



SCOTUS ruling on unions a win for both teachers and students

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The Supreme Court just ruled in favor of Mark Janus, 5-4, making it unconstitutional for unions to force government workers that do not wish to join unions to pay for their services. This is a big win for teachers and kids across the United States. Here's why:

This decision overturned the 1977 Abood case ruling that "fair share" fees that fund union representation in matters such as collective bargaining and arbitration were constitutional.

Wednesday's ruling in support of Janus was based on the fact that mandatory union payments infringes on government workers' First Amendment right to free speech because they are forced to pay for political activity they may not agree with.

But free speech protection isn't the only thing public school teachers should be happy about.

According to a report by Kennesaw State University's Ben Scafidi, although inflation-adjusted spending per student in the U.S. increased by 27 percent from 1992 to 2014, real teacher salaries fell by 2 percent over the same period.

No wonder a 2017 survey by Education Next found that teachers and the general public oppose mandatory agency fees. At least public school teachers now have the option to pocket some extra cash. After all, the data suggest that the teachers unions haven't accomplished much on that front.

The freedom for teachers to opt out of paying agency fees gives unions a stronger financial incentive to better serve their members. According to a 2017 study, the number of administration and other staff grew by about three times as much as the number of teachers from 1950 and 2015 in the U.S.

Maybe now unions will push harder for more education expenditures to go directly to the classroom instead of administrative bloat. Maybe now more money will go toward serving union members instead of union leaders. But what if that still doesn't happen?

Teachers have a better option. When a school choice law or program is enacted, competition is introduced into the labor market, leading to better pay and working conditions for educators.

Put another way, traditional public school districts must compete with charter schools and private schools for talent by providing teachers with the best employment opportunities possible.

The data support the theory. A 2011 study by Northwestern University Professor Kirabo Jackson found that traditional public schools in North Carolina raised teacher salaries to retain talent when faced with charter school competition. Two other studies, one from Sweden and one from Ohio, found that private school competition led to higher teacher pay.

Of course, school choice benefits children. Competitive pressures give schools incentives to perform well. According to a peer-reviewed survey of the evidence by Anna Egalite of N.C. State University, 20 of 21 studies find that competition from private school choice improves outcomes for kids in the U.S. None of the studies find negative effects.

But Wednesday's Janus ruling should also make families excited for their kids. Recent evidence by Cornell University researchers, presented at the 2018 annual meeting of the American Economic Association, shows that collective bargaining laws substantially reduce U.S. students' academic performance in the short-run and earnings in the long-run.

In fact, the data suggest that 12 years of exposure to collective bargaining laws reduces male students' test scores by about 21 percent and later life earnings by \$1,493 annually. As the authors suggest, this is because unions haven't bargained for educational interventions that lead to better student outcomes.

Similarly, when unions bargain against policies such as merit-based pay, they could drive away highly skilled labor from the teaching workforce, which could harm students in the long-term.

The decision is a huge win for free speech advocates, educators and students all at the same time. Such a good bargain doesn't come every day.

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