

# Separate Realities I

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I love the work of Charles Glenn, and I love the work of Milton Friedman, but I've had rare, but important disagreements with both. In, "**School Choice and Accountability: Finding the Right Balance**" Professor Glenn writes, "I'm not willing to see educational freedom turn into a free-for-all in which schools compete through flashy promises that are not backed up by the sort of evidence on which parents can rely, particularly when tax dollars are in play. Such a flawed system, especially likely to mislead unsophisticated parents, would sacrifice justice for freedom." So, free markets in schooling, which means just health and safety rules, and taxes, that apply to all businesses, and can include even-handed subsidies for consumers (to address spillovers, equity, and cash-flow issues), constitute a "flawed system." Does "flawed" mean imperfect? Certainly, I'd agree that free markets, especially given unique attributes of the schooling industry are not perfect. Or does "flawed" mean we can improve free market outcomes with a real-world political process staffed by real-life human beings? It hasn't happened yet? That is, I believe that an imperfect market-orchestrated basis for schooling options, with some subsidies for students, would out-perform any of the world's existing K-12 school systems.

I'm not sure if I disagree with Glenn's premise that schooling option markets need more regulation than the accountability created by market forces, or if we agree on the basic point, but not on the freedom-political accountability balance point. I believe the appropriate balance point is one that real-life human beings working in real-world

political settings are unlikely to deliver, and if they deliver it, they will be unlikely to sustain it. That is, trying to use the political process to fine-tune out the imperfections of a genuine market system, which would include market-based price change, and permission to operate schools for profit, will [did] open Pandora's Box and put us on a slippery slope to a school system like one of the school systems we have now, with the world's best only **eleven to fifteen percent better** than the "**Nation at Risk**" U.S. system. By the way, Glenn and his long-time co-author Jan DeGroof's **Balancing Freedom, Autonomy, and Accountability in Education** provides outstanding, best available descriptions of the first world's major school systems.

Or it may be that we have no modern experience with genuine schooling markets, and the believed need for intervention (by Glenn and MANY others) beyond that which applies to any entity that aims to do business with the general public arises from factors such as widespread pricelessness that makes free enterprise produce unacceptable results for schooling that are not seen in other markets, and that would disappear from schooling markets with price decontrol? There are a lot of needed discussions embedded in the issues touched upon by the last paragraphs. Future blogs will address the key specific implicit assumptions of Professor Glenn's argument for much freer markets in schooling than we have now, but still much less free than is the norm for most of the rest of the economy.