

Why Oppose School Vouchers and Tuition Tax Credits

Parent Accountability Alone Doesn't Work: The Milwaukee Experience

The Milwaukee experience has shown that parents do not hold schools accountable and that parent choices do not close down failing schools. Voucher schools are being closed down by state authorities solely on the basis of financial misconduct (misuse of state funding and defrauding the government) and child safety issues. Authorities have no ability to close down voucher schools based on the poor quality of education students receive.

According to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel in its 2005 investigative report covering the 15 years of the Milwaukee voucher program:

- **“The closures [of voucher schools] were the result of outside intervention or financial malfeasance, not parents voting with their feet.”**
- **“Parental choice by itself does not insure quality. Some parents pick bad schools – and keep their children in them long after it is clear the schools are failing.” “Weaker schools in the choice program manage to survive – in some cases, even thrive.”**
- **“Even the staunchest advocates of school choice admit today that the marketplace theory, which held that parents would pull their kids out of bad schools, or not choose them to begin with, did not pan out.** ‘The reality is that it hasn’t worked like we thought it would in theory,’ said Howard Fuller, head of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University [and an early proponent of school vouchers]. I don’t think anyone that is truthful can say that it has occurred.”
- **“The majority of parents in voucher schools don’t know if their schools are low performing.”**

According to a 5-year study of the Milwaukee voucher program and described in the book, “School Choice and the Question of Accountability, The Milwaukee Experience” (2003) by researchers at the Public Policy Forum, an independent, non-partisan research institution in Milwaukee:

- **“The data are clear: The Milwaukee voucher schools that have closed have not done so because of lack of parental demand. Because parents’ choices are not driving schools to improve or close, their actions will never lead to true accountability.”**
- **“In real life, the school choices of parents do not result in accountability for schools. In the absence of effective accountability in a choice system, the very people choice schools are supposed to help—poor families—are betrayed as are the taxpayers who are footing the bill.”**