

A Close-Up of the Struggle With/Against Pricelessness and Pervasive Fallacies

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The [first in a promised series of reports](#) makes recommendations for improving the usefulness of existing school choice programs. Since Milwaukee was not included in the survey, the survey data does not reflect any experience with private school choices, even at the minimal level of the [restriction-laden Milwaukee](#) voucher program. So, it is about improving the usefulness of public [school choice](#), including choice that includes charter options. That's where the struggle with/against pricelessness comes in; an issue not mentioned in the report. The words price and tuition do not appear anywhere in the report.

The report's recommendations (p 1) are the latest effort in a so far futile struggle to make central planning (price-less decisionmaking grounded on top down accountability) produce decent academic outcomes. The long-time futility is seen in, for example, the report's assertion of fierce "[competition](#)" in the Detroit education "marketplace" among largely persistently low-performing public school choices.

That brings us to the pervasiveness of devastating fallacies. I want to preface my critical comments with the fact that I have worked with the Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE), the source of the report. The co-author that heads the CRPE is on my *Journal of School Choice* editorial board. So, we're talking fallacies infecting the thinking of some of the 'good guys'; scholarly folks quite willing to see market/choice/price-driven transformation of school systems. They want to move us in that direction. The report repeatedly asserts the imagined existence of education marketplaces and competition in school system settings that are not close to real markets. The rivalry behavior that they describe falls far short of the traditional meaning of competition that includes price change, profit-loss, and lightly regulated market entry of new

providers. And note from these recommendations (p 1) that the CRPE authors suffer the devastating one-dimension fallacy.

- 1.) Every neighborhood has great public school options.
- 2.) Children and families facing the most challenges have extra support and equitable access to good schools.
- 3.) Low-performing schools improve or are replaced with better options.

Finding the one-dimension fallacy in a CRPE report is especially noteworthy because CRPE Founder Paul Hill assertively avoids that mistake. Dr. Hill says in his publications that a school must be good for the children that choose it; that there must be choice because a school cannot be ‘good’ for every child that happens to live near it. In other words, Dr. Hill recognizes that schools and children are not one-dimensional. Schools, educators, and children have strengths and weaknesses that make every school that is good for anyone, just good for some children, and bad or excellent for others. The one-dimension fallacy that insists there are ‘good’ schools, without a ‘for whom’ qualifier is so deeply ingrained that even scholars that have worked for and revere someone (Dr. Hill) prominent that has escaped its spell, still succumb to it themselves.

And the imagined existence of “great public schools,” and the assumed potential to greatly increase their number, isn’t just an example of the one dimension fallacy. It also flies in the face of the [heroic nature of the core assumptions](#) of traditional public schools’ schooling strategies, and the persistent widespread failure, despite much effort and [increased funding](#), to find scalable means for major improvements in academic performance outcomes of traditional public schools.