



THE RESEARCH ON PRIVATE EDUCATION CHOICE

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Providing greater opportunity through education choice improves academic outcomes (both for education choice participants in private schools as well as non-participants who remain in public schools), increases rates of high school graduation and college degree attainment, improves school diversity, improves civic knowledge and engagement, and saves taxpayers money.

A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF PRIVATE EDUCATION CHOICE EFFECTS

In 2016, Greg Forster reviewed 100 existing rigorous academic studies of private education choice programs in, “A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice.”¹ He found overwhelming good news for these programs, with 87 studies showing positive effects, 10 studies showing no visible effect and only three studies finding negative effects on students. The studies examined five main research topics of interest:

Research Topic	Positive	Neutral	Negative
1. Academic Outcomes of Choice Participants	14	2	2
2. Academic Outcomes of Students Remaining in Public Schools	31	1	1
3. Effect of Choice Program on Racial Composition of Schools	9	1	0
4. Effect of Choice Program on Student Civic Values	8	3	0
5. Choice Programs’ Fiscal Impact on Taxpayers and Districts	25	3	0

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SHOW?

Participants in Private Education Choice Programs See Academic Benefits

Of the [18 gold-standard studies](#) on the academic outcomes of participating students, 14 show positive results for participants, two have neutral findings and two have negative findings. For example, participants in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program scored 10.7 percentage points higher in math and 5.8 percentage points higher in reading than public school peers.²

Students in Public Schools Also See Academic Benefits

[Thirty-one of 33 empirical studies](#) show improved academic outcomes of students who remain in public schools after education choice programs are implemented. A study of a Florida choice program found that low-performing public schools saw a 15-percentage point improvement in math after facing competition from nearby private schools.³



Private Education Choice Leads to More Diverse Schools

Nine out of 10 empirical studies show that choice programs move students from more segregated schools into less segregated schools, with the tenth study showing no impact. As a researcher noted after studying a Louisiana voucher program: “The bottom line take-away from our analysis is that 82 percent of student transfers made possible by the Louisiana Scholarship Program reduced racial stratification in the voucher students’ former public schools, a clear win for desegregation efforts in the state of Louisiana.”⁴

Private Education Choice Promotes Shared Civic Values

Of the **11 studies reviewed**, eight show positive effects on participants’ civic values, while three showed no effect. A 2008 report reviewed 21 studies that looked at the effect of education choice on seven civic values: political tolerance, voluntarism, political knowledge, political participation, social capital, civic skills and patriotism.⁵ In nearly all cases, there was an advantage for schools of choice compared to public schools in promoting these values. The researcher writes, “The most intriguing explanation for the apparent education choice advantage in promoting civic values is a generally higher level of order and discipline in schools of choice.”

Private Education Choice Programs Are More Fiscally Efficient

Among **28 empirical studies** on education choice’s financial impact on taxpayers and school districts, 25 found that choice programs save money, three studies show choice programs are revenue neutral, and no study shows added costs to taxpayers. EdChoice estimates that benefits from tax-credit scholarship programs alone generated between \$1.7 billion and \$3.4 billion in taxpayer savings through the 2013-14 school year.⁶ Here are two examples:

- The nonpartisan Florida Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability found in 2008 that the state saved \$1.49 for every \$1 in forgone tax revenue through the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program.⁷ Additionally, Florida’s Consensus Estimating Conference projected that the program **saved** the state \$57.9 million in 2012-13.⁸
- A 2017 report on Oklahoma’s tax-credit scholarship program found that the program generates \$1.24 in savings specific to the state for every \$1 of tax credit issued.⁹

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS ON LONG-TERM OUTCOMES AND COLLEGE ENROLLMENT

In addition to positive short-term outcomes, there are several demonstrated long-term benefits of private education choice:

- A 2010 evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program¹⁰ found that participating students were 21 percent more likely to graduate high school.
- In 2012, researchers found that vouchers increased overall college enrollment rates among African Americans by 24 percent.¹¹
- A 2012 study examined student attainment among participants in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, finding that students enrolled in the program saw greater high school graduation rates and were more likely to enroll in four-year college than their public school peers.¹²
- A 2017 study on Florida’s Tax Credit Scholarship Program shows participating students enrolling in college at higher rates than their peers.¹³



