

Do LGBT kids need school choice?

To much national acclaim, a new school for LGBT kids is opening in Atlanta called “Pride School”. According to the school’s website, its [mission](#) is the following:

“To provide LGBTQIAA students, families and educators a safe, fun and rigorous learning environment free of homophobia and transphobia – a place that honors their identities so they can be themselves, find themselves, and find friends and mentors who can help them navigate the challenges of life and education.”

As for the school’s educational philosophy, it seems to be very much of a student-driven or child-centered learning approach:

“All students will have the freedom, responsibility, and support to create their own individualized curriculum, education, and school climate through trust and democratic decision-making processes.”

In an opinion [piece](#) in Atlanta’s major paper, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, columnist Kyle Wingfield makes the argument that the biggest downside to the school opening is that it will likely cost families \$13,000 for annual tuition per student, which many families with LGBT kids probably won’t be able to afford.

“Pride School, and the students it serves and teachers it employs, is a perfect example of why Georgia needs more school-choice measures for more families in more circumstances. There have been awful stories about the treatment of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in public schools. While we certainly shouldn’t seek to remove them from traditional public schools, it’s

perfectly understandable if some of these students and their families think changing schools would be a better option.

Undoubtedly, though, many of these families can't afford the expected annual tuition of \$13,000. School-choice measures, such as Education Savings Accounts, could go a long way toward helping them put their students in a better learning environment.

But while Georgia's Democrats have championed LGBT rights, the majority of them also have stood against expansions of school choice. Why? Because, even though many other longtime Democratic supporters would benefit from having more choices, the various teacher lobbies and education interest groups that contribute to their campaigns demand their fealty to the same old model of public education."

For the sake of transparency, the author is described as the "AJC's conservative columnist". Nonetheless, is his underlying point valid that parents need more freedom to find the right learning environments for their kids? Probably.

What seems to be unsaid but implied in both the creation of Pride School and the argument for school choice is that education is not value-neutral and that parents should have the first right to find schools that match their values.

For the wealthier members of our society it is much easier to find a school of their choice, even if it costs \$13,000 per year. For poor and middle-class Americans, they do not have the same freedom to find schools that reflect family values.

In some areas of the country, \$13,000 per student will seem like a lot compared to local public schools' spending per student whereas in other areas that amount would be on par or even less than what local public school districts spend per student. Ironically, in Atlanta Public Schools, the district itself [admits](#) that it spends \$13,000 per student annually:



With that spending in mind, what if parents with LGBT kids in the Atlanta Public Schools wanted to send them to Pride School instead of the local public school? If all parents had an Education Savings Account of \$13,000 to spend at any school, they could now have the kind of equality of educational choices that has been traditionally available only for the wealthy or higher-income families.

Without a doubt, that idea probably appeals to not just a few parents of LGBT students, but also parents from a wide variety of worldviews, even clashing worldviews. But to provide that opportunity to find schools that are more in line with a family's values while publicly funding student access, means that the "old model of public education" must be tossed aside.

Tossing aside one model of public education does not mean the tossing aside of the desire for the public to be educated or the desires of taxpayers to help make it possible. It simply means that we approach education with a new model, one that recognizes that education is important and should be funded but is not and never was value-neutral. Parents, therefore, should have the freedom to find schools that reflect their values, LGBT or even religious. Values after all are values.

It's certainly something to think about as a model that is more in line with today's dominant cultural values of freedom and equality. And, in the case of Atlanta, it seems financially possible.