

A Swede's School Choice Letter to the U.S.

Posted By [Anissa Borchardt](#) On March 8, 2011 @ 1:00 pm In [Education](#) | [No Comments](#)

12
tweets

retweet

"In 1993, Sweden introduced a system of school choice and vouchers inspired by the ideas of American economists Milton and Rose Friedman," writes Odd Eiken, the executive vice president of Kunskapsskolan, an innovative network of schools in Sweden, and an architect of the Sweden voucher model, in the [Washington Examiner](#) ^[2]:

Even though the system was just as controversial then as any U.S. voucher proposal, the right to choose your school and bring the funding with you is today ... widely accepted by all political parties.

Even Sweden's Social Democrat party supports the system and recently closed an internal debate on for-profit schools by deciding that there is no virtue in running schools at a loss: Schools should be judged on their academic performance, not financial.

Sweden offers universal school choice; public funds follow children to the school of their parents' choice. The [Kunskapsskolan](#) ^[3] network of schools is privately managed and popular among parents. Speaking to an audience at the Cato Institute during January's School Choice Week, Peje Emilsson, owner of Kunskapsskolan, noted, "[In 1999 Kunskapsskolan was founded and today has more than 10,000 students enrolled.](#)" ^[4]

Emilsson also discussed the benefits of Kunskapsskolan, remarking that the school's unique model [is set up in a way that is market-driven and thus promotes educational diversity](#) ^[4]. This helps meet the variety of learning needs among children, instead of requiring students to learn in a uniform way. Not surprisingly, [results show that students in these schools are outperforming those in public schools.](#) ^[5] They are doing better on tests and have high academic achievement.

While Sweden offers its students school choice, in the United States the majority of students are limited in their educational options. As a result, many children are forced to stay in public schools that are not meeting their needs. But it is no secret that public education is seriously lacking: [Test scores and graduation rates have stagnated](#) ^[6], and U.S. [students are continuing to fall behind internationally](#) ^[7].

Sweden has promoted innovative models of learning through school choice, and its students are thriving. While the innovative Kunskapsskolan schools [will soon be available to students in Manhattan this September](#) ^[8], the United States can do much more to open up educational choice for every student. Margaret Hoey, the president of Kunskapsskolan USA, said, "[Even though there may just be one school here, we are really entering into a global community of practice.](#)" ^[9]" Promising examples like Sweden's send a clear message that the United States can help its students to succeed through school choice.

Eiken concludes in his Examiner piece:

As a former Swedish state secretary of schools, involved in developing the



[1]

reform in the 1990s, I often get comments from American friends: 'You're supposed to be the socialists not us. How is it that Sweden, with its egalitarian tradition, has one of the most radical systems for market-driven choice in the world?'

Maybe that is the answer. With our egalitarian tradition, we can't accept that the right to choose the best school for your child should be reserved just for those who have the means to pay for it.

To read more about school choice in Sweden, read The Heritage Foundation's [interview with Thomas Idergard](#) ^[10] of Timbro, a free-market think tank based in Stockholm.

Anissa Borchardt is currently a member of the Young Leaders Program at the Heritage Foundation. For more information on interning at Heritage, please visit:

<http://www.heritage.org/about/departments/ylp.cfm> ^[11]

Article printed from The Foundry: Conservative Policy News.: <http://blog.heritage.org>

URL to article: <http://blog.heritage.org/2011/03/08/a-swedes-school-choice-letter-to-the-u-s/>

URLs in this post:

[1] Image: <http://blog.heritage.org/wp-content/uploads/Sweden.jpg>

[2] Washington Examiner: <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/oped/2011/01/sweden-model-american-school-choice-options>

[3] Kunskapsskolan:

<http://www.kunskapsskolan.co.uk/faq.4.13ed45fa118bfee467380001282.html>

[4] "In 1999 Kunskapsskolan was founded and today has more than 10,000 students enrolled.":

<http://www.kunskapsskolan.se/foretaget/inenglish.4.1d32e45f86b8ae04c7fff213.html>

[5] results show that students in these schools are outperforming those in public schools.:

<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/OtherCo&start=77>

[6] Test scores and graduation rates have stagnated:

<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Reports/2008/09/Does-Spending-More-on-Education-Improve-Academic-Achievement>

[7] students are continuing to fall behind internationally:

<http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/pisa/pisa2009highlights.asp>

[8] will soon be available to students in Manhattan this September:

<http://www.kunskapsskolan.com/sitescontact/usa.4.52155b18128a87c7cfd80009919.html>

[9] Even though there may just be one school here, we are really entering into a global community of practice.:

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/02/09/20swedish_ep.h30.html?tkn=YUWFM2BbrW6j5bSi5p5M0unPM6eSA1TcPsFT&cmp=clp-edweek

[10] interview with Thomas Idergard:

<http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2010/03/school-choice-in-sweden-an-interview-with-thomas-idergard-of-timbro>

[11] <http://www.heritage.org/about/departments/ylp.cfm>:

<http://www.heritage.org/about/departments/ylp.cfm>

Copyright © 2011 The Heritage Foundation. All rights reserved.