UNDERSTANDING WHY STUDIES SHOW MIXED EFFECTS

Washington, D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (DC OSP) - Gold Standard

The Institute of Education Science (IES) released a [report](#) in 2018 analyzing second-year outcomes for students participating in the DC OSP. The report finds that the DC OSP produces negative math results for students after two years in the program.¹⁴ However, consider the following:

- Other gold standard studies of DC OSP show gains for students, particularly in the long-term.¹⁵ It is common for students to enjoy greater achievement gains when they participate in a choice program for longer durations.
- IES's 2018 report found that DC OSP “had a statistically significant positive impact on both parents’ and students’ general perceptions of school safety.”
- DC OSP students receive significantly less funding than their counterparts in district and charter schools. Voucher students receive no more than [\\$9,000 in grades K-8 and \\$13,000 in grades 9-12](#), compared to [\\$21,000](#) in D.C. charter schools and [\\$35,000](#) in district public schools.

Louisiana Scholarship Program (LSP) - Gold Standard

- A [study](#) by Jonathan Mills and Patrick Wolf of students participating in the first two years of the LSP program indicates that “the use of an LSP scholarship has negatively impacted both English Language Arts and math achievement, although only the latter estimates are statistically significant.”¹⁶
- However, the same researchers conducted [a follow-up study](#) of students after three years—this time finding that participating students, after initially falling behind academically, perform similarly to their public school counterparts after three years in the program.¹⁷
- These findings, along with other studies on the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program and Ohio’s EdChoice Scholarship Program, show a transition period in which students newly enrolled in education choice programs briefly struggle and then academic outcomes increasingly improve the longer they participate in the program.

Indiana Choice Scholarship Program (CSP) - Silver Standard

A [study](#) by R. Joseph Waddington and Mark Berends on academic outcomes in Indiana’s Choice Scholarship Program (CSP) suggests a statistically significant decline in math scores, primarily during a student’s first and second year in their new private school. However, performance improved for students that remained in the CSP. After four years, CSP students surpassed their public school peers in English and regained level-footing with their peers in math.¹⁸

Ohio’s EdChoice Scholarship Program - Silver Standard

A 2016 [study](#) by David Figlio and Krzysztof Karbownik of Ohio’s school voucher program, the EdChoice Scholarship Program, showed that “students, on average, who move to private schools under the EdChoice program tend to perform considerably worse than observationally similar students who remained in public schools.”¹⁹

- The study’s negative findings are tempered by a research design that falls short of the gold standard. Students in the EdChoice program (in the years studied) were only eligible if they were in public school that academically fell below a certain level based on state testing. The design of the study was to look at students near this cutoff—those who earned participation because their school barely made eligibility and similar students in schools who just missed eligibility—and compare their performance over time. Because of this methodology, the researchers were not able to study students who would have been most likely to benefit: students from relatively lower-performing public schools.



- Notably, the authors also find that “the EdChoice program improved the performance of students eligible to participate—most of whom remained in the public schools.” In other words, students who were eligible but did not use scholarships saw achievement gains.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RIGOROUS, RELIABLE RESEARCH

When reviewing research on private education choice, consider three types of studies:

- **Random assignment experiments—the gold standard.** These are the most rigorous studies. This type of study uses a random lottery to separate students into “test” and “control” groups. The random selection of students provides researchers confidence that the observable effects are truly a result of participation in the program, not outside influences like parent involvement or student motivation.
- **Matching longitudinal studies—the silver standard.** When random assignment is not possible, silver-standard studies match students in choice programs with similar, non-participating students and track them over time.
- **Control variables—the bronze standard.** This option controls for student characteristics like income, race, and parents’ level of education to determine a program’s effect. This method of research should only be considered if gold and silver standard studies are not available.

