

Scholar: Many Schools Today Are ‘Indoctrination Centers’

Here in my city, parents with privilege have many choices. They can send their children to progressive private schools with no grades and no tests, Montessori or Waldorf schools that each focus on a specific value system and learning philosophy, parochial schools, or traditional independent schools. They can also choose to send their children to the city’s public schools or move to another city or town based on its public school system.

Parents without privilege have far fewer choices. They are often stuck with the district public school to which their child has been assigned. For many families, this assignment works just fine. Parents are content with their appointed public school and their children thrive. For other families, though, this assignment can ensnare children in a mandatory school environment that causes physical, emotional, or spiritual harm. And there is no escape.

In his new book, [*The Corrupt Classroom: Bias, Indoctrination, Violence, and Social Engineering Show Why America Needs School Choice*](#), author Lance Izumi puts aside the many academically-based justifications for school choice and instead looks at non-academic reasons for supporting choice. Senior Director of the Center for Education at the San Francisco-based Pacific Research Institute, Izumi provides a well-researched, richly informed analysis of the ways mandatory schooling without choice can harm children. He writes:

“A public school might have decent test scores, but if parents feel their children are being politically indoctrinated; are at risk of being victimized by other students or teachers; are being shortchanged because of mismanagement by school officials; or are having their basic value system overturned,

then parents and their children should have the right and the tools to exit the public school system for educational alternatives that better meet their needs and preferences.”

In a compelling narrative, Izumi describes examples of political indoctrination, school violence, questionable curriculum content, and religious intolerance as among the reasons parents should be able to choose among a suite of education options for their children.

Describing curriculum shifts and radicalized teachers that present a specific ideological viewpoint, Izumi writes: “Far from being mere anecdotal incidents—and there are a lot of these—political bias is becoming systemic in public school systems and has turned many public schools into indoctrination centers for progressive ideologies and causes.” For families who don’t share those political ideologies, or who want school to be a place for learning not activism, they often have no way to opt-out of an assigned district school.

In addition to avoiding bias and indoctrination, escaping school violence and assault are further non-academic reasons to support school choice. *The Corrupt Classroom* presents startling data showing a rise in student-to-student school violence and bullying. This rise has been attributed to well-intentioned efforts to ease “zero tolerance” discipline policies by reducing the number of suspensions and expulsions. The consequence, however, is that school violence is being more tolerated to a troubling degree. Izumi asks: “Why keep one’s children in systems that do not put an urgent priority on protecting them?”

Peer violence is not the only type escalating in schools across the country. [*The Corrupt Classroom*](#) reports data on sex crimes by teachers against students, saying “in 2014 alone there were 781 reported sex crimes by teachers and other employees. That is an average of 15 students per week who were sexually victimized by school personnel.” Again, for most

parents there is little they can do to remove their children from harm. Without school choice, their children must remain in their compulsory district school.

There are many academic justifications for supporting school choice, but just as important are the non-academic reasons. Parents with privilege get to make these choices everyday, based on their own family values, priorities, and ideologies. But most parents have little choice but to send their child to an assigned district school, regardless of its environment. In cases like the ones described in *The Corrupt Classroom*, this assignment can cause both visible and hidden wounds. Parents have the deep desire and obligation to remove their children from harm. We should give them the freedom to do it.