



School Choice Argumentative Writing Assessment

Introduction

There are now nearly 7,000 charter schools in the United States, serving 3 million K-12 students. More than 6% of the K-12 student population attends a charter school, a four-fold increase over the past 16 years. Charter school expansion accelerated in the Obama years and, in naming devoted school-choice advocate (and billionaire) Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education, the trend toward charters and choice will likely heighten under the current federal and state governmental leaders.

Charter schools – which are publicly funded and privately owned and managed, often by non-profit organizations but sometimes by for-profit companies – were the idea originally of teacher-leaders who wished to create “laboratory schools,” able to innovate and adopt new strategies outside the regulatory control of school districts. About twenty years ago, however, charters began to be pushed heavily by both education reform groups with a significant ideological commitment to free-market solutions and entrepreneurship, and by private-sector companies interested in the prospect of applying their business motives (including the pursuit of profits) to the public education sector. Most teachers – and all teachers’ unions – now are either skeptical of or hostile to charter schools and the school choice movement.

The key question for our society – even more so for current middle and high school students and their parents – is whether charter schools and school choice more generally are improving American education or not. Both sides clash over data – whether it proves that charter school



students do better or not on standardized tests than their neighborhood school counterparts (or relative to the schools in their city or state overall), and what it says about the impact that introducing school choice has on “traditional” (the school choice movement’s preferred term) public schools (whether competition helps or hurts these non-charter, “regular,” district-run schools). More advanced study of this debate requires that students dig into the data, to look at its methodology, assess its credibility, and attempt to judge its applicability. Beyond the data, school choice advocates suggest that the incentives to improve that introducing choice imposes *always* improve the providers of a service or product, in any industry. It is just logical: when providers have to compete for the same “business,” they try to out-compete each other. Opponents of school choice and charters decry the direction in which charters point: toward privatizing public education. They argue that neighborhood public schools have always been a critical component of our democracy.

The debate over charters and school choice has come into focus for the American public. And it promises only to heat up over the coming months and years, with profound and far-reaching consequences for this current generation of young people, their parents, the education profession as a whole, and American democracy itself.

Issue

Does school choice improve public education?

Directions

Carefully read and annotate the attached set of secondary-source document excerpts. Use information from at least four of the sources in a coherent, well-developed essay that has an introduction, argumentative body, and conclusion. Your essay should take a clear position, stated in a thesis, on the issue. Your thesis should be supported and developed by 2 – 3 arguments. Each argument should have a claim, evidence, and reasoning, using one or two pieces of evidence from the set of sources. You should also address and refute at least one counter-argument, either in a separate paragraph or in your argument paragraphs.

Use the set of sources to identify evidence that will support your claims, and supply your own reasoning to explain how it is that each piece of evidence proves that your claim and your



overall position are true. Avoid merely summarizing sources. Indicate clearly which sources you are drawing from, whether through direct quotation or paraphrase. Cite sources either by their letter (A – H) or (even better) by their author, emphasizing qualifications where appropriate.