

# The Case Against Education vs. Libertarian Education Reform

Libertarian education reformers have long argued that education is great, but education plus market reforms is even better. *The Case Against Education* in contrast, argues that the education industry is more like government-sponsored football stadiums: Government support is good for the industry, but bad for society. Here's an excerpt from the book's final chapter, "Five Chats on Education and Enlightenment."

---

Frederick [fictional character who writes for the *Wall St. Journal* and blogs for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*]: You make your reforms sound pragmatic, but isn't libertarian ideology right below the surface?

Bryan: It's complicated. My heterodox views on education long precede my interest in political philosophy. I've believed in something like signaling since kindergarten.

Frederick: [ironic] Strangely enough, the facts all fit the theory you cooked up when you were five.

Bryan: I had no "theory" in kindergarten. Just two epiphanies:

First, I had to excel academically in order to get a good job when I grew up.

Second, I would never use most of my book learning on the job.

Though it took me years to see the tension between these two epiphanies, I (crudely) reinvented the signaling wheel sometime in junior high. Armed with my crude signaling theory, I gamed the system, working as little as possible to get A's in all the classes I deemed boring and useless.

Frederick: So you were a rebel, not a reformer?

Bryan: Right, until my senior year of high school. Once I discovered libertarianism, education reform came naturally. Why on earth should government subsidize socially wasteful education?

Frederick: Then you admit your education reforms are ideologically driven.

Bryan: No. I only admit that my political philosophy-or "ideology" if you prefer-sways the questions I ask.

Frederick: But surprise surprise, the facts are in perfect harmony with your ideology.

Bryan: Hardly. Libertarians rarely challenge the beloved education sector. Instead, they promise, "Free markets will make education even better."

Frederick: Well, why don't you say that?

Bryan: Because I disbelieve it. It goes against everything I've seen. I've attended both public and private schools. They're cut from the same cloth.