

# Press Release

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South African Institute of Race Relations  
*The power of ideas*

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## **Give all pupils school vouchers worth R12 000 each!**

South Africa should introduce a comprehensive system of educational vouchers to level the educational playing field, says the IRR (Institute of Race Relations). The vouchers – which could be spent solely on education – would be tantamount to a universal bursary system.

In an article published today in its *@Liberty* series, the IRR says that the current amount of R180 billion that the state spends each year on paying teachers and running schools should be redirected to parents in the form of vouchers worth some R12 000 each. This is the current level of per capita state spending on schooling.

‘The vouchers would be distributed in the form of smartcards on proof of ID of parents and children via filling stations, national retail chains, cellphone outlets, or any other existing national network. This would enable parents to buy schooling wherever they chose,’ the article says.

More and more parents are already trying to avoid dysfunctional state schools, as shown by the growing number of private or independent schools in South Africa, including schools run as businesses. South Africa is fortunate in also having some excellent state schools, to which very large numbers of township children are commuting on a daily basis.

If vouchers were provided to everyone, then all families would have the choices currently available to only relatively few. ‘They would be a big step towards equality of opportunity and broad-based empowerment.’

The critical idea, says the author of the article, John Kane-Berman, consultant to the IRR, is to introduce competition throughout the education system, as schools will have to compete for voucher-bearing customers in the form of pupils. Schools unable to attract or retain pupils will have to close. This will ensure that schools are run in the interests of pupils rather than in the interests of teachers.

Teacher unions often see vouchers as a threat to their power. However, ‘this is one of the beauties’ of the voucher system.

Kane-Berman says that vouchers already operate in many different countries. They are particularly popular among black families in the US. This is because they enable black parents to buy their way out of bad government schools in the inner cities and put their children into better schools in the suburbs.

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