



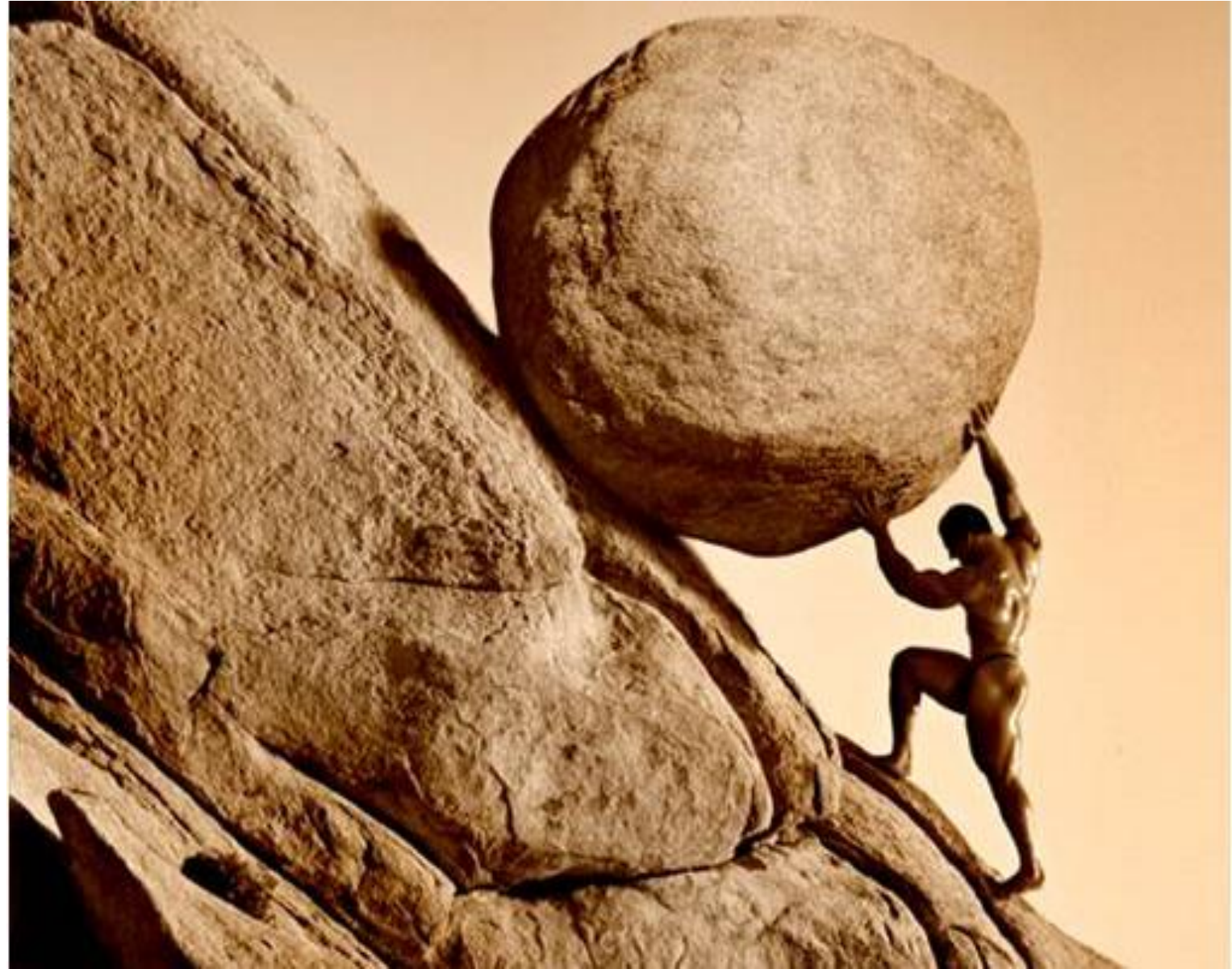
# A IS FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

OR: HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND  
TRUST PARENTS

*Lindsey M. Burke, Ph.D., The Heritage Foundation*

# The Onus of Proof Should Rest with the Regulators

Despite the stark contrast in outcomes between government “accountability” in the public system and choice-based policies (achieved for a fraction of the cost!) – officials too often try to impose the government model of accountability onto private school choice options – an inappropriate and counterproductive approach to quality assurance.



# The law of unintended consequences

Regulations are like the Delhi, India Cobra bounty program: they might seem like a good idea on the surface, but will come back to bite you.



