

## **Daily News**

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### **Larry Sand: Escape the ZIP code for better education**

By Larry Sand

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On Independence Day, as we watch the fireworks that evoke the "rocket's red glare" of Francis Scott Key's "Star-Spangled Banner," we also pause and reflect on everything it means to be American.

In 1776, Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence, asserting, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

These words still bring pride to many Americans who are proud to be citizens of the freest country in the world. But are we really the freest? Too many families do not have the liberty of choosing a quality school that permits them the "Pursuit of happiness." Too many children are stuck in failing schools with no hope of escaping.

Just as the colonists resented the top-down rule of King George, parents today need freedom from government leaders -- beneficent or not -- who make decisions that families should be making.

We need a second American Revolution that would give all families the right to choose the education path for their children -- the choice that wealthier families have always enjoyed. The freedom of choice in education is no less a human right than the others in our Bill of Rights like freedom of religion, of speech, of the press.

While several states such as Indiana and Louisiana are moving toward a system whereby tax money designated for education follows the child to a school of his parents' choosing, most of the country still needs independence from a mandatory ZIP code assignment system. Doing so would mean an opportunity for all children to receive the quality of education they deserve and a real chance to partake in the American dream. As Jefferson, observed, "A nation that expects to be ignorant and free is hoping for what never was and never will be."

Jefferson also wrote, "When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another ...."

If he were alive today, he would say that it's time to dissolve the educational tyranny of one-size-fits-all, a system that King George would have been proud of. While we outspend almost every other country in the world on education, we still can't compete with nations that spend far less. Our national dropout rate is a shameful 27 percent. For African-Americans and Hispanics, it's more than 40 percent. And many of those who do graduate and go on to college are in need of remediation.

Jefferson would have been a major school choice advocate. "That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government ... ." We need to abolish the current ZIP code mandate and institute a system of choice.

We already have vouchers for students on the college level -- Pell Grants and a GI Bill, which allows veterans to choose any college in the country. Our current crop of Redcoats has no answer as to why vouchers are OK on the college level but not for K-12.

The shot heard 'round the world is history. But as Jefferson's "long train of abuses and usurpations" continue to plague us, it is clear that "the home of the brave" needs a second American Revolution. Our enemies are the tyrannical defenders of the status quo whom we will have to defeat as we did the Brits 230 years ago so that all our children have an equal opportunity at a good education and our nation can once again be "the land of the free."

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