

The Black Market In School Choice Ⓟ

by *Mike Antonucci*

(NAPSA)—The political wars over school choice have some very familiar battlegrounds: Milwaukee, Cleveland, Florida and now, Colorado and Washington, D.C. While those struggles continue, school choice—broadly defined—has expanded to virtually every state in the nation.

But there are still many obstacles for parents who want something more than their neighborhood public school can offer. A substantial number of parents are defying laws and regulations to exercise their school choice through a type of “black market.” It is one of the least examined phenomena in public education, because it flies in the face of the myth of universal access for all students.

The greatest hurdle to choice that the American public education system has erected is the district and school boundary. Some states allow student movement from school to school, but charge them tuition.

Parents who most need the change of environment for their children are the least likely to have the discretionary income to pay tuition to a public school.

So what is a parent to do? A surprising number simply choose to ignore residency restrictions and enroll their children in the public school of their choice. Some lie about where they live. Others take more ingenious or devious measures.

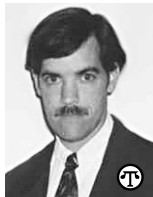
Rick Niemira of Ridgeville, South Carolina, rented a mobile home in a nearby town, in order to place his three children in that county’s superior school system. Niemira’s idea wasn’t all that unusual. The district estimates that one of every 10 students it enrolls does not meet residency requirements. What makes Niemira’s story unique is that he is the mayor of Ridgeville.

Yet another mayor, Debra A. Powell of East St. Louis, Illinois, set the black market standard by transferring custody of her 14-year-old son to a cousin who lived in St. Louis, Missouri, so that the boy could attend the city’s Central Visual and Performing Arts High School. When confronted by reporters about the arrangement, Mayor Powell said, “What I do with my children is my business.”

In Rhode Island, a district attendance officer took tips from teachers and school bus drivers to investigate some 27 suspected “illegal students,” and would even follow parents home after picking up their child.

Black markets don’t spring into existence unless governments place restrictions on goods or services with an inherent public demand. The battle over those restrictions waxes and wanes, but the demand for school choice is constant.

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