



Missouri Families Deserve Choice

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By: Susan Pendergrass

My son, I'm happy to say, is a well-adjusted adult who participates in plenty of active sports—mostly surfing and rock climbing. But, I clearly remember his time as a youth baseball player when he got the “Utility Player” award many years in a row. It wasn't that fun for him and it wasn't that fun for me. Maybe team sports just aren't his thing.

Imagine the feeling of having your eleven-year-old son receive [“The Most Annoying Male Award”](#) from his teacher—who he spends 6 or 7 hours a day with for most of the year—knowing that his social skills are compromised by autism. My heart hurts for that child and his parents. I can't imagine they're excited about sending him back to that school in the fall.

This didn't happen in Missouri; it happened in Gary, Indiana. I guess there's some silver lining in that because [almost half](#) of the public school students in Gary have chosen a charter school. Hopefully his parents can find a better fit—a school that celebrates his strengths instead of making fun of him.

But what if this happened in Missouri? The parents' choices would be to move, pay private school tuition, or to send their son back to the school that humiliated him. The Missouri legislature has consistently [denied](#) parents in the state any option other than their assigned public school. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) tries to reassure themselves and everyone else by claiming 99 percent of districts in the state are “fine.” But fine as defined by

DESE is not the same as fine as defined by every parent. Shouldn't there be options available for parents who want, or more importantly need them?

About the Author



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Susan Pendergrass was Vice President of Research and Evaluation for the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools before joining the Show-Me Institute. Prior to coming to the National Alliance, Susan was a senior policy advisor at the U.S. Department of Education during the Bush administration and a senior research scientist at the National Center for Education Statistics during the Obama administration. She earned a Ph.D. in Public Policy from George Mason University.

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[1] <https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/school-choice/missouri-families-deserve-choice>

[2] https://www.stltoday.com/news/national/an-indiana-special-education-teacher-gave-her-autistic-student-a/article_73f75c31-0e57-5720-adca-523dbe34eb79.html

[3] https://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-03/rd1_napcs_enrollment_share_report%2003112019.pdf

[4] <https://showmeinstitute.org/blog/school-choice/school-choice-fails-while-corporate-welfare-succeeds-missouri-legislature>

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