

Why School Vouchers are a Terrible Idea

For nearly four decades, since the Reagan administration, some among America's "school choice" movement have advocated for the use of "voucher" systems to give parents more control over their children's education. Various jurisdictions around the country have implemented the concept, with varying (and much-debated) results.

Most opposition to vouchers comes, as one might imagine, from supporters of government-run, aka "public," schools for the vast majority of students. Their concerns include loss of funding for those public schools as students migrate to private alternatives, the destruction of America's secular character if church-operated schools gain market share, and perhaps even loss of national identity/cohesion as curricula move in different directions.

My own opposition comes from a very different direction: I'm against vouchers not because they might damage, or fail to replicate, the existing system, but because they threaten to make "private" alternatives more LIKE that system.

We've already seen this phenomenon play out in our colleges and universities. Government funding, whether it be in the form of the GI Bill, student loan guarantees and Pell Grants, research grants from government institutions, etc., always comes with strings attached.

Even if we like the content of some of those strings (non-discrimination requirements, for example), it is a simple fact that strings in general result in a loss of variety in our higher education options. "Elite" private universities may be able to afford more well-credentialed faculty and nicer buildings, but their curricula and their classroom environments have, over time, lost a lot of what made them different. When you take the King's Shilling, you must henceforth take the King's Orders as well.

The history of public education in America is an ugly thing.

You may have been taught that universal public education was implemented for the purpose of increasing literacy, numeracy, critical thinking and so forth among an uneducated populace.

In fact, our system was imported from Prussia and its goal has always been to turn out "good citizens" — drones who get educated enough to turn raw materials into finished goods on an assembly line, or aim an artillery piece on command, but not so well-educated that they might get uppity and question or rebel against the foundations of the system they live under.

It shouldn't be surprising that such a system would devolve, as ours has, into a gulag archipelago of combination daycare centers / day prisons, many graduating inmates of

which emerge barely qualified to press the picture of the cheeseburger on the cash register and count out the amount of change that flashes on the screen.

I'm not interested in saving our broken system. I oppose ideas that threaten to let that system absorb the alternatives to it. Vouchers are just such an idea.

Homeschooling, small cooperative schools funded and operated by groups of like-minded parents, and truly private academies, on the other hand, are our future — if we have a future.

If we're really interested in reclaiming our birthright of literacy, numeracy, and free thought, it's time to separate school and state.