

FACT

OR

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DEBUNKING THE MYTHS SURROUNDING SCHOOL CHOICE



1. Public funds are never used for private entities.

Many government programs are based on funding individuals directly rather than funding institutions. Public funds are often used for private purposes such as food stamps, Pell Grants, the G.I. Bill, and Medicaid. Individuals and families who are recipients of these public funds can choose from a variety of both public and private sector providers. Through the Iowa Tuition Grants, Iowa taxpayers already spend close to \$50 million for tuition to private Iowa colleges.

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2. Private schools turn away students; public schools must take all students.

Public schools in Iowa restrict students by specific school districts. They do have open enrollment which allows parents to enroll their child in another school district, but they are date restricted and the receiving district still must have space for open enrolled students. A recent [report](#) by Tax Education Foundation of Iowa (TEF Iowa) showed Des Moines public schools denied open enrollment to many students in 2020. Private schools do have different requirements and standards for students. For instance, a private school may ask students to abide by a statement of faith or to attend worship services; however, many private schools do not reject students based solely on special needs or socio-economic status. Since private schools have limited funding, they let the parents know what they can or cannot provide for their students in every environment. In the case of a student with special needs, School Choice provides more opportunities, not less. School choice would potentially increase a private school's capacity to support students with unique learning needs. Parents, especially those with lower and middle incomes and who cannot home-school their children, do not have many opportunities for choice in education.

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3. School choice policies harm public education.

School choice is not an attack on public education. Nor is it about dismantling public schools. Rather, it is about the belief that there are many ways to deliver education. Opponents of Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) often argue that they deprive public schools of both students and resources. This [argument](#) is false. ESAs affect public schools' funding and resources in the same way they are affected when a student leaves because their family moved to a new district. In addition, public schools keep some of the federal and local tax dollars and usually a portion of the state funds allocated for each child. Public schools are also held harmless for up to two years from cost changes due to the Iowa Budget Guarantee law. It is also assumed an ESA or other school choice policies will create a mass exodus of students leaving public schools. This argument does not hold water as an [estimated](#) two-thirds of ESAs, voucher, and tax-credit scholarship programs have participation rates of 3 percent or less. An [analysis](#) of research done by Ed Choice found that 24 out of 26 empirical studies showed statistically significant improvements in the academic outcomes of public schools where private school programs were provided.

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4. School choice only subsidizes wealthy families.

School choice is about educational opportunity for all, especially lower-income families. Wealthy families have already chosen the best schools by buying a home in what they consider the best districts. When it comes to education, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Too often, the discussion centers around education funding rather than providing the best educational opportunities and outcomes for families. School choice refers to public education dollars following the student to the school or educational service which best fits their needs. Funding students rather than educational bureaucracies removes barriers. Students should not be denied a better education due to their zip code or socioeconomic status. School choice empowers parents to choose the best educational option for their child, be it in a public, private, or home-school environment. Whether it is values, safety, or if their student is stuck in a failing school, many parents across Iowa are looking for alternatives. School choice is about empowering parents to find what works best for their child.

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5. Iowans support school choice.

Yes, a recent poll showed that [62 percent](#) of Iowans surveyed believe that education dollars should follow the student to a school of their choice.



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6. Education Savings Accounts (ESA) allow all parents the ability to provide the best educational opportunity for their children.



An ESA allows public funding to follow the student rather than a specific designated school. There are many different types of ESAs. Some only apply to lower-income families or to those children with disabilities. The best ESA policy is universal. An ESA provides parents with the flexibility to customize the best education for their children. This includes choosing which school their child attends and purchasing other educational services, thus affecting the overall quality of education they receive. The flexibility of an ESA is what makes it such a popular policy among families.

7. School choice is a bad policy because schools compete on unequal terms.



Opponents of school choice argue that having greater competition in education is unfair. The claim is made that public schools are different and have limited resources, and therefore it is an apples to oranges comparison. It is true that public schools have limited resources, but the same situation is true for private schools. Private schools are dependent upon parents paying tuition and raising funds, while public schools rely on taxpayer dollars. Taxpayer funding has increased for public education in recent years. Since 2011, Iowa has increased education spending by close to \$1 billion. A Kennesaw State [study](#) showed that since 1992 much more public-school dollars have gone to administration bloat rather than adding teachers. Public education also consumes 56 percent of the state's General Fund budget. Private schools are not guaranteed a budget increase and they often must consider tuition increases to meet needs.

Academic standards in private and public schools may be different based on curriculum. Most private schools are accredited and require licensed teachers. Private schools are held accountable to the State of Iowa Board of Education as well as Iowa law and must meet or exceed state standards.

Competition in education creates a better environment. Just as in the marketplace, competition forces a better product. If schools are forced to compete for students, it will force them to provide a better quality of product and use their dollars more wisely. As it stands now, public education has a monopoly on education. Education cannot be a one-sized-approach. Just as institutions of higher education need to compete, public schools should also compete. Iowa has numerous private colleges that are competing with the taxpayer-supported Regent Universities. Is it fair that Luther College must compete with the University of Iowa?

8. ESAs can be used for multiple types of educational services.



ESAs can be used to purchase a variety of educational services. Some of these include:

- School tuition and related fees
- Online education and tutoring services
- Specialized education services and therapies for children with disabilities
- Curriculum and other supporting educational tools
- Education pods
- Unused ESA funds can be used to help pay for higher education



9. School choice benefits rural Iowa.

Public schools across Iowa are a source of community pride. Schools can also make up the heart of a community. School choice can benefit families in rural Iowa by providing additional educational opportunities. School choice also increases the funding per remaining students in the district. Even if a private school alternative does not exist, an ESA program can help families access educational services and courses that may not be provided by their local public school. Policymakers in Iowa could also allow for more charter schools in Iowa. Whether a child is in an urban or rural setting, the objective of school choice is to eliminate roadblocks that prevent the best quality of education. An ESA program is about offering parents the best educational option for their children. If the rural community school is the best choice, then rural schools need not fear an ESA program.

10. More school choice will over-regulate private schools.



The constitutionality of Educational Savings Accounts provides protection for private schools from being over-regulated. An ESA is an account that is controlled by the parent. It does not go directly to a private school, thus creating a barrier from government over-reach. Also, Iowa has a history of government funds going to the Iowa Tuition grant, which works much like an ESA for private colleges. Iowa's private colleges have not been regulated because of the Iowa Tuition grant process.



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