



Private Schools vs. Public Schools – Experts Weigh In

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Public or Private, What Students Need Is Educational Choice

When parents are looking for a school for their children, their primary concern isn't whether the school is run by the government or a private entity. They want to know that the school provides a high-quality education in line with their values that meets the unique needs of their children. The real question isn't "public vs. private" but what sort of education system delivers what parents want and kids need. Assigning children to district schools based on the location of the home that their parents can afford might work for some families, especially those who can afford to live in expensive areas with better schools. But district-based schooling leaves low-income families behind. Instead, our education system should directly empower families to choose the schools that work best for them.

Students have diverse educational needs. They have varying aptitudes and interests and learn better in different environments. No school can be all things to all students. No school can meet all the unique needs of all the children who just happen to live nearby. Even the highest-performing schools aren't necessarily the right fit for some students. Empowering families with educational choice through vouchers, tax-credit scholarships, or education savings accounts enables them to select the education providers that are the best match for their kids.

District schools are subject to political control, which produces winners and losers. At best, district schools will reflect the values and preferences of the majority of citizens in a given area. Other times they even reflect the values and preferences of a mere plurality or a politically powerful minority. The zero-sum nature of political control forces citizens into conflict with each other. By contrast, a system of educational choice avoids social strife and fosters social harmony by allowing parents with differing views of education each to have their preferences met without forcing their views on their unwilling neighbors.

Perhaps most importantly, research shows that educational choice works. The near-consensus of random-assignment studies — the gold standard of social science research — finds that educational choice programs improve students' academic performance and increases their likelihood of graduating high school and enrolling in college.

Not only do participating students benefit, but so do those who remain in their assigned schools. More than 30 studies find that choice programs produce modest but statistically significant positive effects in district schools as a result of the increased choice and competition. Whether they exercise choice or not, all students benefit from having more choices.

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