

WHO IS USING SCHOOL CHOICE:

As the debate for educational freedom grows, it is important to know the facts about how school choice could benefit New Hampshire.

SCHOOL CHOICE: BECAUSE EVERY CHILD SHOULD HAVE THE FREEDOM TO SUCCEED!



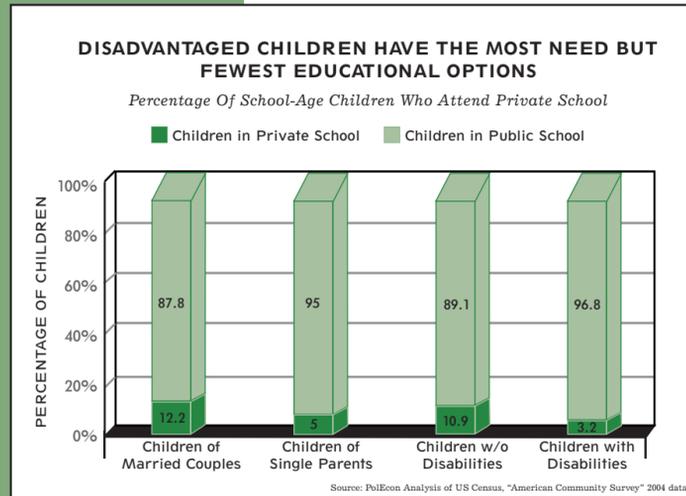
The Economics of Who Has and Who Doesn't Have School Choice in New Hampshire

Until the impacts of school choice, or any education reform, are documented in terms of how they affect the incentives, pressures, and behaviors of families, schools, and communities (in other words their "market impacts") the debates over school choice will largely be based on tired political arguments or superficial details, rather than on a real understanding of how parents, schools, children and communities actually behave in response to choice.

Single Parent Families and Children with Disabilities are Among the Most Adversely Affected by the Absence of School Choice

Education policymakers express a great deal of concern over the educational opportunities of socially disadvantaged children but it is important to note that they are among the groups that are least likely to have their educational preferences met. Children in single parent families have been a growing percentage of school children and because on average, families with just one parent in residence have lower incomes, these families are much less likely to be able to exercise choice either by choosing a private school or that community in which to reside.

Children with disabilities also have fewer choices. On average, families with a child with a disability have lower incomes and fewer options for exercising educational choice either via private schools or by choosing a community in which to live. The difference in family composition, employment, and income is the primary reason why private schools contain a lower percentage of students with disabilities rather than the exclusion of these students from private schools. By eliminating or reducing income constraints in choosing schools, school choice would increase options for children from single parent families and children with disabilities.



How Parents Exercise School Choice in New Hampshire

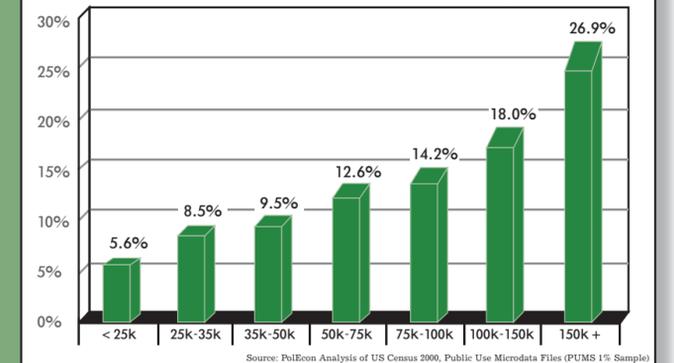
School choice occurs in the absence of official or legislatively enacted, universal school choice policies. Unfortunately, the market for K-12 education without universal school choice programs contains "imperfections" that prevent a majority of families from making their desired choice. Like most locations lacking school choice, New Hampshire families exercise school choice in several ways:

- About 10 percent of school-age children attend private schools with perhaps no more than 1 percent attending elite college preparatory schools. A family's wealth is the biggest determinant of this.
- Just under 2 percent (about 4,500 children) are home schooled.
- A small but growing number of students (approx. 500) attend New Hampshire's chartered public schools (12 authorized; 8 operating). These choice schools are being embraced across the state, demand for them is high, and all post high achievement outcomes.
- Students in all towns are provided choice for a traditional vocational school.
- Students in some smaller towns, without high schools, are given a limited choice of different high schools to attend in nearby school districts.

