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# Debunking the Anti School Choice Myths

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By Israel

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In response to the demands of citizens from across the country for school choice, the National Education Association has launched a multi-million dollar campaign to fight parental choice. If this campaign follows the pattern of earlier campaigns, it will be replete with scare tactics, half-truths and false prophecies.

Their battle cry is, "school vouchers will destroy the public schools". Yet, there is no data to support this prediction. In fact, wherever school choice has been tried, the public schools have quickly responded by improving the quality of their educational programs. Most revealing is Florida's A-Plus Plan, which assigned a letter grade to each public school, based on how their students performed on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. Students attending schools assessed an F grade for two out of four years, become eligible for publicly funded vouchers to attend a private or religious school.

Students

attending as many as 78 schools were expected to be eligible for vouchers by the end of the 1999-2000 school year. But the state department of education reported that all of those schools had significantly improved their student test scores, thus avoiding the F grade that would have triggered vouchers.

The claim

that school vouchers will drain much needed revenues from public schools, begs the question: Why do public schools now receive the funds that should be directed to the children who are not in the public school system?

By far

the most convoluted argument is that school choice violates the separation of church and state. The claim that leveling the playing field and providing equal educational opportunity for all children violates the Constitution is equivalent to saying that the abolition of slavery violates the rights of slave owners. It was never the intent of the First Amendment to punish those who chose a

religious way of life by denying them the benefits available to others.

Following the strategy of those who find themselves in a losing argument, opponents of school choice resort to unleashing a barrage of claims, in the hope that at least one will stick. Thus, they suddenly become concerned for the integrity of religious schools and put forth the argument that school vouchers will invite government interference. They conveniently ignore the religious interference that government now practices by collecting school taxes from all families, but providing funds only to those who agree to have their children indoctrinated in government run schools where parents have little or no say in what their children are taught.

The one reason they do not give for their opposition to school choice is that they want to retain their monopolistic control over the multi-billion dollar educational system. This monopoly affords them the opportunity to gain maximum benefits for minimum performance.

Competition will force greater productivity and more accountability, just as it does in all areas of enterprise. Sources: "The NEA has launched a multi-million dollar campaign"; School Reform News, September 2000, page one, published by The Heartland Institute, Chicago, Illinois. "Most

revealing is Florida's A-Plus Plan"; Ibid., Page five. The

author: Israel Teitelbaum is a co-founder of Parents for Free Choice in Education, a Morristown, NJ based organization founded in November 1998, in the wake of the United States Supreme Court decision to let stand the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruling which approved the school voucher program in Milwaukee.