



STUDY GUIDE

SCHOOL CHOICE SAVED MY LIFE

KEY TERMS: warehouse
voucher

choice
knowledge

education
success

NOTE-TAKING COLUMN: Complete this section during the video. Include definitions and key terms.

CUE COLUMN: Complete this section after the video.

Why did Ms. Merriweather stop asking questions in class?

How did school choice help Ms. Merriweather?

How was Ms. Merriweather's godmother able to pay for Ms. Merriweather to matriculate into private school?

How would school choice help other families?

To what does Ms. Merriweather credit for enabling the possibility of her academic achievement?

DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- After sharing her story with us, Ms. Merriweather explains that, “The system, especially for economically disadvantaged kids, is broken. I’ve seen it up close. And I’ve seen what happens when it works better – when there is choice. School choice allows parents who live in undervalued neighborhoods to pick the school that works best for their children.” Why do you think that the system is so broken, especially for economically disadvantaged students? What do you think the merits of school choice are, especially for economically disadvantaged children? Explain.
- Ms. Merriweather goes on to point out that, “...the opponents of school choice – the politicians and teachers unions who profit off of keeping poor black kids trapped in the warehouses – say it takes money away from students who need it the most. But does anybody believe that money is the problem? Washington DC, for example, spends over \$20,000 per student. We don’t need more money. We need more choice.” Why do you think that so many people tend to believe that a lack of money is the central problem in education rather than see that the problems are more a consequence of how the money available is used and distributed? Explain. Do you agree with Ms. Merriweather that school choice, i.e. a voucher system, is a good solution for many more families than the current system in terms of educational opportunities and quality of education? Why or why not?
- Ms. Merriweather “Let’s challenge public schools to compete on quality. Only competition breeds excellence.” What do you think Ms. Merriweather means by ‘competing on quality?’ Explain. Exactly how do you think that competition between schools would promote a higher standard across the board? Explain.
- Towards the end of the video, Ms. Merriweather claims that, “Prosperous parents can choose where to send their kids to school – public, private, or charter; wherever they have the best chance to succeed. Why shouldn’t all parents have that choice? We have the money to make it happen. We just need the will.” How would you answer Ms. Merriweather’s question? What do you think Ms. Merriweather means when she states that ‘we just need the will?’ Explain.
- Ms. Merriweather concludes the video by stating, “Education is the only path out of generational poverty. I’m a living example. Let’s help redefine public education to make it work for everybody. There’s only one way to do that – school choice. What are we waiting for?” Do you agree with Ms. Merriweather’s conclusions about education being the only way out of generational poverty and about school choice being the only way to make public education work for every student? Why or why not? How would you answer her last question? Explain.

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: DC Public Schools

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “DC Schools: \$29,349 Per Pupil, 83% Not Proficient in Reading,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What percentage of DC students in 2013 tested as not ‘proficient’ in math? How did DC 8th graders rank in the NCES tests? How much of the \$28,403.00 per student did the DC schools spend on ‘instruction?’ How much of the \$28,403.00 per student did the DC schools spend on ‘instructional staff?’
- Considering the academic results achieved by the students, do you think that the way DC schools spent the money per pupil they had was reasonable and good? Why or why not? Do you agree with the author of the article that DC schools should be mandated to give vouchers to DC families? Why or why not? Do you think that vouchers are the best solution to the problem of poor academic performance in DC schools? Explain.
- Does the author of the article make a compelling argument for school vouchers? Why or why not? If yes, what evidence convinced you, if not, what evidence would the author need to provide to convince you? In what ways does this article support the points made by the presenter in the video, if any?



QUIZ

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1. Where did Ms. Merriweather's godmother get the funds to pay for her private school tuition?
 - a. Personal savings.
 - b. A federal income tax refund.
 - c. Ms. Merriweather's parents.
 - d. A tax-credit scholarship.

2. For which segment of the population is the school system most broken?
 - a. The upper middle class.
 - b. First-generation Americans.
 - c. Economically disadvantaged kids.
 - d. It's equally broken for all Americans.

3. Education is the only way out of generational poverty.
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. Was there a difference in the amount of money spent per student between Ms. Merriweather's public and private schools?
 - a. They spent the same amount per student.
 - b. The public school spent less than the private school.
 - c. The private school spent less than the public school.
 - d. There's no way to tell how much money each school spent.

