

Economist Milton Friedman Was Wrong On His Notion That Vouchers Would Improve Education

In 1955 Friedman wrote a paper—The Role of Government in Education—in which he advocated that the only role government should have in education is to provide some money for parents to buy some kind of private education. The last paragraph of his paper sums up his notion that vouchers would improve education:

“The result of these measures would be a sizable reduction in the direct activities of government, yet a great widening in the educational opportunities open to our children. They would bring a healthy increase in the variety of educational institutions available and in competition among them. Private initiative and enterprise would quicken the pace of progress in this area as it has in so many others. Government would serve its proper function of improving the operation of the invisible hand without substituting the dead hand of bureaucracy.”

With more than two decades of experience with vouchers, there is no evidence that vouchers improve education outcomes.

It is note-worthy that Friedman, in a speech to the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) in 2004, advocated that parents should pay for the education of their own children—that education is not the responsibility of government. This is still the endgame for a subset of the voucher advocates.