

Policy Focus

How Educational Freedom Benefits Women

RECIPES FOR RATIONAL GOVERNMENT FROM THE INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM

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WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The late economist Milton Friedman is remembered for many things: for his Nobel Prize-winning work in monetary theory, for helping replace the draft and compulsory conscription in the United States with the all-volunteer military, and, above all, for his unwavering conviction that the key to opportunity and prosperity is individual liberty—not intrusive government. This included his belief that parents should be free to select their children's schools, and that our country should have a free market in education.

Fortunately today, a growing education marketplace and new educational paradigms are benefiting women and society in general. More women than ever are pursuing advanced education, making use of flexible schedules, at-home education options, and other continuing education opportunities. Women are benefiting as educators from a more diversified education marketplace, with new opportunities to use their skills and earn a living with schedules, locations, and work environments that are suited to them. More parents than ever before are also participating in programs that allow them to choose their children's schools and make use of other alternative education providers.

Yet more work needs to be done to fulfill Friedman's promise.

Far too often expanding government instead of freedom is the default education policy "solution." The unfortunate reality is that many government programs and policies—however well-intentioned—are limiting women's freedom to learn, teach, and choose their children's education providers. Policymakers should embrace Friedman's advice and focus on returning control over resources to education consumers.

WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

Educational freedom works for women and for society overall:

- **Women as Learners.** Women are increasingly well educated and are expected to continue to make gains, in part because they are making use of a growing variety of learning opportunities for adults.
- **Women as Teachers.** Women represent close to [three-fourths](#) of all elementary and secondary school full-time teachers in the United States. The growing variety of schools, including public charter, virtual, and blended online/traditional schools, helps make the teaching profession more attractive to a greater number of high-quality prospective teachers by offering even more flexible schedules, challenging classes, and more competitive compensation packages. Teachers are also becoming [increasingly enterprising](#) through technology, which allows them to develop and market their own customized curricula directly to other teachers at affordable prices.
- **Women as Parents.** Mothers know that rigorous standards shouldn't mean [standardized schooling](#) that too often leaves [gifted](#) and [special needs](#) students behind. Parents are increasingly making use of a growing number of alternative schooling options, which are yielding superior results and higher parental satisfaction levels.

We want to continue to unleash the power of the education marketplace to give people more and better options.

MORE INFORMATION

July 31, 2014 marks what would have been Milton Friedman's 102nd birthday. He was a Nobel Prize-winning economist and was a key advisor to President Ronald Reagan. Above all Friedman championed [individual liberty and free markets](#) instead of expansive and intrusive government. This included his belief that all parents—regardless of their incomes or addresses—should be free to choose their and their children's schools.

Friedman made this argument nearly 60 years ago in his 1955 article "[The Role of Government in Education](#)," which was later included in his 1962 book *Capitalism and Freedom*. Just because we publicly fund schools through government, insisted Friedman, there is no reason we must hand control over schools to government. In other words, parents, not politicians, should decide what schools are best for their children.

Today women have greater options than ever before when it comes to their own education, careers, and their children's schooling. Policymakers need to continue to liberalize the education sector to make it more competitive and dynamic.

Freedom to Learn. Currently, female undergraduate enrollment outpaces that of their male counterparts [by a ratio of 1.4 to 1](#). Since the [late 1970s](#), the share of women with college

degrees has skyrocketed, from just 11 percent in 1970 to 38 percent today. Today, a record proportion of American men and women, 30 percent each, hold college or advanced degrees, and over the next decade women are projected to earn a majority of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. Women are particularly benefiting from the new educational options for adults. For example, women are more likely than men to be enrolled in online degree programs offering non-traditional class schedules. These new options are particularly important for women, who are typically responsible for the care of young children and other relatives, which can make it difficult to participate in more traditional schooling programs.

Some believe that women are discouraged from pursuing education in disciplines that have been traditionally dominated by men. The anonymity of online courses may help minimize the impact of such stereotypes and encourage women to try new subjects. Online courses also erase safety concerns which may impede some women in crime-ridden areas from continuing in school.

Freedom to Teach. Women represent close to three-fourths of all elementary and secondary school full-time teachers in the United States. One of the most attractive features of this profession is having a work schedule that allows time to raise a family and earn a living. Teachers note that one of the best aspects of their jobs is the freedom

to influence the mission and curriculum at their schools to better help students reach their full academic potential. The growing variety of schools, including public charter, virtual, and blended online/traditional schools, helps make the teaching profession more attractive to a greater number of high-quality prospective teachers by offering even more flexible schedules, challenging classes, and more competitive compensation packages.

Freedom to Choose Children's Schools. Just as women want greater flexibility and customization for their own lives, they especially want those benefits when it comes to their children's education. Increasingly, mothers know that rigorous standards shouldn't mean standardized schooling. Children have diverse academic abilities, and schooling options should exist that adapt to them—not the other way around. Approximately 2 million children are now being educated by their parents at home, and many others are making use of non-traditional public and private schools, which consistently yield superior results in terms of parental satisfaction and learning outcomes.

More Reform is Needed. Too often education policy debates focus on ways to expand one-size-fits-all government programs instead of fostering innovation and customized solutions. Policymakers should instead focus on continuing to encourage more innovation and greater options for women as

learners, teachers, and parents. They can advance that goal by:

Expanding Higher Education Opportunities.

Women recognize the economic and personal benefits of a college education; however, [only 14 percent of women with college degrees](#) believe higher education is affordable for most people today. Federal financial aid [has done little](#) to contain soaring college costs, and it stifles flexibility because it links dollars to [credit hours and seat time](#).

