

## Improve Our Schools by Giving Parents a Choice

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There's a lot of talk right now about improving our schools by raising teacher pay. I think everyone agrees, our schools do need improvement, and badly. Unfortunately, raising teacher pay just isn't a very promising way to bring progress. By contrast, school choice is a proven way to improve public schools.

Increasing teachers' salaries probably wouldn't attract better teachers very effectively. That's because the current teacher pay system requires us to pay all teachers the same regardless of performance. If we raise salaries across the board, heroic teachers get precisely the same raise as the time-servers and rotten apples. Simply, there's no accountability.

Fortunately, there's a proven way to improve public schools, and it's by adding accountability through school choice. Put parents back in charge and allow them to choose the public or private school that's best for their child.

Many people think school choice will make public schools worse, by draining money or by "creaming" the best students. But the evidence on the real-world effect of school choice programs shows otherwise. Over 100,000 students nationwide attend private schools through school choice programs, and there is a strong body of evidence that they make public schools better, not worse.

For example, three studies in Florida found that public schools eligible for school choice made dramatic improvements – much greater than those made by other Florida public schools. Two studies of Milwaukee's school choice program found the same thing about Milwaukee public schools whose students were eligible for school choice.

No empirical study anywhere in the U.S. has ever found that public schools got worse when exposed to school choice. The fears about draining and creaming just haven't come to pass.

Why does school choice improve public schools? One reason is that it allows parents to find the right school for each individual child. Another is that school choice doesn't really drain money, it saves money. The amount we spend on students in school choice programs is actually less than what we would have spent on the same students in public schools.

But the most important reason is that school choice provides for healthy competition between schools, as they try to attract the students who now have a choice of where to go. This competition spurs schools to improve.

If we want to make our schools better, we need a reform that actually encourages improvement, not one that showers money on the good and the bad alike. School choice provides unmatched accountability, unlike across-the-board raises for teachers, and is proven to work.