



Study Finds Negative Voucher Effects, but Why?

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A trio of economists recently published [the first-ever high-quality study to find negative effects from a school choice program](#). They found students who accepted a school voucher in Louisiana were 50 percent more likely to receive a failing score on a state math test than peers who had applied for a voucher but did not receive one.

Jason Bedrick reviews major related data and concludes [Louisiana's intrusive and ham-fisted voucher regulations are a likely culprit](#):

there is considerable evidence that the problem stemmed from poor program design. Regulations intended to guarantee quality might well have had the opposite effect. The LSP's high level of private-school regulation appears to have driven away better schools while attracting primarily lower-performing schools with declining enrollments that were desperate for more funding.

Jason Richwine thinks [there are more pedantic explanations](#):

In trying to reconcile Louisiana with the successful experiments in DC, Milwaukee, Charlotte, etc., I suggest exploring other explanations. In particular, how well did the private schools align their curricula with the demands of the state tests? Maybe the private schools were simply teaching different material rather than teaching the state's curriculum badly. Also worth examining is whether the randomization process, which was done within a complicated set of priority levels for admission, was conducted appropriately. Another issue is how schools adapt after the first year of statewide implementation. And, remember, it is not uncommon for studies to change significantly from the working paper phase to publication. So let's be patient. Explaining this anomalous study will require more research.

Bedrick responded, agreeing [the issue needs more research](#), but says the available evidence better supports the overregulation theory, which many libertarian and conservative analysts immediately raised when discussing the study results. Not only that, but in many sectors including education the research strongly indicates all but minimal regulation hurts quality,

as Joe Bast and Herb Walberg (president and chairman, respectively, of The Heartland Institute, which publishes *School Choice Weekly*) have ably demonstrated.

A faction within the school choice movement has long supported managed school choice, just as a faction within the conservative movement has long supported an administrative state, just more efficiently managed than liberals do it. Their prescriptions repeatedly fail to result in a healthy or even improving patient. How long does the fever have to continue until we call better doctors?