



Parental involvement crucial in school choice

Bob Kellogg - OneNewsNow - 4/10/2012

A national advocacy group for school choice is launching a campaign to inspire parents to take a more active role in defending their views of education, which are increasingly under attack.

Randan Swindler of the [American Federation for Children](#) says her group is starting the campaign because special-interest groups have increasingly been attacking the judgment of parents when it comes what is best for their children's education.

"We have been told by our parents that they've been seeing these attacks happen from numerous union leaders, teachers associations, politicians across the country that are saying that sometimes, parents just don't actually know what's best," Swindler reports. "And we completely disagree with that, as do our members across the country."

She says school choice only works when parents are involved.

"So, in order for students to benefit from school choice, they have to have active parents; they have to have engaged and informed parents who understand what their options are," she asserts. "And one of the things we're trying to do is not only continue to educate parents, but also to show them you have to get out and you have to help your fellow neighbors to say *Look -- our students are in a failing school.*"

The American Federation for Children is a leading national advocacy organization that believes public education must be defined as providing families, particularly low-income families, with the public funding they need to choose the education they determine is best for their children.

And if there's no school-choice option for parents?

Though the No Child Left Behind Act requires a small portion of funding to be directed toward parental outreach, little activity in that regard seems to be happening.

Neal McCluskey of [The Cato Institute](#) says one problem is NCLB provides little guidance in what parental engagement with school officials should look like. Plus, he says, there is no incentive for schools to make serious efforts to engage parents. ([Listen to audio report](#))

"There really is no reason for an administrator or for a state [or federal] policy maker ... to really care what parents have to say," he explains, "because when push comes to shove, [parents] can't take their child or the money to educate them anywhere else -- and that's all that ultimately matters, is who is controlling the money."

McCluskey, associate director of Cato's Center for Educational Freedom, says the most effective way parents can influence schools and their child's education is if they are given school-choice options.

"Well, the only way they can have meaningful, lasting, real say in what goes on in education and in the schools their children attend is if they have a real, immediate ability to take their child to another school," he contends.

McCluskey says that without the control that school choice affords, parents will always be treated as third-class citizens by school personnel and administrators.