

Rachel N. Clift

Ms. Darrough

A.P. Language & Composition

20 August 2017

The Arduous Endeavor For Affordable Education

Most everyone has a different definition of a good education. Many believe that the public education system, which has served America since the 1800s, is the best way to provide the children of the United States with reliable, effective, and affordable schooling. With recent news of certain cities and states providing free community college, one could conclude that the idea of free tuition is quite popular among the general public. While it may appear that those who support public schools or a free college education make up a large portion of the population, others argue that free teaching is not the way to achieve a good education. Some go so far as to support the idea of defunding public education altogether. A good education differs depending on the type of environment in which one learns best. This is why many argue that affordable education is necessary to provide all children with a learning environment that complements their individual needs.

The public education system has been the center of much attention lately due to the election of Donald Trump and his choice for Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos. DeVos, an active politician for over thirty-five years now, recently entered the Cabinet of the United States as the eleventh United States Secretary of Education. DeVos has been widely criticized due to her lack of experience in the field of education. Last April, DeVos accompanied American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten in a visit to a traditional public school

in Ohio (Strauss 2). There, she would be able to see and decide for herself whether children who are active in the public school system truly do receive what she believes to be a good education. Valerie Strauss writes in her piece for the *New York Times* titled, “Teachers Union Leader Bashes Betsy DeVos — and DeVos Strikes Back,” that the two were planning to visit a charter school as well, until Weingarten gave a scathing speech about DeVos. This speech took place at Weingarten’s union’s convention in Washington. In her speech, the AFT President went so far as to call DeVos an “ideologue who wants to destabilize and privatize the public schools that millions of Americans value and rely upon” (Strauss 2). One may agree with Weingarten’s belief that DeVos’s problems with public education are harmful to many kids. Many students across the country have families with low income. These children strive to pull themselves and their families out of poverty through achieving the level of education they need in order to be financially stable in America. Without affordable education for elementary school, middle school, and high school-aged pupils, these children would not only be held back from a high school degree, which is vital in the U.S. for financial survival, but they would be held back even more from any chance of saving enough money for a four-year college education. While public school is still widely chosen by many families with different financial situations, numerous parents choose to put their kids into private schools instead, despite it often being much more costly.

Earlier this year, DeVos sparked controversy when she stated that she believed taxpayer dollars should be used to pay for private school tuition, displaying her belief that public school students would be more successful in private schools (Washington 1). In Brian Washington’s article for the *National Education Association* titled, “Despite What DeVos Wants You to

Believe, Research Shows Public Schools Outperform Private Schools,” Washington makes a few arguments against the United States Secretary of Education. In his article, he quotes Christopher Lubienski, a researcher with Indiana University: “They make the assumption that moving kids from public to private is going to help them, but actually our data and some of the more recent voucher studies suggest the opposite—that it actually has a harmful effect” (Washington 4). Lubienski and his wife Sarah, a researcher with the University of Illinois, collected data from various studies observing young children in different learning environments (Washington 5). While many of these studies revealed that smaller class sizes often provided in private schools make for a higher quality learning environment (Washington 10), alternate findings showed that public school teachers are often better trained and more properly certified to teach (Washington 11). Overall, the research showed that children in public schools academically outperform children in private schools (Washington 5). While public schools appear to set kids up for success academically, free education in elementary school through high school also allows families to save money for their kids’ college tuitions. This capacity to save money may help parents with slightly lower incomes set their children up for the financial ability to go to college with minimal student debt by the end of their schooling.

While wealthy high school graduates intending to attend a four-year university may have their pick when choosing where to apply for college, countless students with low income are mainly given one option; community college. Community college, a seemingly low-cost and dependable way to receive an education, may not be as reasonably cheap and reliable when one observes all of the additional non-financial costs. According to Kate Schwass of *Education Week*, money is not the sole impediment for students striving to achieve a good college

education. Schwass discusses the difficulties that students from low-income families may face at community college in her article titled, “Will Free Community College Really Help Low-Income Students?” While free community college tuition may attract more students who would otherwise struggle to pay for even standard community college costs, low-income students face a number of other challenges that are not commonly spoken about or acknowledged beyond the campus itself. “One challenge for low-income community college students is that they are more likely to be needlessly placed in remedial courses,” writes Schwass. She explains that “most colleges require that incoming students take standardized placement tests to see if they need remedial reading, writing, and math courses.” Schwass then maintains that “about seventy percent of low-income community college students are placed in remedial courses, compared with about fifty percent of their wealthier community college peers” (Schwass 6). These remedial courses are also a noteworthy obstruction to a successful college graduation (Schwass 7). With the high possibility of being forced into such situations, poverty-stricken families and kids must contemplate whether enduring the placement tests, the remedial courses, the possibility of not graduating, and the potential emotional pain is worth even the slightest chance of earning a college degree. One may argue that no one should have to deal with such discriminatory obstacles at colleges that are meant to assist families with lower incomes. One may also argue that such actions must be taken in order to keep things organized at such largely populated schools, and that the chance of a college degree is most definitely worth the wait and the effort.

For children starting in the public education system in kindergarten and attending school through at least the first two years of college, it appears that countless people are ready to make the first fifteen years of schooling free. Although it has been argued that such methods of

teaching will create crowded learning spaces and less individual attention for each and every student, it has also clearly been shown that lower-income kids in public schools are more than capable of succeeding academically if given the chance. A good education is attained when a student's individual learning style is complemented by an academic course and accepted by their teachers. With some imperfections to be worked out in the future plans for free community college, families can hope for an improved and affordable learning system for their high school graduates in the near future.

Works Cited

Schwass, Kate. “Will Free Community College Really Help Low-Income Students?” *Education Week*. 23 June 2017.

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2017/06/23/will-free-community-college-really-help-low-income.html?qs=college+tuition>. Accessed 2 August 2017.

Strauss, Valerie. “Teachers Union Leader Bashes Betsy DeVos — and DeVos Strikes Back.” *The New York Times*. 20 July 2017.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/07/20/teachers-union-leader-bashes-betsy-devos-and-devos-strikes-back/?utm_term=.3d503270abd. Accessed 2 August 2017.

Washington, Brian. “Despite What DeVos Wants You to Believe, Research Shows Public Schools Outperform Private Schools.” *National Education Association*. 6 April 2017.

<http://educationvotes.nea.org/2017/04/06/despite-devos-wants-believe-research-shows-public-schools-outperform-private-schools/>. Accessed 2 August 2017.