

The HB290 Backtrack Bill Promoters Issue Another Disingenuous Attack Against The Public Common School

An ongoing campaign to blast the public school system seems to be the way the HB290 campaigners hope to achieve their objective of universal vouchers. A December 15 Cleveland Plain Dealer article by Guest Columnist Troy McIntosh, a voucher zealot, is an example.

Backpack Bill would empower parents to make schooling decisions for children: Troy McIntosh

Updated: Dec. 15, 2021, 5:11 a.m. | Published: Dec. 15, 2021, 5:10 a.m.

By Guest Columnist, [cleveland.com](https://www.cleveland.com)

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Political pundits and campaign strategists are filling the airwaves dissecting and analyzing a political wave the led to surprising electoral outcomes in Virginia, and increased focus on local school board races across Ohio and the nation.

But what's happened is quite simple to understand: When the state begins to look at parents not as the stewards of their children's education and upbringing, and instead views them as the enemy, you'll see a wave like we've just witnessed. And this is only the beginning. A huge segment of the parent population is feeling left out of their child's education, stuck with no option but to send their child to a school whose educational philosophies are often diametrically opposed to their own deeply held beliefs.

Those feelings are only exacerbated when public officials like Virginia's Terry McAuliffe take the position that parents should not have a say in what is taught in public schools.

This is just one reason why a record number of parents in the United States now support a school freedom model in which the state's educational funding follows the student to whatever schooling option the student's family chooses, whether that be public school, private school, or home school.

A [June 2021 survey](#) conducted by RealClear Opinion Research found 74% of parents favor this type of school freedom, including majorities from both political parties. Among minority populations, 73% of Black parents, 70% of Asian parents, and 69% of Hispanic parents support state funding following their child to a school of their choice.

Empowering parents to make these decisions is exactly what Ohio HB 290, known as the Backpack Bill, will do.

It would direct that the state's per pupil allocation to be placed into an Educational Scholarship Account for any student who opts in. Parents could use that money (\$5,500 for grades K-8 and \$7,500 for grades 9-12) for tuition at a private school or for home school expenses. If a student chooses their local public school or community school, the funding will follow them there, just like it currently does.

Educational freedom is the rising tide that raises all ships.

The research on the effects of school freedom is overwhelmingly positive across a variety of domains. [Researchers at the University of Arkansas](#) found a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between the level of school freedom that a state offers and both academic gains and academic growth in that state. This same study found that increased per pupil spending was negatively associated with gains and growth. The researchers concluded, "Increased public school spending and reduced class sizes often are proposed as substitutes for school choice policies as instruments for increasing student achievement. While our analysis is not causal, we see that higher educational

expenditures are negatively and significantly associated with 2019 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) levels (Model 1) and NAEP gains (Model 2).”

In other words, simply spending more money on a system that assigns students to schools based on where they live does not work.

The critics will often argue that programs like the Backpack Bill will gut public schools, leaving them underfunded and unable to adequately educate those students who remain.

But [there is research that suggests](#) programs like the Backpack Bill can actually improve public education.

Of the 27 studies that have looked at the competitive effects of school choice programs, 25 of them found that public school academic performance actually improved after school freedom programs were introduced to those schools.

We should fund students, not systems. The Backpack Bill will create a high-quality education system that is as diverse as our student population. The question for Ohio leaders is will they ride this wave of parental empowerment and educational freedom, or get swept up by it?

Troy McIntosh is the executive director of the Ohio Christian Education Network, an association of Center for Christian Virtue. He has 27 years of teaching and school administration experience in Ohio.

<https://www.cleveland.com/opinion/2021/12/backpack-bill-would-empower-parents-to-make-schooling-decisions-for-children-troy-mcintosh.html>