

Education

School Choice

“Schools of choice” refers to an effort to give students a choice in the school they attend. One way, allowed in Michigan, is to let students choose a different public school than the neighborhood school. This program also allows students to go to another public-school district if that other district will accept them. Two other schools of choice are Charter Schools and homeschooling (see separate issue briefs.)

Vouchers give students tax dollars to attend the school of their choice, including nonpublic schools. However, in Michigan and many other states, state tax dollars cannot go to a nonpublic school. In 2001 a proposal to amend the Michigan constitution to allow vouchers was defeated by a large majority of 68%. The leader of this movement was Betsy DeVos, now Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education. After this defeat in Michigan the DeVos family took their plans to other states through the American Federation for children, which they founded in 2010.

Variations of the voucher plan includes setting up education savings account, which are funded either by business leaders with and without tax credits, and general fund tax dollars. Some vouchers based the dollars a pupil receives on the family income.

Fourteen states and the District of Columbia have a voucher in place.

Evaluation and recommendations

The school choice program within the public-school system sounds good on paper but it exists only in districts where there is more than one public elementary, middle, or high school in the district. It is also only a choice when the parents have the resources to provide transportation to the school of choice, so it sounds good on paper but doesn't work well in reality.



Some of the oldest voucher plans are in Milwaukee and Cleveland, where the results are unimpressive, according to Larry Miller, a teacher in Milwaukee for 17 years and a member of the Milwaukee School Board.¹

Proponents of school choice appear to be supportive of better education and schools for all children, but their intention is to dismantle and destroy public schools by fragmentation and privatization. We will be served far better to put our efforts into improving the public schools through better teacher training, more funding and resources, and common goals based on the traditional American value of equality.

1) Larry Miller, “Who is the American Federation for Children? “, *Educate All Students*, April 4, 2014.
<https://millermps.wordpress.com/2014/04/04/who-is-the-right-wing-american-federation-for-children-2/>.