

Don't believe rhetoric, children being harmed

Vouchers, tax credits, charters not good for kids



Your Turn
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Guest columnist

Educating our children is the most important thing we do in the commonwealth. Educating all of our children no matter their family's economic status, their address, the color of their skin, is so critical to our society and our future that our constitution requires it!

Section 183 of the Kentucky Constitution states, "The General Assembly shall, by appropriate legislation, provide for an efficient system of common schools throughout the State."

People are pouring money and rhetoric into our state to convince us all that privatization, school choice, scholarship tax credits (vouchers), and charter schools are the answer to all our public school issues. What they are NOT telling us is that these programs often tend to harm students, public schools, families and our communities.

There are numerous studies on the failure of charter schools and voucher programs to make any progress in a child's education. Recent studies have shown how voucher programs, or scholarship tax credits, have failed students and actually caused students to regress.

All of these school-choice propositions work off of a lie that our public schools are failing, teachers are bad and poor and/or disabled students do better in private and charter schools. Schools and children are not failing. We are failing our children. When we demean the profession of teaching, people don't want to become teachers, and we lose great people.

When we fail to pay teachers and adequately fund our schools, great people choose other professions. When we constantly try to find ways to undercut our public school system with tax credits for the wealthy, we take money out of our public schools. When we move money from public schools to start charter schools or give vouchers to students to attend private schools, we hurt our public schools.

It is time we tell the privatizers no, once and for all. Our children are not commodities, available for the wealthy and corporations to profit.

Tax credits, vouchers and charter schools all pilfer funding away from our classrooms. Don't fall into the traps of the slick and misleading rhetoric. Students with disabilities, impoverished children and those in the foster care system do not flourish with the help of scholarship tax credits or charters. They do not receive more services.

Many times, if they receive services, the therapists and specialists come over from the public schools. The latest maneuver in Kentucky is to say that scholarship tax credits don't take money away from public schools. They do. When someone, typically a wealthy donor, receives a tax credit, dollar for dollar, less revenue is available to the state, and as a result public schools lose funding and rich people get a generous tax break. Our commonwealth deserves better. Our children deserve better.

I want to encourage you to spend a day in any one of our 1,466 public schools. You will see children



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learning, reading, performing science experiments, practicing band and choir and creating art. You'll see them active on the playground or in PE, hear laughter as they play with friends and get excited over reaching a goal.

You'll see teachers, administrators and staff caring and nurturing our children as they patiently work with them to master skills.

Teachers help our children become the adults that will take care of all of us later in life, the adults who will run our country and make grown-up decisions for the world. Teachers work with all our children on being good citizens and caring for those around them, in the diverse settings of our public schools.

Teachers provide critical instruction on basic life skills of compassion and generosity. Teachers do amazing work, and we expect them to do this with fewer and fewer resources.

Every time some high-dollar lobby group creates some new scheme to take money out of public schools, scholarship tax credits being the latest example, we take money away from the 648,369 children in public schools and make the job that much harder. We do not need to fund more than one educational system.

We do not need to give wealthy people tax breaks for donating to the private school of their choice. Instead, imagine the return if we invested everything we could into the great school system we already have going. Imagine how all our students would flourish if we provided for their teachers.

Imagine the future of our commonwealth with a fully funded public school system where teachers were paid what they deserve and had the resources to do their jobs and our children were afforded the highest quality education in the country. We will make this a reality when we choose to invest in our children and their public schools.

Join Pastors for Kentucky Children as we advocate for all of Kentucky's children and our public schools.

Rev. Sharon Felton is the coordinator of Pastors for Kentucky Children, a grassroots movement of clergy and lay people who support and advocate for our public schools and all of our children.