



VIEWPOINT

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Teacher Union Contracts Keep Schools From Competing

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Summary

David Hansen explains how market forces work to improve educational outcomes, and how teacher union contracts inhibit such progress.

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Parental choice in education offers the promise of improving public school systems by holding them accountable to market forces. First, charter schools and private schools innovate and differentiate their product in order to attract parents who want something for their children not offered by the public school system, such as better academics or a safer school environment.

Then public schools respond to the forces of market accountability -- the decisions of parents and pupils to leave their system for better offerings -- by improving their product, listening better to the wants and needs of parents and better organizing their efforts toward educating children.

Market accountability ensures that schools are run for the sake of educating children. Regulatory accountability -- the rules, regulations, contracts and mandates created by politicians and bureaucrats as their tools for micro-managing public schools -- ensures that schools instead dance to the tune of the politically powerful, in particular, teacher unions and school bureaucracies.



Market forces encourage schools to be run for the sake of educating kids.

The promise of parental choice and market accountability to improve public schools systems assumes that school systems are institutionally capable of responding to market accountability.

Recently, an editorial on Ecole Kenwood in the *Columbus Dispatch* shows that this assumption does not hold true for Columbus Public Schools (CPS). Its teacher union contract keeps CPS from offering something as commonsensical to parents preparing their children for success in today's global economy as a language immersion school. Imagine how the CPS teacher contract thwarts other aspects of running schools for the sake of kids as opposed to that of its teacher union.

Columbus is not unique. Across the state, teacher union contracts - the epitome of regulatory accountability of schools -- defeat the best attempts of public school systems to respond to the demands of market accountability in the form of parents newly empowered with school choice options.

Parental choice strategies are still needed to simply save as many children as possible from our failing public schools. Unfortunately for the children left behind in public school systems, teacher union contracts are the greatest impediment to the meaningful reform promised by parental choice.

For the sake of our children's prosperity, Ohio needs to move into a new era of managing teacher resources in public schools where the mission of educating children is put before all other interests, even those of teachers.

This will require the state and local school districts to fundamentally reform their teacher union contract policies to expand the reach of market accountability in the organization and functioning of our public schools and curtailing that of regulatory accountability.

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Market accountability ensures that schools are run for the sake of educating children.

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