

**Learn free or die**

**Edgardo Zablotzky, Member of the National Academy of Education and Vice-Chancellor of the Universidad del CEMA  
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Now that there are no more teacher strikes, is everything OK? Without strikes, the erroneous feeling has been generated that children are supposedly studying and learning and therefore public opinion has withdrawn its attention from education. It is clear that the deliberative state of education has been abandoned, and that is very bad since nothing has changed for the better in the Argentine education system.

Because of that, this piece describes the beginning of a true educational revolution in the United States and the curious barrier it faces, which is similar to that faced in Argentina by any attempt to give parents a wider menu of options concerning the type of schooling that is more appropriate for their children, regardless of their economic possibilities.

Two recent articles by the Wall Street Journal reported that, last April, Arizona became the second state after Nevada to enact universal Education Savings Accounts, or ESAs. These allow parents who take their children out of public schools to receive a portion of the funds that the state would have spent on their education, that they can spend on private-school tuition, tutoring or other state-approved education expenses.

Actually, Arizona is the first state where the idea has already run the legal gauntlet. Every public-school student will be eligible, though new enrollment each year will be capped. The value of the accounts would average about US\$5,600, which is enough to cover tuition in about half of the private schools in the state. What is of the utmost importance is that the legislation also imposes rigorous accountability measures, including mandated standardised testing and public reporting of the aggregated results.

The governor of Arizona, Doug Ducey, a Republican who has made education one of his main issues, declared that “today, we lead the nation again with a bill that’s fiscally responsible, improves accountability and transparency, and prioritises low-income students and families,” adding: “When parents have options, kids win.”

New Hampshire may soon be the next state to establish a universal right to freedom of education. The Senate opened up this possibility by passing a universal ESA bill that would give parents who withdraw their kids from public schools 90 percent of funds of their child’s per-pupil state allocation. Legislation is now facing resistance in the GOP-controlled House. If Republicans don’t lose their nerve, they would be fortifying the state’s motto to “Live free or die” by embracing the freedom to learn.

Texas, Missouri and Maine have considered similar programmes. The first drafts of these bills often make ESAs available to all public-school students.

A programme like Arizona’s permits parents to make their best choice for their families, whether that means a religious school, a secular private school or home schooling, instead of what’s best for the education bureaucracy. Why is it so difficult for this type of bill to pass successfully through both chambers?

Public education is a stock platform for politicians during election season. However, just how many of those federal legislators enjoy the fruits of their labours? Actually, a high percentage of public servants opt for private school when it comes to educating their own children and grandchildren.

Some years ago the Heritage Foundation surveyed the US Congress to find out where members’ children went to school. The survey reported that 38 percent had at one

time enrolled a child in private school. Nationally, only 11 percent of all US students attend private school.

By the way, Amy, the daughter of former US president Jimmy Carter, is the only daughter of a US president who attended a public school since 1906 to date. Furthermore, six of the ten Senate Democrats on the committee that debated the confirmation of the Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos either attended private schools themselves, or their children and grandchildren did so.

It is clear that, at the same time, many US politicians oppose private-school-choice policies for their fellow-citizens but exercise school choice in their own lives. And what happens in Argentina? Do you think that the evidence is different? Of course it's not.

Most of the political class in our country refuse even to consider the possibility of allowing education savings accounts for their fellow-citizens. As expected, they strongly defend public education at every opportunity that they have, but send their kids to private schools. It would even be funny — if the future of our children were not in their hands.