



Education for a New Era provides opportunities for everyone by increasing variety and choice in education

The leadership of Qatar introduced Education for a New Era in 2003 to develop and improve the education system in Qatar by creating a modern, world-class system that was compatible with international standards and able to equip the future generation with the necessary skills and knowledge to compete in the global marketplace. Based on the principles of autonomy, accountability, variety and choice, Education for a New Era benefits from the best educational ideas from around the world, weaving those strategies into a unique framework that serves the needs and ambitions of Qatar's own students.

Although the reform has faced challenges along the way Qatar has made rapid progress. Over the last five years, the Supreme Education Council has designed and implemented internationally benchmarked curriculum standards, created a state-of-the-art system of student assessments and evaluation, and established an advanced technical infrastructure to report and analyze school data. Eighty-eight independent schools have opened to date--more will open each year, as Ministry schools become part of the independent school system.

To complement the Independent School system, the SEC launched two new programs –The Educational Voucher Program and the Outstanding Schools Program that increase the quality of and quantity of educational choices for Qatari parents. Both follow the four principles that guide the current education system. They support autonomy in schools by allowing teachers to be innovative in their approaches to meeting the needs of individual students. Schools are held accountable for student learning and are encouraged to employ a variety of learning and instructional options. Due to the growing number of options available to families, parents can choose schools that best suit their children's needs.

The Educational Voucher Program

The Educational Voucher program allows parents to use government funds toward tuition costs in any of the three schools currently participating in the program. The pilot phase, which began in September 2008 is currently underway, with Qatar Academy, the International School of London and the Michael E. DeBakey High School of Health Professions participating. The second phase will build upon the success of the pilot phase and is expected to include additional private schools to complement the independent schools. In time, parents will be able to use educational vouchers towards the tuition costs in the school of their choice – either Independent or accredited private.

The Outstanding Schools Program

The Outstanding Schools program encourages exceptional international private schools to establish campuses in Qatar, to serve both Qatari and expatriate families. The schools combine the best of an international education with the core values of Qatari culture. The first two Outstanding Schools – the International School of London and the Michael E. DeBakey High School of Health Professions – opened their Qatari branches to students in September 2008. The SEC expects two-to-three private international schools to open each year over the next three-to-five years.

How can variety and choice improve the quality of K-12 education?

In his speech during the inauguration of Education for a New Era, H.H. Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani said "it requires in the first place that the school must provide our children with the adequate skills that enable them to participate actively in the economic and social development. Skills such a critical thinking, communications, creativity, teamwork and problem solving have become basic skills in modern education. Therefore, they should be considered as important as reading and writing."

With the launch of the independent schools, Qatar saw the beginnings of a new style of student-centered education: some schools now offer highly specialized curriculums while others experiment with new programs and novel approaches. The Educational Voucher and Outstanding Schools Programs add value to the system by providing parents and students with a greater variety of quality schooling options that can help prepare them for careers in the global marketplace.

As the population in Qatar grows, the already high demand for both private and independent schools will only increase; the addition of the Educational Voucher and Outstanding

Schools Programs will raise the quality of the education system in Qatar. The Outstanding Schools introduce a variety of diverse curricular options while also adhering to strict criteria, established and monitored by the SEC. And while Outstanding Schools are by definition international institutions, their campuses in Qatar must still respect and value the culture of our great nation by adapting their curricula to include Arabic language, Islamic studies and Qatari history and citizenship.

This first phase of the Educational Voucher Program tests the administrative procedures and systems for using government-funded vouchers for eligible students.

By working first with families whose children are already enrolled in selected private school programs, the SEC can test the program more effectively. As the program expands and more schools join, the SEC fully expects that more families will be able to participate and choose either Independent or private schools for their children.

As more schools are established each year, families can choose from among a wider variety of educational styles and strategies, seeking the best fit between students and schools. The wide variety of diverse schooling options will improve their curricula and educational offerings. Such variety will help Qatar realize our leaders' great vision: to equip this generation and those that come after with the education they need to participate fully in the economic, social, and political development of their country.