

SENATE
presidents'
FORUM

School Choice

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Senate Presidents' Forum

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1. Recent Surge in Universal/Near-Universal Voucher Programs

- **New Hampshire**, Education Freedom Account Program, up to 300% of federal poverty threshold, August 2021
- **Arizona**, Empowerment Scholarship Account Program, September 2022
- **West Virginia**, Hope Scholarship Program, October 2022
- **Tennessee**, Education Savings Account Program, November 2022, up to 200% of federal poverty threshold
- **Utah**, Utah Fits All Scholarship Program, January 2023
- **Iowa**, Students First Act, January 2023
- **Florida**, Universal Education Savings Account, March 2023
- **Arkansas**, Education Freedom Account, April 2023
- **Indiana**, Choice Scholarship Program (2011), from up to 300% to up to 400% of federal poverty threshold, April 2023
- **Ohio**, Educational Choice Scholarship Program (2006), made universal, July 2023
- **Alabama**, Creating Hope & Opportunity for Our Children (CHOOSE) Act, March 2024
- **North Carolina**, Opportunity Scholarships (2014), made universal, May 2024
- **Louisiana**, Louisiana Giving All the Opportunity to Rise (LA GATOR), May 2024

2. Milton Friedman's 1955/1973 Prescriptions Fulfilled

- Universal eligibility (1955)—10 of the 13 states above implemented universal vouchers
- Minimal regulation or accountability, beyond parental satisfaction
- Minimal allocation necessary to meet minimal standards
 - Friedman used “minimum” 13 times in the first 7 pages of this essay
- Tuition topping-up
- Concomitant freedom to spend ESA allocations as desired, on online curricula, ballet or swim lessons, museum or zoo visits (1973)

3. Longstanding Driving Forces

- Commitment of libertarian theorists going back to Milton Friedman (1955) to market-based solutions *and* to less government spending
- Strong support for this commitment from think tanks and advocacy groups—e.g., American Enterprise Institute, Bradley Foundation, American Legislative Exchange Council, Heritage Foundation, CATO Institute, Alliance for School Choice, EdChoice
- Division—explicitly racial following *Brown v. Board* (1954) and implicitly cultural since
- Sympathy from the left —e.g., Kenneth Clark (1968), David Rogers (1968), Christopher Jencks (1968), Ted Sizer (1968), John Coons & Stephen Sugarman (1978), Arthur Levine (1998), Robert Reich (2000), James Forman (2005)

4. Recent Driving Forces

- Inexorably mounting *modern* desire for choice—from chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry to ... Coffee Toffee Bar Crunch, etc.
- Growing frustration of parents with children in private schools over “double taxation”—they’re tired of paying property taxes to support public schools they don’t use while spending heavily on tuition for the private schools they do use
- Advocacy from leaders of private schools hard pressed to cover budgets without subsidies in the form of vouchers
- Election of Donald Trump, at once giving center stage to Betsy DeVos and validating protest against convention, “The System”
- Criticism of the response by public schools to COVID

5. Trade-offs

- Subsidized religious education v. church-state separation
- Private v. public benefits
- School communities v. neighborhood communities
- Selective access v. open access
- Ethnocentrism v. common schools and American identity
- Market accountability v. public accountability
- Options v. information

- “Level” v. uneven playing fields (reduced public school enrollment)
- Restricted access v. universal access

6. Unintended Consequences

- Fiscal pressure on school districts losing students, leading to cuts and closures
 - ... and, in the case of rural towns, ESAs stand to intensify consolidation of districts and thus undermine town life
- Fiscal pressure on states subsidizing families with children already in private schools—Where will the \$ come from?
- Segregation by class brought on by topping-up tuition (e.g., Chile; see Richard Murnane et al., 2017)
- In the long run:
 - Unwinding of all standards and accountability—for public schools, too
 - District schools as schools of last resort, with attendant negative peer-group effects (see Scott Carrell & Mark Hoekstra, 2010)

7. “School Choice” and Policy Design

- This is not mainly a “vouchers” v. “public education” debate
- “Choice” can be achieved without private schools (e.g., charter schools and intradistrict/interdistrict choice)
- Unregulated vouchers constitute an uncharted path
- Vouchers can be implemented with appropriate regulation (e.g., the Dutch, Belgian, French, or Swedish model):
 - Teachers must be certified
 - Curricula must comport with national standards
 - Students and staff shielded from discrimination

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