



“Public” school choice is not real school choice. In fact, private schools offer as much or more choice than public schools.

FACT: PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO NEED IT MOST DO NOT HAVE A CHOICE

One argument against vouchers claims that choice already exists in the current system, therefore vouchers are not necessary. The argument has two parts: first, we have “public” school choice, and second, parents can currently choose between public schools, private schools, and home schools. So, according to the argument, Utahns have as much choice as they need to find the right schools for their children. Well, not really.

The Sutherland Institute tested the “public” school choice argument by contacting sixteen (16) public school districts and asking them about their “open enrollment” policies as well as their practical experiences in its implementation. One public school district refused to participate in the survey; the participating districts account for 83.8% of Utah’s total student enrollment for the 2006-07 school year.

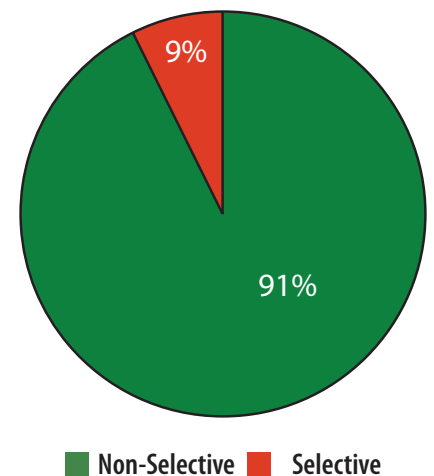
Open enrollment and within-district transfer policies were created by the State Board of Education to provide parents some flexibility in schooling options. The results of the Sutherland survey show that open enrollment and within-district acceptance rates are 81.1% and 92%, respectively, for the school districts that keep such records.

The most frequently-cited reason for rejecting transfer students was space considerations. The second most-cited

reason for rejecting both open enrollment and within-district transfer students was past behavior problems such as a juvenile crime record or behavior in school leading to suspension and/or expulsion. Two districts even cited special-needs status as a reason for rejecting open enrollment and within-district transfer applications.

The Sutherland Institute also contacted a random sample of 61 private schools likely to be eligible to accept voucher students and asked them about requirements for admission into their school, such as academic requirements. The Institute received responses from 45 (73.8%) of the schools contacted. As shown in the chart, 91.1 percent (41 out of 45) of responding schools are *non-selective* in their admissions (i.e. reported having no special admission

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requirements). Four schools reported having some admission requirements, and three of those had to do with academics, meaning that only 6.7 percent of the private schools in our sample “discriminated” in their admissions based on previous academic achievement, and no private school reported past behavior or special needs as factors influencing admissions decisions.

Though private schools are not required to accept all students who apply, neither are public schools. This fact introduces an interesting contrast between how Utah’s private schools and

its public schools serve us. First, many private schools in Utah exist specifically to care for the special needs and behavioral problems of children. Second, public schools are not immune from “discrimination” toward students with past behavioral problems or special needs.

Contrary to popular myth about exclusivity in Utah’s private schools, not only are they as racially diverse as Utah’s public schools, but now we find that private schools are just as open and flexible in meeting the educational needs of all children and, in several instances, they are more so.