

Tribune Chronicle

Opposition to school vouchers a masquerade

July 2, 2023

There has been much handwringing in recent months regarding vouchers and educational choice. School officials lobbied against such policies because they would, ostensibly, harm schools. However, the harm is not to students but rather unionized employees.

Vouchers allow students to take state money from current schools and attend another public, charter, parochial or private one.

Local revenue remains with the home district so per pupil spending at aforementioned school escalates, since more money is spent on fewer kids, but total expenditures decline. The quandary is that reductions in enrollment warrant staffing cuts. A common misconception perpetrated by educational bureaucracy, elected officials and media is inflated spending leads to better schools. The Ohio Department of Education website indicates Lakeview, Boardman, Steubenville and Canfield achieve better marks than Howland on state report cards with less money spent. Teacher's union often insists poverty must be eradicated to improve student performance. U.S. Census Bureau statistics show median annual household income (2021) in Howland was nearly \$75,000. Steubenville's is \$39,400.

The notion is further rebutted when analyzing a larger area. Economist Thomas Sowell revealed in his 2020 book "*Charter Schools and Their Enemies*" New York City public schools spend more than \$20,000 per student, while charter schools (non-unionized), some of which share the same building, spend under \$15,000. Charter pupils tested proficient on state exams at several times the rate of their counterparts, despite living in the same impoverished neighborhoods. These students outperformed those in public schools whose household incomes were 300 to 500 percent larger.

Many charter schools admit kids via lottery and thus cannot be accused of cherry-picking the best. The threat that charter schools pose is underscored by facts that they only educate about 10 percent of the nation's students, and yet there is emphatic opposition to vouchers.

According to 2012 Cato Institute research, the number of public school employees nationwide has doubled since 1970, while enrollment has increased just 8.5 percent. Nearly 33 percent are non-classroom personnel (principals, bus drivers, nurses, psychologists, etc.) If any private school or company competing for consumer dollars had such a disparity of inefficiency, it would likely cease to exist.

However, government has power to force taxes, and a big chunk of politicians fund campaigns with dues contributed by those workers. Efficiency and results are code words for union layoffs.

Similar glaring deficiencies are evident when taking an international perspective. The U.S. has the highest per pupil spending in the world (\$15,000), but results are not congruent. The Program for International Student Assessment tested 15 year olds in 2018. U.S. ranked 11th in science and 30th in math, out of 79 countries. Most nations forbid public school teachers from unionizing, and therefore have no incentive to hire unnecessary employees. How many children have been confined to dissatisfying schools, and what economic opportunities have been forsaken because of zeal to placate the educational system?