

Still Widespread Cluelessness on Roots of the Problem

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Sadly, we have another example of good guys ‘stepping in it’; a major fallacy embedded in an attack on a major fallacy. In, [The Myths of School Vouchers, Then and Now](#), Casey Given asserts this myth: “Poverty, not teacher quality, is the root of America’s educational woes.” He correctly points out that vouchers allow disadvantaged children to find schools that will work better for them. Poor fit is the central problem, not poverty or teacher quality. Misallocation of teacher talent, including rampant [out-of-field teaching](#) is a big part of the poor fit problem.

He could have also pointed out that the standard public school ‘business plan’ doesn’t work much better for non-poverty children. Indeed, studies of student achievement determinants typically show that existing differences among traditional public schools, which are much-constrained by the near universal public school system pursuit of comprehensively uniformity explain little, if any, of the differences in student outcomes. Schoolchildren mostly do better in middle and upper class areas because the children come better prepared, not because the schools function a lot better. [Performance in the non-poverty areas is nothing to get excited about](#); something Lance Izumi [documented for several states including California](#), where even Beverly Hills’ students suffered major skill deficits.

Mr. Given makes no mention of the teacher quality issue, which we know is, to a great extent, an issue of [unnecessarily challenging teaching circumstances](#) in traditional public schools, and frequent failure to dismiss the worst teachers.

The key point of this blog post is that neither our teacher quality deficit nor poverty is at the [root of America’s educational woes](#). At the root are poor incentives, pricelessness, and failure to engage a large number of children because one size does not fit all, but difficulty escaping

comprehensive uniformity because of politics' appearance of fairness imperative. And, indeed, a key part of the one size does not fit all problem of the public school system is that the public school 'business plan' is an especially poor fit for disadvantaged children. It is a key reason for strong political support among disadvantaged groups for 'school choice', and for much chartered public school pedagogical and subject theme specialization in schooling options best-suited to economically disadvantaged children. But [charter price control](#) severely constrains the ability to specialize.