

The Patriots News from the citizen advocates..

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Business and Education

By John R. LaPlante

At the Flint Hills Center for Public Policy, we think that we could all benefit from making K-12 schools act more like businesses in one important way — having to compete for students. Many people in the public school industry disagree, saying that business and learning are in conflict. Yet take a closer look and you'll find that business and learning can go hand-in-hand.

Companies such as the Apollo Group and the Capella Education Company make money by educating students, offering both graduate and undergraduate degrees in multiple subjects. Apollo enrolls well over 300,000 adults in its University of Phoenix and other programs. Capella enrolls about 20,000 students.

Are these “real” universities? Certainly, their students think they are. Also, both are accredited by the same organization that accredits the University of Kansas.

The combination of profit and knowledge isn't limited to colleges and universities. Tutoring has been around for thousands of years. In 2005, an estimated \$4 billion in private funds was spent on tutoring services, and many of those services were offered by commercial enterprises. Under the federal law known as *No Child Left Behind*, \$2 billion in public funds also is spent each year on tutoring.

Kumon Math & Reading Centers began 50 years ago in Japan by a father seeking to help his child learn. Today it operates in 43 countries. Kumon has 1,400 centers in North America, helping 135,000 students with math and reading. If you buy one of the company's franchises, you can earn a living for yourself while educating children.

Educate Services, Inc. operates Sylvan Learning Centers, which has 1,100 locations in North America. Sylvan, founded in 1979, offers tutoring in homes, online, and at its own facilities. Students can get help in math, reading, writing and study skills. They can also prepare for the ACT and earn high school credit.

Huntington Learning Centers, also started in 1979, has 400 locations across the country. As with Sylvan and Kumon, it charges fees to willing families and sells franchises to would-be business owners.

Kumon, Sylvan and Huntington are just a few of the companies that offer tutoring. Together, they have multiple locations in the Kansas City metro area. They also operate in Hutchinson, Lawrence, Manhattan, Topeka and Wichita. The Education Industry Association, a trade group that includes tutoring companies, claims over 800 members.

Is Capella University for everyone? No more than KU is. Likewise, Sylvan Learning Centers are

an appropriate tutoring option for some children, but other children will benefit from a program conducted by a different company, a non-profit community organization, or a school district.

At a fundamental level, people have the same needs, including food and shelter. In today's world, you can add education to that list. Different people meet their needs for food and shelter in different ways. That's also true in education, which means that business and learning can indeed be compatible – perhaps even mutually beneficial.

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