



More for your money: School choice

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Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, hopes to halt school choice expansion in Wisconsin. His budget proposes a suspension of new, independent charter school openings until 2023 and a freeze in enrollment for students using vouchers to attend private schools.

But the Republican-controlled legislature just scrapped Evers' school choice proposal. That's great news for the Badger State, because my just-released study finds that school choice is a wise investment.

Using Evers' own publicly available Accountability Report Card data from the 2017-18 school year, I find that private schools participating in choice programs and independent charter schools tend to offer the citizens of Wisconsin more "bang for the buck" than district-run public schools.

Specifically, private schools deliver 2.27 more Accountability Report Card points for every \$1,000 invested than district-run public schools, demonstrating a 36% cost-effectiveness advantage for private schools. Notably, private schools are 75% more cost-effective in Racine and 50% more cost-effective in Milwaukee, the cities with the highest proportions of students using school vouchers in the state.

The data reveal that Wisconsin's independent charter schools also do more with less. Independent charter schools are 63% more cost-effective in Racine, and 50% more cost-effective in Milwaukee, than nearby district-run public schools.

This isn't the only evidence that school choice is a good investment. In fact, a recent evaluation from researchers at the University of Arkansas finds that charter schools are around 40% more cost-effective than traditional public schools in Wisconsin. Another peer-reviewed study from 2017 finds that charter schools are more efficient than traditional public schools in Milwaukee.

But that's not all.

Most of the rigorous studies find that school choice in Wisconsin also improves students' academic achievement, high school graduation rates, college enrollment rates, civic engagement, and decreases crime.

Contrary to Evers' wishes, Wisconsin should expand education opportunities for children. Instead of freezing programs that work, Evers should call for complete education funding equity for every child in the Badger State, regardless of their zip code or the type of school that works best for them. After all, the evidence suggests that school choice is a wise investment.

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