**To hedge against perceived inequalities created through systems of choice, regulators argue that four specific regulations—at a minimum—are needed to govern school choice programs:**

- **First, the government must intervene to ensure that private schools enroll disadvantaged children.**
  - Require private schools that accept vouchers to adopt open-enrollment policies
- **Next, they argue, even if guaranteed admission to a school, choice is meaningless without the ability to pay for it.**
  - Prohibit private schools that accept vouchers from charging families more than value of the voucher.
- **Third, even if guaranteed a fully subsidized seat at a school, choice lacks value if available options are low quality.**
  - Insist upon private schools obtaining accreditation before receiving students using vouchers.
- **Finally, because accreditation alone is insufficient to guarantee quality, regulators require standardized testing.**
  - Support single standardized test, tying it to a threat of lost program participation.

# What's the Net Effect? Reduced Likelihood of Participation and Negative Impacts on Achievement

## The Effect of Regulations on Private School Choice Program Participation: Experimental Evidence from California and New York

*Corey A. DeAngelis, Ph.D., Lindsey Burke, Ph.D., & Patrick J. Wolf, Ph.D. (2019)*

- 4,825 private school leaders in CA & NY (8.24% response rate)
- Open-enrollment is a deal-breaker (~60% ↓)
  - School leaders 60% less likely to participate
- State standardized tests (~29% ↓)
  - School leaders 29% less likely to participate
- Prohibition of parental co-payment – no significant effect

*Our results suggest that costly regulations tend to reduce the quantity and quality of private schools that elect to participate in school choice programs.*

## The Effects of Regulations on Private School Choice Program Participation: Experimental Evidence from Florida

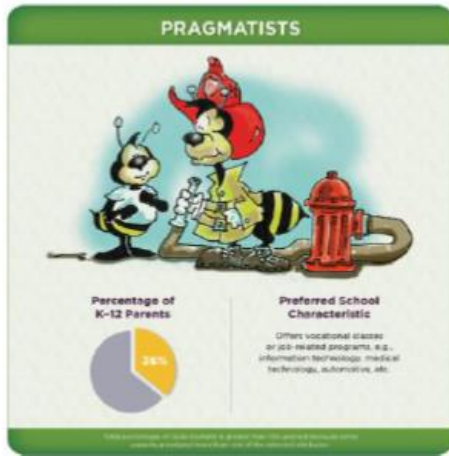
*Corey A. DeAngelis, Ph.D., Lindsey Burke, Ph.D., & Patrick J. Wolf, Ph.D. (2018)*

- Randomly assigned a hypothetical voucher program participation offer to 3,080 private school leaders in Florida in 2018 (11.05% response rate).
- Open-enrollment mandates reduce the likelihood that private schools are certain to participate in a choice program by about 17 percentage points, (~70% ↓)
- State standardized testing requirements reduce the likelihood that private schools are certain to participate by 11 percentage points, (~44% ↓)
- Prohibition of parental co-payment – no significant effect

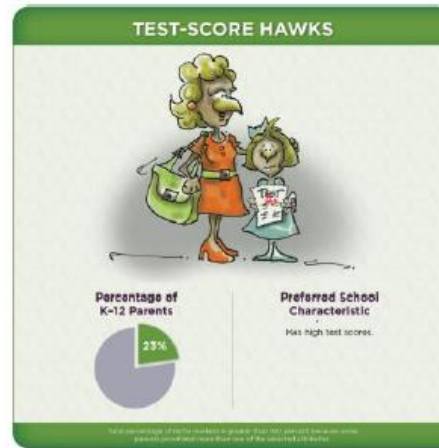
## **A Better Approach:**

Recognize that parents have a variety of legitimate views about education, and are best-positioned to hold providers accountable.

# Parents Have a Variety of Legitimate Views about What is Best for Their Children's Education



**Pragmatists** (36 percent of K–12 parents). Parents ranked highly: “Offers vocational classes or job-related programs.”



