

Ask the Right Questions!

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Failure to focus on the core K-12 reform issues is very frustrating. Reform of our schooling practices is the top domestic policy issue of every state, and deservedly so. Because of persistent failure to achieve meaningful reform, we remain the 'Nation at Risk' described by the 1983 bipartisan national commission on the state of K-12 education. Failure to focus on a key reform issue is a major reason for that persistent failure.

With regard to the critical school choice issue, the central question is often said to be whether we want to spend public funds on private school tuition. The frequency with which that occurs is no excuse for failure to grasp that public funds belong to the public, not the public school system or any other school system. We tax everyone so that we can subsidize schooling to benefit all children. The true central question is whether it should remain public policy to discriminate against the taxpayers that believe that non-public schools are better for their children. That argument for school choice is no slap against the public school system. Our children are so diverse in terms of what works to engage them in serious learning that no set of schooling policies, public or private, could possibly work acceptably for even a significant majority of the children, much less all of them. According to the latest appalling NAEP test scores (see my Oct 23 piece – [JOE, insert link here](#)), we desperately need a diverse menu of competing schools of choice to address that diversity. Denial of that is leaving a lot of children without the education they need, and may ultimately cost us all the great country we have built on freedom, limited government, and free enterprise.

By the way, our policy of discriminating against taxpayers that believe non-public schools would work better for their children exaggerates the church-state issue. That policy causes church-run schools to dominate the private schooling options. In our current system, churches run most private schools because church-run schools can do two things that will convince a significant number of families to pay for private schools that have a zero tuition public school substitute. Church-run schools offer something unavailable from public schools (religion), and they have the resources to keep the tuition below the full cost so that more families are willing and able to pay tuition in addition to the taxes that subsidize only the taxpayers that prefer public schools. A true voucher program would (and has in Sweden) greatly reduce church-run schools' share of non-public schools.