



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on March 17, 2023

Idaho “School Choice” Bill Fails Over Lack of “Accountability”

A “school choice” bill in Idaho that would have given out nearly \$6,000 of tax money per homeschooling or private-schooled child was defeated in the state Senate last week, with opponents citing concerns over a lack of “accountability.” A number of Republicans and Democrats joined forces to stop the proposal.

Under the legislation, [Senate Bill 1038](#), every school-age child in the state would have become eligible for a publicly funded voucher if the family chose an alternate form of education. Known as “Freedom in education savings accounts” (ESAs), the funds that would have otherwise gone to a public school would instead go to a private school or to cover home education expenses.



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Critics of the legislation came from both sides of the political divide. Democrats, seeking to preserve the increasingly unpopular government-school monopoly, insisted it would divert funding away from traditional public schools. Conservative critics, meanwhile, expressed concerns about government funding of home education and private schools being used to eventually regulate and control them.

Aby Rinella, a former public-school teacher turned homeschool mom who co-hosts the popular Schoolhouse Rocked Podcast, is one of those fighting the ESAs. As a director of her local homeschool support group and a board member of Homeschool Idaho, Rinella said the state’s homeschooling community was very concerned about the possible controls that could come with tax funding.

“We already have school choice, amazing school choice — public, private, charter, homeschool, etc.,” Rinella told The Newman Report after the bill was voted down in the Senate 12 to 23. “The ‘school choice’ movement is not about choice, it is about who funds the choice. When all choices are funded by the government, we ultimately lose choice.”

The biggest problem is that once the government funds start flowing, Rinella and other critics of vouchers believe, regulation will inevitably follow. “Never is freedom funded by the government, because the government regulates that which it funds,” she continued. “ESAs, and the like, are the trojan horse into education freedom and true school choice.”

Senator Tammy Nichols, one of the bill’s sponsors, told The Newman Report that two different “accountability issues” were raised by opponents. The first had to do with money, which she said was covered extensively in the bill in the form of account audits, annual applications, government oversight of the funds, and more.

The other accountability concern involved learning. “Some wanted a standard to make sure students



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who were participating were ‘learning’ and that this be done in the form of a test,” she said, adding that the sponsors of the bill did not feel it was necessary because parents “are both responsible and accountable for their children and their learning.”

Government schools, on the other hand, lack meaningful accountability, Nichols continued. “Our current public school education system has no accountability and that is evident in our current testing numbers where we can see our students are failing in areas such as reading and math,” she said, pointing to state and national data showing that most students are not proficient in any core subject.

Senator Nichols also told The Newman Report that government schools were “thoroughly lacking” financial accountability, “as we spend more and more money and our results continue to go down.” This is the very definition of insanity, she added.

“Homeschoolers are fearful of government regulations as they should be,” she said. “The positive with SB1038 is that it actually had a section in it that would strengthen protections for homeschooling.”

The segment in question reads: “This chapter does not permit any government agency to exercise control or supervision over any nonpublic school or homeschooling.” Still, opponents of vouchers have expressed concerns that government funding will almost inevitably result in regulation as courts, lawmakers and bureaucrats seek “accountability” for public money.

Nichols also expressed concerns that keeping children stuck in their current situation would result in them becoming “further indoctrinated.” Eventually, those children will become voters who may vote to get rid of homeschooling entirely, Nichols warned, echoing growing concerns across America about the escalating indoctrination taking place in public schools.

Among conservatives and Republicans, virtually everyone — including both Nichols and Rinella — agree that protecting homeschooling and educational liberty from government overreach will require vigilance. But critics of state funding point to past experience in nations such as Sweden, Australia, and even some American states showing how public funding often precedes regulation.

Thankfully, the debate over education in America is increasingly moving in the direction of how to effectively liberate children from government schools as quickly as possible. There are numerous ways to hasten that. But it is critical that policymakers and voters not lose sight of the dangers that come with government involvement in anything.

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