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Research and Commentary: Ohio Parents Want More Education Choice Options

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A new survey from EdChoice and School Choice Ohio shows the broad popularity of education choice programs among Ohioans. The survey of 1,265 registered voters, conducted by Braun Research, Inc. is purposed to “measure public opinion on, and in some cases awareness or knowledge of, a range of K–12 education topics and school choice reforms.”

The survey found many Ohioans have never even heard of the Buckeye State’s two largest choice programs. A full 40 percent had never heard of the state’s Education Choice Scholarship (ECSP) voucher program, launched in 2006 and serving more than 24,800 students. Another 31 percent were unfamiliar with the Income-Based Scholarship (IBSP) voucher program, which launched in 2013 and assists about 9,500 students. (Ohio has three other voucher programs on the books: the Cleveland Scholarship Program, serving 7,400 students; the Autism Scholarship Program, serving 3,700 students; and the Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship Program, serving 6,300 students.)

However, when asked, and when explained what voucher programs are, a full 69 percent of respondents affirmed they were in favor of generic voucher programs, including 83 percent of black respondents and 72 percent of low-income respondents. ECSP received 74 percent total support, while IBSP received 70 percent total support. Both ECSP and IBSP received 85 percent support from black Ohioans.

It is not surprising that support for these programs is so high, as copious empirical research on school choice programs finds they offer families improved access to high-quality schools that meet their children’s unique needs and circumstances. Moreover, these programs improve access to schools that deliver quality education affordably. (Ohio’s voucher programs have saved the state a cumulative \$984 million through Fiscal Year 2015.) Additionally, these programs benefit public school students and taxpayers by increasing competition, decreasing segregation, and improving civic values and practices.

Research also shows students attending private schools are less likely than their public school peers to experience problems such as alcohol abuse, bullying, drug use, fighting, gang activity, racial tension, theft, vandalism, and weapon-based threats. There is also a strong causal link suggesting private school choice programs improve the mental health of participating students.

More than half of respondents, 52 percent, said they would prefer to enroll their children at a private school, with 56 percent saying they would do so if they didn't have concerns over financial costs. Currently, however, only 11 percent of Ohio students are enrolled in a private school.

Ohio parents view education choice programs favorably, and are clamoring for the opportunity to remove their children from the state's public school system and enroll them in private schools. With broad public support for these programs, Ohio legislators should, at the very least, seek to expand the state's voucher programs in whatever way possible. The best option would be to simply make the ECSP a universal program, open to every child in Ohio, as this would remove the necessity of administering five separate programs, helping to cut costs.

The goal of public education in Ohio today and in the years to come should be to allow all parents to choose which schools their children attend, require every school to compete for every student who walks through its doors, and make sure every child has the opportunity to attend a quality school.

The following documents provide more information on education choice.

Ohio K–12 & School Choice Survey

<https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Ohio-K-12-School-Choice-Survey.pdf>

The purpose of this Ohio survey conducted by Braun Research, Inc. is to measure public opinion on, and in some cases awareness or knowledge of, a range of K–12 education topics and school choice reforms. It finds significant support across the Buckeye State for education choice, the state's current voucher programs, and education savings accounts (ESA).

The 123s of School Choice

<https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/123s-of-School-Choice.pdf>

This report from EdChoice is an in-depth review of the available research on private school choice programs in America. Areas of study include: private school choice program participant test scores, program participant attainment, parent satisfaction, public school students' test scores, civic values and practices, racial/ethnic integration and fiscal effects.

A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice (Fourth Edition)

<http://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/A-Win-Win-Solution-The-Empirical-Evidence-on-School-Choice.pdf>

This paper by EdChoice details how a vast body of research shows educational choice programs improve academic outcomes for students and schools, saves taxpayers money, reduces segregation in schools, and improves students' civic values. This edition brings together a total of 100 empirical studies examining these essential questions in one comprehensive report.

2019 Schooling in America Survey: Public Opinion on K–12 Education, Busing, Technology, and School Choice

<https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/2019-9-Schooling-in-America-by-Paul-Diperna-Andrew-Catt-and-Michael-Shaw-1.pdf>

This annual survey from EdChoice reports polling results based on a nationally representative sample of the general public, with more robust samples of parents, current public school teachers, Millennials and Generation Z than in previous editions. The survey asks standard questions about schooling experiences and educational choice reforms, as well as hot-button K–12 subjects that seem to polarize lawmakers and advocates, including inter-district busing, teacher protests and children’s use of technology.

Child Safety Accounts: Protecting Our Children through Parental Freedom

<https://www.heartland.org/template-assets/documents/publications/CSAccountsPB.pdf>

In this *Heartland Policy Brief*, Vicki Alger, senior fellow at the Independent Women’s Forum and research fellow at the Independent Institute, and Heartland Policy Analyst Tim Benson detail the prevalence of bullying, harassment, and assault taking place in America’s public schools and the difficulties for parents in having their child moved from a school that is unsafe for them. Alger and Benson propose a Child Safety Account program, which would allow parents to immediately have their child moved to a safe school – private, parochial, or public – as soon as parents feel the public school their child is currently attending is too dangerous to their child’s physical or emotional health.

The Public Benefit of Private Schooling: Test Scores Rise When There Is More of It

<https://object.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa830.pdf>

This *Policy Analysis* from the Cato Institute examines the effect increased access to private schooling has had on international student test scores in 52 countries. The Cato researchers found that a 1 percentage point increase in the share of private school enrollment would lead to moderate increases in students’ math, reading, and science achievement.

Effects of Scaling Up Private School Choice Programs on Public School Students

<http://papers.nber.org/tmp/97079-w26758.pdf>

This working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research finds the continued expansion of Florida’s Tax Credit Scholarship Program produced modestly larger benefits for students attending public schools that had a larger initial degree of private school options, measured prior to the introduction of the program. These benefits include higher standardized test scores and lower absenteeism and suspension rates. Effects are particularly pronounced for lower-income students.

The Effects of School Choice on Mental Health

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3272550

This study from Corey DeAngelis at the Cato Institute and Angela K. Dills of Western Carolina University empirically examines the relationship between school choice and mental health. It finds that states adopting broad-based voucher programs and charter schools witness declines in adolescent suicides and suggests that private schooling reduces the number of times individuals are seen for mental health issues.

Competition: For the Children

<https://www.heartland.org/publications-resources/publications/competition-for-the-children>

This study from the Texas Public Policy Foundation claims universal school choice results in higher test scores for students remaining in traditional public schools and improved high school graduation rates.

Fiscal Effects of School Vouchers: Examining the Savings and Costs of America's Private School Voucher Programs

<https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Fiscal-Effects-of-School-Vouchers-by-Martin-Lueken.pdf>

In this EdChoice study, Director of Fiscal Policy and Analysis Martin F. Lueken examined the fiscal impact of voucher programs across America—from their inception through fiscal year 2015—to determine whether they generated costs or savings for state and local taxpayers. Lueken found these programs generated cumulative net savings to state and local budgets of \$3.2 billion. This represents a \$3,400 savings per voucher recipient.