

Voucher proponents are winning in the legislatures (including in Ohio) across the nation, that is why litigation is essential.

A listing of the winning record of voucher zealots is provided by Steve Nuzum.

Legislators and governors throughout the nation have been drinking the voucher Kool-Aid for more than a decade. Many legislators refuse to listen to the rational opponent testimony of professional public educators and other citizens.

[Voucher Proponents Across the Country are Winning. What Are the Stakes?](#)

Steve Nuzum

Jan 30

Across the country, states like Utah and Iowa are getting closer to passing school voucher legislation, while many others have already done so.

According to Education Week, “lawmakers in at least 11 states—Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Virginia—have introduced and, in some cases, passed school choice bills”.

Generally speaking, these bills fund private schools in one of several ways, usually routing state money creatively in order to circumnavigate— often in only the most technical sense—prohibitions against direct state aid to private schools. Many of these measures are probably legal, but in states like SC they openly flout the spirit of state constitutions. “Education savings account” bills give state funding to qualifying families, who are then able to spend the money on private educational services. “Education tax credit” bills instead essentially refund taxpayers who provide “grants” to public schools. (In South Carolina’s “PACE” bills, for example, you can “donate” up to \$11,000 to a fund that provides private school vouchers to students, and in return the state will deduct the entire amount from your taxes.)

As critics of voucher proposals in many states, including South Carolina, have pointed out, it’s unclear what kind of organizations will receive these funds. Generally speaking, private schools which are both geographically accessible to and willing to accept many of the neediest students from areas with the most underfunded schools are likely pretty rare.

Several outlets including Vice have recently reported on an Ohio-based network of homeschooling parents. According to the report, one of the leaders of the network said, “We have our children’s best interest at heart and nobody can do a better job than we can because it’s our child. We are so deeply invested into making sure that that child becomes a wonderful Nazi”.

While the newsworthy part of this statement is the frank embrace of Nazism, the rest of the statement is paint-by-numbers “parent rights” rhetoric, the same rhetoric that is increasingly being used to promote vouchers and other education deregulation schemes. Of course this doesn’t mean that all “parent rights” advocates are promoting dangerous ideologies; I truly believe many just want to figure out a way to help their kids get a good education, often in states which have abandoned their responsibilities to provide that for all children. But the juxtaposition also demonstrates how a fairly reasonable-sounding premise— that parents and guardians should ideally be deeply involved in their children’s educations— can also be used to support all kinds of insanity.

I don’t think Ohio allows homeschool programs to receive state funding, but current SC proposals to create “education savings accounts” (Senate Bill 39) and “education tax credits” (House Bill 3422 and

Senate Bill 285) would potentially allow state funding to flow directly to organizations like this, or to reimburse those who fund them.

H. 3422 and S. 285, for example, would each allow funding to go to “home school curriculum fees,” defined in the bill as “the total amount of money charged for instruction-related expenditures of a home school child to attend an eligible home school including, but not limited to, curriculum packages, textbooks, digital education, and testing materials”. S. 39 could easily be amended to include these programs as well.

As to why the funds might end up supporting something like a Nazi homeschool network (or, more likely, a school that discriminates against LGBTQ+ students, as North Carolina has with millions in “opportunity scholarships” or teaches that humans and dinosaurs lived side by side, as publicly funded Florida private schools and textbooks have), the reason is simple: voucher bills tend to explicitly prohibit most regulation that would keep that from happening. (This lack of oversight makes the loudest argument for “alternative education”— that public schools are somehow underregulated because current rules and procedures supposedly aren’t enough to keep the local public school teacher from brainwashing your kids— even more ridiculous, but we’ll get to that.)

S. 39, for example, forbids any state oversight of programs, businesses, and individuals receiving money from an “education savings account,” even though by definition those funds will come from state tax revenue.

The tax credit bills contain similar language, although instead of sending tax dollars directly to families to use to pay for educational services, as the ESA bill does, these bills would reimburse donors with state funds.

This lack of oversight, in fact, is usually presented as a selling point: that the unregulated free market will somehow avoid the “indoctrination” of students... somehow... just don’t think about it too long. As Jack Schneider and Jennifer Berkshire write in *A Wolf at the Schoolhouse Door*,

But for proponents of private school choice, the absence of oversight is a feature, not a bug. Unregulated by design, these programs are intended to undermine the apparatus of the state, not expand it. In Florida, for instance, the state is only allowed to pay ten visits a year to schools receiving tax-credit scholarship funds— a tiny fraction of participating schools. The vast majority of private schools aren’t accredited, and the schools are exempt from the state’s accountability system... Freedom from “red tape” allows private schools to skirt any number of laws and regulations, including those pertaining to civil rights, anti-discrimination, and the rights of children with special needs.