But by far the major form of choice in New Hampshire and the United States occurs when the family chooses its place of residence. Since higher-quality schools are often found in communities with higher housing costs, this type of school choice is available at a very high and unaffordable price for most families. Even among middle income families, those with incomes of \$75,000 or more, about 75 percent of them say they exercise choice through choosing a house and community, and another 15 percent of them exercise choice through choosing a private school.

SCHOOL CHOICE IN NEW HAMPSHIRE INCREASES DRAMATICALLY AS FAMILY INCOME INCREASES

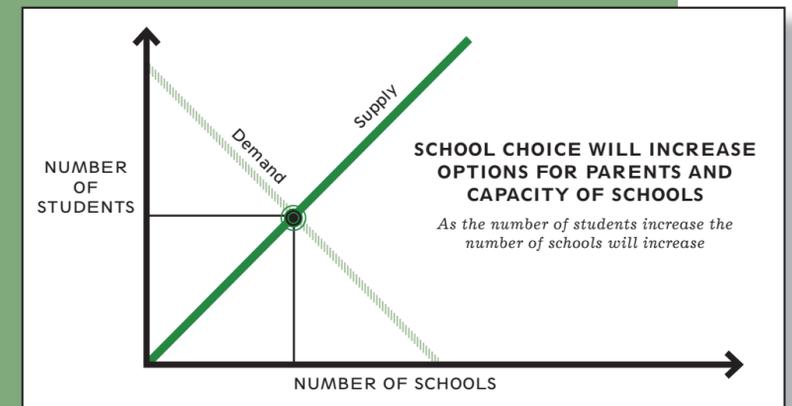
Percentage of School-Age Children in Each Income Category that are Enrolled in Private Schools in New Hampshire



School Choice Will Serve Those Who are Not Being Served Now

Many commentators and opponents of school choice, unburdened by the demands of empirical economic analysis, look at the current population of students in private schools and assume that school choice would simply benefit those same students and magnify the distinctions between public and private schools. However, even a cursory economic analysis of school choice understands that the effect of choice is to relax the constraints on families to choose among schools and thus the families that will be most affected by school choice are those families that are currently most constrained and least able to enroll in their preferred schools. This applies to none of the students currently in private schools because by definition they have not been prevented from exercising school choice.

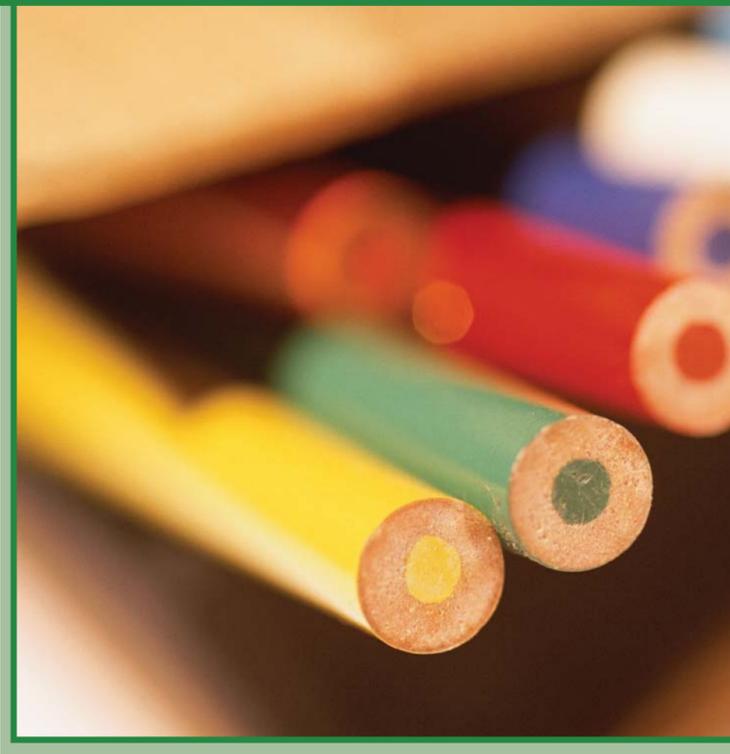
Similarly, without an understanding of economics and how markets work, commentators argue that existing private schools would not be capable of accommodating an influx of school choice students. Empirical economic analysis, however, tells us that the supply of private schools will expand and change when large numbers of formerly education constrained families have the ability to choose schools.



School Choice will increase educational options for all New Hampshire families!

