



PRIVATIZING K-12 PUBLIC EDUCATION

HOW THE PROFIT MOTIVE CHANGES SCHOOLS

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What are privatized schools? Privatized schools are schools that are funded by the public, but are run like private businesses. Privatized schools include charters, vouchers, Education Savings Accounts, and Tax Credit Scholarships.

Many privatized schools are not held accountable. Privatized schools are under no obligation to make records public or to abide by federal guidelines for special education, equal rights, and due process. While public schools are held accountable for every penny, most tax-supported privatized schools can do what they want with regard to curriculum, spending, and policy.¹

Privatized schools tend to segregate children. The evidence that privatized schools act as agents of segregation is well documented. From selective admissions to a narrowed curriculum, privatized schools tend to be monocultural and radically different from the traditional, integrated public school.²

Privatized schools tend to denigrate teacher quality. Charter and private schools are not required to hire certified teachers. In some states, a teacher at a privatized school need not even hold a bachelor's degree. Teachers in privatized schools are often paid significantly lower salaries and about half of charter schools offer no health insurance or retirement plans.³ There are no alternative certification programs and no emergency certification programs in Finland or Singapore, whose students are among the highest-performing in the world. Finland and Singapore incentivize teaching and require all teachers have master's degrees from accredited universities.⁴

The bottom line – privatized schools:

- Do not improve performance.
- Concentrate tax dollars in the salaries of a few administrators.
- Lead to segregated schools.
- Are not transparent (though funded by tax dollars).
- Lack oversight and are not held accountable.
- Divert money from students who go to public schools.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

One of the most famous charter schools is Harlem Children's Zone in New York. Harlem Children's Zone currently pays its principal almost a million dollars a year and pays other administrators double what comparable public school administrators get. The same is true of the owner/operators of KIPP, who make hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. In addition to high salaries for owner/operators, charters often pay high salaries to non-instructional personnel, such as "chief external impact officers," "publicity coordinators" and "directors of development."⁵

SELECTIVE ADMISSIONS

It is not well known that Geoffrey Canada, founder of the Harlem Children's Zone charter school, fired his entire first class of students because of their low-test scores. With both Harlem Children's Zone and KIPP schools, parents must sign an agreement that they will always get their child to school on time, will always attend school events, will ensure their children do their homework, and will bring their children to school on Saturdays or Sundays as requested.

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Parents who do not have transportation or cannot abide by these rules cannot enroll their children in these schools. Privatized schools can expel any student at will.⁶ A report from UCLA found that charter schools expelled, on average, 25% of their African American students. On the other hand, public schools are expected to serve all children, regardless of income, disability, or special needs.⁷

CHARTERS AND TEST SCORES

Many public school students do as well or better than students from charter or private schools on a variety of measures—high school graduation rates, test scores, college enrollment rates, feelings of safety at school, and satisfaction with school. Public schools will never do well against “no-excuses” charter schools because such schools select out or expel the lowest-performing and most troublesome students.⁸

Charters in Michigan – Most charter schools in Michigan (80%) are run for profit. Because charter schools tend to hire inexperienced, uncertified teachers at under-market salaries, there is continual teacher churn. Indeed, charter schools in Michigan lead the nation in teacher turnover. Charter schools have boomed to such an extent in Detroit that they enroll more students than do Detroit Public Schools, despite data that indicates that children in Detroit Public Schools actually perform better academically. When charter schools move into an area, the funds that used to go to public schools shrink. When charter schools become widespread, as they have in Detroit, public schools get shut down, certified teachers leave or get laid off, and neighborhoods deteriorate.⁹

Charters in Texas – A charter school in Dallas spent 70% less than the state average on students while it paid its administrators (all related to the owner) hundreds of thousands of dollars. Student achievement at the school was among the lowest 5% in the state. The school also hired a convicted felon and one of its former teachers was sentenced to prison for sexually molesting two fifth graders.¹⁰

VOUCHERS

About vouchers, the non-partisan Center for Tax and Budget Accountability came to two major conclusions:

- “None of the independent studies performed of the most lauded and long standing voucher programs in the U.S.—Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Cleveland, Ohio; and Washington, D.C.— found any statistical evidence that children who utilized vouchers performed better than children who did not and remained in public schools.
- “After controlling for school type and student demographics, a study commissioned by President George W. Bush found that students who attend traditional K-12 public schools outperform students who attend either charter schools or private religious schools, irrespective of denomination.”¹¹

Vouchers in Indiana – Indiana created the largest voucher system in the country in 2011. While vouchers were initially approved to serve low-income families located near failing schools, today less than 1% of vouchers serve low-income families. Most families who receive vouchers are not poor. More than 50% of voucher recipients go to families whose children have never even attended public schools.¹²

EDUCATION SAVINGS ACCOUNTS & TAX CREDIT SCHOLARSHIPS

ESAs and TCSs are mechanisms that channel tax dollars to private schools. ESAs and TCSs allow parents who want to enroll their children in a religious school—Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or other affiliation—to do so at taxpayer expense. Curriculum and student records at private schools are not open to the public. There is little to no public oversight of privatized schools.¹³

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