

Great Lakes Center: Student-centered school funding report provides little value to policymakers, academic review finds

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EAST LANSING, Mich. (Jan. 9, 2018) — A report from Jeb Bush's Foundation for Excellence in Education (ExcelinEd) attempted to illustrate and explain how state policymakers could design fairer and more transparent state funding systems where monies 'follow the child' through parental choice. The school finance systems promoted in the report allow for all state and local tax dollars to flow freely to local district, charter, or private and religious schools. However, an academic review released today finds that the report lacks any clear understanding of the true costs of providing equal educational opportunities and provides too few specifics to inform policy design.

Bruce D. Baker, a professor of education finance and the economics of education at Rutgers University, reviewed the brief, Student-Centered State Funding: A How-to Guide for State Policymakers, for the Think Twice think tank review project. Think Twice, a project of the National Education Policy Center, is funded in part by the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice.

Baker says that the central premise of the report is: "that adopting 'student-centered' funding to enable parental choice of schools necessarily leads to a fairer and more transparent system for financing children's schooling."

The report, according to Baker, supports an approach that sanctions public tax dollars that follow children to the schools of their choice. These 'money follows the child' approaches facilitate the diversion of public funds into school choice programs.

In his review, Baker finds the arguments offered in the report to be “entirely unsubstantiated and unlikely to stand up to even the most cursory debate within state legislative subcommittees.”

He finds three major faults in the report:

It advances a false dichotomy between funding the child and the institutions (e.g., public school districts) serving children;

It is based on overly simplistic, frequently misrepresented, and often outright incorrect versions of the status quo, including overly broad mischaracterizations of how schools are currently financed; and

The recommendations advanced within the report are purely speculative and unsubstantiated.

“Worst of all,” Baker concludes, “the authors convey reckless disregard for equity and equal educational opportunity through their outright denial of and recommendations in opposition to well understood, empirically validated factors affecting the costs of providing children equal opportunities to achieve common outcome goals.”

Find the review on the GLC website:

<http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

Find the original report and other similar reports from ExcelinEd on the web at:

<https://www.excelined.org/quality/education-funding/>

Think Twice, a project of the National Education Policy Center (NEPC), provides the public, policymakers and the press with timely, academically sound reviews of selected publications. The project is made possible by funding from the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice.

The review can also be found on the NEPC website:

<http://nepc.colorado.edu>