

How much school choice do parents have?

- Most countries rely on public schools to provide compulsory education, although private alternatives also exist.
- Opportunities for school choice have expanded in the past 25 years. Restrictions on school choice among public schools have been reduced in more than half of countries that reported findings.

Significance

This spread looks at the scope and nature of choice available to parents. It looks first at the alternatives to public schools that are available and, second, at the extent to which parents can choose their child's school from among public and private alternatives. The issue of school choice has been hotly debated in a number of countries. Proponents argue that, among other benefits, it can allow parents to “vote with their feet” when a school is failing and allows schools to better match their services to students' needs. Opponents argue that it can encourage a two-tier education system, with the benefits being enjoyed mostly by better-off families.

Findings

Most countries allow both public and private schools to provide compulsory education. Out of the 28 OECD countries for which data are available, four out of five allow government-dependent and independent institutions to provide such schooling. Over 70% of OECD countries also report that homeschooling may be allowed.

In practice, however, most compulsory schooling is provided by public institutions. Enrolments in government-dependent private schools exceed 10% in only seven countries – Belgium, Chile, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Spain. For independent private schools they exceed 10% in only Mexico, Portugal and Brazil. Only half of countries reported figures for homeschooling; on average, it accounts for only 0.4% of total enrolments.

In about five-sixths of OECD countries, the main criterion used to assign students to schools is geographical location – i.e. the proximity of the family home to the school. Public schools establish selective admission criteria in only 12 out of 30 OECD countries at the primary level and in 17 out of 30 at the lower secondary level (see online Table D5.5 in *Education at a Glance 2010*). By contrast, independent private schools report the greatest flexibility in establishing admission criteria at both the primary (16 out of 19 OECD countries) and lower secondary (16 out of 18 OECD countries) levels. Criteria typically include academic achievement, religion and gender.

In public education, opportunities for school choice have expanded since 1985 at both primary and lower secondary level. Such opportunities grew at primary level in 17 of the 30 OECD countries for which data is available and at the lower secondary level in 18. The reforms also include new funding mechanisms that promote school choice in England, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg (lower secondary), Poland, Portugal (lower secondary), the Slovak Republic, Sweden, the United States and Estonia and Israel (see online Table D5.6 in *Education at a Glance 2010*).

Similarly, for government-dependent private schools, school choice has expanded at primary level in 11 of the 23 OECD countries for which data are available and at lower secondary level in 12 of 24. New funding mechanisms in support of school choice have also been created in the Czech Republic, England, Finland, Hungary, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Sweden and Israel and Slovenia.

Definitions

Data are from the 2009 OECD-INES Survey on School Choice and Parent Voice and refer to the school year 2007-08. Data on enrolments are based on the UOE data collection on educational systems administered annually by the OECD and refer to the school year 2007-08. Educational institutions are classified as either public or private. Public institutions are controlled and managed directly by a public or government agency or by a body whose members are appointed by a public authority or elected by public franchise. Private institutions are controlled and managed by a non-government organisation or by a governing board whose members are mostly not publicly appointed: They cover three categories: 1) Government-dependent private institutions – these receive more than half of their core funding from government agencies or rely on government funding to pay teaching staff. 2) Independent private institutions – these receive less than 50% of core funding from government and teachers are not paid by government. 3) Home-schooling – education of children at home, by parents or sometimes tutors, that replaces school-based compulsory education.

Information on data for Israel:

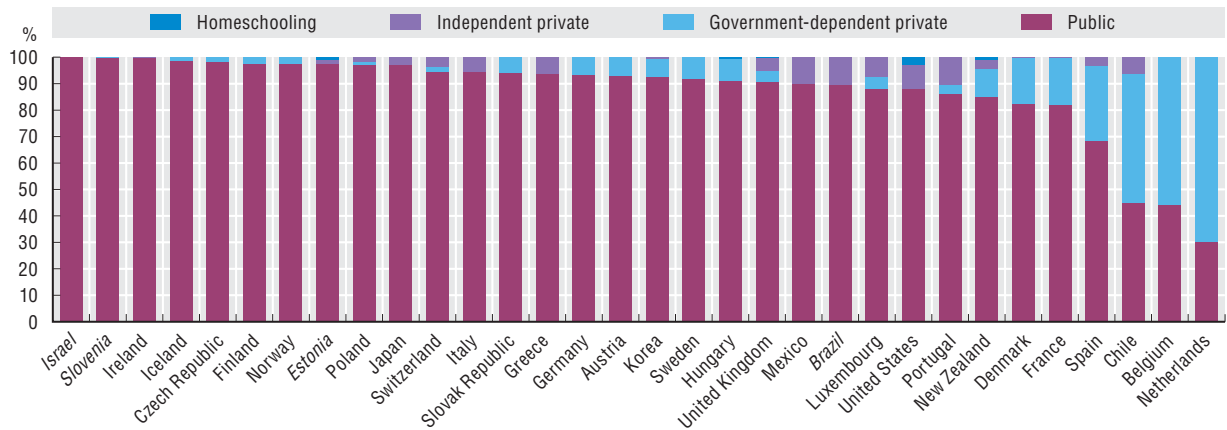
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

Going further

For additional material, notes and a full explanation of sourcing and methodologies, see *Education at a Glance 2010* (Indicator D5).

Figure S.1. **Distribution of students across various types of schools, 2008**

This figure shows the breakdown of students between public and private institutions (which, in turn, comprises three sub-categories: government-dependent; independent; and homeschooling).



Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010*, Table D5.2, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310548>.

Table S.1. **Freedom for parents to choose a public school, 2008**

This table shows the extent to which parents can choose among public schools at both the primary and lower secondary levels (x = no, ✓ = yes).

	Initial assignment based on geographical area		Families are given a general right to enrol in any traditional public school they wish		Choice of other public schools is restricted to the district or municipality		Choice of other public schools is restricted by region		Families must apply to enroll in a public school other than the one assigned to their child		There is free choice of other public schools if there are places available		Others restrictions or conditions	
	Primary	Lower secondary	Primary	Lower secondary	Primary	Lower secondary	Primary	Lower secondary	Primary	Lower secondary	Primary	Lower secondary	Primary	Lower secondary
Austria	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Belgium (Fl.)	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x
Belgium (Fr.)	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x
Brazil	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Chile	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	x
Czech Republic	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x
Denmark	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x
England	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Estonia	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Finland	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓
France	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Germany	✓	✓	x	x	✓	x	✓	x	✓	✓	x	✓	x	✓
Greece	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Hungary	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Iceland	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Ireland	✓	✓	x	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Israel	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	x	x
Italy	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	m	m
Japan	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x
Korea	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Luxembourg	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Mexico	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Netherlands	x	x	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	x	x	✓
New Zealand	x	x	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Norway	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	m	m
Poland	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Portugal	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Scotland	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Slovak Republic	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x
Slovenia	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Spain	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x
Sweden	✓	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	✓	✓	x	x
Switzerland	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	x	x
United States	✓	✓	m	m	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	x	x	✓	✓

Source: OECD (2010), *Education at a Glance 2010*, Table D5.1, available at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932310548>.



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