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False Hopes

Posted: 11/20/2013 9:07 pm EST | Updated: 01/25/2014 4:01 pm EST


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This weekend I received an email from an enthusiastic supporter of the Children's Education Alliance of Missouri's (CEAM) (<http://ceamteam.org>) policy agenda. The email subject was "False Hopes: Transferring Students from Unaccredited Districts". This email was referencing a 1993 Missouri law that allows children in failed school districts to transfer to higher performing districts in the same or adjoining county (you can read more about the law here (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kate-casas/mo-court-liberates-childr_b_3431052.html)).

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...point that the State Legislature, the State Department of Education, CEAM, and school districts involved in the transferring of students from one district to another are providing a false hope to the students who transfer and their families. In most cases, the students are African American students from low-income households. In each case the families are looking for a better education.

She correctly pointed out that the achievement gap between white and African-American students in the districts to where many children are transferring is enormous. In fact, there is anywhere from 21 percent to 49 percent discrepancy between the percentage of white students who are on or above grade level and the percentage of African American students who are on or above grade level. This CEAM supporter also correctly pointed out that if it were not for the White students in these majority White districts, they too would be considered unaccredited.

Because the achievement gap between African American and white students has existed for decades and in many places is widening rather than shrinking, this is not surprising. Unfortunately, in Missouri today, parents in failed school districts have just two choices: 1. Keep their child in the failed school where less than 25 percent of the students are on or above grade level, discipline is a paralyzing problem and only about 50 percent of kids graduate on time or 2. Choose to put their child on a bus to a school where 24-50 percent of students who look like their children are on grade level, discipline is not a problem and 70-99 percent of students who look like their children graduate on time.

Clearly this is not the kind of school choice that education reformers want for America's children. In fact, this barely qualifies as school choice. However, for now it's the only law that allows Missouri's children in unaccredited districts the immediate opportunity to leave their failed district, even if the alternative is only slightly better.

Real choice for kids in failed schools would look like the choices middle- and upper-income parents in Missouri, and across America, make every day. It would include the opportunity to choose between a high quality neighborhood school, an excellent charter school, a private school, and the right to access a high performing school in a neighboring district. This is not an impossible goal... in Missouri or anywhere else. It requires the education establishment to admit that its "one size fits all" method of educating children is broken. It also will require that members of the state's General Assembly listen to constituents who do not possess the title "Superintendent." Most importantly it will require that the majority of citizens and elected officials believe that it is our current schools that are broken, not the children who attend them.

Follow Kate Casas on Twitter: www.twitter.com/@KatieCasas (<http://www.twitter.com/@KatieCasas>)

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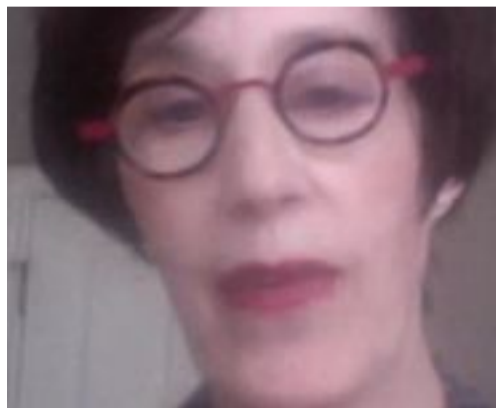


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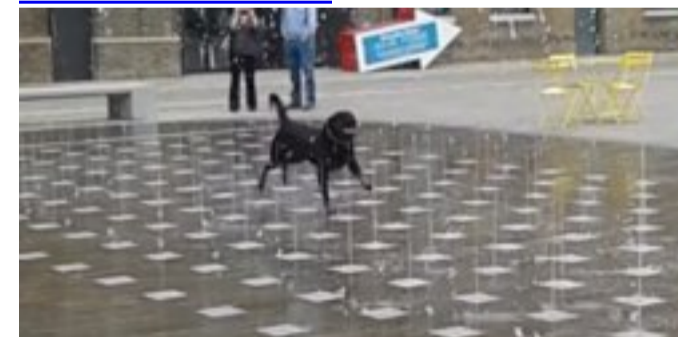
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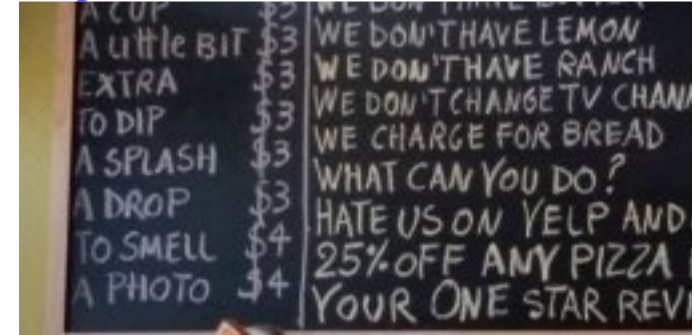
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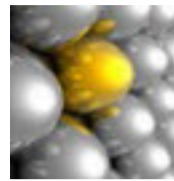
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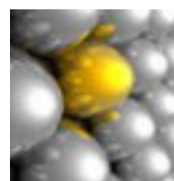
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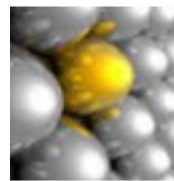
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