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Joanne Jacobs

Free-linking and thinking on education by Joanne Jacobs

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Can good schools help poor kids?

Published on October 6, 2009 in [Education](#), [5 Comments](#) Tags: [Andrew Coulson](#), [Ben Chavis](#), [Charles Murray](#), [school reform](#).
By [Joanne](#)

Cato's Andrew Coulson believes [better schools produce better outcomes](#) for disadvantaged students, citing the success of [Ben Chavis' American Indian Public Charter Schools](#).

IQ expert and *Bell Curve* author Charles Murray [disagrees](#), responding that "such a huge proportion of a child's educational prospects are determined by things other than school (genes and the non-school environment) that reforms of the schools can never do more than produce score improvements at the margin."

The [throwdown](#) continues with Coulson citing international and U.S. research:

. . . moving from our current monopoly school system to a free and competitive education marketplace would shift the bell curve of academic achievement significantly to the right, raising the mean achievement substantially above its current level.


I can't believe this is the best we can do.

Public Forum profiles five bad schools that got much, much better after restructuring in [Breaking the Habit of Low Performance](#).


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5 Responses to "Can good schools help poor kids?"

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-  Stacy
[October 7, 2009 at 6:31 am](#)

Whether Murray is right or not, aren't we morally obligated to attempt a more Coulson-like solution? I can't believe accepting the status quo is acceptable to anyone. Coulson does seem to have significant evidence on his side.

-  Mike G
[October 7, 2009 at 7:10 am](#)

I wonder what Murray says to the recent Tom Kane study of Boston charters, or the Caroline Hoxby study of NYC charters?

Murray asks (I answer)

- 1) Were the tests conducted by the same people who reported the results? (No)
- 2) Were the students tested representative of the entire student population (or were certain kids mysteriously absent that day)? (Nobody was mysteriously absent)
- 3) Are the results compared to those of a legitimate control group? (Yes, charter lottery losers)
- 4) Were there practice effects from teaching to the test? (Not studied.)
- 5) Has attrition been taken into account? (The failure to include the subsequent performance of the kids who dropped out of the program or school is usually the single most decisive artifact of inadequate evaluations.) (Yes. Attriters were assigned to the experimental group).
- 6) Was there a test for fadeout two or three years after the exit test? (Fadeout of initial results has been universal when such tests have been conducted.) (Hasn't been studied, but it seemed like gains INCREASED for each year in the school).

-  Parent2