



## Remembering the Life and Legacy of Education Reform Scholar Andrew Coulson

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One of the leading intellects in educational choice, Cato Institute Senior Fellow Andrew Coulson, passed away this week after battling brain cancer for the past 15 months. In the 1990s, Coulson left a promising career in computer engineering to devote his time and talents to making the case for educational freedom — first with his groundbreaking book *Market Education: The Unknown History*, followed by senior fellow positions in educational policy at both the Mackinac Center for Public Policy and the Cato Institute, where he led the Center for Educational Freedom.

Two of Coulson's colleagues at the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, Neal McCluskey and Jason Bedrick, have posted a memorial to Coulson's rigorous policy work and personal exuberance:

Andrew was not in the reform vanguard just in laying out the historical, logical, and empirical case for truly free-market education, but also in determining how, practically, to do that. Andrew was perhaps the earliest and clearest voice calling for tax-credit funded choice in preference to publicly funded voucher programs, which are themselves infinitely preferable to being assigned to a school based simply on your home address. Tax credit programs, he argued, would be more attractive—except to those who would lard regulations onto schools—by breaking the connection between state money and school choices. People would choose whether to donate to scholarships, and even to which organizations or schools such donations would go, rather than have the state hand out funds from all taxpayers.

Today, the wisdom of this choice mechanism has been borne out, with tax-credit-based programs starting later than vouchers, but now exceeding total enrollment by about 53,000 students. And enrollment through private educational choice programs of all types—vouchers, tax credits, and education savings accounts—has ballooned since 1999, when *Market Education* was published, from just a few thousand children to nearly 400,000.

That is tremendous progress. But as Andrew would be the first to proclaim, it is not nearly enough. Indeed, with an eye to pushing choice much further, before he died Andrew was putting the finishing touches on a documentary series vividly and humorously illustrating why we need educational freedom, and the great benefits even limited freedom in education has produced. We hope Andrew's labor of love will be appearing on television sets across the country in the coming months.

Andrew Coulson is no longer with us. Thankfully, his ideas remain, and they will always illuminate the pathway forward.

McCluskey also spoke about Coulson's life and work in [the Feb. 8 edition of the Cato Institute Daily Podcast](#). Other tributes to Coulson's life and work have been published by the [Mackinac Center](#), [Reason Online](#), and [the blog of education reform professor Jay P. Greene](#).

Coulson is survived by his wife Kay, who has [posted a public thread to her husband's Facebook wall](#) devoted to memories from his friends and family. Countless children have brighter futures today because Coulson spent so many years arguing for their educational freedom, and building a practical case for systemic reform.