

**Disrupting the Coercive Government School System with Market-Based Solutions:
A Three-Pronged Strategy for Incremental Privatization through Disruptive Innovation**

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Abstract

The United States is in the midst of an education revolution, since the pandemic response has awakened parents to demand curriculum transparency, more flexibility, and better educational options for their children—without added costs. Competition is the key to such improvements. To overcome the well-funded compulsory government education system takes a multifaceted approach. This landscape analysis shows what is happening and what still should happen in policy, professional development of teachers, and the private sector.

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Introduction

The pandemic response in the United States, which caused many children to “go” to government schools while at home, led many parents to observe the poor performance of classroom instruction and of their children’s public schools more broadly. These parents now often demand curriculum transparency, more flexibility, and better educational options for their children—without added costs. They have joined a robust movement for education freedom that has deeper roots than they recognize.

For more than a century, government schooling has been the default for most elementary and secondary students. It is a well-funded and engrained system that lives off of taxes and government funds. But without a free market in education, parents don’t have enough alternatives to meet the needs of each child. How can startups develop a free and flourishing marketplace of schools and other educational services and resources?

Advocates thinking nationally need a strategy for meeting parents’ demand with tactics that emphasize (1) policies of deregulation and encouragement of entrepreneurial competition; (2) effective professional development of teachers; and (3) de facto privatization as families leave the public system to take advantage of disruptive innovations and emergent order. The simultaneous progress of such tactics will create more good schools and quality educational options.

But what is a “good” school? Each family has its own, extremely subjective, idea, which makes sense: the parents, not the state, are the rightful decision-makers about educational priorities for their children. For some the priority is getting high grades, but for others it could be getting into a good college, developing an extensive social network, securing a high-paying job, learning to be a respectful or contributing citizen, or becoming a community leader. Still other parents are content for their children to simply be excited to be at school or to have a great overall experience.

The Purpose of Education: Philosophy and Curriculum

America’s government system of schooling often feels like a monopoly because so much of our society treats it as the default option; government schooling is mandatory unless a parent claims an exception. Compulsory public education is stifling children’s natural curiosity and desire to learn. It often teaches them *what to feel* and how to memorize and regurgitate facts instead of *how to think*. When children are not in an environment conducive to learning, they tend to shut down or act out. Furthermore, many parents utilize public schools primarily for free babysitting and free food.

Since nothing is “free,” however, these parents should know that in 2021 federal, state, and local governments provided \$764.7 billion (or \$15,120 per pupil) to fund K-12 public education (Hanson 2022). Even with this exorbitant spending, kids still don’t acquire the knowledge and skills needed to

make informed choices, so they remain ill-prepared for life's challenges. As a result, lack of education and mis-education are at the root of many of America's societal problems. But when adults nurture the natural inquisitive nature in children, we encourage their creativity, their love of learning, and their journey to personal flourishing, which will prepare them well for the world.

According to Ayn Rand, the purpose of education is "to teach a student how to live his life—by developing his mind and equipping him to deal with reality. The training he needs is theoretical, i.e., conceptual. He has to be taught to think, to understand, to integrate, to prove. He has to be taught the essentials of the knowledge discovered in the past—and he has to be equipped to acquire further knowledge by his own effort" (Rand 1999, p. 88). A good education should equip students with the intellectual tools necessary to help them understand the world and how it works, and to help them identify their values in order to pursue individual goals successfully.

Maria Montessori, for her part, understood that learning must come from within. The American Montessori Society defines the Montessori philosophy as "an education philosophy and practice that fosters rigorous, self-motivated growth for children and adolescents in all areas of their development, with a goal of nurturing each child's natural desire for knowledge, understanding, and respect" (Colby 2013). Children gain exposure to a multitude of subjects through playing (working) with hands-on manipulatives and absorbing by doing. This experiential learning model upholds lifelong independence and emboldens children with the freedom to fulfill their needs and natural inclinations to learn.

The theme of respect is clear with the Montessori philosophy, as it is with Socratic pedagogy, which fosters critical thinking by asking questions and encouraging respectful, two-way dialogue. This type of intellectual discourse was common in educating the brilliant, Enlightenment-era American Founders. They continue to be studied and admired around the world for their ability to think through extraordinary complexities in order to create a new nation, America's democratic republic. Although they had very diverse backgrounds and practical experience, they had one thing in common: a classical liberal education (Cothran 2020). Were their intellectual skills really so rare, or can children today develop them?

The classical liberal arts curriculum and pedagogy have been utilized since ancient times to teach youth to live in freedom and meaning by deeply engaging their minds with questions and discoveries of truth, beauty, justice, and virtue. This method emphasizes teaching goodness by studying The Great Books, as well as the Latin language and the liberal arts. The method involves a three-part process of training the mind: (1) The early years of school are spent in absorbing facts, systematically laying the foundations for advanced study. (2) In the middle grades, students learn to think through arguments. (3) In the high school years, students learn to express themselves. This classical pattern features the trivium, the language or verbal arts of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and the quadrivium, the mathematical arts of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy (Bauer 2009).

Parents increasingly demonstrate a demand for schools and educational programs that offer a classical liberal arts education. Most classical charter schools have long waiting lists and have to use a lottery system to fill their annual vacancies, leaving all the “unchosen” stuck in the system. Parents may not understand the underlying philosophical and pedagogical foundations that result in students prospering, but they do know that students are thriving, that classical education works, and that they want it for their children. Consider phonics in this context: you don’t need to know the name of the letter “A”; you just need to know the sound it makes in order to read. Some parents want to understand why it works, but many lack the time or interest. Parents know from their friends and community members which schools produce great results—where children are happy, having positive experiences, and excited to learn on a daily basis. Parents who express demand for a classical education are signaling the market and making it very clear what they want for their kids.

