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Ten Good Reasons for Free Market Schooling

©2005 Marshall Fritz S June 7, 2005 S Version 6.6

Prologue

Free Market Schooling means educational services are offered without compulsion or subsidy by any level of government. This means repealing the compulsion of financing, attendance, content, and state regulation of teachers and institutions that are central to today’s “public schooling.”

Free Market Schooling requires the separation of *school* and state so that government no more runs “Monday School” than it does “Sunday School.”

Free Market Schooling means repealing the compulsion schooling measures passed in America since the 1840s. It means reversing school socialism, that is, the ownership and operation of schools by cities, counties, school districts, states, and the federal government.

Free Market Schooling avoids the menace of monopoly, *single-provider* schooling, such as today’s “public schools,” and of monopsony, *single-customer* schooling that results from tax-funded school vouchers or education tax-credits.

In a truly free market, schools can be operated by a variety of individuals and organizations ranging from private individuals to teacher co-ops; from for-profit corporations to churches; from secular to mildly religious to highly religious. Just remember that the essence of the free market is not the presence of profit motive but the absence of force and compulsion.

Free Market Schooling respects the rights of parents to choose the form, degree, and content of schooling they believe best for their children. Children are not conceived by the state; they are not mere creatures of the state; they should not be fed, churched, clothed, entertained, or educated by the state.

1. Free Market Schooling means unsafe schools will go out of business. Disciplined by competition, Free Market Schools won’t tolerate violence because parents can easily move their children to a competitor.

2. Free Market Schooling will provide a psychologically safer environment for children. When we think of emotional bullying, we typically think of children bullying each other. But more damage can be done when adults tell little children their parents are wrong.

The immature child suffers psychological abuse when he is forced to decide which authority figure not to believe, his parents or his school. The child can resolve such “cognitive dissonance” by concluding truth can be anything he wants it to be. This confusion about reality impedes development of reasoning because reality appears inconsistent.

Free Market Schooling avoids this emotional trauma because (a) private schools advertise their worldview or religion so parents know what they’re getting, and (b) parents can more easily change schools if they discover they are being undermined.

3. Free Market Schooling fosters responsibility. Many parents feel helpless in the face of educational authorities telling them they’re not qualified to make education decisions. Many abdicate their child-rearing decisions to these “credentialed experts.”

With Free Market Schooling, all parents will be in the position of home schooling parents: They expect to make decisions about education. These same parents learned to make choices about cars, computers, health care, and careers. They can learn how to select schools. No one says, “I’m neither a car nor a career expert, so I want the government to pick them for me.”

Parents get involved in education when they *directly* pay for it. Every time the government takes on more parental duties, parents will parent less. Ask a sports coach what happens when you expect nothing.

There is no utopian escape from bad parenting, but Free Market Schooling at least offers hope to involve parents and thus reverse the decline of parenting.

4. Free Market Schooling will be the “Great Emancipator of the Poor.” Innovation and competition will cut the cost of schooling by 50-80 percent while improving quality over the “public schools” that are mis-serving the poor today. Good super-saver schools will be available for \$40-60 per week in America as they are today for \$1-3 per week in Brazil, India, and several countries in Africa.

Even at \$60/week, between a quarter and a third of American families will need tuition help. Can we prudently expect enough to be contributed voluntarily?

Yes. Americans currently donate over \$200 billion per year to charities, including over \$30 billion to higher education. To make sure that 15 million lower-income children have access to good schools, private K-12 scholarship programs need to expand by \$25-30 billion per year. This is prudently predictable considering current charitable levels and the \$400+ billion tax cut resulting from the extinction of compulsion schooling.

5. Free Market Schooling improves real tolerance and civic harmony and also protects minorities and cultural diversity. Advocates of compulsion schooling claim that “public schools” (a/k/a “common schools”) are necessary to unite us as a nation. Nothing could be further from the truth: compulsion schooling creates conflicts by forcing “one-size-fits-all” on our diverse population.

