



BluegrassBeacon
BY JIM WATERS

March 6 rally can stop 'Monopoly' players from passing 'Go'

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ABC's John Stossel in a "20/20" report examined America's education system in a segment called "Stupid in America." It wasn't pretty.

Teacher unions and bought-and-sold politicians don't look so good when a reporter of Stossel's ilk tells the unvarnished truth about public schools. The unions moaned, and one in New York, which planned to give Stossel an award, pulled it after the piece aired.

But many levelheaded viewers – including teachers – cheered.

Stossel's investigation showed how students keep falling way behind their peers in other countries where school choice prevails. Unions staunchly oppose giving parents the freedom to determine where students go to school, and where the money their taxes provide for schools goes.

"Now, my tiny brain can't imagine what experiments might blossom if we had a market in education, because markets work without central planners trying to picket," Stossel said during a speech at the Heritage Foundation's spring 2006 President's Club in Washington, DC.

Unions don't like that kind of talk but cannot refute it.

Stossel and others know that bureaucracy makes it nearly impossible to fire teachers in public schools – even ones accused of making sexual advances toward students. He also knows that school choice would result in some teachers – good ones – getting big pay raises based on student performance.

"Government can't run steel mills or airlines," Stossel also has said. "Why should we think a government monopoly would be good at educating kids?"

Americans have benefited greatly from the break-up of monopolies so we have better choices.

And if you want to help break the "Big Ed" monopoly and allow competition that benefits our state's neediest families and students, here's your chance. Gather at noon in the Capitol Rotunda in Frankfort on March 6 for a "Rally for School Choice."

Why? It's spring, and just like Chicago Cub fans, Kentuckians should have hope. Because school-choice bills filed in the Legislature provide a reason for it.

- House Bill 397 would offer scholarships for Kentucky's 109,000 special-needs children to attend schools of their liking.

School districts often claim special-needs students represent the most costly group for which to provide a “free and appropriate education,” as the federal law requires.

The research backs up this claim. Vicki Murray of the Pacific Research Institute, who wrote a report on Kentucky’s proposed special-needs bill, found that every special-needs student who receives a scholarship “could save the state and local school districts approximately \$5,100 each.”

If just 1 percent of Kentucky’s special-needs students – approximately 1,100 – could have participated in this type of scholarship program in 2005, the state and school districts would have saved an estimated \$5.7 million. That’s because the school districts these special-needs students left would still receive the same amount of money from other local and federal revenue sources without the responsibility, or cost, of teaching as many kids.

- Second, House Bill 578 would make Kentucky the 41st state (plus the District of Columbia) with charter schools. Herbert J. Walberg of the Hoover Institution said in an interview with the Cato Institute about his book, “School Choice: The Findings,” that charter schools are “growing like lightning” throughout the country.

Why? Because charter schools allow low-income parents, those who couldn’t afford to pay private-school tuition, the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of school choice. Why should a parent’s zip code or small paycheck keep a student from enjoying the benefits of quality education?

And the more residents who show up for the rally March 6, the less chance opponents of education freedom have to stop the school-choice storm.

I’ll be there. I hope you will, too. Let’s strike lightning together.

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