



Michelle Rhee — Supporter of ‘Heavily Regulated’ School Choice — as Education Secretary?

Dr. Susan Berry

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In a 2012 [interview](#) with *Education Week*, Rhee, a Democrat who heads political education lobbying group StudentsFirst, said she supports targeted school voucher programs that provide taxpayer funds to low-income students in poor schools. Her view of school choice, however, is one that would bring greater regulation to private and charter schools.

School vouchers – which are a transfer of taxpayer funds to private and charter schools – have been shown to bring about the highest level of regulation in private and charter schools that agree to accept them.

“It has to be a heavily regulated industry,” she said. “I believe in accountability across the board.”

Rhee, who says she is a “believer in public schools,” continued:

If you’re going to be having a publicly funded voucher program, then kids have to be taking standardized tests. We have to be measuring whether kids are academically better off in this private school with this voucher than they would be going to their failing neighborhood school. If they’re not, they shouldn’t get the voucher. ... I’m about choice only if it results in better outcomes and opportunities for kids.

The *Federalist*’s Joy Pullmann [wrote](#) that Rhee is “highly skeptical of school choice” in that parental choice is not Rhee’s goal.

Pullmann continued:

She strongly supports charter schools, a good but highly managed government alternative to traditional public schools, and [prominently reversed her opposition to vouchers in 2013](#). Yet she still supports a highly regulated version of vouchers driven by applying the tests to them that public schools use, which undercuts their very premise. We don’t want to use vouchers to mold

private schools into the public schools whose failure justifies vouchers in the first place, but to provide diversity of parent choice in education. That requires light regulation.

Rhee dismisses the Constitution's basic principle that says all parents – regardless of income level – have the right and responsibility to choose their children's education.

“I don't think it makes sense to subsidize families who are already sending their kids to private schools, anyway,” she said. “I'm not a voucher proponent in the way that some people would want me to be. ... This is not about choice for choice's sake.”

“When people talk about universal vouchers, first of all, I've never seen an economic model that actually made sense and laid that out in [a] way that's sustainable,” Rhee said. “I haven't seen any kind of model that makes economic sense. ... My support for vouchers is around a specific group of kids.”

“There are a lot of people out there who sort of believe, the free market, let the free market reign, the market will correct itself—give every kid a backpack with their money in it and let them choose wherever they want to go,” she added. “I don't believe in that model at all.”

Rhee's desire for choice only for low-income students is consistent with her support for Common Core, the highly unpopular education program that ultimately hoped to close the achievement gap between white and minority students. As it turned out, Common Core did nothing of the sort, and some have even said it simply “dumbed down” standards for all students.

A recent *Education Next* poll shows that while overall support for school choice is high in the United States, support for the use of vouchers to access choice programs has declined.

“Program design matters,” Lindsey Burke, education fellow at Heritage Foundation, told Breitbart News. “The poll results found a drop in support for school vouchers, which could reflect recent experiences in states that have heavily regulated their school voucher programs, leading, paradoxically – as the regulations were promulgated in the name of accountability – to lower participation among high quality private schools.”

In a 2010 study at the Cato Institute, Andrew Coulson found that voucher programs are more likely to “suffocate the very markets to which they aim to expand access” because state funds—which invariably invite state regulation—are directly transferred, in the form of vouchers, to parents to spend in an alternate education setting.

Jason Bedrick, policy analyst with the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, also wrote, “Once again, the most popular type of school choice program – scholarship tax credits (STCs) has remained high and steady” in the 2016 *EdNext* survey. He continued:

With the addition of South Dakota earlier this year, 17 states now have 21 STC programs. Last year, more than 230,000 students used tax-credit scholarships to attend the private school of their choice, compared to about 150,000 students who used school vouchers and about 6,000 who used education savings accounts (ESAs). Their high level of public support makes them the most politically viable form of school choice, and because they are privately (rather than publicly)

funded, they have a perfect record of being upheld as constitutional, making them the most constitutionally viable form of school choice yet devised as well.

Rhee's support for "heavy regulation," however, is contrary to what Trump promised to parents while on the campaign trail and throughout the country.

In an open letter and petition to Trump, Parents Against Common Core, an organization of parents who have fought both big business and elite politicians in their own states and in Congress, is urging the President-elect to choose an education secretary who will ultimately want to be fired:

[We recommend] appointment of a Secretary of Education who is committed to reducing, if not eliminating, the federal footprint in education; who understands the Constitutional role of the federal DOE is non-existent; who will work to eliminate any incentives or requirements supporting Common Core; who understands that Title 1 portability will impose Common Core and other federal strings on private and home schools, completely undermining your key promise of local control; and who is a parents right advocate.

The parents' recommendations for the post of U.S. secretary of education include Dr. Williamson (Bill) Evers; Dr. Larry Arnn, president of Hillsdale College; Dr. Sandra Stotsky, standards writer and professor emerita, University of Arkansas; Dr. Peg Luksik, Pennsylvania constitutionalist and co-founder of the Center for American Heritage; and Dr. William Jaynes, professor of education at California State University, Long Beach.