Encouraging online and competency-based programs would allow college students of all ages to progress at their own pace while focusing on gaining the knowledge and skills they need. Alternative providers offering such programs would also introduce competition for students and their education dollars, putting powerful pressure on all postsecondary institutions to keep costs down, program quality high, and the degree process streamlined.

Creating More Options for Teachers. A thriving education marketplace means more options for teachers as well as students. Schools offering different curricula, philosophies, and schedules increase the likelihood of the [best possible fit between them and teachers](#), which helps improve job satisfaction and teaching performance. [Effective teachers](#) are the [key factor for students' academic success](#), increasing student learning by more than one and a half years in a single school year. Effective teachers can also

improve their students' lifetime earnings by [more than \\$400,000](#).

A greater variety of schools would increase competition for top teachers and introduce strong incentives for schools to [direct resources toward better salaries](#) and rigorous professional development. [Growing evidence](#) also shows that paying teachers for years of service, instead of their success at educating students, discourages talented individuals from entering and remaining in the profession—lowering the quality of the teaching workforce overall. Virtually [every other profession](#) pays employees [for performance](#). Students in countries where teachers are paid based on performance also [score higher on international assessments](#). Teachers should be free to choose whether they prefer to be paid according to traditional salary schedules or according to performance-based plans. Consider: Per-pupil funding exceeds [\\$12,000](#) and the typical classroom has [16 students](#). That amounts to approximately \$192,000 per classroom. Yet teacher salaries average around just 30 percent of that amount at [\\$56,400](#). If teachers' salaries were just 50 percent of the total classroom funds received, average teacher salaries would be \$96,000. Teachers should be free to perform, and schools should be free to pay them top dollar for top-quality work.

Empowering Parents, Not Government, to Choose Their Children's Schools. It makes little sense that 18-year-olds can use public funds to attend the colleges and universities of their choice,

but once those young people become parents they cannot similarly use public funds to send their own children to the schools of their choice.

Friedman agreed, and that is why back in 1955 he advocated voucher scholarships. Similar to college Pell Grants, K-12 vouchers are publicly-funded scholarships that help parents pay for private school tuition. In 1997, Arizona became the first state to offer another kind of parental choice option: tax-credit scholarships. These are privately-funded scholarships paid for by individual or business donations to non-profit scholarship-granting organizations. Donors receive a full or partial credit against their state income taxes in exchange for their contributions. Then in 2011, Arizona also became the first state to enact education savings accounts (ESAs). Parents who do not prefer a public school for their children simply inform the state education agency and agree not to enroll their child in a public school for the current school year. The state then deposits an amount worth 90 percent of what it would have spent to educate the child in a public school into that child's ESA instead.

Research shows that children who participate in these programs do better academically in their chosen schools, and they have higher high school graduation, college attendance, and college completion rates and are more cost-effective. Research also consistently documents strong support for parental choice in education. Importantly, a majority of mothers support

vouchers, 71 percent; tax-credit scholarships, 69 percent; and ESAs, 65 percent.

Such programs should be expanded throughout the country to continue to provide parents more options and to create the most innovative education system possible.

Educational Choice by the Numbers

Back in 1955 Nobel Prize-winning economist Milton Friedman argued that parents should be able to direct their children's education funding to schools of their choice using publicly-funded voucher scholarships—much like college Pell Grants. The belief that parents should be empowered with choice has inspired a growing array of education options that are benefitting millions of American schoolchildren today:

- More than 300,000 schoolchildren are attending private schools of their parents' choice through more than 50 parental choice programs in 25 states, including the District of Columbia.
- These programs include publicly-funded voucher scholarships, privately-funded tax-credit scholarships, and education savings accounts (ESAs), which allow parents to use a portion of what their states would have spent to educate their children in public schools for private school tuition, tutoring, online courses, and future expenses such as college instead.
- Families in seven states have used tax credits and deductions totaling nearly \$900,000 to help offset out-of-pocket education expenses such as tuition, textbooks, and tutoring.
- Nearly 2.1 million more students are enrolled part- or full-time in online schools. Another 2 million students are educated at home; while nearly 2.3 million students attend public charter schools.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- **Get Informed:** Learn more about how educational freedom benefits women, men, and children of all ages! Visit:
 - Independent Women's Forum
 - Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice
 - American Center for School Choice
 - Heartland Institute *School Reform News*
- **Talk to Your Friends:** Help your friends and family understand these important issues. Tell them about what's going on and encourage them to join you in getting involved.

- **Become a Leader in the Community:** Get a group together each month to talk about a political/policy issue (it will be fun!). Write a letter to the editor. Show up at local government meetings and make your opinions known. Go to rallies. Better yet, organize rallies! A few motivated people can change the world.
- **Remain Engaged Politically:** Too many good citizens see election time as the only time they need to pay attention to politics. We need everyone to pay attention and hold elected officials accountable. Let your Representatives know your opinions. After all, they are supposed to work for you!

ABOUT THE INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S FORUM

The Independent Women's Forum (IWF) is dedicated to building support for free markets, limited government, and individual responsibility.

IWF, a non-partisan, 501(c)(3) research and educational institution, seeks to combat the too-common presumption that women want and benefit from big government, and build awareness of the ways that women are better served by greater economic freedom. By aggressively seeking earned media, providing easy-to-read, timely publications and commentary, and reaching out to the public, we seek to cultivate support for these important principles and encourage women to join us in working to return the country to limited, Constitutional government.

We rely on the support of people like you! Please visit us on our website www.iwf.org to get more information and consider making a donation to IWF.

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