

Education Reform



INTRODUCTION:

School choice has emerged as a significant topic in educational policy debates, with advocates asserting that it promotes parental rights and educational diversity, while critics argue that it may exacerbate inequalities and destabilize public education. This policy examines the benefits and downsides of school choice, focusing on how it supports the rights of parents and allows for a diverse educational landscape. Additionally, we will discuss the potential disadvantages of being forced into government-selected schools.

DEFINITIONS:

Voucher system - Rather than the province directly funding the schools, parents will get vouchers for their school aged children with which they would pay the schools.

School choice - Cancellation of school districts, parents will be able to register their children to any school in the province. Schools will be allowed to select students based on their grades only, but not any other criteria (detailed below).

FACTS:

- In 2019-2020 Nova Scotia spent \$15,014 per student which is 6% higher than the national average.
- Estonia, Netherlands, the Flemish community of Belgium, Denmark, Chile, Sweden have moved to school choice and school vouchers-based systems and are beginning to transition towards privatized schooling. [1]
 - Estonia has implemented the most successful voucher-based system.
- In Ireland School choice is a constitutional right.

Benefits of School Choice

Parental Rights: School choice empowers parents to select the best educational environment for their children, recognizing that each child has unique needs and interests. This freedom allows parents to prioritize their values, be it a focus on academic excellence, extracurricular activities, or a particular teaching philosophy. By giving parents the right to choose, it upholds the belief that parents are best positioned to make informed decisions about their children's education.

Educational Diversity: A system that supports school choice encourages the growth of a diverse array of educational options, from traditional public schools to charter schools, magnet schools, private schools, and even homeschooling. This variety allows families to find educational solutions that best align with their values, leading to a more tailored and effective learning experience for students.

Competition and Innovation: School choice can foster competition among schools, incentivizing them to improve their offerings and attract students. This competitive environment can drive innovation in teaching methods, curriculum design, and the integration of technology, ultimately benefiting all students.

Downsides of School Choice

Instability in Public Schools: As students leave traditional public schools for other options, funding and resources for public schools may decrease, undermining their ability to provide a quality education for the remaining students in those schools. This can create a cycle of declining quality, leading to further attrition and amplifying the challenges faced by public schools.

The Detriments of Government-Selected Schools

One-Size-Fits-All Approach: A system where the government selects schools for students assumes a one-size-fits-all approach to education. This can be detrimental to students with unique learning needs or interests, as they may be forced into a school environment that is not conducive to their success.

Limited Parental Involvement: Removing the right to choose from parents can lead to reduced parental involvement in their children's education. Studies have shown that parental involvement is a key factor in student success, and by disempowering parents, government-selected schools may be inadvertently harming students' educational outcomes.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Transition to a voucher-based system:
 - a. Parents will receive vouchers for each child attending grades 1-12.
 - b. School districts will be dissolved and parents will be able to register their children in any school accepting vouchers of their choosing.
 - c. The value of the voucher will be up to \$15K per child per year which is approximately what we spend now.

- d. Parents could send their children to any school in the province, registration zones will be canceled.
 - e. Schools will be allowed to select students based on their grades only, but not based on any other criteria such as race, gender, religion, parents' income, place of birth, place of residence, etc.
 - f. Schools will be allowed to limit admission; the province will offer alternatives to students who found no school to accept them.
 2. Home school parents will be able to access $\frac{1}{3}$ of the voucher monetary value offered to parents who send their children to school.
 - a. Home school students will be able to join extracurricular activities in all schools that accept vouchers.
 - b. Make optional curriculums available to homeschooling parents who choose to use them according to the age and past academic achievements of their children.
 - c. Optional standardized tests will be provided for each subject to homeschooled children based on their age and past academic achievements.
 - d. In cases of students who are above the academic standards of their peers of the same age, advanced programs will be offered.
1. The province will ease the process of privatizing public schools and encourage the establishment of new private schools.
 - e. The province will promote competition between schools.
 - f. The province will gradually stop funding public schools directly and increase the monetary value of the vouchers over time. Good schools will expand, bad schools will close, new schools will open. The schools will eventually depend entirely on the money they get from the parents as vouchers, and cashable only by them (except of vouchers intended for homeschooling)
 - g. The end goal is having a full taxpayer funded but privatized school system.
3. Remove the "everyone must pass" policy in all schools.
 - a. Schools implementing the "everyone must pass" policy will be penalized by the province.
4. Implement curriculum changes prioritizing classes about physical fitness and nutrition alongside math and English.
5. Transition our curriculum around individual students not groups.
 - a. Lay the foundations to transition to a system that prepares our young adults not wanting to participate in post-secondary education, teach them skillful trades they could make a living from, such as already done in Germany and Switzerland.
 - b. Offer 3rd and 4th language courses for interested students.
 - c. Allow students to take the final exam for courses they wish to skip, in case they get an A (or above) they will be allowed to skip and move on to the next (higher) level. Credits will be given for these courses.
 - d. Allow students to study courses in advanced levels in cases they are above the required level for their age. Never holding back students with higher abilities.
 - e. Create excellence programs in collaboration with universities for students who are above 12th grade level (starting at the 10th grade).
 - f. In cases where a student finished all studies required for graduation of the 12th grade, they will be allowed to apply to higher education, as early as they finish the 10th grade (if they are no more 12th grade courses they need to take, due to passing all the final exams with an A or above as explained in c)

Closing Statement:

School choice offers many potential benefits, including the promotion of parental rights and the fostering of a diverse and innovative educational landscape. However, it is essential to address the potential downsides listed above. A balanced approach to school choice that seeks to minimize these negative consequences while maximizing the benefits is vital for creating a more equitable and effective education system for all students.

- **References**

#1 - <https://internationalednews.com/2017/08/02/10-surprises-in-the-high-performing-estonian-education-system/>

#2 - <https://www.oecd.org/education/School-choice-and-school-vouchers-an-OECD-perspective.pdf>