



With DeVos' school choice model, everyone gets the education they want

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Spurred by President Trump's selection of Betsy DeVos to lead the Education Department, the New York Times informed its readers that the Christian Right desires "extreme measures." With Trump on their side, "gutting public education will be just the beginning." Politico warned of "an advocate of private Christian education helming the largest public-education agency in the country."

There is no denying the truth: A living, breathing Christian will likely hold a position of power in the federal government, and school choice will help her "advance God's Kingdom," as she once told a Christian audience more than a decade ago.

What gets lost in the hysteria, however, is that these secular critics have come close to identifying the most important reason to support school choice: Charter schools, voucher programs, and scholarship tax credits empower not just Christians, but all parents to educate their children in accordance with their own values, whatever they may be. Parents with legitimate disagreements on the purpose of education can all win by sending their children to schools of their own preference.

This is necessary because, as the Cato Institute's Jason Bedrick explains, public schools are not truly "public" or "common." While technically welcoming of any student whose parents can afford to live in its district, no public school is "intended to serve Orthodox Jews or others like them who have a different vision of education." With one system of public education for all, the government cannot help but cater to the educational views of some parents, typically those with political power, while eschewing others desires. Even though everyone pays, public education is not designed for everyone.

School choice ends this zero-sum game. It indeed helps Christians afford Christian education, confirming the commentariat's fears. But choice also empowers all sorts of parents, secular or religious, who couldn't otherwise afford a school that emphasizes, for example, the Montessori

approach, computer programming, the "three Rs," the arts, open-concept learning, or anything else.

At its core, school choice is an egalitarian means of resolving disputes about the purpose of education. It allows for different children to be educated according to different understandings.

By aligning incentives properly, better educational results are achievable. With choice, schools must compete for the favor of parents spending their own money on their own children. No longer held hostage to their local school districts, middle- and low-income parents can hold their children's schools accountable just like wealthier parents. It's no wonder that multiple meta-analyses of random-assignment studies have shown that school choice programs improve their students' reading and math scores.

Many worry, however, about the effect of school choice on public schools, or on national cohesion. After all, might school choice divide and weaken where public schools unite and strengthen?

Answering this question exposes the many myths of the public school.