What is inhibiting the supply of classical schools? To understand what happened to classical education in the United States, a short history is in order.

History of Education in the United States

It is not easy to convince government to relinquish power when so much money and control is at stake. But America has not always put government in charge of education. Alex Newman writes in “The Origins of Public Education” that “Early American schooling was dominated by homeschooling, along with a vibrant free-market education ecosystem. Outside of education at home, which is where most children learned to read, the landscape featured mostly schools run by churches and entrepreneurs, as well as private tutors. Even poor children could receive a formal education, though, provided largely by churches and philanthropists” (Newman 2019).

For centuries in European and then American civilization, school choice was the norm. What happened? Two valuable surveys are the Applied Research Center’s “Historical Timeline of Public Education in the U.S.” (2006) and John Taylor Gatto’s *An Underground History of American Education* (2000), summarized as follows:

In 1647, all towns with more than 50 families had to have an elementary school, per a decree by the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. This rule was established to ensure Puritan children would learn about their Calvinist religion through education that focused on teaching them how to read the Bible. In 1779, Thomas Jefferson proposed a two-track educational system, with different tracks for “the laboring and the learned,” which only allowed for the top students to advance, Jefferson argued, by “raking a few geniuses from the rubbish.” Then in 1805, wealthy businessmen formed the New York Public School Society to provide education for poor children with an emphasis on discipline and obedience. These were the qualities that workers needed to display to ensure they performed as required by the owners to maximize productivity. Soon thereafter in 1820, the first public high school in the United States opened in Boston.

Also in the early 1800s, Robert Owen established a Communist society around a cotton mill in Scotland. He then established a commune in Indiana called “New Harmony” in 1825, which included an education system that was “equal for all” (Pettinger 2013). Although Owen’s collectivist colony in Indiana failed, his writings on education inspired the King of Prussia to establish a national government education system based on statist ideals. Prussia’s totalitarian system included mandatory schooling for all children, with powerful compliance laws.

In 1827, Massachusetts passed a law making all grades of public school free of charge. In 1837, Horace Mann, inspired by the Prussian schools, became head of the newly formed Massachusetts State Board of Education. He was instrumental in helping to create a property tax–funded compulsory education system in the United States.

Then in 1846–1856, big agriculture took over family farms, forcing people to flock to cities for work as the manufacturing industry expanded. At that time, 3.1 million (mostly European) immigrants arrived, or 1/8 of the entire U.S. population. Owners of industry needed a docile, obedient workforce and looked to public schools to provide it. In 1851, Massachusetts passed its first compulsory education law. The goal was to make sure that the children of poor immigrants became “civilized” and learned obedience and restraint, so they would make good workers and would not contribute to social upheaval. By 1918, Mississippi became the final state to pass laws mandating that public school should be universally available and compulsory through elementary grades.

Highlights of School Choice and Education Freedom

Education freedom and school choice also are not new, although they became hot topics when COVID school closures accelerated a movement that was already in motion. A timeline from Neal McCluskey (2023) of the Cato Institute gives an excellent overview. Three highlights include 1780, when John Adams included school choice in the Massachusetts Constitution, 1962, when Milton Friedman discussed the importance of school choice in *Capitalism and Freedom*, and 1972, when Ayn Rand envisioned, “Parents would still have to pay for education, but they would have a choice: either to send their children to free public schools and pay their taxes in full– or to pay tuition to a private school, with money saved from their taxes.” She believed it wasn’t a solution, but a step in the right direction. (Rand 1972).

Then came the silver lining of the COVID response: it inadvertently inspired a new era of reform. In 2022, Arizona expanded its Empowerment Scholarship Account, an education savings account (ESA) program, to make all students eligible, based on the nation’s first Flexible Use Scholarship Account (Horne 2011). West Virginia had come close to universality the year before, but required most students to have first been enrolled in public schools. Iowa, Utah, Arkansas, Florida, Oklahoma, Ohio, and then Indiana followed in 2023 with universal (or near universal) eligibility laws. Universal vouchers and ESAs, where money follows the student, are likely to become more prevalent in coming years.

Parents Abandon Traditional Public Schools

According to EdChoice, levels of optimism are at an all-time low for public education (Ritter 2023). Only 23% of adults nationwide think that public education is going in the right direction. In the recent report, “Where the Kids Went: Nonpublic Schooling and Demographic Change during the Pandemic Exodus from Public Schools,” Stanford economist Thomas Dee reported that more than 1.2 million students had left district schools since 2019 and that this exodus was sustained throughout the 2021–2022 academic year, as families continued to opt for private schooling (up 4%) and homeschooling (up 30%) even though most district schools reopened (Dee 2023). The American Federation for Children (2022) similarly reported that homeschooling jumped to 3.7 million during the pandemic. Kerry McDonald, Senior Education Fellow at the Foundation for Economic Education, also reported that homeschooling numbers tripled during the pandemic and that those families represented an extremely diverse population who no longer trust the traditional education system (Ray 2023).

Many observers speculated that such numbers would drop significantly once schools reopened. But Steven Duvall, Director of Research at the Home School Legal Defense Association, found that the homeschool surge is still going strong (Duvall 2022). That’s 6% (over 3 million) K-12 students who continue to be homeschooled today, according to the National Home Education Research Institute (Ray 2023). This is a conservative estimate because it does not include children who are educated at home through virtual charter or private schools. It also does not include many 5, 6, and 17+ year-olds, who are often excluded from reports.