In South Carolina last week, legislators rejected amendments to S. 39 which would have prohibited discrimination against students with disabilities, funded vouchers only in years in which public schools were also fully funded, prohibited private schools receiving vouchers from raising tuition more than 2.5% a year, and guaranteed a minimum number of days of in-person instruction. While I doubt legislators want to promote Nazi homeschools, they also don’t seem to want to promote schools that are required to serve all students or maintain any kind of accountability to the many taxpayers whose students will not attend these voucher-funded schools, and yet who will have to subsidize them nonetheless.

The reality is that once you throw chum in the water— in the form of nearly or even completely unregulated state money— there is no way to control what will rise up to eat it. Of course, most schools, homeschool networks, and service providers won’t be as extreme as those which are explicitly teaching children to revere Hitler. Many of those programs will try, and perhaps succeed, to legitimately serve student needs. But it is an obvious fallacy to pretend total deregulation won’t almost certainly lead to

fraud and abuse in state's adopting neo-voucher schemes, just as they have led to fraud and abuse in other states.

The advantage of sending tax funds to organizations accountable to taxpayers, after all, is that they are accountable to taxpayers.

But while legislators push for these neo-vouchers to fund unregulated private programs, many of the same legislators will also be pushing bills to add censorship and redundant reporting requirements to public schools, such as H. 3728. The new chair of the SC House Education and Public Works Committee has stated directly that two of her major priorities for the Committee are to continue to try to ban "critical race theory" and to pass "school choice" (vouchers), goals which are obviously incompatible (at least if taken at face value) because the first significantly expands government oversight of some state-funded schools, while the other deliberately deregulates other schools which would now be at least partly state-funded.

Of course, that's the goal, really: the anti-"woke"/ anti-"CRT" propaganda works mainly to serve an emotionally powerful but deeply illogical argument that the only way for students to escape "failing" public schools is to seek refuge in unregulated, publicly-funded private schools.

A Huffington Post article on the Nazi homeschool network laid out the disturbing juxtaposition at work in these complementary movements to heavily censor publicly-accountable schools while empowering "private" (but potentially state-funded) education networks:

Although the Lawrences will now surely face some public scorn and accountability, it's likely their neo-Nazi curriculum is legal. A concerted, decades-long campaign by right-wing Christian groups to deregulate home schooling has afforded parents wide latitude in how they teach their kids — even if that means indoctrinating them with explicit fascism.

Meanwhile major right-wing figures are increasingly promoting home schooling as a way to save children from alleged "wokeness" — or liberal ideas about race and gender — in public and private schools. As extreme as the Dissident Homeschool channel is, the propaganda it shares targeting the American education system is just a more explicit and crass articulation of talking points made by Fox News hosts or by major figures in the Republican Party.

More likely than Nazi schools are the kinds of unregulated fly-by-night programs uncovered by the Orlando Sentinel in Florida, the state which pioneered these kinds of neo-vouchers. According to the investigation, "Private schools... in Florida will collect nearly \$1 billion in state-backed scholarships in 2017 through a system so weakly regulated that some schools hire teachers without college degrees, hold classes in aging strip malls and falsify fire-safety and health records." As Newsweek has reported, "Despite relying on public funding, the Florida Department of Education is prohibited by law from tracking the curriculum used by the 140,000 students attending private school on state scholarships. And you can probably guess which state South Carolina's new Superintendent of Education, Ellen Weaver, has often held up as a shining example of the kind of "school choice" she would like to pursue.

In one of many representative examples, Ellen Weaver celebrates Florida's "school choice" programs.

In other words, we know what's coming if we pass legislation that subsidizes the educations of some children (and, based on amendments discussed on S. 39, it looks more and more likely that many of these children will be from wealthy families who don't need subsidies) while defunding the public schools that will always serve the majority of students— nearly 800,000 of them in South Carolina.

CC3448 2.14.23 Tuesday

S. 39 and S. 285 both have hearings this week. If you're in South Carolina, please contact your state senator and let them know you want state education funding to go to public schools, which are accountable for the content they teach and required to serve all students.

Meetings on S. 285 start Tuesday.

Please use the following link to access hyperlinks and other information contained in the article:
[Voucher Proponents Across the Country are Winning. What Are the Stakes? \(substack.com\)](#)