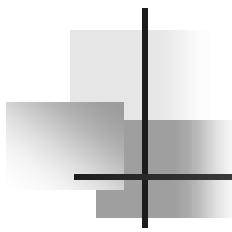


# The Effects of School Choice: What the Research Says

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September 6, 2006



# Policy Questions

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1. Do school choice programs primarily serve disadvantaged students?
2. Do students and families tend to benefit from exercising school choice?
3. Do non-participating students also tend to benefit from school choice?
4. Are the public purposes of education threatened by school choice?



# What is School Choice?

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Any arrangement whereby a parent or guardian deliberately selects a child's school

- Traditional school choice:
  - School-choice-by-mortgage (~30% of students)
  - Self-financed private schooling (~10%)
- Policy-induced school choice:
  - Deviations from residential assignment -- e.g. magnet, intradistrict, interdistrict (~8%)
  - Public charter schools (~1%)
  - Publicly-funded school vouchers (~.1%)

# Policy Background: Voucher Programs in the U.S.

<b>Location</b>	<b>Eligibility</b>	<b>Initiated</b>	<b>Students</b>
Milwaukee	Means-Test	1990	15,000
Cleveland	Means-Test	1996	5,600
Florida	Needs Improvement Public School	1999*	760
Florida	Disability	1999	16,000
Ohio	Disability – Autism	2003	270
DC	Means-Test	2004	1,700
Gulf Coast	Displaced by Katrina	2006	30,000
Ohio	Needs Improvement Public School	2006	3,600
Utah	Disability	2006	300

\*Ruled Unconstitutional by state Supreme Court in 2006



# Profile of DC Opportunity Scholarship Participants

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- 95% African American
- 11% Hispanic
- Average family income of \$17,500
- 44% from schools now designated in need of improvement (Wolf et al 2006)



# First General Conclusion

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School choice programs predominantly serve highly disadvantaged students

# Vouchers Increase Graduation Rates

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- Especially for minority and low-income students
- Confirmed by dozens of reputable studies
- Featured Fact: Urban minorities are 245% more likely to obtain a college degree if they attend a Catholic versus a public high school (Neal 1997)

# Vouchers Increase Parental Satisfaction

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- Especially regarding curriculum, safety, parent-teacher relations, academics, and religion
- Confirmed by dozens of studies (Witte 2000)
- Decreases somewhat over time
- Featured Fact: Even among parents who *stopped* using Florida's McKay scholarship for students with disabilities, 62% were satisfied with their child's private school while only 45% were satisfied with their child's previous public school (Greene and Forster 2003)



# Vouchers Tend to Boost Test Scores

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- Most clearly for African Americans
- Usually in both math and reading
- Gains clear within a few years (Rouse 1998)
- Confirmed in seven experimental studies of five cities by five different research teams
- Featured Fact: African Americans in the NYC private scholarship program closed the Black-White test score gap by half in three years (Howell et al 2002)



# Charters Boost Achievement Under the Right Circumstances

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- New students and new schools struggle initially
- Charters tend to be new schools with new students recruited from disadvantaged populations
- “Snapshot” studies show students in charters performing below students in public schools
- Longitudinal (Loveless 2003; Witte 2004) studies indicate charters deliver positive achievement gains over time compared with public schools
- Featured Fact: Students in Texas charters initially suffer a mobility decline, then slightly out-gain their public school counterparts in both reading and math (Booker et al 2005)



# Second General Conclusion

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School choice programs tend to produce a variety of positive outcomes, but not necessarily immediately or under all conditions