These exit statistics are aligned with the findings of a Yale study that asked high school students how they felt at school:

the answer you’ll likely hear is “tired,” closely followed by “stressed” and “bored.” In a nationwide survey of 21,678 U.S. high school students, researchers from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and the Yale Child Study Center found that nearly 75% of the students’ self-reported feelings related to school were negative (Belli 2020).

Parents and their children are more than ready to take advantage of any new supply in education.

A Three-Pronged Strategy

It is clear that monopolies tend to provide lower quality at a higher cost than competitive markets. Whether they understand this principle or not, politicians commonly choose not to send their own children to their district public schools; they want a higher quality education, and they can generally afford one. Even the existing competition in the education marketplace is producing higher quality at lower cost. A fully robust marketplace would satisfy each student’s unique learning style and needs.

Since there is no overnight solution for supply, advocates need practical applications with the aim to achieve optimal market-based solutions with expansive, demand-driven, sustainable educational

options. To do so, this paper advocates a set of tactics using a multi-faceted approach for the near term and mid-term. Since government schools are accountable to the state instead of their true customers (parents and children), they have very little incentive for positive change. This is why advocates should work to shift the incentive structure to meet the needs of schools' proper customers through disruptive innovation in three areas: policy, professional development, and community.

(1) Policy

Education freedom has seen many wins in the last few years, which shows demand and momentum. But this is only the beginning of the 21st-century education renaissance, and there is much room for further progress. Advocates ultimately must address the systemic issues of government involvement.

Education is not a federal issue. It is not a federal power in the U.S. Constitution. The responsibility of education begins and ends with parents. An important priority should be to eliminate the federal Department of Education, which was founded as its own agency in 1979, thus engraining a "welfare system" in education that now features massive grants and hundreds of billions of dollars in student loan cancellation initiatives. When the government interferes with the free market and starts granting money, it distorts the economy and puts existing nonprofits and NGOs out of business. For example, the establishment of a welfare state in the United States coincided with the disappearance of many mutual aid societies.

State government interference similarly crowds out private education innovators, although not entirely. Free enterprise and market-based solutions are far superior for solving problems in low-income sectors because they are voluntary, scalable, and sustainable since the solutions are based on the moral grounds which are fundamental to sound economics. Without government interference, private funding and philanthropy have offset tuition costs for low-income families for years. Graves and Jones (2022) write:

Many philanthropic organizations' sole focus is providing charity to the least among us. This is a noble cause, and these organizations should be applauded and supported. However, this is not the only type of philanthropy that can move our society forward. The education space has a huge opportunity to provide philanthropic support to families that need just a small hand up to achieve the educational dreams they have for their kids.

While state and federal governments retain significant control over education, ultimately parents, philanthropists, and partnerships in the local community should oversee the fulfillment of educational needs. Policy tactics should focus on removing government barriers to enable "edupreneurs" to take risks and build options.

Unfortunately, bad government policies do the opposite and exacerbate the problems. For example, adding more funding to a flawed system of homogenized government education (such as some microgrant programs do) only fuels the fire and makes it harder for upstarts to compete. Other bad

policies have counterproductive and dysfunctional effects, such as redlining, cultural conflicts like gender identification, porn as sex education, indoctrination through various agendas (diversity-equity-inclusion or DEI, Critical Race Theory or CRT, and Social-Emotional Learning or SEL), physical health regulations that fail to address concerns such as poor nutrition, and decreasing physical fitness activities in schools (often due to fear of liability). Moreover, the exodus from public schools suggests that government regulations have not sufficiently addressed serious safety concerns such as campus shootings, the rise in mental health problems (anxiety, depression, and suicide), or bullying.

Meanwhile, governments have painted as enemies those parents who want something different and demand choice. In turn, many parents now view public school as an enemy that interferes with their right to direct the upbringing of their children. In 2021, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) attacked parents who complained at school board meetings as “domestic terrorists” in a letter to President Biden requesting federal intervention (Parents Defending Education 2022). Thirty states left the NSBA, and currently 23 states have come together to form the new Consortium of State School Boards Association (COSSBA), which consists of mostly southern and midwestern states. Another monopoly bites the dust.

The touchstone question for developing and evaluating education policy initiatives is, “Will this lead to an increase in competition?” To make it easier for parents to signal the market through exercising mobility, they need more choices. In order to help the supply side expand, deregulation is a key tactic. Many legal and educational support groups that fight barriers to entry on behalf of edupreneurs and education startups already exist and do incredibly important work: the Home School Legal Defense Association, Institute for Justice, The Pacific Legal Foundation, Goldwater Institute, the American Federation for Children, and EdChoice, just to name a few. Many other such groups are 501(c)(4) nonprofits that are affiliated with the State Policy Network. They help ensure that homeschool laws remain free from invasive regulations and support edupreneurs with the issues they face such as zoning, accreditation, safety, financial accountability, transportation, licensing, and many other compliance laws.

Proposed legislation should be extremely detailed and thought through completely, including steps for implementation and considerations of anticipated long-term effects. Former Indiana governor Mitch Daniels noted at the Midwest Classical Liberals Conference on May 16, 2023, “It’s fun to celebrate at the signing ceremony, but that’s where the work starts. Implementation is key!” State boards and departments of education do not enthusiastically support efforts to implement laws that will put them out of operation, so crafting an impactful strategy is key here.

