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6/27/24

Educational Decline: The Need for School Choice

Abraham Lincoln said, “Upon the subject of education... I can only say that I view it as the most important subject which we as a people may be engaged in.” Education was once a cornerstone of societal development in the United States, shaping future generations and ensuring the continuation of knowledge and values. However, in recent years, the education system has been in a sharp decline. This educational decline can be seen in various forms, such as decreasing academic performance and lower graduation rates. The concept of school choice has emerged as a necessity to revitalize our education system nationwide, especially here in Orange County. It allows parents and students to select institutions that best fit their unique needs and create an environment of competition and innovation.

Educational decline is evident in various indicators such as declining academic performance, reduced literacy rates, and increased dropout rates. Approximately 40% of undergraduate college students dropout of school each year, and in 2022, there were 2.1 million students aged 16-24 who dropped out of school. These alarming national dropout rates show the failure of our education system to develop students into strong community contributors. The 2022-2023 California Statewide Assessment Results showed that only 46.7% of California’s students met English-Language Arts standards, 34.6% met mathematics standards, and 30.2% met science standards. Schools around the country and within our state are suffering from educational decline. The California Statewide Assessment also supplies data on each school district, providing shocking statistics in our own community. For example, of the 2022-2023 students in Newport Mesa, just 37.3% met science standards, 48% met mathematics standards, and 58.8% met English-Language Arts standards. Schools have been unable to prepare students to continue their education, as they cannot advance intellectually and often decide to drop out. This can be attributed to curriculum changes in which traditional subjects and teaching points are being replaced with classes and lessons on social justice, gender studies, and other left-wing

political ideals. This shift has diverted time and resources away from the core subjects necessary for educational success and intellectual development. The politicization of our schools has led to the suppression of intellectual diversity in our students. Alternative viewpoints have become marginalized, which limits students' exposure to new ideas and eliminates critical thinking.

It is more important than ever that our country embraces school choice and allows students to gain the best education possible. School choice empowers parents to choose the best education setting for their children, whether that be public, private, charter, or home schools. Children have unique needs, learning styles, and interests, and no one knows them better than their own parents. Parental rights must not be infringed upon, and it is important to have parents making the decisions when it comes to their own children's schooling. In order to make school choice an option for all, school vouchers are a necessity. Vouchers offer students in low-income areas with underperforming schools an opportunity to afford a different option of schooling and a chance at a greater education. Voucher programs redirect tax dollars that would typically go to the public education system and give them to parents to pay for their child's education how they see fit. This eliminates the need for parents to pay twice for their children's education, once in tax dollars and again in tuition costs. If parents didn't have to pay taxes towards the public-school system while also sending their child to a tuition-based school, they would be more likely to afford the type of education they deem fit.

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program is the oldest school voucher program in the United States, dating back to 1990, and is an example that should be followed nationwide. They provide vouchers to low-income families to send their children to private school, and studies show that students participating in the program have higher graduation rates and parental satisfaction compared to their peers in public schools. Several large cities and states have established voucher programs to help students and parents afford their desired educational institution, including Indiana, Arizona, and Washington D.C. However, California has not, even though it is one of the most expensive states to live in and has one of the highest low-income family populations. The government-run education system is failing and students are falling through the cracks. School choice helps with this issue by promoting competition that can drive schools to raise the standard of education. When schools must compete for students, they are incentivized to raise academic expectations, innovate in teaching methods, and provide a better

overall education. With school choice, schools are also held more accountable by students and parents. There is a serious lack of accountability with schools today as many feel they are free to do and teach whatever they desire, but an uptick in competition would force them to appeal to taxpayers and encourage a strong core curriculum instead of promoting personal ideologies. School choice must be an option across the country before it is too late to save the intellect of our future leaders.