

Vouchers

I get asked about vouchers a lot. Not because they are necessarily a big issue in Columbia --- there was no voucher bill introduced in 2008, nor did we even have any discussion of the topic at the subcommittee, committee, or House level --- but because it gets folks fired up about elections. The V-word is trotted out every two years to scare parents into thinking their schools will close, and to convince teachers they will lose their jobs if Candidate So-and-So gets elected.

My opponent has regularly stated that vouchers are the most important issue in the entire state. With 12% unemployment in our area, budget deficits, and runaway spending, I am not sure how she says that with a straight face. Honestly, vouchers aren't even the most important issue in education: Act 388 funding formulas, the embarrassingly low amount of money that gets into the classroom – less than 50 cents on every dollar – and encouraging alternative teaching methods in public schools (single gender, Montessori) are far more crucial.

But, since I get asked the question a lot, let me answer it this way:

Statewide, our dropout rate is 50%. In some schools is even higher. Only 25% of our eighth graders read at grade level. While good stories about public education can be found everywhere – including in Lancaster and York Counties – to deny that we need to do something about our statewide issues borders on immoral.

If you had the chance to give the poorest kids in the very worst of our schools another choice – a way out – and you knew that giving them that choice would not take a PENNY away from the existing schools, would you do it? What if you could do it while guaranteeing that no one was discriminated against based upon their religious preference or color? What if you could do it while still having teachers be certified? What if you could do it while still requiring the same level of testing and reporting as our public schools?

Would you give those kids a chance? I would. And honestly, if you wouldn't especially given all those protections of public education, I have to wonder what you are thinking.

That is what I voted for two years ago. It called for a \$4800 voucher for kids in those worst of our schools. And before you fall prey to that "That won't buy a private education argument," you should know that one of the best schools in Lancaster County – Carolina Christian Academy --- charges \$3100 per year.

Does that make me anti-public education? Some people say it does. But those are the same people who have allowed those atrocious conditions in our state to exist for far too long. Those are folks who are for the "status quo."

That isn't me. I say, let's give those kids in our worst schools a chance.