



This activist wants all parents to have educational freedom for their kids

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Seventeen years ago, Corey DeAngelis made a decision in middle school that changed his life.

He applied to Communications Arts High School, a magnet high school in San Antonio, Texas, got in, and his experience there turned him into a national advocate for parents demanding a choice in their children's education.

"Everyone wanted to be there. Everybody wanted to learn," recalled 30-year-old DeAngelis of his magnet school.

His magnet happened to share a campus with the local traditional public school. When he took a math class in the other school's building, the difference was stark.

"Just walking through the halls, you could see the difference immediately," he told me. "The classrooms were disorderly. The culture incentivized bad behavior. Being in a gang and doing drugs was the cool thing to do."

Meanwhile, the hallway at his magnet school boasted a map plotting where graduates were heading to college.

"I just saw the night-and-day difference in my four years of high school, and that really opened my mind to the concept of school choice."

When he went on to study economics at the University of Texas at San Antonio, everything clicked.

"The lightbulb went off in my head," he told me. "Thinking from the standpoint of an economist, the school system is one of the most messed up monopolistic systems we have in American society, and a lot of our problems stem from that."

DeAngelis realized the common sense of a school choice system, through which parents are given the taxpayer funds allocated to their child — an average of \$15,424 per student annually — to spend on whatever form of education best suits their family. By severing the arbitrary relationship between zip code and school quality, school choice programs foster free market competition in education. They also tangibly benefit students, increasing graduation rates by 21 percent and reducing rates of crime.

“Funding should follow the decision of a family, wherever that leads,” DeAngelis said. “The money doesn’t belong to government schools in the first place. Education funding is for educating children, not for propping up any institution.”

After earning his PhD in education policy from the University of Arkansas in 2018, DeAngelis became an activist, rigorously researching the benefits of school choice and advocating for legislative change.

“I would like other people to have the educational options that work for them because that had an enormous, positive impact on my life trajectory,” he told me.

DeAngelis serves as National Director of Research at the American Federation for Children. He is also an adjunct scholar at the Cato Institute, a senior fellow at the Reason Foundation, and Executive Director at the Educational Freedom Institute — all by the age of 30. He has also authored 32 peer reviewed studies, made hundreds of speaking engagements and television appearances, and was named to Forbes’ 30 Under 30 list this year.

Meanwhile, his efforts are making waves. He said he is contacted regularly by parents across the nation thanking him for opening their eyes to their educational options, and he even hears from students who credit school choice programs with saving their lives.

State by state, progress is being made towards broadening school choice. Florida and Arizona have historically led the way on educational freedom, and just this year, West Virginia passed the most expansive education savings account program in the country.

However, the tristate area is lagging behind. “New York, New Jersey and Connecticut are way behind the curve when it comes to educational freedom,” Corey told me, “Over 30 states now have some form of private school choice, but New York, New Jersey and Connecticut families are currently missing out on those opportunities.”

Recently, his activism gained even more steam during the COVID-19 pandemic as parents across the country saw, in their own living rooms, exactly how public schools were failing their kids.

After nearly two years of mask mandates and Zoom school, parents are now demanding a say in how their children are taught. This year alone, 18 states have enacted or expanded school option programs. Meanwhile, the proportion of households that say they are homeschooling their kids rose from 5.4 percent in spring of 2020 to 11.1 percent that fall.

“2021 is the year of school choice,” said DeAngelis, who currently does not have kids of his own. “There’s a huge uptick of momentum for securing parental rights and educational freedom. COVID didn’t break the public school system, but it has shined a spotlight on the main problem with K-12 education, which happens to be the massive power imbalance between the government school monopoly and individual families.”

Despite all his successes, DeAngelis won’t stop his fight until every student and parent nationwide has control over their educational destiny.

“If you can fix the education system in our country, you will fix a lot of our other problems, many of which are the result of inadequate education,” he said.

“We’re moving in the right direction, but there’s a long way to go when it comes to unleashing educational freedom for every child.”