



## Driverless Cars Will Make School Choice Easier

By [Matthew La Corte](#)

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The buzz surrounding driverless cars is heating up. The innovative new technology has the potential to revamp the entire U.S. surface transportation system and forever alter how drivers view mobility. The U.S. Institute of Electrical Engineers has estimated that up to 75 percent of all vehicles will be autonomous by 2040, but the first consumer models produced by Google, Ford, and Nissan could be available by 2020. Driverless capability comes with the initial promise to reduce traffic accidents and surrounding deaths and injuries by up to 93 percent, but the secondary effects could make tremendous waves in other areas of public life.

One of those places could be the U.S. school system, where one of the most significant barriers to school choice is transportation, especially for low-income families. Last week, the Cato Institute's Jason Bedrick wrote about the connection between driverless cars and the future of school choice or giving parents more freedom to choose the best schools for their children — whether it be public or private. The commute from home to school is often one of the most important deciding factors when it comes to choosing schools. Driverless cars have the ability to greatly lessen commuting time which opens available opportunities for parents to choose new schools.

The safety implications of a driverless car fleet are extraordinarily positive. Each year, over 30,000 Americans are killed in automobile accidents, and thousands more are injured. Human error remains the cause of 90 percent of these accidents. Accidents are cut down by removing the human element from the driving experience and implementing advanced computer systems that react faster than the naked eye. Similarly, reducing accidents will drastically limit congestion and increase the efficiency of roads as these vehicles allow for less following distance between vehicles. Driverless cars do not only increase mobility for the youth but also the disabled, the elderly, the drunk, the sick, and other groups who have faced traditionally limited travel options.

But aside from the safety, congestion, and mobility issues, driverless cars enable greater school choice for parents. As of now, if the schooling options in a given geographic area are all below average, the student does not have a choice for better education. In many cases, better schools are outside the geographic area and require timely commutes which make them unreachable, but driverless cars have the ability to change this.

The unbelievable truth is the every 26 seconds, a student drops out of school. Far too many students, especially in minority communities, are simply not receiving an education that is preparing them for long-term success in the real world. Educational options are limited, school districts are determined by arbitrary lines, and the needs of students are not prioritized. By allowing parents to choose their child's school outside of their district, pressure is applied to those poorly-performing schools. School choice enables educational competition to improve districts.

The logistics of a long-commute to more schooling options are mitigated with this new technology. Bedrick cites a 2009 study by the Center for Reinventing Public Education that found one-fourth of all families and one third of low-income families in Denver and Washington, DC, "did not enroll their child in the school they preferred due to transportation difficulties." The report adds that nearly half of private school and charter school parents reported commutes of twenty minutes or more.

Expanding educational options furthers competition that raises the level of educational value. In his article, Bedrick explains a simple Google search found twelve private schools within three miles of his home but two-hundred thirty schools within twenty-five miles. Driverless cars can help lead to a more competitive school system.

Not only will regulating driverless cars result in the deaths of more American travelers, but it will keep schoolchildren stuck in zip-codes and failing schools without options. It's time to free up schoolchildren and save lives by welcoming driverless car technology to the U.S.

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