¹ Forster, Greg. “A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice.” <http://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/A-Win-Win-Solution-The-Empirical-Evidence-on-School-Choice.pdf>

² Greene, Jay P., Paul E. Peterson, and Jiangtao Du. “Effectiveness of School Choice: The Milwaukee Experiment.” <https://www.uark.edu/ua/der/People/Greene/Effectiveness-of-school-choice.pdf>

³ Winters, Marcus and Jay Greene. “Competition Passes the Test.” <http://educationnext.org/competition-passes-the-test/>

⁴ Egalite, Anna J. “The Effect of Louisiana’s Voucher Program on School Integration: A Response to The Century Foundation.” <http://educationnext.org/effect-louisianas-voucher-program-school-integration-response-century-foundation/>

⁵ Wolf, Patrick J. “Civics Exam: Schools of Choice Boost Civic Values.” <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED498124.pdf>

⁶ Lueken, Martin F. “The Tax-Credit Scholarship Audit.” https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2016-11_Tax-Credit-Scholarship-Audit-by-Martin-F.-Lueken-Jacob-UPDATED.pdf

⁷ Office of Program Policy Analysis & Government Accountability. “The Corporate Income Tax Credit Scholarship Program Saves State Dollars.” <http://www.oppaqa.state.fl.us/reports/pdf/0868rpt.pdf>

⁸ Florida Consensus Estimating Conference, March 2012. <http://www.edr.state.fl.us/Content/conferences/revenueimpact/archives/2012/pdf/page540-546.pdf>

⁹ Dearmon, Jacob and Russell Evans. “Fiscal Impact Analysis of the Oklahoma Equal Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit.” https://www.okcu.edu/uploads/Fiscal-Impact-Study_Scholarship-Tuition-Tax-Credit.pdf

¹⁰ Wolf, Patrick J., Brian Kisida, Babette Gutmann, Michael Puma, Nada Eissa, and Lou Rizzo. “School Vouchers and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from Washington, DC.” <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/pdf/20104018.pdf>

¹¹ Chingos, Matthew M., and Paul E. Peterson. “The Impact of School Vouchers on College Enrollment.” https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Impacts_of_School_Vouchers_FINAL.pdf

¹² Cowen, Joshua M., David J. Fleming, John F. Witte, Patrick J. Wolf, and Brian Kisida. “Student Attainment and the Milwaukee Choice Program: Final Follow Up Analysis.” <http://www.uaedreform.org/downloads/2012/02/report-30-student-attainment-and-the-milwaukee-parental-choice-program-final-follow-up-analysis.pdf>

¹³ Chingos, Matthew M., and Daniel Kuehn. “The Effects of Statewide Private School Choice on College Enrollment and Graduation.” <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/effects-statewide-private-school-choice-college-enrollment-and-graduation>

¹⁴ Dynarski, Mark, Ning Rui, Ann Webber, Babette Gutmann. “Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts Two Years After Students Applied.” <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20184010/pdf/20184010.pdf>

¹⁵ Wolf, Patrick J., Brian Kisida, Babette Gutmann, Michael Puma, Nada Eissa, and Lou Rizzo. “School Vouchers and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from Washington, DC.” <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/pdf/20104018.pdf>

¹⁶ Mills, Jonathan N. and Patrick J. Wolf. “The Effects of the Louisiana Scholarship Program on Student Achievement After Two Years.” <http://www.uaedreform.org/downloads/2016/02/report-1-the-effects-of-the-louisiana-scholarship-program-on-student-achievement-after-two-years.pdf>



¹⁷ Mills, Jonathan N. and Patrick J. Wolf. "The Effects of the Louisiana Scholarship Program on Student Achievement After Three Years." <https://educationresearchalliancena.org/files/publications/Mills-Wolf-Effects-of-LSP-on-Student-Achievement-After-Three-Years-July-2017.pdf>

¹⁸ Waddington, R. Joseph and Mark Berends. "Impact of the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program: Achievement Effects for Students in Upper Elementary and Middle School." http://creo.nd.edu/images/people/Waddington_Berends_Indiana_Voucher_Impacts_06.24.17.pdf

¹⁹ Figlio, David and Krzysztof Karbownik. "Evaluation of Ohio's EdChoice Scholarship Program: Selection, Competition, and Performance Effects." http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/FORDHAM%20Ed%20Choice%20Evaluation%20Report_online%20edition.pdf