

You Don't Have to Be an Active Chooser to Benefit from Parental Choice Expansion

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Another huge fallacy is that expanding choice beyond the alleged few (poor, special needs, etc.) most in need an immediate alternative to the assigned public school is either unnecessary or counter-productive because it jeopardizes a system that serves the vast majority reasonably well.

Actually, [that huge fallacy](#) is a bundle of fallacies. First is what I'll call the zip code fallacy; that if your home is in one of the right zip codes, you'll be assigned to a high-performing school. Actually, everyone but the super-rich would benefit from the major systemic improvements that would result from the introduction of universal choice with few restrictions, including price decontrol. That vast majority that would keep their children in the assigned public school, at least at first and perhaps long-term, would benefit from the reduction in the learning-style-diversity of public school classrooms that would result from the departure of the poor fits for the public school mainstream pedagogies. Public school teachers would face fewer, smaller [differentiated instruction](#) and [ability grouping by subject](#) challenges; also a huge boost for parental involvement and the hope for professionalization of teaching.

Gradual, entrepreneurial evolution of the menu of schooling options would likely provide widespread improved engagement in learning through better and better customization of instruction. That would increasingly focus assigned public schools on the mainstream, easy-to-educate niche. Over a very long period of time, assigned public schools would become obsolete, or much-improved in a chosen niche; likely a wide one. Obsolescence would occur if policymakers cannot escape the futility of trying to be everything to everybody, and thus fail to establish a niche; a necessary basis for competitive choiceworthiness. Because of the clunkiness of the political process ('priceless' central planning almost always fares poorly against decentralized planning through

dynamic price signals and free enterprise) that gives traditional public schools their marching orders, gradual obsolescence is a real possibility. It's not a bad scenario. It would mean gradual replacement of traditional public schools with a 100% dynamic menu of diverse schooling options. Still, I hope that doesn't happen. There is the intangible benefit of sustaining the neighborhood public school tradition, and the tangible benefit of having 100% certainty that every child will have a free schooling option; an option that would better than current traditional public schools at least because distracting, often disruptive poor fits for the traditional public school pedagogy will be much less common than now. The new competitive pressures would likely lead to some improvement as well; at least through faster improvement of materials and instructional practices that all schools will have access to.

In the gradual obsolescence scenario, all of the schooling options might charge a co-payment to top-off public funding that exists through tuition tax credits, education savings accounts, or tuition vouchers. Low levels of per pupil public funding would be the cause of widespread co-payment requirements. For example, nearly all Chilean private schools of choice require the shared financing of a co-payment, though the vast majority of co-payment amounts are nominal. [Low income scholarship funds](#) would defray the co-payments for most needy families, but without a free public schooling option, some co-payment hardships might survive the availability of the low-income scholarship funding.