

# A Strategic Defeat for Educational Freedom

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An expansive new voucher program, signed into Indiana law today, has been widely praised as a momentous victory for school choice and Gov. Mitch Daniels on the brink of his long-awaited presidential campaign announcement. In reality, [the voucher program](#) is a *tactical* victory for highly constrained choice won at the price of a broad *strategic* defeat for educational freedom.

To see why, consider the bill's regulations. Most people would agree there are some topics about which every child in this country should learn. Historical documents, for instance, that are vital for understanding our shared American heritage: the Federalist Papers, the Constitution, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, and Chief Seattle's 1852 letter to the United States government.

Chief Seattle was a great leader of native Americans in the Northwest, and this moving letter lays out the vast gulf between how his people and the "white" man viewed the land, not as a commodity to be bought and sold but a part of themselves, a sacred trust. Chief Seattle's letter is also a modern fabrication sprung from the pen of a screenwriter for a 1972 film about ecology.

And in Indiana, it is a legally protected historical document that public, and now voucher-accepting private schools, are *required* to have on hand for academic use by students.

The apocryphal Chief Seattle letter is merely an illustration of the dangers and absurdities of state-controlled curriculum. Private voucher schools will not only be forced to make this fabrication available to students, they are also prohibited from lowering a student's grade, if he should, for example, cite the letter as a primary source in the course of his school work.

Unfortunately, this is just the peak of the regulatory mountain being dropped on participating private schools. The legislation will greatly expand state regulation of and authority over participating private schools. It will force them to annually administer the Indiana Statewide Testing for Progress examination (ISTEP), and submit both ISTEP and other progress and performance data to the state. It will require the state to track and evaluate private schools according to state standards, and to align consequences with their performances. It establishes a lottery admissions requirement for over-subscribed schools that could interfere with their ability to determine admissions procedures and the character of the school.

Finally, it establishes extensive and detailed new curriculum and pedagogical requirements for participating private schools, including some requirements that are not