Today’s harmony-breaking issues are rooted in teaching methods and religious beliefs. Pedagogy battles include back-to-basics vs. progressive methods such as phonics vs. whole language and traditional math vs. “new math” and “new new math.” Religion-rooted battles range from “evolution as fact” vs. “evolution as one of several theories” to “abstinence until marriage” vs. “sexual experimentation to find one’s ‘sexual identity’.”

Regarding minorities, America has been simultaneously generous and cruel to minorities, especially immigrants. Compulsion schooling has been and still is the major instrument to cleanse society of minority differences.

Every few decades, the minorities qualifying for such abuse changes. In the past, Indians, blacks, Cajuns, Hispanics and others have been abused. Today, those who don’t vaccinate or recycle, those who enjoy guns or drive gas guzzlers, those who believe in free markets or complain about welfare are some of the minorities whose children qualify for bullying by textbooks (and some teachers) in “public” schools.

For America to grow toward an ideal of free minds, free speech, free markets—indeed, a free people—we must stop using schools to force acceptance of the politically correct ideas *du jour*. When schooling is fully returned to the free market, such conflicts are handled within the family.

For contrast, note that we never have “pizza wars.” The conflict between vegetarians and meat lovers never splits a community because we don’t allow our neighbors to vote on what our family has for dinner. We don’t live in pizza districts. With Free Market Schooling, we won’t live in school districts.

6. Free Market Schooling fosters better academic achievement. Removing government compulsion means that schools will be free to use time more efficiently. In the past, eighth-grade graduates mastered subject material far beyond that covered by most of today’s high schools. A generation of homeschooling has proven students still can learn much more in fewer hours and fewer years. Free Market Schools will offer individualization so children do not have to “adapt to the herd” in learning style and pace. Today’s square pegs will find square holes in which to learn.

With the repeal of compulsion attendance, those few children actually unfit for classroom instruction will not be in classrooms. Other programs will be devised for them. The innovation to do this is sadly suppressed by today’s compulsion schooling, but glimpses can be seen in private continuation schools.

7. Free Market Schooling is good for educators. Teachers and administrators will be able to do what attracted them to teaching—concentrate on children rather than bureaucratic rules.

Principals and teachers who share a worldview and an education philosophy will start their own schools, often renting space in former government-school buildings. Like physicians, they'll hire assistants and business managers, not superintendents.

Schools will be smaller and more numerous. Teachers will typically know the name of every child in the school. Some teachers will bring back “dame schools” where a teacher instructs 8-15 students in her home. Teacher pay will go both up and down: up for the best, down or eliminated for those to whom parents will not willingly send their children.

Parents, not politicians, will be educators’ customers. Teachers will not be subject to the whims of the latest “Education Governor.”

8. Free Market Schooling better utilizes student and teacher time. Repealing compulsion attendance and compulsion content promotes competition to lower prices while improving the service. This will spur educators to become more careful in the way they use student, teacher, and administrator time.

Bright children will likely spend fewer hours and years in secondary education. Technological innovations will allow some students to study from home or learning centers, arranging their own schedules.

Students who have mastered material need not repeat it year after year simply because that’s what is done at each grade level. Efficiency will free up resources for more special interest classes, vocational and technological job training, and part-time work to help pay tuition.

9. Free Market Schooling will reduce waste. Colleges and businesses will become more efficient when high school graduates can think, read, write, and compute. Students with specific career goals can partner with like-minded businesses for apprenticeship programs. Millions of people will be added to the productive sector as the largely wasted age of adolescence gives way to creativity and production.

10. Free Market Schooling is available for your family now. It may take one or two generations for enough Americans to see the benefits of Free Market Schooling, hence achieve the political will to repeal the compulsion we have come to accept as normal. It took several generations under communism for the Russians to reverse course.

But unlike the Soviet Union, America is still free enough that you can achieve the most important benefits for your family without waiting for 51 percent of your neighbors to “get the plot.” It simply means extra sacrifice to forego the “free public schooling” and either home school or put your children in a non-government school that reinforces your beliefs.