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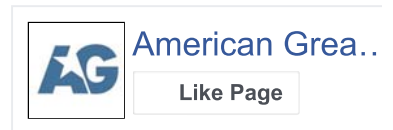
GREATNESS AGENDA

Bloomington versus Belmont: School Vouchers and Economic Diversity

By Eric Rasmusen | June 13, 2017



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Boston suburb Belmont is Charles Murray's example in *Coming Apart* of rich, liberal, respectable people who preach relativism and moral agnosticism while leading orderly lives with minimal amounts of divorce, drugs, and dissipation—nice people, but entirely out of touch with Donald Trump's America. I saw that, too, when I was a visiting professor at Harvard and lived in Belmont—a place we chose to live because of its reputation for excellent public schools.

My daughter said her high school classmates had never met a professing protestant Christian before. They were friendly, though, and valued her as a breath of fresh air—someone who wasn't in constant worry about which private college she'd get into. That's the big problem faced by Belmont High kids. It was a good school, and I wondered why anyone would pay \$38,000 per year to send their kids to the private Belmont Hill School.

Last week, Belmont's U.S. Representative, Katherine Clark, brought our kids' current school, Lighthouse

Christian Academy in Bloomington Indiana, into the national news. Lighthouse says it may deny admission to students if their parents engage in homosexuality or “alternative gender identities.” Rep. Clark leaned into her microphone, shook her fist at Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, and asked, “Will you stand up that this school be open to all students?” DeVos answered, “the bottom line is, we believe that parents are the best equipped to make choices for their children’s schooling and education decisions.”



Lighthouse Christian Academy in Bloomington, Indiana.

No gay
or

transgender parents have actually been turned down for admission yet by Lighthouse. Probably most don’t think a bible-oriented school is the choice they want for their children. More likely, they would choose public schools, or the Montessori or Harmony private schools if they live in Bloomington—though, to be sure, neither of those schools currently accepts voucher students. (Poor families would no doubt be welcomed at those schools, but they’d have to arrange to pay somehow.)

Lighthouse takes a Christian view of sin. Christians consider sin as evil, but also normal. I know, and the school knows, of alcohol abuse, domestic violence, and

adultery by parents. Lighthouse works with that. That is one reason why divorced mothers, especially, choose Lighthouse. But parents are expected to try. One couple was surprised when they were told their child couldn't attend because they were living together unmarried. "But we're planning to get married!" they said. On learning that wasn't good enough, they got married. It's just that nobody had told them before.

People need help and LCA offers it. In elementary school every year, each student gets a character award (yes, everybody gets a prize; sometimes that *is* a good idea). The award might be for Honesty, or Kindness, or Helpfulness. The school is about more than getting into the right college, especially for kids who have zero chance of the Ivy League, or even of the Big Ten.

Bloomington isn't Belmont. A couple of fathers are doctors, and a number of us are professors, but we're not typical. Most families are ordinary people who can't substitute money for morality. The main way to tell how rich parents are in a school is to look at how many children qualify for the federal free-and-reduced lunch program. Lighthouse's numbers are 37 percent—slightly more than the the 36 percent at neighborhood public school. Public elementary schools in Bloomington range between 11 percent and 86 percent: the richest four below 30 percent, the poorest six above 50 percent, and the remaining five somewhere in-between. Lighthouse is about average for income, but has more diverse incomes than are present at most of the public schools. Somehow Lighthouse also manages combined average SAT scores of 1,298, as compared to 1,094 for the public schools.

At Lighthouse, 53 percent of the students use vouchers. Tuition is about \$6,000 per year, as opposed to Belmont Hill's \$38,000. But \$6,000 is hard for most people. The voucher covers 50 or 90 percent of tuition, depending on the family's income. For a family of four, the income limits are \$46,000 and \$68,000. Vouchers are why Lighthouse has more diversity in family income than two-thirds of the public schools.

To be sure, Lighthouse is not ideologically diverse—it's a Christian school, after all—but its existence gives parents a diverse set of choices. They can choose the unionized public schools and liberal ideology, or the "classical" charter public school, or the "project" charter public school, all of which teach as if God did not exist. Or, they can choose the private progressive Harmony or Montessori Schools, which also ignore God. But they can also choose Lighthouse, or the Roman Catholic school, or the Adventist school, or Clear Creek Christian, or the Muslim school. Vouchers help with income diversity within schools and also with viewpoint diversity between schools. Parents have a choice, rather than accepting the kind of schooling the local government chooses for their children.

What's wrong with that?

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Eric Rasmusen, Yale '80, MIT Ph.D. '84, is the Dan R. and Catherine M. Dalton Professor of Business Economics and Public Policy, Kelley School of Business, Indiana University. He has also held various positions at UCLA, Harvard, Yale, Chicago, and Oxford. He is best known for his book *Games and Information: An Introduction to Game Theory* and he is currently working on a book on government regulation.

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Eric, common sense says: nothing wrong with that! Ah but Katherine Clark and other proponents of Big (Leftist) Gov't find everything wrong with it... they have decided that they are in competition with those schools, and most especially religious schools. The churches have always been deeply involved with a member's life, whole life, from cradle to grave. THAT is what Gov't Leftists want. But without the person's consent.

Very good piece (why is it being overlooked here at AM?! Thanks!

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Bad Wolf • 8 days ago



A key property of freedom is that free people have varying values and make different choices. Another key property is that neither parents not children are owned by the state. It is perfectly reasonable to have a diversity of schools with different philosophies and entry criteria operating in a competitive marketplace with parents and children choosing what they want. Forcing all people into a single atheistic Statist Collectivist Progressive mode is not a reflection of freedom, it is an expression of tyranny. I am not even religious yet I can see the value of religion for many people and as a libertarian see an important role of religion in filling the need many people have to live sub specie aeternitatis - in the aspect of eternity, under something bigger than themselves. I would prefer they meet

