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School choice 'keeps public schools on our toes,' Mesa principal says

Jan 31st, 2017 · by Olivia Q Davila, Special to the Independent · Comments: 0

One principal in the Mesa Unified School District fears school choice will affect public school funding but believes potential competition between schools is good.

Greg Milbrandt, principal of Mountain View High School in Mesa, says he doesn't have any issues with students being provided more options in education and believes that, "choice is good, it keeps public schools on our toes."

Those additional options to students are being proposed in the form of school choice, an idea brought to the public by President Donald Trump and Betsy DeVos, Republican Party nominee for secretary of education,.

School choice, as described by edchoice.org, includes the use of education savings accounts, school vouchers, tax-credit scholarships and individual tax credits and deductions to help give students access to private, charter and vocational schooling.

Alicia Lopez Ramirez, a former student at Westwood High School in Mesa, thinks that some of her peers would have benefitted from non-public schooling, holding a similar view that choices can be good.

"For the kids who don't participate or are distracting, something else may have been better. Or even the kids who did good in school, maybe they would go to a charter school," she said.

However, Ms. Ramirez doesn't think public schools should suffer from an increase in alternative options. "I don't know how they would get the money to make more schools," she said.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the 2013-14 school year, Arizona ranked in the top five for largest percentage of public school students enrolled in charter schools. "I don't think they need more money," Mr. Milbrandt said, referring to education institutions that are separate to traditional public schools.

Mr. Trump proposed on his platform that "if the states collectively contribute another \$110 billion of their own education budgets toward school choice, on top of the \$20 billion in federal dollars, that could provide \$12,000 in school choice funds to every K-12 student who today lives in poverty."

Having already lost teachers to private schools because of low wages in the public school system, Mr. Milbrandt thinks it is unrealistic to expect the states to be able to collectively contribute an additional \$110 billion to budgets.

After multiple phone calls, Helen Hollands, director of communications and marketing for Mesa Public Schools, declined to comment on the topic of school choice due to Mrs. DeVos still being in a confirmation hearing with the Senate.

Olivia Q Davila is a journalism student at the Arizona State University Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and wrote the article as a class assignment.

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