Advocates also should beware of legislative efforts to treat homeschoolers like other kinds of students. Tim Tebow laws, for example, mean well but have downstream regulatory effects. Such laws generally provide free access to the extracurricular activities, such as athletics, offered by the public schools. But with access comes new regulation.

Furthermore, although many states are passing legislation to allow for redlining reform through open enrollment, which essentially rescinds zoning laws, the previous “district lines” will simply turn into “real-estate lines” if there is little to no marketplace of education available outside of wealthy areas. Families will continue moving to areas with the “good” schools, making redlining reform merely a superficial solution if not combined with supply-side solutions in every community. Redlining reforms will otherwise become isolated pieces of legislation that delay the inevitable need for more education choices, giving legislators only a quick win. This is another reason that solutions such as open enrollment must be combined with structural reform that stimulates innovation, encourages competition, and ultimately brings more educational options to the marketplace.

Many ESA programs are just variations on a government entitlement. Universal ESAs are making a big splash in today’s headlines as a focal point for the school choice movement. Since education is at the forefront of many political campaign platforms, politicians are pushing for school choice (“education freedom”) in various forms: vouchers, personal-use tax credits and deductions, credits or deductions for taxpayers who donate to scholarship funds, government-filled ESAs (including Title I funds that follow the student and not go to the school system), and credits for taxpayers who donate to fill these ESAs. These savings accounts and tax credit scholarships allow for money to follow the student and can be used for private school, microschoools, tutoring, special needs, or any other “accepted” educational product. Education policy groups share a consensus that these initiatives are a major step in the right direction. But they are not the full solution since they ultimately delay free market reforms by instituting new government controls with strings attached. Rules on how to use ESAs should be loosened considerably, thus allowing for more providers to enter the competitive space. Letting students and parents decide which educational products and services should rise to the top involves risk but is likely to entail far less waste and abuse than a monopolized government system.

Another policy tactic involves reforming or eliminating K–12 accreditation. Accreditation at the K–12 level, as well as the college level, is costly, often biased, hinders student outcomes due to the emphasis on process and bureaucracy, and prevents educators from teaching freely and effectively by enforcing conformity. It “only shows that the school is following what the accreditors think is the proper formula for a successful educational institution, not whether an institution is in fact successful at teaching students” (Munson 2007). As new accreditation bodies emerge in the marketplace, they should disclose their evaluation criteria, methodologies, outcomes, and consumer reviews, thus allowing educational institutions and stakeholders to make informed decisions on which accreditation system to use, if any. The issue at hand is that in a state that requires accreditation for government funding, the state has a stronghold on educational institutions that participate. This mechanism gives legal authority to government regulators to maintain control over the education system under the guise of quality assurance, quality control, and consumer protection.

To support such policy initiatives, policy think tanks and scholars who conduct research and analysis could use more information about facts on the ground for individual families navigating their options and for edupreneurs navigating local and state regulations. This knowledge will better enable them to develop model legislation advocating for privatization and regulatory reform.

For example, deregulation and elimination of barriers to entry are critical for edupreneurs in private education as well as those wanting to start or expand, for example, a classical charter school. Many of these existing schools have a strong growth demand but face barriers from the district or the state. It is easy to advocate to eliminate charter school caps, but policy groups are likely missing the full scope of edupreneurial needs. Policy organizations are not necessarily set up for community outreach and local communication to identify specific entrepreneurial needs, but barriers to entry and utilization need to be fully communicated because the demand side does not naturally filter up to policy groups in a timely fashion.

To participate in a state reform ecosystem, a policy organization should either have clear ownership of this critical communication role or should know who does. Policy groups may be better off when they know their communities well from having their own staff with boots on the ground, so that legislatively they can be more proactive and anticipate issues, rather than being reactive. If nobody is hearing from entrepreneurs, they too often get discouraged, run out of energy or resources, and give up.

(2) Professional Development for Educators

Educators are often shocked to discover how many facts and principles were not covered or taught correctly (or at all) at their teaching colleges. Such programs historically have attracted a progressive staff who adhere to a social reconstructionism philosophy and pedagogical approach—quite unlike the approaches described above.

To address this challenge, a key tactic is to bolster education nonprofits and think tanks that either advocate for educating teachers in the freedom philosophy, free enterprise, classical liberal arts, and civics, or which directly provide it. David Randall, of the National Association of Scholars, revealed his findings in a report card. He states,

In 2021, the American people awoke to the longstanding crisis in K–12 civics education. Not the old crisis of plummeting test scores and abysmal knowledge of our republic’s structure and our nation’s history, but the new crisis—that radical advocates have seized control of our K–12 public education system and have imposed a curriculum that forwards their dogmas in the guise of civics and history—and, indeed, not only in these subjects but also in classes ranging from literature to science to mathematics. Critical Race Theory (CRT) has emerged as the flashpoint of political conflict regarding the Woke Educators’ curriculum. (Randall 2022)

Furthermore, only about half the states currently require passing the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) citizenship test in order to graduate high school. Why would parents find it acceptable that an immigrant can come to the United States, study and pass the citizenship test, and vote when American students who graduate from the country’s government system can’t pass the test and know very little about the American government—yet have the same rights to vote? The Annenberg Public Policy Center’s annual survey (2022) shows that less than half of U.S. adults can’t name all three

branches of government, and about one in four cannot name any. One in four also cannot name a single freedom in the First Amendment.