School Choice: because every child should have the freedom to succeed!

Did you know that there are now **22 school choice programs in 12 states?**



One American Square • Suite 2420
Indianapolis, IN 46282

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Why School Choice Today?



Before New Hampshire's citizens and elected leaders can engage in an informed debate about school choice, they need to have the facts. This newsletter is a joint venture between the Josiah Bartlett Center for Public Policy and the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation in an effort to fully explain what it means to provide the best education possible for our children.

We believe parents should be empowered to make a free choice of the school that they deem best suited to serve the individual needs and interests of their child. Others believe that the status quo system of assigning children to a school based solely on where they live is the best way. It is our sincere hope that the information contained in this and other issues of School Choice Today will enlighten that debate.



www.friedmanfoundation.org

www.jbartlett.org

Changing Lives by Choosing Schools

by John Mitchell

I suspect we all end up supporting choice in education for different reasons. Part of me responds to a combination of respect for the benefits of free markets in general and of fear of the government's inability to run anything well. But to a great extent, I support choice in education because of my own personal experience.

In May of 1993, my wife and I attended yet another public school individual education plan ("IEP") meeting for our 8-year-old third-grader. The school principal, school nurse, school guidance counselor, school district special education director, school special education reading teacher, school district special education testing specialist, school special education speech therapist and our son's third-grade teacher sat with us. We discussed our son: identified as highly dyslexic in the first grade, who at the end of third grade could not read at all.

The group talked of plans for new programs focused on reading, the creation of special classes for our son and others, and the availability of certified teachers; in other words, the public school could meet its legal obligations with respect to our son. We expressed concern about our son's lack of progress. The third-grade teacher responded that perhaps we should consider that our son might never be able to read. This comment, stunning to us for its ignorance, went unchallenged by this group of professionals. Fortunately, my wife and I had studied this issue for years, and knew that our son would be able to read at some level.

I then asked the group, if in a perfect world, our son would be better off at this public school or in a private setting. Every head in the group went down, without a word spoken. Even though this public school could meet its legal obligation to provide programs, its own professionals did not believe in their programs for our son, but could not say so because the school district would have to pay for an out of district placement. You have to be the parent of a child with a problem, facing a public school administration that can only pretend to be able to help, to fully understand the depression that accompanies a sense of hopelessness about the future for your child.

Fortunately, unlike most parents facing a public school's institutional inability to focus on a single student, we had the ability to make a choice. Having been reasonably successful financially in life, my wife and I had the wherewithal to consider private schools. We researched and visited a variety of private schools for learning disabled students ranging from extraordinarily expensive residential facilities promising everything from state of the art classrooms to state of the art athletic facilities (including the apparently obligatory climbing wall for children who cannot read) to the other extreme of places reminiscent of the old one room schoolhouse. The more expensive options generally relied on the money public schools paid for out of district placements or wealthy families.

Ultimately, we chose to leave the public schools without asking for financial assistance from them, and enrolled our son at a small day school for grades K-8 that accepted both regular and learning disabled students. Because of the lack of administration in this three room school, our IEP meetings consisted of my wife, me and the lead teacher (the school did not have a principal or other administrators). She told us early on that our son was extremely bright and that he would learn to read. The key would be to keep his general knowledge at a high level until the reading kicked in. We never felt so relieved.

The school we chose did not have a cafeteria, library, gym, athletic fields or high tech classrooms (certainly no climbing walls). It had good, hard-working teachers who understood and cared about our son. The tuition was also about a third of what the public schools claim is the cost of educating special needs children. As it turned out, our son thrived at this school and did learn to read. He recently graduated from College, and now is a full time reporter for a daily newspaper.

In our view, an ability to choose to change schools for our son at the end of third grade saved his life. He received the special supportive education he required, which allowed him the time and space he needed to learn to read, and the ability to keep up with his general knowledge. At some instinctual level, most parents know what is best for their children. I suspect that most parents would choose the public schools, but many would recognize that their children would be better off in a different setting. Because of the miracle of free markets, schools would form to provide these different settings, which could provide for everyone from the learning disabled to the gifted (or combinations thereof). I believe that, like my son, the lives of many children would be saved or dramatically changed if people had the ability to choose a different educational path for their children, and that the lives of those in public schools would improve because of the need to compete.

John Mitchell is Vice President and general Counsel of Aavid Thermalloy. He graduated from public school.