

Education Reform Goes Global
Richard Thornburgh, February 3, 2011

To conceive of a better education system for the struggling classrooms of the United States, Andrew Coulson of the CATO institute invited education experts from Sweden and Chile to share thoughts on their success. Coulson, who serves as Director of the Center for Educational Freedom, asked why Americans aren't taking action for education reform, perpetuating a status quo that has frustrated parents, educators and students.

From Sweden, Peje Emilsson outlined the benefits of a free market education voucher system that incites competition for a private education. By rewarding teachers with better pay for better performance – think in terms of number of successful student per class – they are making success a dual effort.

The first come-first serve voucher system has lowered the cost per student by 20% [\[1\]](#) and performed “substantially better” than its public counterpart, while increasing independent status ratio to one in every five schools, Emilsson claimed. Emilsson's independent school company, Kunskapsskolan, has already profited and expects a seven percent long-term increase.

In Chile, the education standard continues to see progress from a 1981 government privatization program, which recently resulted in a near 50-50 split in the number of Chilean private and public schools. However large the success has been, education expert Humberto Santos indicated two points that need to be considered when comparing Chile to counterparts.

First, there is far less empirical evidence on Chilean education than on the school systems in the United States and Sweden, which makes calculating success or failure difficult. Second, their private schools are outperforming public schools in test results, but the support comes directly from hard working teachers who migrated from the public school sector.

Sarah Sparks, contributing commentator from *Education Week*, discussed the Swedish and Chilean concept models as intriguing but not realistic for the United States. Citing problems with government education policies and the high cost of private education, Sparks argued that, “parents cannot just say, ‘we’re trying a new school tomorrow.’ It doesn’t work that way.”

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