

ECON 317 - Microeconomic Analysis

3 opinion pieces about school choice & vouchers

[1] "Tim Scott: Why I'm voting against Biden's nominee for Education secretary"

By Tim Scott | Feb. 18, 2021, updated Mar. 4, 2021 | *The Post and Courier*

Following a year defined by tragedy, uncertainty and the pain of living through a pandemic, I did not expect that I would have to defend the educational opportunities of millions of struggling children and their parents during a confirmation hearing for Miguel Cardona, President Joe Biden's nominee for secretary of education.

Education is the closest thing to magic we have in America: It is the great equalizer and our generation's modern civil rights issue. Yet it seems that just weeks into his presidency, instead of uniting the country, President Biden is rallying behind the hardly uniting principles of far-left progressivism. The latest in this progressive wish list: listening to teacher unions over parents, dismantling successful, commonsense education reform measures such as charter schools and private-school choice and sending mixed signals on reopening schools nationwide.

I am willing to work in good faith with Cardona to help the millions of poor kids, like I was, have a fighting chance at the American dream. Ideally, Cardona would be setting the education agenda for the Biden administration. But the reality is, Biden will be dictating his agenda to Cardona. Unfortunately, it is not his Connecticut policies that he will be championing as Biden's education chief, it is the president's union-focused progressive policies. And because of that, I voted against advancing his confirmation in committee, and will vote against him on the Senate floor.

I have great respect for Cardona's background - we share similar life stories that have shaped who we are and have brought us from poverty to the highest levels of public service. And while I commend him for his personal success, if Cardona follows the Biden plan to pit teacher unions against parents and students, our kids will never get the education they truly deserve.

As a member of the U.S. Senate Education Committee, I know that true education reform must include charter schools, public funding for Catholic and other religiously affiliated schools, CCVID-relief for nonpublic schools and the bipartisan District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship program, which has opened the doors for kids in our nation's capital to climb the ladder of success. In a time when too many of our students lack access to quality education or are trapped in failing schools, we must pave the way for greater choice and innovation for learning.

But not everyone feels the same way. Elites in Washington have had the luxury to send their children to private schools when they think their assigned school is not good enough. In fact, President Biden and his family, former President Barack Obama and his children, House Democratic Whip James Clyburn, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and so many others who refuse to support options for students and parents all benefited from private and parochial schools.

It smacks of hypocrisy that those policymakers who block the poorest Americans from reaching those educational dreams have paid for their children to reach theirs. And if the wealthy elites decide against private school, they can just move into a better house, in a better district, with better public schools. This "do as I say, not as I do" mentality is pervasive in our government today.

Kids from low-income families in both rural and urban areas deserve a chance at reaching their full potential. They need to see success, not suffer the status quo. The pandemic has strained already-failing schools and left millions of students in virtual learning. And on top of that, teacher unions continue to silence the voices of scientists, parents and reasonable people who support the safe return of students to classrooms.

The answer is not to just throw good money after bad, but to reform the foundations of our system. Charter schools and private-school choice incentivize our traditional public schools to do better and has been a lifeline for millions of students to escape failing schools.

Parents deserve to have a larger and louder voice in the conversation, but I am not convinced that this administration is interested in hearing them. The Biden administration, and the education policies implemented by Cardona, must put students and parents first, and I will do everything I can to hold them accountable for their decisions.

Tim Scott is a Republican senator from South Carolina. He grew up in North Charleston.

**[2] "Commentary: Tim Scott has right premise, wrong solutions on education"
By Kendall Deas | Mar. 4, 2021 | *The Post and Courier***

In his recent commentary, "Why I'm voting against Biden's nominee for education secretary," U.S. Sen. Tim Scott is right on the money with his observations that "education is a great equalizer" and that "education is our generation's civil rights issue." While one would be hard-pressed to find any American who would disagree with this premise given the challenges facing our nation and its PK-12 public education system, the policy prescriptions of charter schools, public money for private schools, privatization and private school choice he lauds can result in outcomes that are contradictory to these goals and values.

For one, the option of private school choice, one of the approaches that Sen. Scott, R-S.C., views as commonsense solutions to school reform, can hardly be seen as one that truly equalizes educational opportunities or reflects civil rights ideals. School choice leads to capital, both financial and human, being funneled away from our traditional public schools, leaving behind an oasis of underachievement at schools surrounded by impoverished communities where there is a lower tax base to support education.

Further, in direct contradiction to the ideals of civil rights and the goals of the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court,

school choice results in de facto segregation occurring as a result of custom, circumstance or personal choice as opposed to segregation sanctioned by law. Leading scholars in the field such as Gary Orfield of The Civil Rights Project at UCLA have expressed concerns about the re-segregation of public education in the post-Brown era that is the result of shortsighted policies such as private school choice.