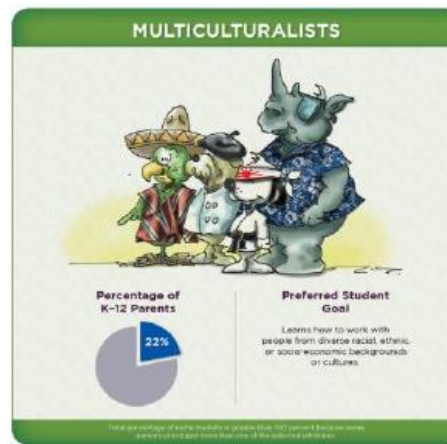
**Test-Score Hawks** (23 percent). These parents ranked highly the school attribute: “Has high test scores”



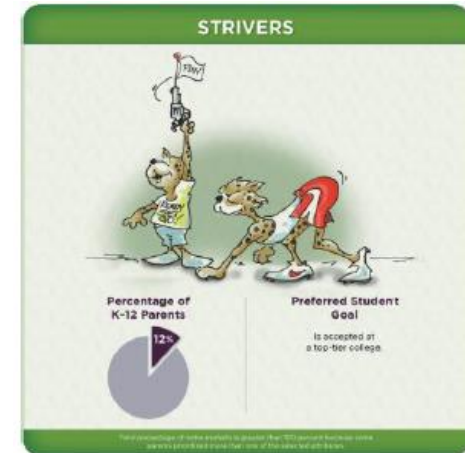
**Expressionists** (15 percent). Parents ranked highly: “Emphasizes arts and music instruction”



**Jeffersonians** (24 percent). Parents ranked highly: “emphasizes instruction in citizenship, democracy, and leadership”



**Multiculturalists** (22 percent). Parents ranked highly: “Learns how to work with people from diverse backgrounds”



**Strivers** (12 percent). These parents ranked highly the student goal: “Is accepted at a top-tier college”

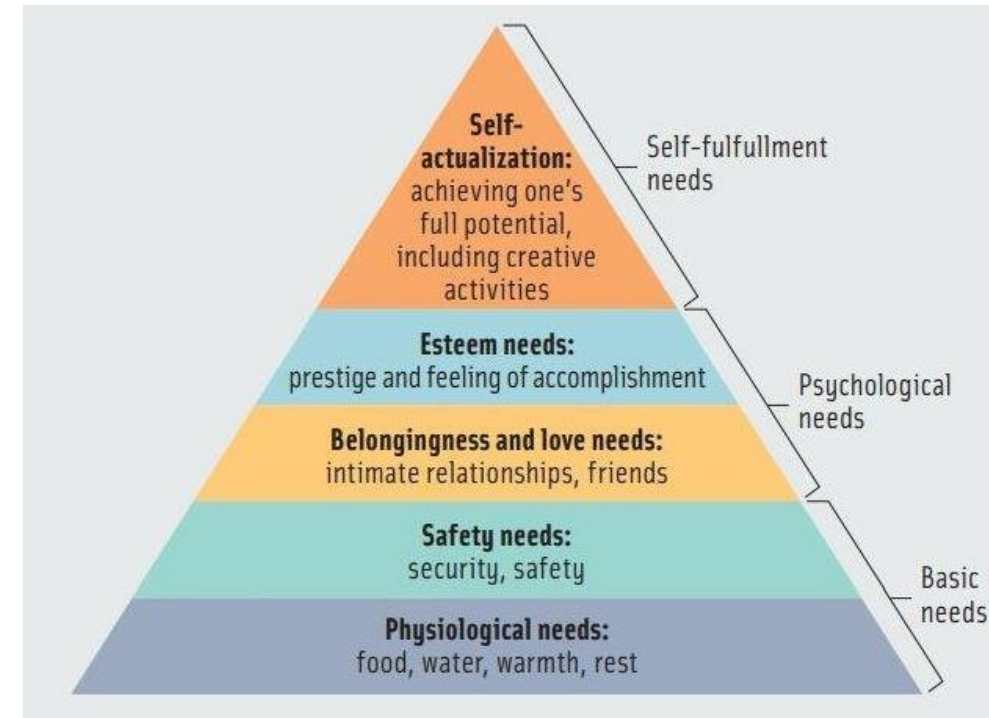
## An Education Maslow's Hierarchy

Safety First: “The high school parents initially emphasized positive school conditions such as safety... As their children approached high school graduation, these parents began to shift their focus to end outcomes such as student grades, graduation, preparation for higher education, and college plans as measures of student and Program success. (Source: Stewart, Wolf, Cornman, McKenzie-Thompson, & Butcher, 2009).

