

## Education: Too Important for a Government Monopoly

By John Stossel · Wednesday, February 17, 2010

The government-school establishment has said the same thing for decades: Education is too important to leave to the competitive market. If we really want to help our kids, we must focus more resources on the government schools.

But despite this mantra, the focus is on something other than the kids. When The Washington Post asked George Parker, head of the Washington, D.C., teachers union, about the voucher program there, he said: "Parents are voting with their feet. ... As kids continue leaving the system, we will lose teachers. Our very survival depends on having kids in D.C. schools so we'll have teachers to represent."

How revealing is that?

Since 1980, government spending on education, adjusted for inflation, has nearly doubled. But test scores have been flat for decades.

Today we spend a stunning \$11,000 a year per student -- more than \$200,000 per classroom. It's not working. So when will we permit competition and choice, which works great with everything else? I'll explore those questions on my Fox Business program tomorrow night at 8 and 11 p.m. Eastern time (and again Friday at 10 p.m.).

The people who test students internationally told us that two factors predict a country's educational success: Do the schools have the autonomy to experiment, and do parents have a choice?

Parents care about their kids and want them to learn and succeed -- even poor parents. Thousands line up hoping to get their kids into one of the few hundred lottery-assigned slots at Harlem Success Academy, a highly ranked charter school in New York City. Kids and parents cry when they lose.

Yet the establishment is against choice. The union demonstrated outside Harlem Success the first day of school. And President Obama killed Washington, D.C.'s voucher program.

This is typical of elitists, who believe that parents, especially poor ones, can't make good choices about their kids' education.

Is that so? Ask [James Tooley](#)<sup>1</sup> about that. Tooley is a professor of education policy who spends most of every year in some of the poorest parts of Africa, India and China. For 10 years, he's studied how poor kids do in "free" government schools and -- hold on -- private schools. That's right. In the worst slums, private for-profit schools educate kids better than the government's schools do.

Tooley finds as many as six private schools in small villages. "The majority of (poor) schoolchildren are in private school, and these schools outperform government schools at a fraction of the teacher cost," he says.

Why do parents with meager resources pass up "free" government schools and sacrifice to send their children to private schools? Because, as one parent told the BBC, the private owner will do something that's virtually impossible in America's government schools: replace teachers who do not teach.

As in America, the elitist establishment in those countries scoffs at the private schools and the parents who choose them. A woman who runs government schools in Nigeria calls such parents "ignoramuses."

But that can't be true. Tooley tested kids in both kinds of schools, and the private-school students score better.

To give the establishment its best shot, consider Head Start, which politicians view as sacred. The \$166 billion program is 45 years old, so it's had time to prove itself. But guess what: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently [found](#)<sup>2</sup> no difference in first-grade test results between kids who went through Head Start and similar kids who didn't. President Obama has repeatedly promised to "eliminate programs that don't work," but he wants to give Head Start a billion more dollars. The White House wouldn't explain this contradiction to me.

Andrew Coulson, head of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Reform, said, "If Head Start (worked), we would expect now, after 45 years of this program, for graduation rates to have gone up; we would expect the gap between the kids of high school dropouts and the kids of college graduates to have shrunk; we would expect students to be learning more. None of that is true."

Choice works, and government monopolies don't. How much more evidence do we need?

COPYRIGHT 2010 BY JFS PRODUCTIONS, INC.  
DISTRIBUTED BY CREATORS.COM

---

## Links

1. <http://tinyurl.com/ydgl9z>
2. <http://tinyurl.com/ylcmb92>