Civics, American history, and American government are clearly not taught well in K–12. This is also shockingly revealed in the latest civics and U.S. history scores of eighth graders on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which are the lowest ever: Just 13% of students scored “proficient” in history, and just 22% scored “proficient” in civics (Malkus 2023). Frederick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute notes:

The biggest problem ... may be that we’ve created a culture in which too many educators have been encouraged to imagine that civics and history education is less about mastering key events, democratic norms, or America’s political institutions than raising a generation of political activists. RAND Corporation found that more teachers thought civics education is about promoting environmental activism, rather than about “knowledge of social, political, and civic institutions.” (Hess 2023)

Educators are the ones who supposedly impart civic knowledge to future leaders, business professionals, and the next generation of educators. The evidence suggests that a large proportion of them do not.

To remedy this situation, there is a massive multiplier effect in teaching one current or future teacher compared to teaching one student (unless the student becomes an educator himself or herself). Fortunately, several organizations are already providing high-quality professional development and curriculum support for existing educators. These organizations are remedially filling the gap for educators who did not learn this material at their teaching colleges. It’s worth noting here that Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida has been significantly redirecting resources into the Florida Department of Education to conduct professional development with teachers in the arena of civics and the specific topics of communism and socialism with an overwhelming positive response from educators. Other states should follow suit, as their departments of education can receive support at no charge from organizations mentioned below.

Many of the leading organizations that provide professional development offer resources that fall under the social studies umbrella of economics, civics, and history, but others also focus on business (including entrepreneurship and financial literacy) or literature. Leading providers of professional development for K–12 civics and U.S. history teachers include the Bill of Rights Institute, Cato Institute, Arkansas Center for Research in Economics, Stossel in the Classroom, Ashbrook Center, the Jack Miller Center, the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, and the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University, just to name a few. The Foundation for Economic Education has a Learning Center dedicated to supporting K–12 economics teachers, as well as the Foundation for Teaching Economics and the Fraser Institute, all providing resources and training in sound economics and free enterprise. The Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation has a plethora of teacher resources for teaching the history and dangers of communism, socialism, and totalitarianism. Lastly, the Ed Snider Center at the University of

Maryland stresses the importance of professional development in the humanities, in its *Enterprise through Literature* program for high school English teachers.

In many cases, the aforementioned organizations provide curricula and textbooks to reinforce quality professional development in the classroom. Some examples of top curricular resources include *Land of Hope: An Invitation to the Great American Story* by Wilfred McClay (2019), for U.S. history; *Economics in One Lesson* by Henry Hazlitt (1946) and *Common Sense Economics* by Gwartney et al. (2005), and its accompanying website, for free market economics; and Core Knowledge Foundation resources based on E. D. Hirsch's *Core Knowledge Series* (1986), for a variety of subjects.

Educators may work with state-based councils for social studies and economic education as well as university centers that advocate for classical liberal ideals. The Leadership Institute and the Mercatus Center conduct media training to prepare subject-matter experts for interviews and to prepare those who may be asked to testify in front of legislatures. Those educators and subject-matter experts who want to share the philosophy of freedom with political and administrative decision-makers also should accept invitations to join state Department of Education working groups on standards development and revisions to advocate for teaching free enterprise, world and American history, civics/government, and indeed any topic that determines the course of future standards. The author has experienced firsthand how valuable someone's input can be, so getting involved with state efforts, even if one doesn't believe in public education, is a way to help educate teachers who currently teach inside the state system.

Additionally, private schools and charter schools often have the autonomy to hire whomever they choose. Therefore, many teachers do not need professional teaching certificates to teach at these schools, thus decreasing the demand for a teaching certification from a college of education. To increase the supply of educators, there is an enormous opportunity to make current and potential educators aware of their options and redirect the teaching profession pipeline towards alternative certifications and educational models.

Lastly, the recent push for training educators in the field of classical liberal arts will be especially valuable. The University of Dallas, Hillsdale College, Templeton Honors College at Eastern University, and Mises Institute are several institutions that offer a master's degree in classical liberal arts education. Educators also may be attracted to schools that focus on preparing students for assessments in classical education rather than state standards.

Indeed, it is unfair to require educators to prepare students for assessments that are not based on the curriculum that is actually taught. In recent years, the College Board has had a monopoly on national assessments (SAT, ACT, and Advanced Placement), on which most colleges and universities have depended to assess a student's admission or rejection. The Classic Learning Test (CLT), developed in 2015, has broken up the College Board monopoly and is an additional assessment that schools and scholarship programs may use based on a classical liberal arts curriculum (Tate 2023).

Adding the CLT to a classical curriculum may prove attractive to many teachers. It uses traditional language in contrast with progressive jargon. As Randall (2022) has noted,

The radical establishment's war on English is a central component of their war on America. Civics reformers must not surrender our language, or they will surrender our liberty.

Randall's examples of holding the line include keeping the use of "slave" rather than "enslaved," "illegal alien" rather than "undocumented immigrant," and "sex" rather than "gender." Many schools are now able to offer a test that reflects the material being taught in the classroom based on a classical liberal arts education. Many higher education institutions are no longer requiring ACT/SAT exams and are instead accepting the CLT as a measurement of student achievement. On May 9, 2023, the Florida Legislature passed a bill to allow high school juniors to take the CLT as a qualifying test (in lieu of the SAT/ACT) in order to determine eligibility for the state's Bright Futures scholarship (Blanchard 2023).

(3) Community: Options, Training, and Tools

Beyond policy and professional development, simultaneous tactics should include various aspects of community and various kinds of school options. The education community—mostly teachers and parents—are hungry to develop their entrepreneurial spirit and to create new educational options. Their efforts are integral to the growth of education freedom. Many current edupreneurs are becoming mentors and incubators for new startups by providing guidance on starting a business, government compliance, how to utilize the tuition and tax credit scholarships, and how to generally navigate the expanding landscape of education freedom reform.

