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School Voucher Students' Scores Show No Significant Change, Study Reports



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The school voucher debate is shifting, in part, a new study released today concludes, because participating students' test scores are not.

School vouchers, which have been argued over since before economist Milton Friedman issued his support for them in the 1950s, are meant to offer a broader element of control for parents in their children's education. Traditionally, the legislation would allow underprivileged students from failing public schools to attend a private school on a government funded scholarship.

As The Huffington Post reported last month, opponents of the program argue that government funds should not pay for children to attend school's that don't meet government regulations -- including possible religious affiliation. Others say the policies are unfair to students who are not selected, in part because it seems like government assent that [public education is a second class education](#), NPR reports.

As some see it, shifting public school funds toward private schools is defunding the education system when as many as [90 percent of children attend public schools](#), according to the CATO Institute.

According the latest [study by the Center on Education Policy, "Keeping Informed About School Vouchers,"](#) however, there is no evidence that voucher students' are performing any better than students who stay in public school.

From the study:

Studies have generally found no clear advantage in academic achievement for students attending private schools with vouchers.

Additional research has demonstrated that vouchers do not have a strong effect on students' academic achievement. The rhetoric used to support voucher programs has shifted, with some proponents giving less emphasis to rationales based on achievement and more emphasis to arguments based on graduation rates, parent satisfaction, and the value of choice in itself.

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The study purports that this trend can be seen in the evolving statements from proponents. But by 2010, as more studies showed that improved student performance after switching schools was unverifiable, supporters like the American Enterprise Institute's Rick Hess used different logic. [Hess blogged on Education Week last April:](#)

First off, 20 years in, it's hard to argue that the nation's biggest and most established voucher experiment has “worked” if the measure is whether vouchers lead to higher reading and math scores. Happily, that's never been my preferred metric for structural reforms'both because I think it's the wrong way to study them . . . but, more importantly, because choice-based reform shouldn't be understood as that kind of intervention. Rather, choice-based reform should be embraced as an opportunity for educators to create more focused and effective schools and for reformers to solve problems in smarter ways.

Similarly, [the report found that](#) the groups of students who can apply to voucher programs has also widened -- increasingly including the middle class.

At present, [Florida, Georgia, Ohio and Utah have voucher programs for special needs students](#). D.C.'s was defunded by the Obama administration, which prefers the charter school model of education reform,[only to be brought back earlier this year](#) due in large part to the pushing of Rep. John Boehner, *The Washington Post* reports.

Indiana, Wisconsin, Ohio and Louisiana have programs for underprivileged students, Louisiana's having been established following Hurricane Katrina. In Wisconsin, students from families up to 300 percent of the official poverty line can apply for vouchers, compared with 250 percent in Louisiana, 200 percent in Ohio and 150 percent in Indiana.

The study has been met with backlash from school voucher supporters, who claim it creates an inaccurate portrayal by using too small a sample of data.

“CEP’s study narrowly cherry-picks school choice studies in a handful of states and inaccurately characterizes the results of these studies,” Andrew Campanella of the American Federation For Children [told Education Week](#).