5. Only _____ breeds excellence.
 - a. jealousy
 - b. competition
 - c. anger
 - d. equality



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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<http://www.cnsnews.com/commentary/terence-p-jeffrey/dc-schools-29349-pupil-83-not-proficient-reading>

DC Schools: \$29,349 Per Pupil, 83% Not Proficient in Reading



By Terence P. Jeffrey | May 14, 2014 | 4:25 AM EDT

The public schools in Washington, D.C., spent \$29,349 per pupil in the 2010-2011 school year, according to the latest data from National Center for Education Statistics, but in 2013 fully 83 percent of the eighth graders in these schools were not "proficient" in reading and 81 percent were not "proficient" in math.

These are the government schools in our nation's capital city — where for decades politicians of both parties have obstreperously pushed for more federal involvement in education and more federal spending on education.

Government has manifestly failed the families who must send their children to these schools, and the children who must attend them.

Under the auspices of the National Center for Education Statistics, the federal government periodically tests elementary and high school students in various subjects, including reading and math. These National Assessment of Educational Progress tests are scored on a scale of 500, and student achievement levels are rated as "basic," "proficient" and "advanced."

In 2013, students nationwide took NAEP reading and math tests. When the NCES listed the scores of public-school eighth graders in the 50 states and the District of Columbia, D.C. came in last in both subjects.

D.C. eighth graders scored an average of 248 out of 500 in reading, and Mississippi finished next to last with an average of 253.

Only 17 percent of D.C. 8th graders rated "proficient" or better in reading. In Mississippi, it was 20 percent.

In math, D.C. public-school eighth graders scored an average of 265 out of 500, and only 19 percent were rated "proficient" or better. Alabama placed next to last with an average math score of 269, with 20 percent rated "proficient" or better.

Some might argue it is unfair to compare, Washington, D.C., a single city, with an entire state. However, D.C. also does not compete well against other big cities.

The Department of Education's Trial Urban District Assessments program compares the test results in 21 large-city school districts, including Washington, D.C.

In these assessments, the scores of students from charter schools were removed and the average reading score for D.C. public school eighth-graders dropped to 245. That was below the national large-city average of 258, and tied D.C. with Fresno for seventeenth place among the 21 big cities in the TUDA.

In math, minus the charter school students, D.C. public-school eighth graders earned an average score of 260. That was below the national large-city average of 276, and put D.C. in a tie for sixteenth place, this time with Fresno and Baltimore.

The NCES database indicates that in the 2010-2011 school year, Washington, D.C. public schools spent a total of \$29,349 per pupil, ranking No. 1 in spending per pupil among the 21 large cities in the TUDA.

New York City Public Schools ranked second among these large cities, spending \$23,996 per pupil. That was \$5,353 — or about 18 percent — less than the \$29,349 the D.C. public schools spent.

Table 236.75 from the NCES's Digest of Education Statistics compares per pupil spending among the states and the District of Columbia. It indicates that D.C. spent a little bit less per pupil — \$28,403 — who enrolled in the fall in 2010-2011 school year. But that still ranks D.C. as No. 1, out-spending all the states.

How did the D.C. public schools spend \$28,403 per student?

Among other things, they spent \$10,584 per pupil on "instruction," which "encompasses all activities dealing directly with the interaction between teachers and students."

Then they spent \$5,487 on "capital outlays," which includes "the acquisition of land and buildings; building construction, remodeling," etc.

Then they spent \$2,321 on "operation and maintenance," which includes "salary, benefits, supplies, and contractual fees for supervision of operations and maintenance," etc.

Then they spent \$2,124 on "interest on school debt."

Then they spent \$1,613 on "instructional staff," \$1,546 on "school administration," \$1,404 on "student transportation," \$1,208 on "student support," \$866 on "general administration," \$761 on "food services," \$450 on "other support services."

Congress ought to give every family in Washington, D.C., a choice of whether or not they want a government school to spend this money on behalf of their children. The D.C. public school system should be required to provide every family in the district with school-age children with a voucher for each child that is worth every penny the district now spends per pupil in its public schools. Families should be able to use that voucher at any school they want, anywhere they want.

Terence P. Jeffrey