

Why Are Parents Paying Twice?

Ending Two-Tier Education

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Executive Summary

- A significant and growing minority of parents choose alternative education options for their children.
- The most common alternatives are independent schools, home-schooling and supplementary tutoring.
- Currently, more than 14 000 students are enrolled at independent schools in Manitoba, which receive only half of the per-capita resources allocated to public schools. Tuition fees make up the difference.
- Giving parents more control of this funding, so that the money follows the child, would make independent schools an option available to all, not just the affluent.
- Approximately 1,500 students in Manitoba are home-schooled. They may be receiving a higher quality of education than most public school students, with no government funding at all.
- If the government paid for the curriculum costs of home-schooled students to a maximum of \$1,000, taxpayers would still save \$7,000 per year over the cost of educating that child in the public school system, and home-schooling would be financially viable for more Manitoba families.
- Many children in public schools are performing below grade level. Parents with the means often purchase additional tutoring or remedial schooling. Private tutoring services have excellent track records and provide guarantees that students enrolled with them will show measurable improvement quickly.
- Public school divisions should be required to pay for independent-school tutoring for students who are significantly behind the average achievement levels for their grade. Remedial tutoring should be available to all who need it, not only those who can afford it.
- Holding public schools responsible for the costs of supplementary tutoring would encourage them to be more vigilant in ensuring that students are well-educated.
- Parents who choose alternative education options should not be required to pay for their children's education twice. The ability to choose the education best suited to their child's needs should not be restricted to the wealthy.

Introduction

While the majority of Manitoba's students are enrolled in public schools, parents are increasingly choosing alternatives to government schooling for their children. These alternatives provide elements that public schools do not. Most of them produce educational results as good as or better than those of government-run schools. Alternative schooling offers families more options and accommodates a broader range of students, families and lifestyles than the public system can.

Just as Canadians expect excellent health care to be universally available, so should the best possible education be enjoyed by each child. The reality for Manitoba families is that parents who want something better than the public schools for their children must pay a steep price, while continuing to finance the government system. As a result, choice in education is enjoyed only by the financially secure.



Some parents choose to enroll their children at one of over one hundred independent schools in Manitoba. Although these schools can receive partial funding from the provincial government, parents pay an additional tuition fee in order to cover the cost of educating their children. Many independent schools deliver excellent education for a lower cost than do public schools, but nonetheless are allotted less money per student.

A smaller number of parents choose not to enroll their children in any school and home-school them instead. While such parents may not have to pay a formal tuition fee, they pay for books and materials, and invest either time to develop their own curriculum, or money to purchase one. More significantly, since home-schooling requires a full-time parent at home, home-schooling families sacrifice the income foregone by that choice.

Many parents whose children remain in the public school system find that the education delivered to their children is not adequate. Those who can afford it may continue to use the government system, but enroll their children in after-school tutoring programs provided by proprietary schools such as Kumon and Sylvan. Fees for this extra tutoring are the responsibility of the parents.

Parents in these three situations have something in common. All of them have decided that the public school system does not meet the needs of their children; all of them have committed their money and time to providing their families with a better option; and all of them are required to pay taxes in support of the public school system, even if they make little or no use of the services provided. This is unfair, in that such parents pay twice for education, discriminatory, because only those families with sufficient resources can ensure a good education, and untenable, because as more families leave the public system for better options while continuing to pay school taxes, the inefficiencies of public schools are subsidized.

Independent Schools

The Manitoba government recognizes two different types of independent schools, funded and non-funded. Funded independent schools are eligible to receive 50 percent of the per-pupil funding given to public schools. This funding applies only to operating costs, not capital expenditures. This creates large obstacles for groups who seek to create new alternative schools.



