



Why shouldn't PBS air a documentary series on school choice?

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"School Inc.," a [three-part documentary series](#) about how we deliver education and what might work better, will be airing Monday night on [PBS stations around the country](#). At least for one public schooling supporter, this is outrageous. But is PBS showing something that may be critical of public schooling—that may even offer what some consider a better educational way—really so awful?

Asserting in a [blog post last week](#) that airing School Inc., "must be public television's effort to curry favor with the Trump administration," historian and public schooling champion Diane Ravitch expressed great displeasure with PBS stations for their plans to show a documentary by "libertarians who want to destroy public institutions." She continued, "It is ironic and sad that public television would lend credibility to an attack on public education."

School Inc., just to give you the basics, was created and almost single-handedly produced over several years—starting long before there was a Trump administration—by the late Andrew Coulson, and brought to the finish line by [Free to Choose Media](#). The documentary explores many ways to deliver education, and a whole bunch of other things, historically and around the contemporary world. Having seen the whole thing, I think it's a heck of a ride!

Ravitch, and anyone else who objects to PBS stations showing School Inc., is of course entitled to her opinions, and I for one am glad to hear them. I'd much prefer to know what Ravitch and others with whom I often disagree think and believe.

But shouldn't that go both ways? Ravitch seems to feel it is unacceptable for PBS stations to give voice to an opinion she does not share. She found the four-part series "SCHOOL: The Story of American Public Education," which ran in 2001, very pleasing and totally acceptable. Why? Because "it was a history of public education that documented the role of public education in welcoming immigrants and leading the way to a better society." But it is apparently a bridge too far to air a program that might offer a different perspective on education history than the one Ravitch prefers.

Now, it is reasonable to worry that political pressures would affect PBS programming, because PBS receives government funding, and government is inherently political. Indeed, the constantly looming threat of political interference is a terrific argument for ending such funding.

Of course, public schooling is intentionally controlled by those with the most political power, so if one worries about PBS currying favor with Trump, one ought to be sleepless over the far more immense threats to freedom and equality under the law with government-run schools. There is, however, no meaningful evidence that PBS gives preference to libertarian or conservative programming. I would guess, if anything, such views are underrepresented. And if government is going to fund PBS, shouldn't all viewpoints get an airing?

Apparently for Ravitch, the answer is no. But I hope that whether you love public schooling, yearn for school choice, or are anywhere in between, you'll watch School Inc. If nothing else, it will give us some interesting ideas we can openly debate.

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