



Breaking Out of the Public Education Box

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What does student success look like to you? That was one of the questions asked last week at the eighth [Regional Meeting on Education](#) hosted by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education at Pattonville High School. The school's cafeteria was packed with parents, community members, teachers, principals, and superintendents, all of whom were asked four guiding questions by DESE officials. They were then given an opportunity to discuss with others sitting at their table and later share their thoughts with the audience.

The attendees at the meeting described an education system I think all of us would want for our children: a system that meets the unique needs of every student and prepares each one for college, careers, and life. The attendees wanted students who are prepared to be engaged citizens, programs that offer arts and cultural enrichment, and work that equips students for the real world. Hard to argue with any of that.

The problem is that you can't get there from here.

Think about it for a minute. In a room filled with people heavily invested in education, there was almost universal agreement that what we are doing isn't working. Participants at the meeting repeatedly spoke out about the need for less rigidity in the education system; less reliance on test-based accountability systems. They spoke about innovation, creativity, and the need for thinking outside the box. I suspect DESE officials have heard similar responses at every one of these regional meetings.

So why aren't we there already? Our education system isn't the one we envision because it can't be. And it can't be that ideal system because it wasn't designed to be. We wall off schools with artificial boundaries, and we assign students to those schools. People have no way to hold their school accountable for delivering the type of education they expect, so we regulate through rules, regulations, and laws. There is no other option. We will *never* get the type of schools that you or I envision through this system.

The only way to get there is to fundamentally reorganize the system. If, instead of centrally determining which students attend which schools, we were to empower parents with school choice, we could replace centralized accountability systems. Teachers would be free to teach, school leaders would be empowered to lead, and parents would have the ability to choose. No need for cumbersome regulations or stifling standardized tests. If you want the schools that we all envision, that's how you get there.

For some reason educators and politicians have been taught to fear school choice. But it is only through school choice that we will ever create the type of schools that educators and parents want; schools that are responsive to the needs of students and where teachers are empowered to use their creative abilities.

Sound Cloud Link:

About the Author



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