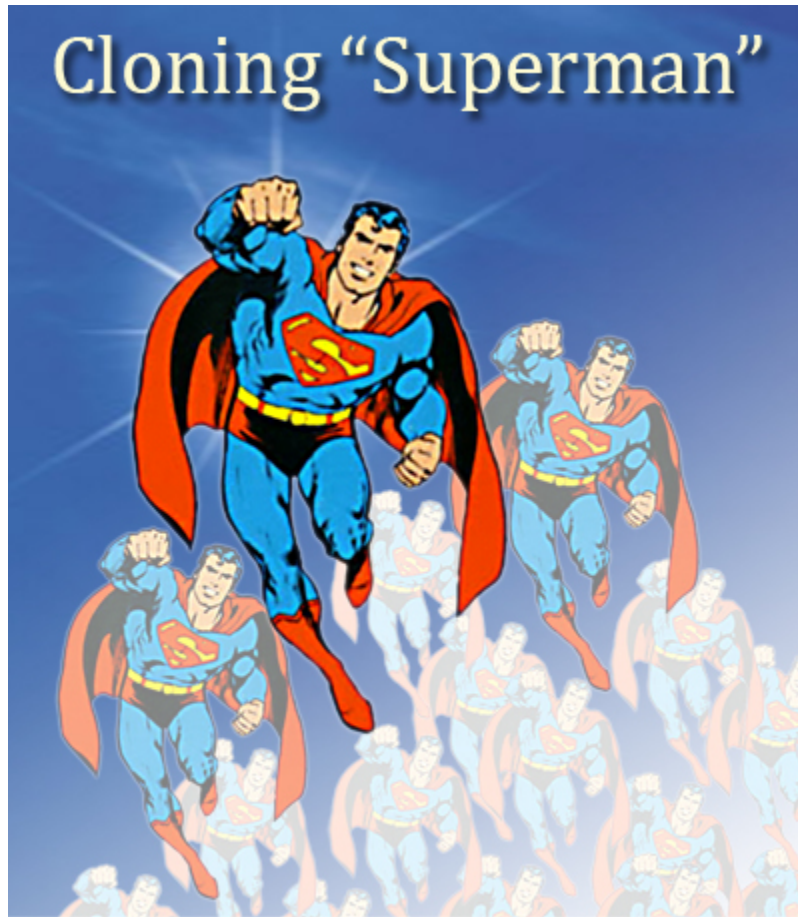


## Cato Institute Threatens to Unleash Plague of Bizarro Schools on America

Andrew Coulson tells us that Cato is [putting together an event](#) on replicating high-quality schools:



How Other Countries Replicate Great Schools  
Cato Institute - January 28 - Noon

We all know there are too few good schools and too many lousy ones. **The trouble is, we lack a mechanism for reliably scaling up the former and crowding out the latter. Competitive markets perform this service in other fields, from coffee-shops to cell phones. Can the same thing work in education?**

To find out, we've invited experts from both hemispheres to tell us what their nations have learned from decades of experience with private-school choice. **Peje Emilsson founded the largest chain of for-profit private schools in Sweden's nationwide voucher program. Humberto Santos has studied the academic performance of public schools, independent private schools, and chains of private schools in Chile's**

**voucher program.** Responding to their findings and asking challenging questions will be Education Week journalist Sarah Sparks.

Of course what happens when you try to clone Superman is you wind up with [Bizarro](#).

I'm not sure if I actually want to extend that metaphor into a full-fledged policy argument, but here's what I'd say. Currently in the United States we have two different kinds of models of "good schools." KIPP schools are "good schools" in that KIPP students perform better than one would predict from the demographics, and we've got the [sophisticated studies to back it up](#). Ivy League colleges are also "good schools" in that tons of kids with high SAT scores apply to them and consequently the pool of students the admit has very high SAT scores.

I have no doubt that competitive markets can help spur more good schools *in some sense*. But will this be KIPP or will it be the Ivy League? The free market's given us lots of tasty snacks like Fritos and Oreos, but not so much in the way of *healthy* snacks.

The right answer, I think, is to expand choice and competition—including across district lines—in K-12 education, but also to insist on accountability. Schools benefitting from public funds should be required to admit all comers (or exclude based on a lottery), to record and report rigorous demographic information, and to have kids take the same tests as public schools. That way competition happens on the basis of *performance* rather than on the basis of *recruitment and screening* of students. This is basically what they do in Sweden, and it's basically what we call "charter schools" in the United States, but it's quite different from what we normally call a "voucher program."

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