



Why I'm Unapologetically Pro School Choice

By Educator Barnes – May 29, 2019

I am unapologetically pro school choice. Right now parents' right to choose the best school for their children is under attack. All parents, especially parents of color and parents living in poverty, need to pay attention to the foolishness taking place in California and the education plan shared by presidential candidates like Bernie Sanders.

In California, legislators want to limit charter schools. The 74 [recently reported](#), "Amid competing protests in Sacramento on Wednesday, the California Assembly narrowly passed

legislation that would give local school districts sole authority to approve new charter schools.” Why is this legislation even needed when parents are willingly sending their children to charters? Some of the parents sending their children to these schools have reported their children are being served better than they were in their traditional public school. We need to make sure this legislation does not spread across our country or more children of color will be in danger of not receiving a good education.

This battle is not only playing out in California, but it is also part of the presidential campaign. According to an article by the NY Times:

When Senator Bernie Sanders delivered a wide-ranging speech on education Saturday, he became the first major Democratic candidate to propose a detailed plan to racially integrate schools, calling for \$1 billion in funding to support local integration efforts, such as magnet schools and busing...But for some, those ideas were overshadowed by more divisive elements of the proposal: Mr. Sanders's plan to freeze federal funding for all new charter schools.

How many times do we have to repeat the same plan? We want to bus black kids again. Let me tell you about how that turned out in Indianapolis. There are eleven school districts within the boundaries of Indianapolis. For 35 years, black students were bused from some of the other school districts into Indianapolis Public Schools. This desegregation busing did not end until 2016, yes 2016.

My husband and I were part of desegregation busing in Indy. Yes, we received a good education being bused from the boundaries of Indianapolis Public Schools into the MSD of Lawrence Township, but at what cost? The busing destroyed our neighborhood where my parents and his mother live today. It is a food desert and a lot of families moved out of IPS and into Lawrence Township.

When we attended Lawrence Township, they split up the black kids. If there were five fifth graders being bused to the same elementary school more than likely we were each placed in a separate class. We got lucky if there were two black kids in a class. Only part of our neighborhood was bused to Lawrence. The next street over, students went to IPS. That line drawn by legislation drew a line between neighbors and friends. As a black child, I was isolated from other students who looked like me during the school day, and when I returned home, some of the kids didn't want to be associated with those kids that were bused to another school.

Instead of going to a school within walking distance, we rode the bus for 30 minutes. Think about how this affects parents. My parents made it to school events, but some of the other black parents didn't. I remember my mom later told me the school principal asked her, a faithful school volunteer, how she could get more black parents involved. My mom simply told her, "They don't want to drive that far to the school."

When people left our neighborhood and moved into Lawrence, guess what the white people did? They moved away. When my niece and nephew were attending school in Lawrence Township a couple of years ago before they moved to Georgia, it was clear the demographics had changed. Most of the students were of color. So no, I am not interested in any more busing schemes. You cannot force people to integrate. White people who can move away will, and you will be back where you started.

That's why I don't hop on the integration bandwagon. My children attend a nice integrated school in Washington Township that I love, but if they attended a mostly black school that achieved the same results, I would support that too. Make no mistake, my sons' school is not achieving greatness because there are just enough white students at the school to make it nicely integrated. It is a good school because of the leadership, teachers, instruction, and parent involvement. This can happen at any school regardless of the demographics.

It is a lie that we didn't have good black schools before the Brown decision. We had terrible buildings and a lack of resources. Chris Stewart, CEO of Education Post, elaborated on the unintended consequences of the Brown Vs. The Board of Education decision:

I believe black folks should resist integration proposals as the sole or primary educational interventions necessary for our children to succeed. We lost so much by placing our faith in the social engineering of schools that robbed us of black educational capital and infrastructure. Our teachers fired. Our principals demoted. Our children handed over wholesale to an education establishment that had no reason to love them.

We lost our black teachers and administrators. Countless research studies have shown that black students benefit from black teachers and black teachers help black students and nonblack students have better academic outcomes. I think of the white teachers I know who parents and even grandparents were teachers. We don't have much of that in the black community anymore. Brown is one reason why.

If traditional public schools were serving children of color well, charter schools would not be needed. I know too many black kids who are successful today because their parents pulled them out of their failing traditional public school and enrolled them into public charter school. Yes, some charters schools are bad, but until all traditional public schools are great, don't tell parents that we don't need choices.