

Are Private Schools Inherently Unethical?

There has always been a difference in the quality of education between private and public schools in the United States. Because private or independent schools are privately funded, they have more money to spend on good teachers, materials, and overall education. Public schools, on the other hand, are funded by tax dollars. They don't have as much money to spend on programs and materials that enrich students' education as private schools do. Many people wonder if it's fair that quality of education rests on the socioeconomic status of families. This raises the question, "Are private schools inherently unethical?"

On the one hand, some argue that parents should be able to choose their children's educational paths. Many parents believe that their kids should be able to benefit from the fact that the family worked hard and can afford to pay for private school. Some note that public schools aren't a good fit for everyone, and that private schools can create environments in which all types of students can succeed, such as kids who have been bullied or those who want more interesting courses. This is especially relevant for students with learning disabilities and neurodivergent students. Independent schools offer a more catered education to students who don't benefit from the more "one-size-fits-all" education that public schools offer. In addition, many private schools provide opportunities for less fortunate students to attend by offering financial aid and scholarships. This support can help break the cycle of income inequality by giving some lower-income families the support they need to send their children to college.

On the other hand, private schools can take away money and opportunities for students from public schools. If private schools didn't exist, high-income families would be more inclined to support and donate to public schools to improve their children's educations. These donations could then be used to increase teachers' pay and fix overpopulated buildings. More people may decide to become public school teachers because of higher wages. If all schools were public, this would level the playing field for all students to have the opportunity to attend elite colleges. According to Forbes magazine, although private school students made up only 8.5% of American students in 9th—12th grades in 2019, they accounted for almost 40% of the classes of 2025 at Harvard and Yale and over 40% of the Dartmouth class of 2026. If there were no private schools, college admissions might be based more on merit than the perceived quality of students' high school educations.

Discussion Questions

1. Should parents have the right to send their children to private school?
2. What responsibilities do parents have to the educational system as a whole?
3. Do private schools have any positive benefits for the larger society?