adult to every student. Often these relationships continue after students graduate.

Jorge Aguilar says his mentor “planted seeds in my brain that I could do big things in life.” Aguilar then became the first person in his family to go to college. Now he’s a doctor.

“SSP helped me break the chain of poverty,” he says.



Gage Skidmore/Wikimedia Commons



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Eighty-five percent of SSP kids graduate high school, twice as many as their public school peers. Most are accepted by colleges.

All this happened because decades ago, philanthropist Peter Flanigan wanted to give parents an alternative to government schools. He hoped that would help at-risk teenagers escape poverty.

He started SSP. One of the first kids he helped was Debra Vizzi.

“I had been homeless,” she tells me. “I left an abusive foster home and was sort of hopping around from shelter to shelter.”

She met Flanigan at a soup kitchen. He told her he’d pay for her to attend Cathedral High School.

“I was suspicious, especially as a kid on the street, but he was legit,” Vizzi laughs. “He paid \$350 for me to go to one of the best high schools in New York City.”

Flannigan’s mentorship gave Vizzi more than a better education. “He helped me trust men, believe in people, helped me have a future. Even helped me become a mother later ... something that I hadn’t had.”

Vizzi is now executive director of SSP.

“If you would have told me when I was 12 years old, I would run this organization, I would have said you were crazy.”

This year, SSP has a thousand students attending different private high schools.

Want to help? SSP seeks more people who will mentor a student and more donors who’ll help pay for it. You can get more information at [sspny.org](http://sspny.org).

Maybe you’ll join us and help more kids escape bad government-run schools.

*John Stossel is author of Give Me a Break: How I Exposed Hucksters, Cheats, and Scam Artists and Became the Scourge of the Liberal Media. For other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit [www.creators.com](http://www.creators.com).*

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