

Walton Family Uses Fortune to Promote Radical Right-Wing Voucher Movement

A recent Fortune profile said: "The Walton's have a large, if quiet, influence on our economy and society." This point is particularly relevant to the Walton family's involvement in the radical pro-voucher movement. John Walton has donated money from his personal fortune to legislative campaigns that would allow taxpayer money to fund private school vouchers, while the Walton Foundation has funded a \$200 million scholarship program for children to attend private schools. Here is a look at the Walton Family influence and ties to this radical right-wing agenda.

Walton Family Education Reform Donations top \$700 Million. USA Today reported, "The Waltons -- the USA's richest family -- have quietly become top philanthropists in education reform, including controversial charter-school and school-voucher causes. They have donated at least \$ 701 million to education charities since 1998." [USA Today, 3/11/04]

Walton Says Family Education Donations Aimed At Promoting Publicly Funded Vouchers. Critics call the private scholarships a stalking horse for publicly funded vouchers. And Walton concedes as much, insisting that private vouchers will never go far enough. Only with publicly funded ones will "we secure the future of charter schools and all the other reforms," says [John] Walton. [Business Week, 2/7/00]

Right-Wing Voucher Group Happy about Walton Family Involvement. "Having someone like John Walton in this movement makes it easier for other business people to enter the fray," says Clint Bolick, litigation director of the Institute for Justice, a conservative group that promotes vouchers. [Business Week, "Going to Bat for Vouchers," 2/7/00]

Walton Founded Children's Scholarship Foundation with \$50 Million Donation. According to USA Today, "Some of the family's biggest giving goes to the Children's Scholarship Fund in New York. It started in 1998 with \$ 50 million gifts from the Waltons and from financier Ted Forstmann. It gives scholarships to needy children to attend private elementary and junior high schools." More than 62,000 children in 38 cities and towns across the country have received scholarships from CSF. [USA Today, 3/11/04; Fortune, 11/15/04]

- **Walton's Scholarship Program Designed to Parallel School Choice/Voucher Movement.** A Wall Street Journal report about the creation of the Children's Scholarship Fund described the venture as a "parallel initiative to focus on the creation of schools to serve the burgeoning choice market." [Wall Street Journal, 8/31/99]

Walton Heir Founded Voucher Advocacy Group. A study by the People for the American Way detailed Walton's pro-voucher donations. "One of Walton's most telling contributions was the financial backing he gave to found the American Education Reform Foundation (AERF), a voucher advocacy group. AERF was a driving force behind efforts to get voucher initiatives on the ballot again in California in 1996 and 1998, and has since relocated to Indianapolis.³³ One California reporter noted in a 1995 article, 'With its California initiative, the American Education Reform Movement hopes to launch a national movement. Welcome to schoolmart.'" [http://www.pfaw.org/pfaw/dfiles/file_74.pdf]

Black Alliance for Educational Options Was Founded by Walton Family Grant. The conservative journal, Human Events reported Feb.12, 2001, "With \$900,000 from the Walton Family Foundation, BAEO [Black Alliance for Educational Options] was able to launch an ad campaign before the elections." According to the American Association of School Administrators, BAEO's activities include originating

and conducting a nationwide media campaign in support of vouchers.

[http://www.aasa.org/government_relations/other/07_30_01_voucher_supporters.htm]

Examples of Walton Family Donations to Pro-Voucher Campaigns:

California: John Walton was “Chief Financial Backer” of Failed Voucher Proposition. The San Jose Mercury News reported, “[John] Walton, son of Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton, was the chief financial backer of the ill-fated Proposition 174 - a school voucher proposal shot down 70 to 30 percent by voters in 1993.” Walton donated \$250,000 for the Yes-on-174 campaign. [San Jose Mercury News, 3/23/96; San Francisco Chronicle, 10/27/93]

Michigan: John Walton Gave \$2 Million to back Pro-Voucher Campaign. In 2000, John Walton donated slightly more than \$2 million to support Proposition 1, a pro-voucher ballot initiative in Michigan in 2000. [Detroit News, 11/1/00]