

Ohio's Premier Education Blogger Jan Resseger--Americans for Prosperity in Ohio: What is the Koch –Funded Buckeye Blueprint's Education Plan?

In a May 19 Blog, Jan Resseger exposes the anti-public school strategy of a new initiative of the Koch's Americans for Prosperity.

The Kochs, along with a plethora of other billionaire individuals and organizations, have been waging war against America's public school system for decades. In a new grassroots tactic these folks are currently spewing their anti-public school venom at the school district level.

Americans for Prosperity in Ohio: What is the Koch-Funded Buckeye Blueprint's Education Plan?

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We ought to suspect that someone has been investing heavily to push school privatization in Ohio. Last summer our legislature passed a budget that radically expanded state funding for private school tuition vouchers, allocated more money for charter schools, made every one of the state's 610 school districts eligible for charter school operators to open schools, and allocated so much money for school privatization and tax cuts that legislators felt they couldn't pass a stand alone bill that would have established the full six-year phase in of the Cupp-Patterson public school funding plan.

I cannot name all of the far-right organizations investing in the promotion of school privatization in Ohio, but one new initiative, launched in February, is [Americans for Prosperity-Ohio's Buckeye Blueprint](#).

[The Buckeye Blueprint](#), describes itself in overblown hyperbole as, "a new grassroots campaign that seeks to build a bolder and better state by bringing people together to build bottom-up movements around policy priorities at the state and local levels. This will be accomplished by empowering concerned citizens to participate in the legislative process by building greater awareness of critical legislative opportunities for change.... Americans for Prosperity-Ohio is driving long-term solutions to the country's biggest problems."

In [Advancing Educational Opportunities for Everyone](#), the Buckeye Blueprint campaign announces the campaign's education agenda—beginning with a celebration of the Ohio Legislature's expansion of publicly funded private school tuition vouchers last summer: "Governor DeWine, Speaker Cupp, and, most notably, Senate President Huffman, deserve credit for steps taken in the most recent Budget that increased educational opportunity through vouchers."

[Advancing Educational Opportunities for Everyone](#) also plugs [Ohio's Backpack Bill, HB 290](#), a bill being discussed in the legislature to establish a universal Education Savings Account voucher program that would give every Ohio family public dollars to choose a school or spend the public dollars on any so-called educational activity the family prefers including home schooling. The Buckeye Blueprint website explains: "Passage of universal Education Savings Accounts... would put more parents in a better position to make the best choices for their kids." Americans for Prosperity-Ohio wants us to follow the lead of our neighbors, Indiana and West Virginia, by expanding all kinds of vouchers: "Hoosier & Mountaineer families are feeling the benefit of bold reform in the last 12 months while Buckeye families seeking opportunity are currently under attack in our courts."

Glowing language frames an individualistic agenda that claims its purpose is to expand educational opportunity, but the buzzwords show that Americans for Prosperity-Ohio is not a bit concerned about the needs of our state's 1.8 million students in the public schools. Instead the Buckeye Blueprint demands that Ohio's citizens pressure the legislature to: "Fund students, not schools," for the purpose of unlocking "each individual's unique potential." The Buckeye Blueprint prescribes that, as an alternative to a system of public schools, the Ohio Legislature should offer, "credit for learning, wherever it occurs; (provide) the freedom to enroll in a variety of courses inside and outside of a child's school; (provide) funded accounts that can be used for a variety of educational uses; (and ensure) public schools of choice."

The Buckeye Blueprint refers parents and education advocates to another website: [Yes. Every Kid](#), where we can find the "yes. policy framework": "Does this policy contribute to a diversity of solutions?" "Does this policy empower families to choose what works best?" "Does this policy allow students to customize their education?" "Does this policy ensure funding is attached to the student?"

To refute this sort of slick, individualist appeal, it is helpful to remember that public education is designed to balance our society's obligation to meet the needs of each particular student with the public responsibility for maintaining a system that secures the rights of all of our state's students. Public schools are not only publicly funded, but they are expected to be universally available and accountable to the public by law and through the oversight of locally elected school boards.

In [Consumed](#), the late political philosopher, Benjamin Barber explains precisely where campaigns like the Buckeye Blueprint go wrong in their individualist ideology and why school privatization will undermine our society and inevitably disadvantage the most vulnerable children:

“Through vouchers we are able as individuals, through private choosing, to shape institutions and policies that are useful to our own interests but corrupting to the public goods that give private choosing its meaning. I want a school system where my kid gets the very best; you want a school system where your kid is not slowed down by those less gifted or less adequately prepared; she wants a school system where children whose ‘disadvantaged backgrounds’ (often kids of color) won’t stand in the way of her daughter’s learning; he (a person of color) wants a school system where he has the maximum choice to move his kid out of ‘failing schools’ and into successful ones. What do we get? The incomplete satisfaction of those private wants through a fragmented system in which individuals secede from the public realm, undermining the public system to which we can subscribe in common. Of course no one really wants a country defined by deep educational injustice and the surrender of a public and civic pedagogy whose absence will ultimately impact even our own private choices... Yet aggregating our private choices as educational consumers in fact yields an inegalitarian and highly segmented society in which the least advantaged are further disadvantaged as the wealthy retreat ever further from the public sector. As citizens, we would never consciously select such an outcome, but in practice what is good for ‘me,’ the educational consumer, turns out to be a disaster for ‘us’ as citizens and civic educators—and thus for me the denizen of an American commons (or what’s left of it).” (*Consumed*, p. 132)

For all the specific reasons our society would be worse off with the expansion of vouchers at the expense of public schools and would be even more damaged by a universal Education Savings Account program like Ohio’s proposed HB 290 Backpack Bill, we can turn to the resources at [Public Funds Public Schools](#), a [collaboration of the Education Law Center and the Southern Poverty Law Center](#). Public Funds Public Schools has posted a [catalogue of research, gathered into eight categories](#):

- Private School Vouchers Don’t Improve Student Achievement.
- Private School Vouchers Divert Needed Funding from Public Schools.
- Private School Voucher Programs Lack Accountability.
- Absence of Oversight in Private School Voucher Programs Leads to Corruption and Waste.
- Private School Vouchers Don’t Help Students with Disabilities.
- Private School Vouchers Don’t Protect Against Discrimination.
- Private School Vouchers Exacerbate Segregation.
- Universal Private School Voucher Programs Don’t Work.

Public Funds Public Schools summarizes this research into several two-page fact sheets:

- [Research Shows Private School Vouchers Don't Work for Students and Harm Public Schools.](#)
- [The Myth of Cost Savings from Private School Vouchers](#)
- [Vouchers for Private Virtual Education are Misspent Public Money.](#)

Benjamin Barber precisely defines how privatization damages a society. His words perfectly describe what it will mean if states like Ohio continue to expand, at public expense, private school tuition vouchers and Education Savings Account programs like Ohio's proposed Backpack Bill:

"Privatization is a kind of reverse social contract: it dissolves the bonds that tie us together into free communities and democratic republics. It puts us back in the state of nature where we possess a natural right to get whatever we can on our own, but at the same time lose any real ability to secure that to which we have a right. Private choices rest on individual power... personal skills... and personal luck. Public choices rest on civic rights and common responsibilities, and presume equal rights for all. Public liberty is what the power of common endeavor establishes, and hence presupposes that we have constituted ourselves as public citizens by opting into the social contract. With privatization, we are seduced back into the state of nature by the lure of private liberty and particular interest; but what we experience in the end is an environment in which the strong dominate the weak... the very dilemma which the original social contract was intended to address." (*Consumed*, pp. 143-144)

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