Parents should have access to understanding their available choices. This is why transparency for alternative schools with regard to the school philosophy, curriculum, staff/teacher reviews, cost, and so on, is so important. Hess states in a recent op-ed,

Today, it can be tough for parents to find comparable, trustworthy data on school safety, arts instruction, programs for high achievers, or the outcomes of former students. There is a gaping need for third parties to step up and play the role of a Zagat's guide or *Consumer Reports*, providing accessible, independent information on K–12 schools. And there is an immense opportunity for philanthropists or civic-minded enterprises to help do something about it. (Hess 2023a)

Market-based solutions so far have included reforms in the public sector, such as public charter schools, exhibiting steps in the right direction, since such schools have more autonomy. Charter schools with management companies should be seen as public/private partnerships. School choice change agents are expanding various charter school models that are in demand, such as Hillsdale's Barney Charter Schools, Great Hearts Academies, and other charter classical academies. Many such schools use a lottery system for admissions and have growing waiting lists. Additionally, many states have underutilized dual-credit

offerings because parents and students are often unaware that students can take college-level courses at no additional charge and satisfy high school requirements simultaneously.

Since the year 2000, the state of Georgia has been implementing dual-credit programs through its College and Career Academies (CCAs). Georgia now has 56 CCAs. CCAs serve students in neighboring public district schools that feed into one academy, which can efficiently provide a variety of vocational and high-tech offerings that are currently being used in industry, particularly local industry. Students are exposed to a multitude of Career Technical Education (CTE) or vocational pathways, resulting in a pipeline of students entering the local workforce and thus meeting the demands of local businesses without wasting money on unnecessary university degrees. These businesses, in turn, often provide educators for the academies, without needing a teaching certificate. When space allows, students in private schools and homeschool programs may take advantage of these opportunities, which often include internships, mentorships, and full time employment immediately after high school graduation.

CCAs also partner with local technical colleges to provide education and certifications. This model can be adapted for optimal efficiency not only within the charter system, but ultimately as a private system since the majority of students do not require a four-year postsecondary education.

Imagine a secondary education model that offers a classical liberal arts curriculum for providing fundamental knowledge, teaching students how to think critically and solve problems. Then add access to a vocational academy for exposure to a variety of postsecondary pathways (including a higher academic pathway for those students on track for a university or graduate-level education). This model may also be a solution for families who choose alternative education to have access to extracurriculars, such as sports and the arts. Georgia's regional CCAs offer a model approach for entrepreneurs and investors in other states. CCAs represent a key tactic in providing high-quality programming, utilizing educators from the field, and offering a technical education that is currently in demand to satisfy the needs of the local job market.

Meanwhile, with the introduction of ESAs, parents will have the option to reclaim some of their tax dollars, and many will choose to use those dollars towards private school. This is not necessarily the traditional \$30,000 or higher-tuition private school. Edupreneurs have been creating low-cost private schools for years, many of which are under \$7,000 per year per student, even in the United States. James Tooley has been in the business of low-cost private schools for decades, researching these models around the world. As the keynote speaker at the National Hybrid School Project conference in 2023, he stated that "the U.S. can learn much from the international low-cost private school revolution" and that this is a "global movement" (Tooley 2023).

In the United States, education entrepreneur pioneer Robert Luddy founded Thales Academy and has been expanding low-cost, high-quality private schools since 2007. "Thales Academy has grown exponentially in just a few short years," the Academy writes, "expanding from 30 students in 2007 to over 4,800 students across 12 locations in 3 states today." Thales Academy's high standards result in "an exceptional education at a remarkably affordable rate" (Thales Academy 2023). These schools may not

have all the bells and whistles that come with top-tier private schools, but given the option to escape a public school for an alternative with a solid core curriculum and student experience, parents are taking the leap and are happy with their decisions.

Many emerging education models utilize innovative technology to drive costs down, taking advantage of a multitude of websites and third-party platforms that offer engaging and interactive tools for students and educators. An excellent example of a school that has completely revolutionized learning delivery is Optima Classical Academy. It combines a classical liberal arts curriculum with virtual reality instruction available to students full-time or part-time, including availability for homeschooled students (Optima Classical Academy 2023).

Hybrid models often take advantage of technology since it can be used as an efficient means for online virtual schooling from anywhere, resulting in less time needed to attend a brick-and-mortar institution in person. Hybrid schools are cheaper than most since they don't meet in person every day. Some meet two, three, or four days per week, thus bringing down the cost of tuition considerably.

Over one million students are currently attending a microschool, which generally aims to instill a love of learning that's customized and geared towards meeting the individual child's unique needs. Microschools are organized around the country in different ways, sometimes as small private schools (accredited or unaccredited), sometimes as learning centers serving children following their states' homeschool frameworks, or even as hybrid charter schools. Since the pandemic, more learning pods and microschools have been popping up all over the country. These individualized learning environments, commonly found in small settings, can be independent/private, part of a network or partnership, or sometimes part of a public charter.

Unfortunately, because the existing regulatory infrastructures of many states had not anticipated the popularity of these permissionless, innovative schooling models, some regulatory tensions persist, which can make it difficult for leaders and families to start them. Organizations like the National Microschooling Center and others offer support, including basic business training on how to start a business and understand licensing rules and relations that are specific to their state and municipality. In many places, over-regulation and extensive statutory requirements interfere with starting a private school (including accreditation), or a child care facility. Zoning, land use regulations, and business license barriers also persist, depending on the legal structure of the business. Access to startup capital is often difficult to obtain, since few philanthropic initiatives have stepped up to fund alternative education solutions (National Microschooling Center 2023).

