

Swedish Schools Are Benefiting From For-Profit Schools

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The folks at Cato Institute have re-published a column written by one of their scholars on the benefits his country are seeing from for-profit schools



From a new piece at the Cato Institute's website, [Cato.org](#):

The central problem facing education systems around the world has not been a lack of excellent schools; it has been our inability to routinely *replicate* them. If you build a smarter cell phone or design a safer car, your sales increase, your company grows, and you spawn countless imitators. But education is different. If you find a better way to teach children, your innovations seldom reach beyond a single neighborhood.

These words were written by Andrew Coulson, the director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom in Washington D.C. Coulson also authored the book [Market Education: The Unknown History](#). His article on the for-profit school industry in Sweden originally appeared the Swedish newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*. Coulson recounts how over the past two decades, Sweden and the United States have tried to address that problem in very different ways. Those very different ways have yielded, not surprisingly, very different results. In the United States, philanthropists have donated hundreds of millions of dollars to replicate what they consider to be the best charter schools. Sweden's free schools system, by contrast, has allowed both for-profit and non-profit private schools to compete for the privilege of serving students.

To find out how well the U.S. approach is working, I recently studied the academic performance of California's charter school networks (groups of two or more schools with the same management or teaching methods). I discovered that there is essentially no correlation between the performance of these networks and the amount of philanthropic funding they have received. That means philanthropists are indiscriminately replicating the bad and the mediocre networks as well as the good ones. On average, charter schools perform at about the same level as traditional government schools.

The Swedish private school experience is not uniform. While for-profit schools are growing substantially over time, bringing their higher quality services to more and more families every year, non-profit schools have experienced relatively little growth.

Coulson has penned a fascinating piece, and you can read the full article [here](#).

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