

THE JOURNAL RECORD

Free Market Friday: Give parents a choice

By Michael C. Carnuccio January 31, 2013

Free markets do the best job of delivering quality products at affordable prices while maintaining customer satisfaction. As National School Choice Week wraps up – a major thank you to Gov. Mary Fallin for proclaiming it School Choice Week in Oklahoma, too – now is a good time to be reminded that freedom especially works in education.

Cato Institute scholar Andrew J. Coulson, who spoke in 2011 at an Oklahoma symposium on digital learning, is the author of the important book *Market Education: The Unknown History*. And after writing that book “comparing the performance of alternative school systems over the past 2,000 years,” he writes, “I surveyed the modern econometric literature on the subject for the *Journal of School Choice*. What I found is that the freest, most market-like education systems consistently outperform the sorts of state monopolies” preferred by the education establishment.

This should not surprise us. Readers of this publication, of all people, should expect free markets to outperform state monopolies – especially those that are heavily unionized.

Intellectually honest researchers have noted with alarm the disturbing trends in public school spending (up) and student achievement (flat). Indeed, as Coulson wrote in 2009 in *Investor’s Business Daily*, public education’s productivity collapse has been truly jaw-dropping.

“Once upon a time,” he wrote, “America could afford to sustain a parasitic school monopoly, fecklessly throwing billions more dollars at it decade after decade despite its failure to improve. That time has passed. ... The perpetuation of that monopoly puts our economic future at unacceptable risk.”

Coulson illustrates the point by noting that if music players had suffered the same cost/performance trends as public education, “we’d all still be lugging around cassette boom boxes, but they’d now cost almost \$1,800.”

With 39 different voucher, tax credit, tax deduction, or education savings account programs operating across America – the number growing every year – educational freedom is the way of the future.

A few years ago, while in Pennsylvania to study the success of tax credit scholarships, I heard now-state Sen. Jabar Shumate, D-Tulsa, make the keen observation that school choice is the civil rights movement of the 21st century.

Lawmakers have a choice of how to approach education. For the sake of Oklahoma’s children, let’s hope they use it to give parents one as well.

