

As an economist working in education, I was dismayed by your two articles on for-profit schools for the poor in developing countries (August 1). Your extremely one-sided portrayal ignores many issues. These schools are not cheap for poor people who often confront a choice between private education and necessary expenses for food and health, especially when they have several children. Research has shown most of these private schools to be of very low quality. The reason many poor parents “vote with their feet” by choosing a private school is because 30+ years of Economist-like market fundamentalism has so decimated governments and, consequently, public schools that sometimes they are worse. The Economist editorial actually recommended “ideally” taking even more resources from governments to subsidize these private schools – so much for free enterprise! The answer is not to privatize a public good, further stratify education and increase inequalities, but to fully fund public schools and these private schools will go out of business like they should. It may be privately rational to send your child to a private school but supporting this in any way is bad public policy, and makes a mockery of broad international agreement on every child’s right to fee-free education.

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