

THE ABCs OF SCHOOL CHOICE



It may seem strange for advocates of educational freedom to be against “School Choice.” After all, why would anyone be against parents’ freedom to choose the school that best fits their children’s needs? Like so many policies do-gooders promote, “School Choice” sounds good—but look behind the slogan. It also means other things...

ASSUMPTION: “School Choice” assumes the idea that the Government should provide the good things people want. If schools, then why not hospitals, grocery stores, restaurants, amusement parks, dry cleaners, cars, houses, clothes, etc.? Americans already have freedom to choose, and our choices are always subject to the limitations of geography, income, and preferences. Even the Bill of Rights does not mean that the Government is obligated to buy every citizen whatever printing press, place to assemble, or gun he wants—or any at all—simply because those things are rights.

BENEVOLENCE: “School Choice” cannot exist without the Government taking money from a person who earned it and giving it to a person who didn’t. Suppose Tommy Taxpayer loves what’s going on at your school; suppose Polly Parent hates what your school stands for and chooses instead another school for her child. Does Polly’s choice over her child’s education take precedence over Tommy’s choice to support a school he loves? Why should Tommy be forced to fund someone else’s choice? Bureaucratic “benevolence” to a parent can come only at the expense of earners from whom the Government takes the money. It’s simply good ol’ fashioned wealth redistribution—and there’s nothing benevolent about that!

CHOICES: “School Choice” cannot exist without the bureaucrats defining the acceptable pool of choices. For all the talk about “universal choice,” at the end of the day, even the most expansive plans define which school a parent can choose for her child. She may prefer ABC School, but if it’s not on *The List*, the bureaucrats will not fund her choice. Schools not on the list cannot compete against Government-funded (actually taxpayer- or deficit-funded) schools and wind up closing. All everyone is left with is bureaucrat-approved schools. So much for freedom of choice!

DEFICITS: “School Choice” cannot exist without driving up taxes—or cutting other parts of the budget to avoid deficits. As of 2019, private schools educated 44,000 students in Mississippi. If the legislature approved a \$7,000 voucher for each of those children, it must come up with \$308,000,000 more dollars in tax revenue—plus the increased bureaucratic costs (and other costs) associated with administering the program.

Freedom advocates, instead, look for policies like tuition tax credits and tax credits for donations to scholarship funds, to free up resources so that parents and donors can fund their own choices. Such policies expand choice for parents without forcibly shifting the burden for their choices onto others.

BOTTOM LINE... Do you advocate for freedom of choice for both parents and taxpayers, or for forced wealth redistribution, bureaucrat-prescribed choices, and increased dependency on the Government? Understand what “School Choice” as a political slogan means and be prepared to act.