

Another Superintendent Bites the Dust

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The latest example of a dis-employed school district superintendent is a Starr (literally and figuratively), Joshua Starr. The *Education Week* [article](#) that reported Superintendent Starr's demise – written by John Mannes, a former member of the School Board that employed Mr. Starr - blamed widespread “school board dysfunction.” “A successful superintendent with a national reputation for positive change and vision was made unwelcome to continue his work by board members in Montgomery County, MD;” the nation's 17th largest public school district.

Mannes cited several other examples of dysfunctional school board politics, which is almost redundant. Indeed, we should expect high superintendent turnover just from the nature of the job. School district superintendent is arguably a very [difficult, yet unnecessary job](#). Being forced to attempt satisfying a diverse student/parent clientele through cartelized, comprehensively uniform, centrally planned, assigned public schools will invariably yield a lot of unhappy clients. Top off the disappointments that will arise from that immense challenge with school board member political antics, and you get high turnover, generally, and eye-popping, eye-rolling cases like the Starr dismissal and the Franklin Township public schools in New Jersey that went through four superintendents in a single year.

The political process has never been known for bringing out the best in people as individuals, or in its ability to yield collective wisdom from people with noteworthy individual wisdom. And whereas political accountability at its strongest is still weak and poorly focused, school board elections probably yield less useful accountability to the general public than another political forum. School board elections are virtually invisible, often by design, to keep unseemly politics from interfering with decision-making by wise school system central planners. But the

difficulty casting an informed vote in a school board election doesn't eliminate politics. It just focuses the politicking within an [over-extended electorate](#) on the special interests with a strong, direct interest in school board decision-making. So, for example, it is not unusual for teacher unions to dominate school board elections. That's the sad reality of political control of instruction delivered by the schools with a monopoly on the public funds collected to support primary and secondary education.

A reasonable alternative to political micro-management eliminates school districts or relegates them just to collection of the local share of public money earmarked for schooling expenses. In that alternative, states decide the public funding per pupil through a weighted student formula, and parents may supplement their family's share of public funding that arises from the formula with an out-of-pocket private co-payment; for example, combining \$7000 in public funds with a \$1000 of their own money to pay an \$8000 tuition levy. The resulting public-private shared financing of tuition yields market price change that guides provision of schooling options, and parental choice from a dynamic menu of schooling options. Price change will gradually produce a menu of [bottom-up accountable](#) schooling options as diverse as schoolchildren schooling wants and needs.