

# WHY TEACHERS SHOULD BE FOR REAL SCHOOL CHOICE

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***By real school choice I mean a 'system' in which there are no attendance areas. Each school is managed by its principal.*** The politics of reform would probably keep taxpayer support of K-12 education at least at current levels. In a 'system' with real school choice, the allocation of tax dollars to schools would occur through tax credits or vouchers issued to parents.

The elimination of the administrative overhead of school district control of school policies, and because some parents will want premium education services costing more than their vouchers would be worth, more money will be available to pay teachers. Since schools must compete for the best teachers to compete for students, it is very likely that a large share of those additional funds will go into teacher salaries.

Salaries are higher when there are more competitors for teachers, currently school districts. With real choice, more numerous individual schools would compete for teachers. Parent/customer-funded schools would also behave more competitively than tax-funded school districts.

To be competitive, schools will also have to give their teachers much more autonomy to use their personal strengths, and to improve through innovation. Paychecks will reflect teachers' achievements in the classroom. That would be in stark contrast to the status quo in which the political process regulates textbook content, teaching methods, and the curriculum, often through insulting 'teacher-proof' materials, and where paychecks reflect only credentials, and time served.

Also as a result of the change in their employers from a few districts to numerous individual schools, teachers will enjoy greater mobility, campus choice, and less vulnerability to administrative decisions that are arbitrary or personal. Now, with teachers hired by school districts, the district chooses which school to assign them to. They can end up in a very undesirable school. It can take years of begging for a transfer to get a better assignment, including an escape from disagreeable superiors, or just to work at a school that is closer to their homes.

Real school choice would let teachers specialize in what they are best at, and like the most, and it would produce a better match between students' and teachers' unique skills, aspirations, and requirements. With the elimination of attendance areas and political micro-management of content and method, schools will specialize in several significant ways, including teaching style, use of technology, governance structure, and subject

emphasis, and parents will be free to choose among the diverse offerings. That would mean an end to much of the conflict between over-extended teachers and unhappy, trapped parents. By better matching them with tasks they like the most, and are best trained for, it would also increase teachers' professional satisfaction (students achieve more), and reduce their stress level. The status quo has produced a teacher burnout epidemic, and widespread dissatisfaction is well-documented.

When teachers begin to see that real choice is in their self-interest and break ranks with their union leadership, real choice will be implemented much more quickly. The benefits that school choice programs can produce for teachers, as well as children, are diminished to the extent that restrictions limit parental freedom and entrepreneurial initiative. For their own sake, and for our children, teachers should work for real school choice. For everyone's sake, our leaders must begin making this case directly to teachers.