

Let (educational) freedom ring!



"You could be forgiven," Neal McCluskey once wrote, "for thinking that first God created public schools, and then, seeing that they were good, let them create the United States."

That's certainly the vibe you get from many folks in the education establishment. But of course it's incorrect. As attorney and professor Justin Paulette reminds us, before its "eventual foray into public education," America "enjoyed a flourishing of educational freedom which relied upon parents and churches educating children through local, cooperative efforts consistent with their social and religious traditions. As observed in the early 19th century by that famed French observer of American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville:

Proportionately, there was a greater mass of enlightenment spread among those men [who came to settle on the shores of New England] than within any European nation of our day. All, perhaps without a single exception, had received a quite advanced education, and several among them had made themselves known in Europe by their talents and their science.

"The early American view of education," Paulette says, "was codified in the Northwest Ordinance of 1787:"

Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the

happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.

Unambiguously, "religion, morality and knowledge were the goal of education. As to the means, Adam Smith's monumental *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776 articulated the prevailing preference that governments provide parents with vouchers, thereby funding education and preventing a monopoly over educational services. Concurring with this judgment, the Virginia Assembly twice rejected Thomas Jefferson's proposals to create a free public school system funded by general tax revenues and free from sectarian influence."

Incidentally, even Jefferson's vision of public education didn't include compulsory attendance. "It is better to tolerate that rare instance of a parent's refusing to let his child be educated," he believed, "than to shock the common feelings by a forcible transportation and education of the infant against the will of his father."

Regrettably, we have squandered our educational-freedom inheritance. And as Greg Forster points out, "the seizure of power over education by a government monopoly and attendant interest groups (especially unions) has had far-reaching implications for our nation. The American founders would have viewed it as incompatible with a free and democratic society, as well as a realistic understanding of the natural formation of the human person in the family."

Public education, far from being "the cornerstone of our republic" (as the Oklahoma Education Association believes), in fact arose "in shameful acquiescence to an overriding contemporary intolerance grounded in nativist bigotry." Thankfully, as we celebrate Independence Day 2011, there are encouraging signs that educational freedom is making a comeback.

Posted by Brandon Dutcher at [10:35 AM](#)  

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