



Enterprising Education: Doing Away with the Public School System

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Abstract. We critically examine the accepted notion that primary education is a legitimate and necessary function of the state. The notion is based upon three tenets: 1) public education is a necessary condition for democracy, 2) the market will not provide equal access and quality of education to all, and 3) education represents an external economy. Each tenet is addressed and evaluated according to its merits. In doing so, we also contrast the fulfillment of the ends implicit in the tenets under state and market provisions. We conclude that the state provision of primary education cannot be justified by these goals, and that market provision is a preferable alternative.

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Besides national defense, no government-provided service enjoys as much exemption from scrutiny as the provision and subsidization of primary public education. Even presumed champions of the free market, such as Milton Friedman, support the government subsidization of education through high school:

We have always been proud, and with good reason, of the widespread availability of schooling to all and the role that public schooling has played in fostering the assimilation of newcomers into our society, preventing fragmentation and divisiveness, and enabling people from different cultural and religious backgrounds to live together in harmony (Friedman and Friedman, 1979, pp. 140–141).

The very suggestion that government should be removed entirely from the realm of education is either taken as irrational and malicious or viewed as foolhardy and quixotic. This seems very peculiar when considering that the critics of the present state of public education appear on both sides of the political spectrum. Still, the overwhelming sentiment, ubiquitous in both the general citizenry and academia, is that while public education may need to be reformed, it still should be guaranteed ‘free’ to all by government.

