



Obama's Confusing Stance on Charter Schools and Voucher Programs

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In an interview on MSNBC Tuesday, President Barack Obama defended both Chicago Teachers and Rahm Emanuel as having an appetite for reform, despite the teachers' reluctance to move away from maintaining one of the nation's shortest school days (for a large school district). He suggested that both structural changes and more resources, aka, taxpayer dollars, are needed to improve America's school system.

Obama called himself a "big proponent of charter schools" in the interview, but when he presented a 2013 budget, he cut funding for a program that allowed residents of Washington, DC to use a voucher to attend charter schools. This program targeted low-income children, many of whom will now be forced back into failing public schools. Joe Biden has famously told people "Show me your budget, and I will tell you what you value" referring to Paul Ryan's budget proposals. According to Biden, Obama's budget reveals that he doesn't value one of the best ways to give parents the power to take real initiative in their children's education.

"Race to the Top" is Barack Obama's attempt to introduce competition into a system which has a near monopoly on public education. Instead of being heralded as a unique solution, it was derided by people on both the Right and the Left. Neal McCluskey of Cato Institute ridiculed the program, saying that instead of bringing real reforms it simply asked how many unions endorsed the reforms. Diane Ravitch of New York University says that the program encourages teaching to the test, a method of teaching supported only by those who must use it to protect their jobs.

Nobody is questioning the dedication of teachers – the vast majority of teachers work tirelessly and selflessly to ensure that they do a good job teaching their students. The problem is the longstanding power structures in school that do not reward teachers who do their job well, but instead those who have been around longest. It is not the teachers themselves who are standing

in the way of reform, but the teachers unions, who care more about protecting their inflated ranks than about teaching children. It is unfortunate that such a noble profession has become intermingled with the world's least noble.

It is difficult to determine exactly which reforms need to be implemented by each school in order to get the most out of their students. Anybody who claims to know is probably a politician and lying to you (but I repeat myself). It is not until we force schools to compete for a family's business that they will cater to the needs of America's children. Fortunately, school choice is beginning to become a bi-partisan issue. The Chicago teacher's strike indicates that the Democratic Party is less beholden to the lobby than it has been historically. While "Race to the Top" was largely a failure, it is encouraging to see Obama attempt to introduce some semblance of competition into education, even if he attempted to do it via a top-down federal government mandate. While I am pessimistic about the future of freedom, I remain optimistic that school choice will be a major victory for proponents of liberty and most importantly, millions of kids who will finally get the education they deserve.