



## Study Links School Choice to Crime Reduction

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A new study compared over 1,000 students on vouchers to their public school peers, finding that school choice programs may help reduce crime.

The study, authored by Prof. Patrick J. Wolf of the University of Arkansas and Corey A. DeAngelis, Director of School Choice for the Reason Foundation, found that participation in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) lowered the chances of a student being convicted of a crime in adulthood. The pair analyzed over 1,000 students on vouchers via the MPCP in 2006 and compared them to their peers at public schools.

Enrolling in the MPCP throughout high school lowered the chances of a student committing a misdemeanor by 2 to 7 percentage points, a felony by 3 to 4 percentage points, being accused of any crime by 5 percentage points, and being found guilty of theft by 2 percentage points. These numbers are more significant when analyzing men, who make up 93 percent of inmates. The statistically significant reduction for men as a percentage of their incidence rates is 22 percent for felonies, 20 percent for misdemeanors, 21 percent for convictions, 29 percent for drug-related crimes, and 41 percent for theft.

The MPCP was established in 1990 as the first major urban school vouching program. The cap for the program was eliminated in 2012. Participating students must have a family income at or below 175 percent of the poverty level, which the authors note is slightly less than the qualifying level for the federal lunch program.

DeAngelis, who also serves as a scholar at the Cato Institute, said that public school districts can put less fortunate students at an unfair disadvantage. He says school choice aims to minimize this issue, calling it the "civil rights issue of our time."

"The least advantaged groups are stuck in the worst government-run schools in the U.S.," he told the *Washington Free Beacon*. "Rich people can buy their way into the best government-schools by purchasing the most expensive houses. Forcing the least advantaged to remain in the worst schools is disgraceful—school choice gives them a chance to succeed in life."

DeAngelis says a likely reason for his findings on crime reduction is that private schools have to effectively serve students so that families see them as a worthy investment. Public schools, he says, do not have that incentive, as students are required to attend their school based on where

they live. He also notes that many private schools are religious, leading them to put an additional emphasis on moral decision-making.

"The vast majority of school choice research—and education research in general—has focused on standardized test scores," he said. "But students are so much more than test scores—we should put more weight on long-term outcomes of school choice evaluations like crime reduction. After all, families are choosing schools based on more important things such as culture, mission, and safety."

In addition to sparking further research, DeAngelis says he hopes his study will help restore bipartisan support for school choice nationwide. Nearly every major Democratic candidate, including former champions of education reform such as Sen. Cory Booker, opposes charter schools.

"School choice started as a bipartisan issue—and it still should be," he said. "Republicans should support school choice since it leads to more competition, better outcomes, and taxpayer savings. Democrats should support school choice because it leads to more equality."

The National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers' union, opposes legislation increasing access to private school vouchers. The NEA did not respond for comment regarding the study's findings.

DeAngelis and Wolf's study is the first peer-reviewed evaluation linking a private school choice program to adult criminal activity. However, the authors note that previous studies found similar results on school choice reducing crime. Studies in North Carolina and Harlem found that winning a charter school lottery significantly reduces crime, and in Harlem's case, all but eliminates the chance of incarceration for men. The authors cited another study finding a correlation between the closing of inner-city Catholic schools and rising crime rates.

"Anyone, Republican or Democrat, who opposes school choice is logically inconsistent or highly misguided," DeAngelis said.