In recent years, many parents, educators and policymakers in education have begun to question whether the Brown decision has had a substantive or symbolic impact on racially desegregating or providing quality education equity. Leaving behind students of color in broken, under-resourced public school systems that still face challenges escaping that system even with private school vouchers, often due to issues associated with proximity and transportation, is not a true reflection of equalization in education or the ideals or intentions of civil rights.

School reform policies Sen. Scott contends are commonsense approaches to improving our education system, such as charters, using public funding to support religiously affiliated private schools and privatization, undermine goals associated with greater equity in PK-12 education because the end result is general resources are taken away from traditional public schools. This weakens our traditional public education system with less money available to support public schools given the funneling of public money to support private education. It is a deeply flawed assertion when policymakers argue that these approaches to school reform can serve as an incentive for public schools to improve. How can they be expected to improve when these policies undercut critical resources needed to enhance our traditional public education system?

Recent state legislation, such as H.3589, S.208 and a current education savings account bill offering some \$6,500 for private school education, are laying the groundwork for these approaches to school reform that pose challenges for traditional public education. True education reform that adheres to the goals and values of equity and civil rights is not advocating for more charter schools, private school choice, public funding for religiously affiliated private schools and privatization.

Rather, school reform resulting in greater choice and innovation can be achieved by researching and implementing best practice models for quality public education such as the creation of community schools. As a society we cannot afford to turn our backs on traditional public education where the majority of Americans were educated during their formative years. Supporting and investing in this system is paramount to achieving greater equity and honoring principles associated with civil rights.

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[3] "Commentary: In God we trust, all others bring evidence"

By Ben Scafidi | Mar. 17, 2021 | Palmetto Promise Institute

[Note: This essay was submitted to *The Post and Courier*, but P&C didn't publish it.]

Proposals in the South Carolina Legislature [to give families more opportunities to choose schools and educational settings](#) for their children have come under fire,

including in a recent [newspaper column](#) by College of Charleston professor Kendall Deas.

Deas defends a public education system that has had [stubbornly persistent achievement gaps between students-for decades](#). He defends a system that spends [more and more money](#) each year for [stagnant results](#). For example, South Carolina's public schools received [twice as much funding per student](#) in recent years as compared to 1980, adjusted for inflation.

And, Professor Deas was critical of Senator Tim Scott's support of empowering families to make more educational decisions for their children.

The actual evidence indicates that Senator Scott's ideas are what will improve educational outcomes for all children, whereas Deas' ideas have been tried for decades-and have failed.

Deas claims that choice programs defund public schools. But when a student leaves a public school district - for any reason - not all dollars follow. Specifically, funding from local taxpayers is not allocated on a per-pupil basis. When a public school district loses students via private school choice - or for any reason, such as moving to another district - [it retains locally generated funding](#) and a significant portion of [federal funding](#) as well, such as funding for special-needs students. So public schools get to retain large portions of funds for students they no longer serve.

Let me state that again-public schools get to retain large portions of funding for *students they no longer serve*. So, when students leave public schools for any reason, there are actually more funds available on a per student basis.

To my knowledge, no other enterprise in America gets to retain a significant portion of funds for customers they no longer serve, including universities. As another example, if you switch from Food Lion to Walmart, Food Lion does not get to keep 20% of your future grocery bill to cover its "fixed costs." Yet public schools get to keep an even higher proportion of student funding than that when they lose students for any reason.

The charge that choice programs would somehow defund public schools is simply a myth. Further, it does not seem that South Carolina public schools have been starving of cash-for example, since 1994 the [number of public school students in South Carolina has increased about 21 percent](#), while [the number of public school employees has increased over 40 percent](#). Thus, employment growth in South Carolina public school has been almost double what has been needed to accommodate enrollment growth.

Twenty-five out of 27 studies on the subject find that when some students leave via choice programs that [public school students experience modest learning gains](#). So, it seems that public schools do improve-when families are offered a choice to go elsewhere.

Second, Deas claims that choice will cause segregation-which is also contradicted by the evidence.

Six of the seven studies on integration (from three states and the D.C. scholarship program) find private school choice programs have improved school integration while the seventh study finds no visible effect. These studies, from a variety of researchers, can be found: [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Meanwhile, [public school segregation has been increasing or lagged improvements in neighborhood integration](#). While [American society has been integrating](#) in neighborhoods, adoption, marriage, voting and other respects, [public schools have been the anomaly](#).

The [evidence](#) suggests that those who support integration should support educational choice.

As shown in the hyperlinks in this piece, supporters of giving families more choice in education have evidence on their side. Supporters of the public school status quo continue their pleas for more of your tax money and a promise to do better. In fact, they have been getting [lots more of your money](#) and have been [promising to do better since World War II](#).

It is time to stop believing their promises and go with the [evidence](#). We can have a better education system for our children, if we are willing to let families make decisions instead of [federal, state, and local bureaucracies](#).

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