



Idahoans for Choice in Education

Creating a Brighter Future for Idaho Families

LEGISLATIVE BRIEF

Home School

Harbor School

Traditional School

Charter School

Virtual School



Darrell Deide, Chairman



Holland Johnson, Treasurer

Why Education Choice Matters

Volume IV Issue VI

In many Idaho communities, taxpayers have stepped up to the plate to help finance the building of nice new schools with modern amenities. Today's teachers, in comparison to just a few years ago, are better trained. Nearly all teachers are fully certified for the subjects they teach, almost all have four-year degrees and a great many have advanced degrees. In short, our schools, from almost every standpoint appear to be better than at any time in our history. But if our schools are better, than why do we continue to have high dropout rates and low achievement. And why do our schools, that once led the world, rank low on the world stage? Why haven't they improved?

The reason schools don't improve is because they don't have to! Are there consequences for poor performing schools and poor performing teachers? For the most part the answer is NO! The state funding continues whether our schools succeed or fail. Kids continue to arrive at school every day, every year. They do so because they have very little choice. The traditional school, in most Idaho communities, is the only "game" in town and nothing really changes. Failure and mediocrity are continuously rewarded. All kinds of efforts have been tried over the past few decades to make substantive improvement, beginning with the school improvement study and recommendations of "A Nation At Risk." Many readers will recall this hard-hitting and damning paragraph of that 1983 report:

"If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains in student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled essential support systems, which helped make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament."

Now, 27 years later after spending billions of dollars to improve our schools, where are we? No better, and perhaps we are worse. We have allowed our educational status in the world to fall further behind. Again why? It is because schools are a monopoly with no competition, and parents and students are not empowered with choice. Without choice for the consumer and without incentives to improve there is no change.

SCHOOL CHOICE:

Freedom to choose a school that provides the environment that you desire...not someone else's!

Freedom to choose a school that meets your student's needs... not someone else's!

Freedom to choose a school that meets your expectations... not someone else's!

Freedom to choose a school based upon its performance... not where you live!

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Competition works! It has worked in every facet of our lives to give us the best standard of living on the planet. It can work to once again make our schools the envy of the world.

What can be done? First, our policy makers at every level must come to grips with the reality of the situation. When our policy makers truly understand the problem and the solution they will come to the conclusion that a drastic change must take place. That change must be in some way, to empower parents with the right to make the decision where their children attend school. Parents also must be given the monetary power through tax credits, scholarships or vouchers to do so. Affluent parents have always had education choice. Now is the time to give that same option to all parents.

The naysayers about choice will downplay the idea of competition. Opponents of choice use children as a "shield," saying schools can't compete for students. Doing so, they charge, will lead to the collapse of the education system and hurt kids. Not true. In fact, schools DO compete for students. Higher education is a perfect example. Students aren't told to attend a state university based on their zip code. Universities compete statewide, nationally and globally for students. These schools do so by offering as superior a product as they can and targeting the academic interests of their prospective students. These colleges and universities recognize that if they fail to compete -- if they revel in mediocrity, students will vote with their feet. They'll attend school elsewhere. Therefore, unlike traditional public schools, failure is not an option for colleges that must compete in a free market.

It is time to get serious with empowering parents with choice as to how and where their child is schooled. Then, unlike the last fifty years, we will really start to see changes and improvements in our education system.

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