

A Public School Common Core Context: Universal School Choice

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There is a simple answer to the Common Core Standards Initiative ([CCSI](#)) controversy. Limit the CCSI rules to traditional public schools, and eliminate public schools' public finance monopoly, which means make it easy for families to opt out of their assigned traditional public school (TPS). That, in turn, would mean TPS-Chartered Public School (CPS) funding equity and price decontrol (allow shared financing) to eliminate waitlists so that CPS can become schools of choice instead of schools of chance. It would also mean that public funding follows children to a private school of choice, again with shared financing allowed to avoid the devastating effects of price control. In that context, CCSI becomes a matter of defining a management prerogative of the public school system. The general public must decide the policies of the schools owned by the public and staffed by government employees through the political process. With a good political outcome, the public school system stakes out a viable niche, and sets a bar for all schools. If the ['sausage factory'](#) produces another bad result from the good intentions of the mostly outstanding people holding public office (a quite common outcome), the essential universal choice policy minimizes the damage by expanding the non-TPS share of the school system. That would simply reflect that a poorly conceived common core would make TPS a poor fit for more children.

The political result that must be avoided is a common core for all schools that accept government funding, public and private. Countries such as Sweden and Holland impose a curriculum mandate on public and private schools. That's why they gain little from their school

choice policies. There could be much larger useful differences in the school choices. The government-established national curriculum imposed on all schools severely limits the degree to which schools can differ. Since Sweden's national curriculum requires nearly 100% of school hours, school choice in Sweden means choice in how the government-chosen curriculum is taught; only pedagogical choice exists. To engage a high percentage of diverse children in high value content, we need more than pedagogical choice.