

Those who believe EdChoice vouchers, Education Savings Accounts, and Tuition Tax Credits can co-exist with the public common school system are not acquainted with the actual motivation and current actions of those who control the voucher agenda and movement.

Some public school allies and advocates, even some engaged directly in the management and operation of the public common school system, have concluded that school vouchers and other forms of tax-supported privatization can co-exist with the public common school system. An examination of the motivations and actions of those driving the school choice movement indicates otherwise.

The universal voucher scheme in Ohio grew from a legislative mandate requiring vouchers in just one of Ohio's 617 districts in the mid-1990's to legislation making vouchers available to every school-age student.

But this universal voucher coup is not the endgame. Voucher-like schemes—Tuition Tax Credits, Education Savings Accounts for non-chartered private schools, and capital funding for private schools—are on the legislature's agenda. These privatization schemes are in addition to EdChoice vouchers and long-standing non-public Administrative Cost Reimbursement, Auxiliary Services, and private school student transportation provided by public school districts.

The president of the Ohio Senate announced his intent to provide capital funds to existing private schools. He is particularly interested in expanding private school opportunities in rural areas. This initiative is to expand the demand for vouchers.

The voucher threat to the public common school system is real. Powerful forces throughout the nation and especially right here in Ohio are attacking the traditional concept of education being provided and publicly operated via school districts. Teachers' unions have been under attack for several decades. Powerful voices are now suggesting that boards of education are a relic of the past; that school district boundaries should not limit where a student will attend school; that tax funds belong to students, not school districts.

The father of school vouchers, Economist Milton Friedman, in the 1950's, recommended universal vouchers for private schools. Later in life, Friedman said that parents should pay for the education of their own children, just as they provide food and housing for them.

Presidents Reagan and G.H.W. Bush were Friedman-type voucher advocates. Neither were fans of public schools. Reagan's Nation at Risk report was framed and broadly publicized as a blunt instrument to hammer public schools.

The long game for voucher zealots is the elimination of traditional public education. Voucher schemes have a private purpose. The common school system has a public purpose. The two are not compatible. Co-existence is not a long-term option. Public school management and staff, and public school advocates must probe deeply into the motivation and actions of those who are actually driving the voucher agenda. Their ultimate goal is to eliminate public education. Senate President Huffman wants to expand private school enrollment by providing tax funds to build private schools. A private school in northeastern Ohio recently purchased land for one-half million dollars. Certainly, this school will welcome tax funds for facilities.