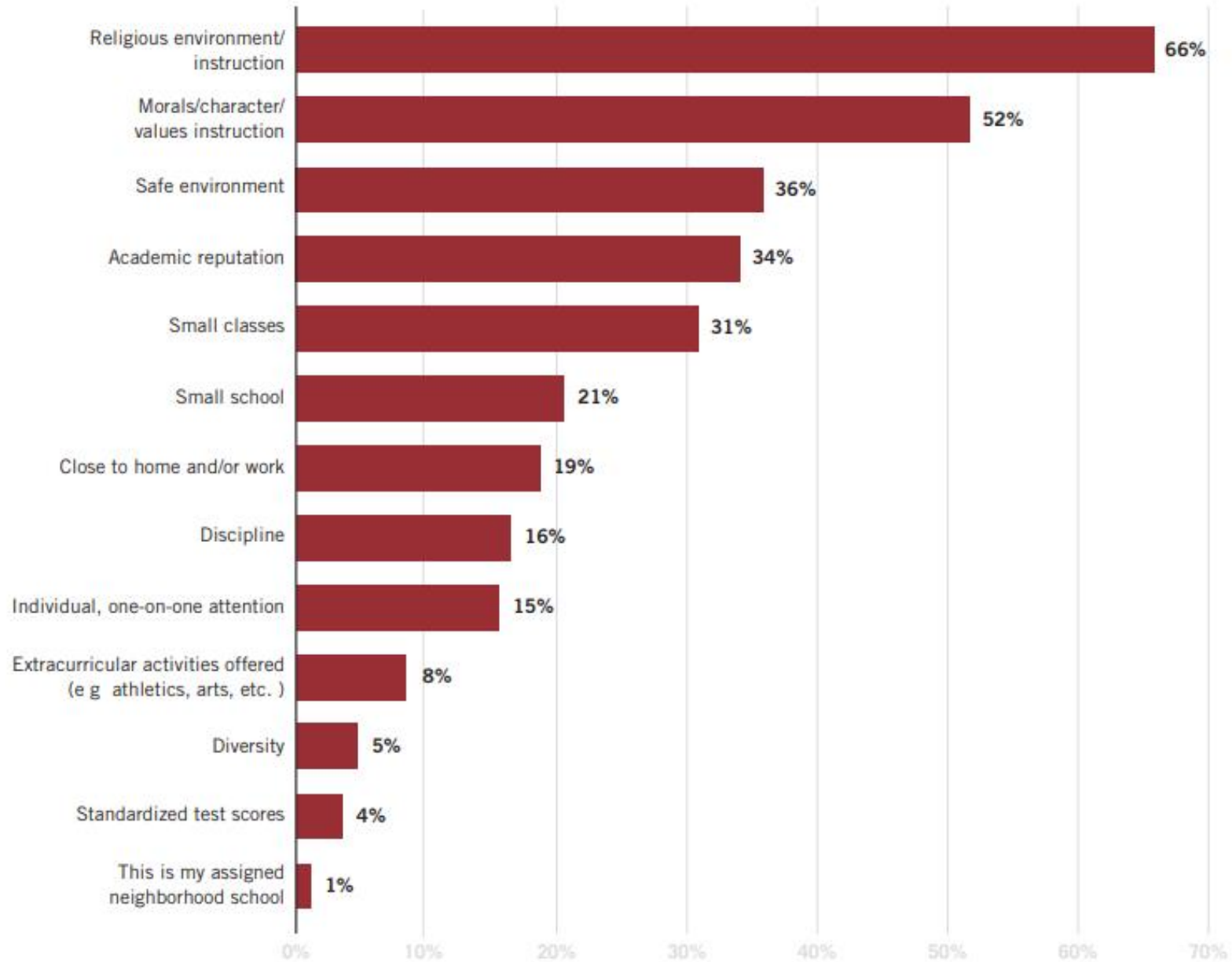
*“Well I think once you pull your children out of public schools and you get comfortable with the private atmosphere, safety becomes no longer an issue because they are safe. So then you can focus on what is important and that is the curriculum.”* (Source: D.C. OSP Elementary School Parent, Spring 2007. in Wolf et. al).

Parents choose schools for their children based on a variety of factors:

- Student safety is a key priority for many families (Stewart et. al, 2009);
- School culture (Bulman, 2004);
- School name recognition or reputation (Goldring & Phillips, 2008);
- Teacher quality and demographics (Schneider & Buckley, 2002);
- Transportation (Zimmerman & Vaughan, 2013);
- Parents' values (Bosetti & Pyryt, 2008);
- Peers (Abdulkadiroglu, Pathak, Schellenberg, & Walters, 2017).