With such rapid growth in alternative education models, it can be confusing to understand the definitions of various types of models, since they are defined differently from person to person and state to state. There are fine lines between homeschooling, co-op groups, learning pods, microschools, low-cost private schools, and so on. Every state and district can have different regulations and definitions, so understanding the regulatory laws and sources of funding will help define the type of model, which affects its accreditation and accountability requirements. For example, online virtual

schools that are publicly funded allow for students to “school at home,” which is not the same as homeschooling. Edupreneurs are often new to these distinctions and need guidance from more knowledgeable people and organizations in their communities, such as Love Your School and Families United for Education in West Virginia.

Tools for Edupreneurs

Joseph Schumpeter (1942) coined the term “creative destruction.” Contrary to popular belief, creative destruction is a good thing that government should not inhibit. It leads to innovation and revolutionizes entire industries like the world witnessed during the Industrial Revolution. By introducing products and services that are in demand, consumers will abandon existing inferior products and replace them with products that they want. Increasing competition in an industry places pressure on existing products to up their game in order to keep up with others’ advancements. Providers who keep a strong pulse on changing consumer demands and continuously improve to meet those changing demands will stay in the game. Those who are complacent or remain with the status quo will most likely fail.

To help bolster this disruptive innovation in education, Kerry McDonald conducted a case study in partnership with Vela Education Fund, surveying microschools in Florida. Florida is ranked #1 according to The Heritage Foundation’s Education Freedom Report Card, which is based on state spending, regulatory freedom, transparency, and school choice options (Heritage Foundation 2022). When McDonald asked which characteristics of edupreneurs have been most helpful, a whopping 42% of microschool founders responded by saying “collaboration with others,” and 25% responded with “knowledge sharing” (McDonald 2023).

It’s clear that having a community is critical to help navigate the changing educational landscape. Creating a network of mentors, community knowledge sharing, and institutional infrastructure can facilitate the training of more education entrepreneurs and guide them through the process of starting a school or system of schools. This is already happening through nonprofits and university centers. They host several market-centric events with the purpose of networking, providing practical training for mentors and startups, and knowledge sharing. The International School Choice and Reform Conference is held annually and plays a vital role in the global education freedom reform movement. The virtual conference The Liberation of Education is a new event that started in 2022 and is accessible to anyone in the world who is interested in learning or getting involved in advancing education freedom. The National Hybrid School Project conference is part of Kennesaw State University and doubled since its inception the previous year with over 400 edupreneurs and education freedom experts in attendance in Atlanta in April 2023.

In order to expand educational options in the private sector, education entrepreneurs must be effective enough to survive. These edupreneurs want to meet the clear market demands and anticipate the explosion of hundreds (if not thousands) of new schools in the next several years. Parents want flexibility, a la carte options, and hybrid options to meet the needs of individual students, so edupreneurs need to deliver.

Of course, not all charter, private, and microschoools are “good” schools, but that’s what a true market offers: the good comes with the bad. With spontaneous or emergent order, the schools in highest demand will rise to the top and prevail, signaling the market to bring more of that kind. Deregulatory policies should not come with undue fear of change.

With the recent influx in demand for alternative schools, a growing number of initiatives are helping edupreneurs fulfill the supply side. Educational resources for the public include websites, podcasts, blogs, and newsletters. C. Bradley Thompson of the Clemson Institute for the Study of Capitalism, for example, launched *The Redneck Intellectual*, a newsletter about the privatization of education with the catchphrase, “just walk away.” McDonald has a newsletter and podcast called LiberatEd, which advocates for permissionless education. National School Choice Week features the latest news in education legislation and resources promoting school choice. FindaBetterSchool.org is a free U.S. alternative school directory helping parents navigate the expanding educational options outside the district school system, featuring school philosophy, curriculum transparency, and parent reviews.

Voice and Exit Support for Teachers

More choice will increase exit options for educators who find themselves caught in the public system, unable to teach what and how they want. They are often underpaid and overworked with little to no freedom to practice their craft. A growing number of teachers are already looking to this education renaissance to find better teaching environments outside the district public school system. Haskel Academy is a teacher database matching tutors and educators with homeschool and alternative education learning programs.

Traditionally, educators join teachers unions for support but often find them counterproductive to their actual needs. The Association of American Educators is a growing, non-union teacher support organization and an excellent alternative that also fosters personal and professional growth.

Board Activism

Another community opportunity resides with school boards. As mentioned previously, the NSBA monopoly was splintered by COSSBA, which presents an opportune time to offer training to current and new school board members. Here are some options: The Heritage Foundation and Leadership Institute offer on-demand training for school board members, candidates, and in-person events for networking, fundraising, and communications. Building Education for Students Together (BEST) offers a six-week webinar series for school board members and candidates at no charge. Its goal is to unite state-based parent coalitions to protect parents’ rights and pass policies aligned with their vision of expanding education freedom. Moms for Liberty was founded by two former school board members who “witnessed how short-sighted and destructive policies directly hurt children and families. Now they are using their first-hand knowledge and experience to unite parents who are ready to fight those that stand in the way of liberty” (Moms for Liberty 2023). Additionally, school boards would probably function

more effectively if most members had skin in the game and actually had children (or grandchildren) in the district where they serve.

Philanthropy

Meeting the full set of needs of the education freedom ecosystem takes considerable work as well as extensive financial resources. Organizations that provide educational support to edupreneurs who want to start charters, microschoools, and hybrid learning models are dependent on philanthropy especially in this early stage of the education freedom renaissance, when there is tremendous need and opportunity for growth.

