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FRI AUG 12, 2011 AT 01:10 PM PDT

Pennsylvania school voucher push is about privatization, not education

Laura Clawson

Daily Kos Labor

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School privatization via vouchers has been one of the big right-wing pushes in Pennsylvania this year. The legislature is on recess for the summer, but voucher advocates are **not giving up** on the idea, despite a study finding that, across multiple other studies, there's "no clear, positive impact on student academic achievement" from voucher programs.

There's a reason they won't give up easily: For their fiercest advocates, school vouchers aren't about educational outcomes. They're about getting the government out of education:



Vouchers are funded with public school dollars but are used to pay for students to attend private and parochial (religious-affiliated) schools. The idea was introduced in the 1950s by the high priest of free-market fundamentalism, Milton Friedman, who also made the real goal of the voucher movement clear: "Vouchers are not an end in themselves; they are a means to make a transition from a government to a free-market system." The quote is in a 1995 Cato Institute briefing paper titled "Public Schools: Make Them Private."

Joseph Bast, president of Heartland Institute, stated in 1997, "Like most other conservatives and libertarians, we see vouchers as a major step toward the complete privatization of schooling. In fact, after careful study, we have come to the conclusion that they are the only way to dismantle the current socialist regime." Bast added, "Government schools will diminish in enrollment and thus in number as parents shift their loyalty and vouchers to superior-performing private schools."

One Pennsylvania newspaper, the *Beaver County Times*, has a **pointed suggestion** for an amendment to voucher proposals: If a school accepts vouchers, it has to admit every child who applies, regardless of the student's achievements or disabilities and of the school's capacity.

That's not too much to ask of private, parochial or religious schools. After



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all, every public school in Pennsylvania operates under those conditions.

Without this amendment, the bill really is about school choice, in that private, parochial and religious schools would decide what children they want to admit—just as they do now.

In its present form, this bill only gives parents or guardians the right to apply for their children's admission to the schools of their choice. It doesn't say anything about those schools having to accept those children.

As hilarious as it would be to watch Democratic legislators make a push for that amendment, it's unlikely voucher advocates would squirm as much as they should. Because to them, it's not even inconsistent to say that private schools should be able to turn people away while receiving government money.

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