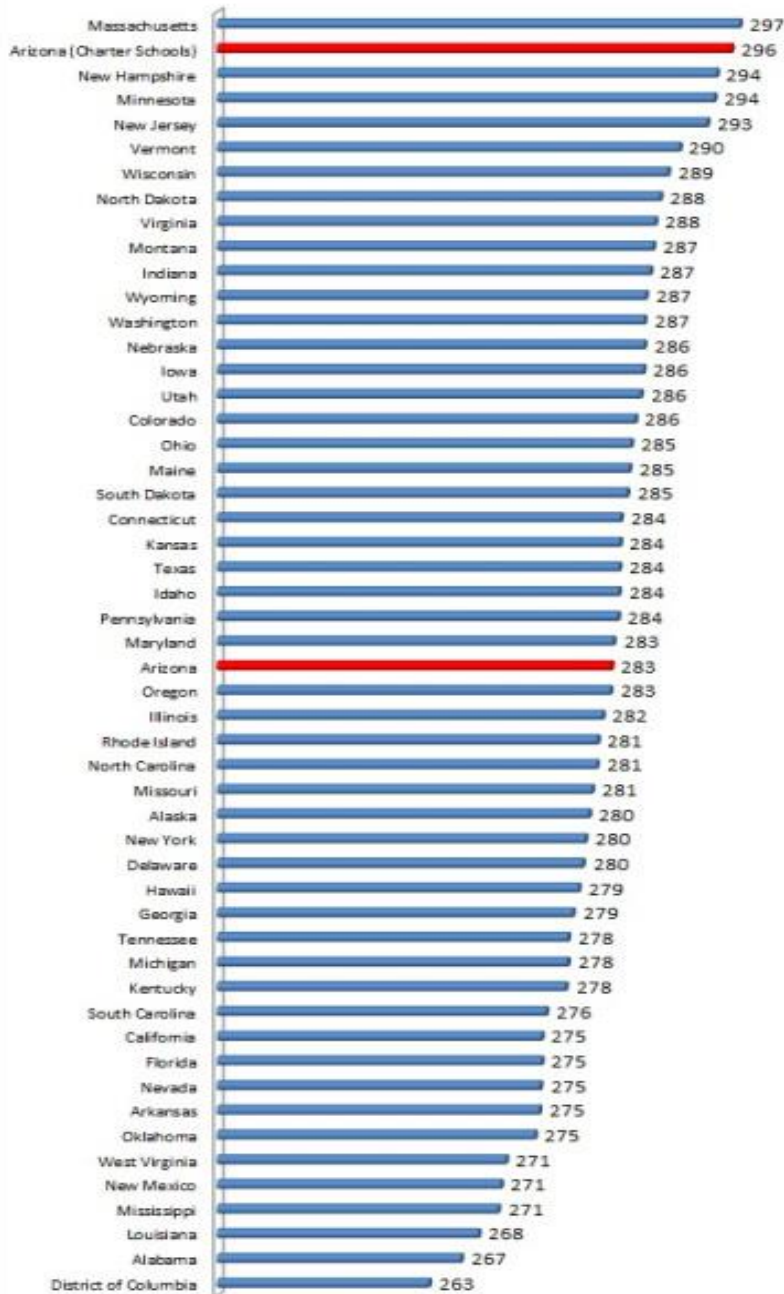




**FIGURE 9****What Parents Want from Schools (Top Three)**

Source: Jason Bedrick and Lindsey Burke, *Survey of Florida Families, EdChoice, 2018*

