

THE SCHOOL CHOICE ISSUE: DOING GOOD AND DOING WELL

By

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SCHOOL CHOICE IS NOT A GAMBLE

- CONTINUATION OF THE STATUS QUO (A GOLD-PLATED DISASTER) IS A MUCH MORE COSTLY CERTAINTY THAN ANY DOWNSIDE OF COMPETITION, TRIED AND TRUE.
- **Education Emergency**: Proficiency rates (NAEP) for Texas children are stuck in the 20s!?!?!?!?! ~40% Below Basic!!!! How can that not prompt outrage and then overhaul?!?!?!

We're Not Going to Politically Create the Menu of Schooling Options Texas Schoolchildren Need!

- "Fairness Imperative" Undermines Specialization
- Unintended Consequences
- The Lawmaking Process
- Resistance to Change
- Debilitating Uniformity
- Information and Incentive Deficiencies

The Political Process – Mostly With Best of Intentions - Produced the Emergency

THE ISSUES, COMMENTARY, AND Q&A

Public School – Private School Comparisons

- Largely Irrelevant: the Imperative is to Greatly Improve the Performance of the Entire System
- Private: Slightly Better Test Scores, and Cheaper
 - Key Private School Advantages Largely Unmeasurable
 - ‘Adjustments’ Typically Eliminate Benefits of Choice
- Q&A: Typical possible dialogue with media or voters.
 - Q: ‘Private schools aren’t much better than public schools and they have little space available for new students, so choice is a distraction. We NEED to improve public schools.’
 - A: School choice is the way to improve the entire school system, public and private. Efforts to significantly improve the system without school choice have failed; predictably so since choice is necessary to fundamentally change the reasons for failure. If public schools can’t make themselves choiceworthy, private schools will expand and diversify to meet the demand.

No Child Left Behind – The Concept, not the Federal Law.

- Need Specialization, which requires Choice
 - You Can’t Assign Children to Specialized Schools
 - Seems ‘Unfair’ (Politically Infeasible) to Provide Some Services in Some Attendance Areas but not Others.

- Once Size Does Not Fit All - Absence of Specialization is a Big Reason for Imagined ADHD and Resulting 'Medication' of Bored or Overwhelmed Children.
 - Attention Deficit, Hyperactivity Disorder is Virtually Unheard of Outside of the USA; we consume ~85% of the world's Ritalin.
 - We Need Choice to Engage Diverse Children
- A Menu with some outstanding choices for every Child

VS.

- Every school must serve every child: major Mistake.
- Achievement 'Gaps' are a Mis-Characterization of the Core Problems; Best is Mostly Still Pretty Bad
 - Loose Middle Class – Suburban Vote if You Just Portray this as a Low Income – Inner City Disaster.
 - It's a System-Wide Emergency; Need to Maximize the Rate of Improvement
 - Proper Goal is Maximizing Each Child's Opportunity.
- Q&A: Typical possible dialogue with media or voters.
 - Q: What are going to do to close the Achievement Gap?
 - A: The best way to address the achievement gap is to maximize each child's educational opportunities. School choice will gradually create a diverse menu of schooling options that address the huge differences in how children learn and what interests them. Since economically disadvantaged children suffer the most in the current system, they should gain the most from access to a menu of competing specialized options.

Equity and Anti-Discrimination

- 100% Child-Based Funding is the Shortest, Clearest Route to Funding Equity; High Level of Opportunity for Every Child
- Contrary to Stratification, Segregation, Balkanization, and Creaming Claims, A Level Playing Field between Specialized Public and Private Schools of Choice is the Best Integration Tool; already in Limited Use in De-Segregation Plans.
- No Evidence to Support 'Creaming' Claim
 - The Leavers are Mostly the Struggling Students
 - Public Schools 'Respond'
 - Perform Better After They Lose Strugglers
 - Media Attention and Funding Pressure - Try Harder
 - Q: Aren't you worried that loss of the best students will leave the remaining public school users even worse off?
 - A: The struggling students leave. So-called 'creaming' does not occur. Loss of struggling, often disruptive students to more appropriate settings helps the students left behind.
- Actually No Evidence of Increased Stratification (Separation by Income, Race, Ethnicity, Social Class, etc.)
 - Wrong Comparison is Typical; Hard to Increase the Stratification of the Current System.
 - Q: Won't school choice undermine desegregation efforts?
 - A: School choice, even with severe limitations, is already used to integrate. With fewer limitations, it will be even more effective.

- Studies Claiming Otherwise Looked at Very Minimal Programs
 - Choice Among Relatively Uniform Alternatives Should and Does Yield ‘Stratification’, Though not More than we Already Have.
 - Choice Sorts People by Academic Interest and Learning Style, which works against stratification.

Q: Won’t Choice drain money from Public Schools?

- A: The taxes levied for education belongs to the children.
 - "Public Education" is a commitment to universal access, not the funding and decision-making processes embodied in the public school system.
 - We need to focus on academic results, and not worry about the percentage of teachers that are government employees.
- Public Schools Need to be Choiceworthy; if not chosen on a Level Playing Field, then children are better served when educators are not gov’t employees.
- Universal Choice is Necessary in Case Public Schools cannot make themselves Anyone’s Best Available Value.
- May Only Drain to the Extent that One Size Cannot Fit all; no producer of anything makes the best product for everyone.

Big Difference Between LIMITED RIVALRY and GENUINE COMPETITION (requires universal choice and level field).

- Don’t Ban or Cap Private Co-Payment
 - Co-Payment Bans Reduce School Funding

- Co-Payment Bans are Price Control; Something With a Terrible History
 - Hurts Some Children Without Helping Any
 - Stifles Innovation
 - Some Services will be Unavailable
 - Reduces Parental Involvement
- Q: Doesn't co-payment subsidize the wealthy?
- A: No, they bear most of the tax burden, and there aren't enough truly wealthy people to justify seriously undermining education with price controls. We need the benefits of the price system that makes our economy great.
- Equity Benefits: Poorest Would Gain the Most

Tax Credits vs. Enrollment-Based Direct Payment: Key Issues

- Who will Regulate Private Schools; Likely Degree of New Private School Regulation?
- Size: Non-Discrimination Principle Precludes Non-Refundable Tax Credits

A Key ECI function is Outreach and Extensive Documentation (Website) for these Kinds of Issue Briefs. Comment on the Substance and the Concept, PLEASE!!! If you believe we are worthy, ECI needs every kind of support (Ideas, \$\$, critique).

Key Perspective: Okay, so the public does not understand school choice; they're afraid of change they don't understand. We NEED **LEADERSHIP**; some real effort to change public opinion, rather than just 'represent' misinformed people? Few representatives LEAD! That hurts!! ECI exists to get more officials to champion CRITICAL issues. ***School choice is the most critical long-term issue!!!!!!!!!!*** It means LEADERS will do well by doing good!!