In order to be eligible for provincial funding, independent schools must employ certified teachers, follow the provincial curriculum and have an incorporated board of directors and parental advisory board. They must also meet building code criteria for the community, have two or more contiguous grades and submit all forms required by the Manitoba government. They are eligible for such funding only after two complete years of operation. Currently, 67 funded independent schools exist in Manitoba.¹

Non-funded independent schools are not required to follow the provincial curriculum or employ certified teachers. They are still required, however, to demonstrate to the government that the education they are providing is at least equivalent in quality to that provided in public schools. With the exception

of a \$50-per-student textbook grant, these schools receive no funding from the provincial government. Currently 50 non-funded independent schools operate in Manitoba.²

In 2004, 13,127 students were enrolled at funded independent schools, while 1,202 students patronized non-funded independent schools. Since enrolment reporting remains optional for non-funded schools, this total—more than 14,000—is actually somewhat higher.³ While public school enrolment has declined by 2.9% in the last five years, independent school enrolment has steadily increased. This growth is reflected by the fact that independent school students made up approximately 7.1% of the total student population in Manitoba in 2004 compared to 6.9% in 1999.^{4 5}

In addition to paying their regular school property taxes and other provincial income and sales taxes that support public schools, parents who send their children to independent schools pay tuition fees. Since these schools receive half the money per student that public schools do, and frequently have much lower student-to-teacher ratios, they could not operate without charging fees. This has the predictable effect of discouraging many parents from exercising this option, since not all parents have the financial resources to afford an independent school and at the same time pay high taxes to support the public system.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS EXHIBITION

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Considering the stringent requirements independent schools must meet to receive only half the funding given to public school students, the province's refusal to provide them with full funding cannot be justified. Because funded independent schools must hire certified teachers and follow the provincial curriculum, little difference between them and public schools is apparent. A more equitable approach would give parents complete control over the funding provided for other children, a reform that would allow them to choose either a public or an independent school for their child. Funding would follow the child. Eliminating the ability of school boards to charge property taxes through the special levy, and instead following the lead of other provinces by providing education funding through general revenues, would enable such a model.⁶

By provincial requirement, independent schools must provide curriculum and staff that meet or exceed those in the public system. Currently inaccessible to families of limited means, the opportunities they offer are available only to wealthier families. Full funding that follows the student would end this two-tier system and allow all parents, regardless

of income, to decide what school best suits their children's needs.

Home-Schooling

Parents in Manitoba have the option of educating their children at home. In 2004, approximately 1,500 children—about 0.5% of public school enrolment—were exercising this option.⁷ Parents who choose to educate their children at home have several curricular options. They can follow the Independent Study Program provided by the Manitoba government, use one of a multitude of privately designed curricula or design their own program from a variety of sources.⁸



While many opponents of school choice are critical of families who home-school, the evidence indicates that, in Canada as in the U.S., home-schooled students are often more successful than those enrolled in the public system.⁹ Studies conducted by education departments in Alaska, Tennessee, and Washington demonstrate that home-schooled students come out ahead of public school students on virtually every academic measure.¹⁰ Top-tier American universities like Yale, Princeton, and Harvard actively recruit home-schooled students because they achieve higher SAT scores and demonstrate advanced social skills.¹¹

Is there a danger that home-schooled children will slip through the cracks and in fact receive an inferior education? Yes, and that danger is ironically increased by the province's opposition to standardized tests.¹² Since Manitoba's education authorities refuse to engage in any rigorous or widespread testing of children in public or independent schools, what assurance can they offer that home-schooled children are receiving an adequate grounding? Home-schooling parents are required to register their children with the province, but anecdotal evidence suggests that at least some of them have stayed below the radar.¹³ A policy of requiring that every child be tested every year would eliminate that possibility.

Even if home-schooling parents enrol their children in the province's Independent Study Program, they receive no funding from the government. On the contrary, if they choose to use materials provided by the government, home-schooling parents can expect to pay \$300-\$800 per year per child, a figure which varies according to the student's grade level.¹⁴ Since home-schooled children acquire significant advantages from this method, it is clear that the government has no basis for providing these students with even less support than that provided for non-funded independent schools.



Since the costs of home-schooling are substantially lower than schooling provided in the public system, the government could at the very least pay for curricula and supplies for these parents. If this amount were capped at \$1,000 per annum, it would alleviate the financial strain on home-schooling families while still costing the taxpayer substantially less than the public school average of \$8,200 per student.¹⁵

Instead, the government continues to force home schooling parents to pay crushing education property taxes to their local public school board and other provincial taxes that end up in public schools, while requiring them to pay out-of-pocket for any curricular

materials needed for their children. As with independent schools, those parents who invest the most money and time to home-school pay additionally for a public system from which they do not benefit. This lack of equity makes the home-schooling option affordable for far fewer families.