## 2015 NAEP 8th Grade Math Scores

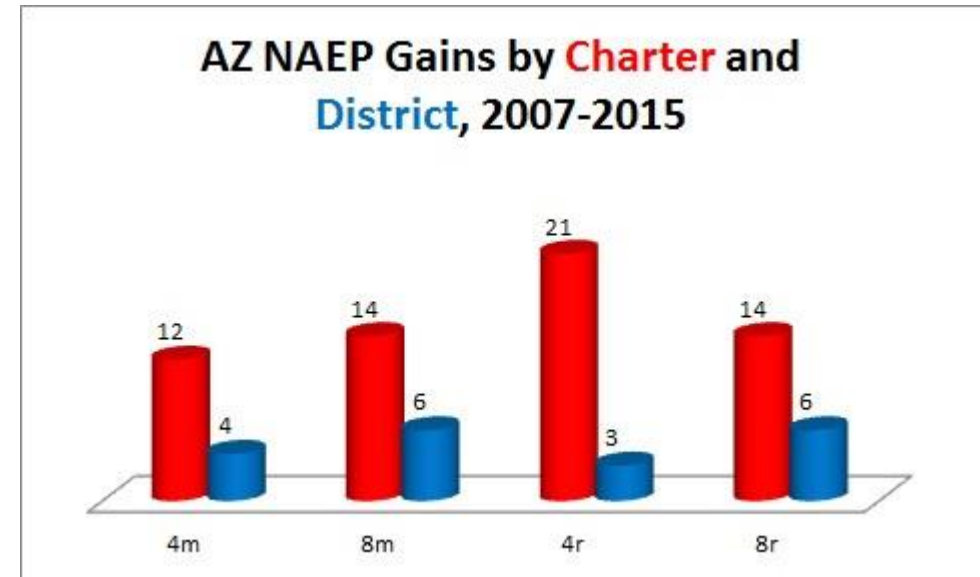


# Parent-Driven Accountability Works

- Arizona charter schools that closed down did so, on average, after four years
- Arizona's charter law grants 15-year charters

*So what?*

- Arizona parents close down bad charter schools before state officials do, and are extremely adept at doing so
- This “Darwinian competition” (Ladner, 2014) has worked wonders.



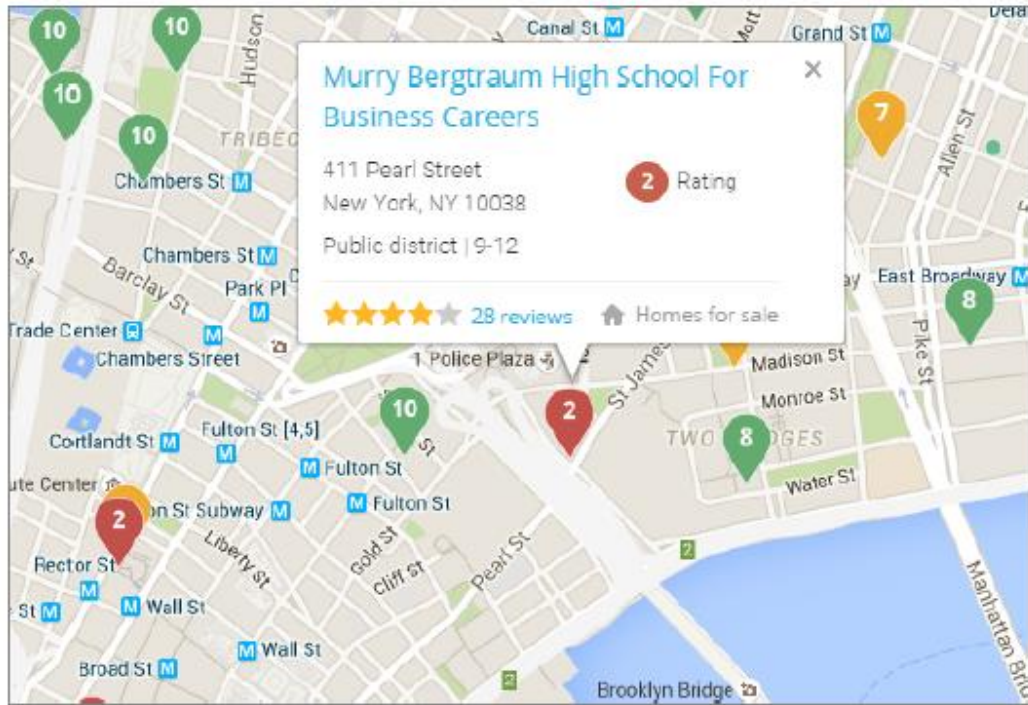
# Why? Because Incentives are Properly Aligned

		On Whom Spent?	
		You	Someone Else
Whose Money?			
Yours		Category 1: Strong incentive both to economize and to maximize value	Category II: Strong incentive to economize; weak incentive to maximize value
	Someone else's	Category III: Weak incentive to economize; strong incentive to maximize value	Category IV: Weak incentive either to economize or to maximize value

Source: Milton Friedman, *Free to Choose*

# GREAT!SCHOOLS

Using parent ratings and objective metrics to help parents navigate school choice.



Interactive search tools, community advice, and expert reviews to find the right tutor, school, or education service.



# The Accountability Equation

When thinking about accountability ask yourself: accountability for what and to whom?

Fiscal accountability → taxpayers

Acad accountability → parents

Accountability means being answerable to those who bear the consequences of your performance.

Parents have a variety of legitimate views about education that are best served by a system with lots of choices.