

School Choice Is Like Halloween Candy, Free but Not Safe

By Richard Norman Rickey

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For about one week after Halloween my kids would fight over the sugary snacks they had collected during their “trick or treat” march. The treats they had gathered without a cost were at risk of being stolen once at home. Little Snickers Bars were purposely hidden from their sibling like you would hide a bar of gold. They both had learned the hard way, that what was given to them freely could quickly disappear into the mouth of an enemy candy snatcher.

Halloween candy is not unlike school choice. Those of us who have enjoyed the taste of school choice need to understand that the candy snatchers are out, and they are biting away at our freedom to choose a school that we feel is the best fit for our children. Have you heard what presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren is saying about public education and charter schools? You need to pay attention, not only to her, but to all the presidential hopefuls. Clearly there is a growing political trend in parts of our country that is now anathema to public charter schools, holding exclusive loyalty to only the most traditional of public schools, the education establishment, and even to overly aggressive teachers’ unions.

If we don’t organize to protect our freedom to choose your kids may be going back to the school they are zoned for. Don’t kid yourself. It can happen. If they think they have a right to come get your private property, believe me, some of these politicians will also have no problem coming to get your kids.

Oh, you think I’m being overly dramatic? In multiple states and cities across America they have stopped charter school expansion or eliminated charter schools all together. Most recently in Chicago, where an eleven-day teacher strike just ended, part of the concessions included a moratorium on charter schools. Texas is still considered a pro charter school state, but some of our cities are writing new zoning laws that deny charter schools a level playing field to build a school and operate. While some policy makers are finally addressing the public concern about the monopolies of Google, Amazon, China, Facebook, and others, I find it very odd that some of these same people would endorse limiting choice and consolidating traditional public education.

I never intended to get into public education. I was a healthcare executive overseeing a long-term care facility for children and youth that had an on-site school. We had been served adequately, but not good enough, by a traditional school district when I learned about the public charter school reform movement. After years of planning we turned our on-site school over to a charter school we created from scratch. By the second year the improvements were so impressive that we knew we were on to something unique and special.

Let me be clear. As a charter school operator we do not seek to replace traditional public schools, but rather to serve as a niche, and compliment what the long established schools do well. Our

way is better for some students, not all. We believe you should decide for yourself and have that choice, as should every parent in America. Protect your candy. Promote, vote for, and financially support school choice and your charter school.