# Voucher Programs Induce Higher Achievement in Public Schools

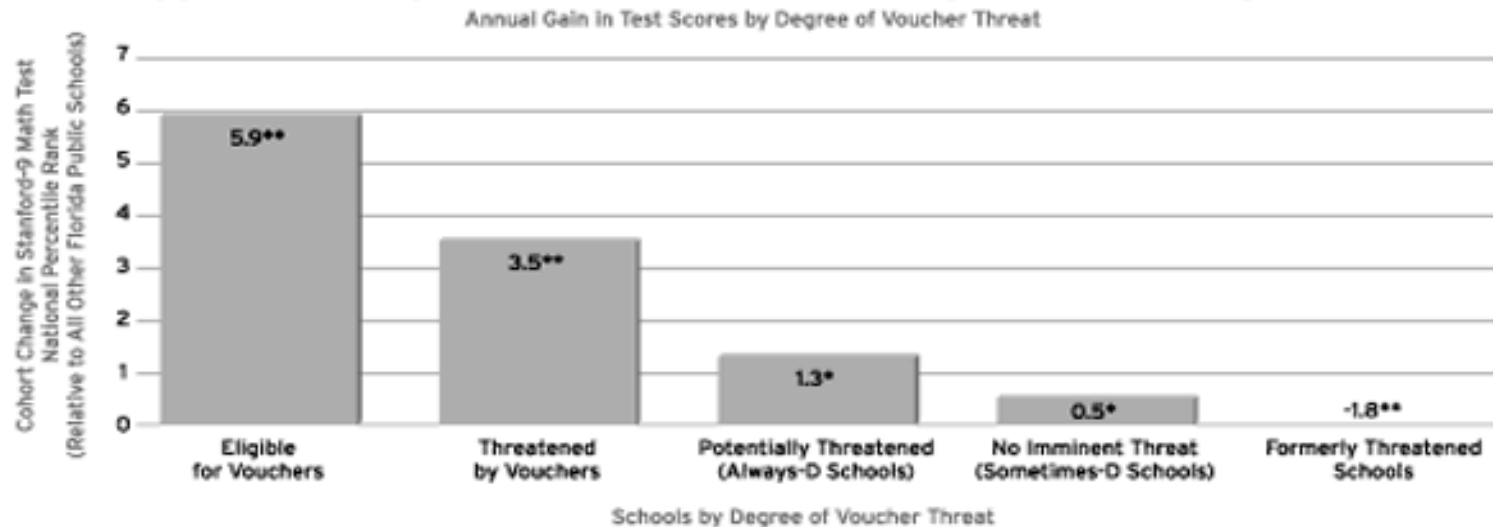
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- 4 studies in Florida (Greene and Winters 2004; West and Peterson 2005; Chakrabarti 2004; Figlio and Rouse 2004)
- 2 studies in Milwaukee (Hoxby 2001; Greene and Forster 2002)
- 1 study in Maine and Vermont (Hammons 2002)
- DC is the exception (Greene and Winters 2005)

# Florida Public Schools Rose to the Challenge (Greene 2005)

## Genuine Learning (Figure 2)

The same pattern—of greater gains among schools facing competition or the threat thereof—was witnessed on the national Stanford-9 exam, confirming that the gains reflect genuine improvements in learning rather than “teaching to the test” or cheating. The gains among schools whose students were eligible for vouchers were enough to erase almost one-fifth of the gap between their average score in the 2001–02 school year and the average score of all other Florida public schools.



\* Result significant at the .05 level

\*\* Result significant at the .01 level

Note: Gains between 2001–02 and 2002–03 school years. Results account for the level of school spending, the proportion of students speaking limited English, and for changes in students' other demographic characteristics.

SOURCE: *Achieve*



# Most Charter Studies Show Benefits from Competition

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- In Arizona, Michigan (Hoxby 2001), and Texas (Booker et al 2005)
- Gains are slight and not always robust (Hanushek et al 2005)
- Clearest public school response is to focus on public relations (Hess 2003)



# Third General Conclusion

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Based on review of 200 competitive effects analyses:

“The above evidence shows reasonably consistent evidence of a link between competition (choice) and education quality. Increased competition and higher educational quality are positively correlated.” (Belfield and Levin 2005)

# Choice Programs Support the Public Purposes of Education

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- 20 empirical studies reveal a private or charter school advantage in instilling civic values (Wolf 2005)
- Evidence is strong for political tolerance, voluntarism, and political knowledge
- Urban voucher programs primarily draw minorities from more segregated public schools to less segregated private schools (Greene 2005)
- Featured Facts: Texas college students are more tolerant if they attended private versus public schools (Wolf et al 2001) and Texas school lunchrooms are better integrated by race in private versus public schools (Greene and Mellow 2000)





# Fourth General Conclusion

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The educational benefits of school choice programs do not appear to come at the cost of important social goals

# Summary of the Research Literature on School Choice

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1. Choice programs disproportionately serve disadvantaged students
2. They tend to deliver a variety of educational benefits to most of them
3. They appear to spur affected public schools to improve
4. They appear to enhance and not undermine the public purposes of education

# Author Contact Information

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