



Democrat rethinks school choice

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As a dyed in the wool Democrat with early memories of being the only student in the school yard with an Adlai Stevenson button, and casting my very first vote for Shirley Chisholm, I had an ideological conviction that public money should not be spent for private schools.

When I learned more about how school choice works in Vermont, I began to rethink. Our daughter attends the Sharon Academy, a small independent school, predominantly (83 percent) populated with students from "tuition towns" at no extra cost to their families. (Thirty-five percent qualify for free or reduced lunch programs.) Without excluding applicants based on test scores or learning difficulties, the Sharon Academy produces impressive results (98 percent graduate), and it does so with a balanced budget and a lower public cost per student than many of the public schools.

I now believe that the real question is not ideological, but practical: What can Vermont do to provide equal access to first class education with a balanced budget? If this is the question, and the Sharon Academy provides equal access and superior results for fewer public dollars per student, then we need more Sharon academies. The Sharon Academy uses fewer public dollars because private dollars make up the difference. By protecting school choice, we protect a model in which public money and private money can work together in the education of our children. It would be a shame to let ideology stand in the way.

B. DEBORAH ALDRICH
Stockbridge