



LEADERS FOR A BETTER COMMUNITY INC

FOR A BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE



LEADERS FOR A BETTER COMMUNITY

**Believes That All
Children Deserve
High Quality
— AND —
Accountable
Schools**

Wisconsin Democrats and Public Education

Imagine this scenario: a candidate for governor threatens to completely eliminate the food stamp program, sending thousands of Milwaukee families scrambling to replace a fundamental human need. Our fellow Democrats would be aghast. After all, food assistance empowers those who qualify to have both the ability and dignity to make nutritional choices for their families. However, as statements by the current Democratic gubernatorial candidates show, similar attacks on another social benefit, Wisconsin's school choice program, are widely accepted and even embraced as "progressive."

Anti-school choice views dominate the Democratic Party of Wisconsin. To a casual observer, the once muscular pro-school choice wing of the Party (think former Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist and the late Assemblywoman Polly Williams) appears to have been vanquished.

However, recent data shows this is not the case. According to a poll commissioned by the Wisconsin Institute of Law and Liberty, 46% of Democratic voters support the idea of educational savings accounts (ESAs) that would "allow parents to receive a portion of the money that would have been spent on their children in a public school." Also, more than a quarter of Democratic voters support "vouchers" and over one-third support charter schools. While these may not be majorities, it reveals that Democrats don't hold monolithic views on

education. In short, among Democratic voters, the intraparty debate over the concept of empowering families over systems is alive.

Well-off whites with financial means, like Democratic candidates for governor Matt Flynn and Kelda Roys, have always been able to exercise their own school choice. After all, paying out of pocket for a private school, or moving into an affluent public school district is an exercise in choice. It is also a reflection of inequitable privilege, the breaking down of which is voiced by many of the same activists who so stridently attack Wisconsin's school choice programs.

The causes of the candidates' views are hardly a mystery. A significant portion of the Democratic Party's activist class is personally invested in district schools as teachers and public school union members. Unlike the teachers' unions, black and brown families in Milwaukee, Racine and Green Bay seldom have the resources to competitively lobby their own interests.

The Democratic Party champions social justice issues and fights for the marginalized. Instead of being a megaphone for teachers' unions, the Democratic Party should be advancing the interests of parents and students regardless of the educational sector they choose. We can unify families by calling for every type of school to be better supported by our state government. The focus should be to improve the scholarly and extracurricular success of every young person in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Democrats should stop the ad hominem attacks on the choice and charter sectors. After all, more than 30,000 Milwaukee school children attend choice and charter schools. Overwhelmingly, they are from low-income black and brown families. These families have made a decision about their child's future and they deserve to have that decision respected.

Democratic Party leaders' embrace of a school sector war, that treats children as market share, must end. Beat the political swords into ploughshares and focus on better funding, accountability in the form of "apples-to-apples" testing, and real consequences for schools that fail to achieve academic success. An articulated goal of better outcomes across sectors would resonate with Wisconsin voters and be a boon to Democrats' long-term political and social objectives.

Politics is the game of addition. By continuing to advocate for the complete destruction of school choice and charter programs, the Democratic Party leadership continues to subtract those who want to empower families to make their own educational choices. It's time to recognize the futility of this position and return a respected, pro-educational choice wing to the Party.

**This op-ed was co-written by
Sherwin Hughes
Executive Director
Leaders for a Better Community
and Milwaukee defense attorney Dan Adams**



©2018 Leaders for a Better Community, Inc | 1345 N. Jefferson Street #136, Milwaukee,
WI 53202

[Web Version](#)

[Preferences](#)

[Forward](#)

[Unsubscribe](#)

Powered by
[GoDaddy Email Marketing](#)®