Proprietary Schools

While most parents choose to have their children remain in the public school system, a significant number have found the education provided there inadequate. Many have turned to independent proprietary schools that offer after-school tutoring in basic academic skills such as reading and mathematics. In particular, the Kumon and Sylvan Learning Centres have multiple franchises throughout North America. In Winnipeg alone, they offer these services at several locations.

The growth of Kumon and Sylvan Learning Centres across North America has been explosive. Over the last 25 years, 1,000 franchised centres have opened across the continent. Sylvan uses standardized tests to diagnose weakness, and then designs a customized program implemented by certified teachers. Sylvan provides a written guarantee that each child will improve by one full grade level within 36 hours of instruction.¹⁶ This level of service and results-based education is only available to families who can afford private tutoring. Those without the means for such supplementary education have no recourse from a failing public system.



That parents whose children receive an inadequate education in the public system must pay extra in order to bring their performances up to grade level is clearly unfair. The provincial government should require school divisions to pay the cost of tutoring at an independent school for every child who falls significantly below their nominal academic level.¹⁷ If the province had to pay the price for ensuring that all students finish school at a minimum level of academic achievement, it might take steps to ensure that schools are performing better. When parents must pay to ensure a minimal level of academic achievement, no pressure is placed on public schools to improve.

Conclusion

Manitoba operates a two-tier education system where only parents with financial resources have options outside of the public system. Significant changes are needed in education funding. Instead of forcing parents who choose alternative education options to pay twice, the provincial government should ensure that such parental decisions are fully supported. Enhancing choices like independent schools, home-schooling and the use of remedial, proprietary schools would strengthen Manitoba's educational system.

About the Author



Dennis Owens is the Frontier's Senior Policy Analyst. A descendent of homesteaders near Portage la Prairie, he graduated from the University of Winnipeg in 1970 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and Political Science. Over a 20-year career in the transportation business, he rose to the position of operations manager of a Winnipeg-based firm. Since then he has researched and written about Canadian public policy issues for a variety of organizations including the Manitoba Taxpayers Association and the Prairie Centre. His specialties at the Frontier Centre include municipal issues, public education, healthcare and aboriginal policy. His frequent exposure in electronic and print media has included a regular commentary on CBC radio and articles printed in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *National Post*.

Footnotes

¹ Manitoba Education, Citizenship, and Youth, *Funded Independent Schools*, available at http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/specedu/indsch/funded_ind.html

² Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, *Non-Funded Independent Schools*, available at http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/specedu/indsch/non_fund_ind.html

³ Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, *Finance and Statistics: Enrolment September 30, 2004*, available at <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/finance/facts/index.html>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, *Finance and Statistics: Enrolment September 30, 2000*, available at <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/finance/facts/index.html>

⁶ *Eliminating School Property Taxes in Manitoba*, the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, February, 2005, available at http://www.fcpp.org/main/publication_detail.php?PubID=951

⁷ Manitoba Education, Citizenship, and Youth, *Home Schooling*, available at http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/specedu/indsch/home_sch.html

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Homeschooling and Canadian Educational Politics: Rights, Pluralism and Pedagogical Individualism," by Scott Davies and Janice Aurini, *Evaluation and Research in Education*, Vol. 17, no. 2 & 3, pp 63 – 73, 2003.

¹⁰ "Home Schooling Benefits are Real, Widespread," by David W. Kilpatrick, *School Reform News*, Heartland Institute, February 1, 2005, available at <http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artId=16300>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Educational Achievement in Canada*, the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, available at http://www.fcpp.org/main/publication_detail.php?PubID=1017

¹³ This writer has privately interviewed and tested a 17-year-old home-schooled child whose "favourite subjects" were English, history and music, but who was able to demonstrate little mastery of any of those subjects. When pressed for an explanation, her parents admitted that they had stopped registering the child with the province years earlier, and had faced no sanctions for their manifest neglect.

¹⁴ *Home Schooling*, op. cit.

¹⁵ Manitoba Education, Citizenship, and Youth, *FRAME 2004/2005 Report Budget*, available at <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/ks4/finance/facts/index.html>

¹⁶ Sylvan Learning Center, available at www.educate.com

¹⁷ *Modified Voucher Would Improve Public Education*, the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, April, 2002, available at http://www.fcpp.org/main/publication_detail.php?PubID=283