Several organizations have stepped up to help make this happen so far, such as Stand Together Trust, Vela Education Foundation, Yass Prize, and other foundations and philanthropists. These donors have provided seed funding, guidance, and support to private edupreneurs and educational startups, but there are still plenty of unfulfilled, innovative ideas just waiting to be hatched and supported.

Philanthropy in the innovation space is not a simple task of giving once and trusting someone else to convert the investment into the desired impact. Philanthropists who invest in educational innovation should make themselves accountable to their own goals in a dynamic environment. They are key to funding educational nonprofits in the 501(c)(3) and 501(c)(4) spheres in addition to school startups. To be most effective, philanthropy needs specialized education and advice prior to entrusting substantial dollars to existing or new initiatives. Individuals and family foundations in particular need philanthropic consultants and program officers to do extensive due diligence in order to appropriately select those organizations which solve problems and offer scalable long-term solutions. Organizations like DonorsTrust and The Philanthropy Roundtable can help serve this need, but there is room for additional consultants and advisors who have deep knowledge in the liberty and mainstream education space and can analyze products and programs based on sound measurements, accountability, and long-term effectiveness.

After making a gift or grant in the education innovation space, the donor would be well-advised to follow up on implementation, both in the short term and the long term. All too often, donors do too little beyond reading an annual report. To best steward their own intent, large-dollar donations must include an in-depth analysis of what is truly being produced and achieved and whether it is in alignment with the project's goals. Individuals and foundations, particularly donors to projects in the 6+ figures, should have someone dedicated to ongoing product immersion and assessment.

Such analysis is critical because many nonprofits in the education space often talk bigger than they deliver. They need dedicated accountability measures so that they don't become complacent, cut corners, or sway off track, like many do. If donors get complacent, everything they are trying to build in the freedom movement could collapse. Philanthropy, the key to driving positive change, would be well-advised to give wisely and stay more involved, outside the already commonly accepted reporting channels.

Conclusion

It's interesting to note that there is little to no state intrusion on parenting prior to age five or six, depending on the state. Parents are entrusted to educate their children, choose day care, doctors, and so on. Why, all of a sudden at a certain children's age, do some people think that parents are no longer capable or should be allowed to educate their own children? Why, at a certain children's age, are parents burdened with compulsory school and truancy laws?

Legislators, parents, and other advocates in states that are behind the trend can learn from other states with increased education freedom, such as Arizona. Without infusing any more dollars into the flawed government education system, states can incrementally shift control and existing funds from politicians and bureaucrats to parents and entrepreneurs. Initial free market wins, with deregulation, education savings accounts, and tax credit scholarships, are a good start.

The education freedom renaissance shows that parents are no longer complacent. Millions are going where they think education works best for their kids. They want an individualized educational journey, ultimately producing an optimal learning experience for their children according to their own family's values and choices. They are losing their fear of moving around and trying out different models as more educational options become available.

This growing demand for education freedom has outstripped the supply, evidenced by waiting lists, while many parents continue to find that cost constrains them from leaving their tax-supported public schools. The marketplace of educational products and services that meet the needs of its end users—students and parents—is still emerging. As parents signal in this marketplace through exercising mobility, we will see incremental positive change as the “bad schools” are replaced by a new generation of higher quality, lower cost educational options that only a marketplace of education can provide.

Next steps involve addressing the gaps within the three prongs of policy, professional development, and community through simultaneous efforts, which are already underway. While many states need substantial policy reform, the biggest opportunity with high demand and growth potential remains within the third prong, community. The United States can achieve educational freedom in this generation, as proven when the marketplace of education has the products and services that actually meet the needs and demands of the vast majority of customers.

As immigrants who came from the former Soviet Union, the author's family risked everything to live in a land where Americans can live where they want, go to any doctor or dentist they choose, eat whatever they like, and choose their own profession, just to name a few examples of the moral difference between the authoritarian regime of the U.S.S.R. and the United States which, under the Constitution, protects individual rights and provides equal opportunity under the law. Why would choosing an education model for one's children involve any different principle of freedom? Choice and competition drive societies to flourish and their citizens to prosper.

Education choice is an uncoordinated global phenomenon. As James Tooley recently professed, “It’s as natural to want to educate your child as it is to feed him.” This natural energy can be organized in the United States as a movement with boundless possibilities, once we release the exciting “chaos” of bottom-up educational solutions that only free markets can provide.

Let’s celebrate the entrepreneurs in education as elsewhere: the heroes who drive prosperity. We’ll know we’ve succeeded when large proportions of students are having great experiences and thriving in this knowledge economy.

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Marianna Davidovich and her family emigrated to the U.S. as part of the Soviet Jewish exodus in 1976. She attended public and private schools, served as a Russian linguist and instructor for USAF Intelligence, served as precinct chair of the Republican Party, worked on the local charter school board and the Fulton County Health Advisory Committee to help improve the local district system. Ultimately she pulled her two children out of the system and used a wide variety of adaptive and experiential educational models and low-cost alternatives on their homeschooling journey, which she admits was the best decision she ever made. Marianna's goal was to teach her children to reason: *how* to think, not *what* to think, to be personally responsible, and teach by modeling the entrepreneurial spirit and strong personal character. She is currently an education advisor and is Chief External Affairs Officer at the Foundation for Economic Education. For fun, Marianna is a professional ballroom, Latin, and swing dance instructor who also loves standup paddleboard surfing.

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