



“Ray is doing unbelievable. It’s the difference between day and night. He gets extra help when he needs it. He is doing better in reading and math. He feels better about himself. His spelling is better. He wants to go to school. He really enjoys it. He’s more eager.”

**Andy and Janice Cameron,
Pensacola, Florida**

School Choice Research

There is a growing body of scholarly research on school choice programs. Last year, a Brookings Institution report characterized the overall findings about several tax-supported and privately financed programs in urban areas:

“Although controversial, research generally shows positive effects for students using vouchers to attend private schools.”

“How Well Are American Students Learning?” The Brookings Institution, Brown Center Report on American Education, September 2001.

In a separate book published last year, Paul Hill, Ph.D., director of the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington and former Senior Social Scientist in RAND’s Washington, D.C., office said:

“Rigorously controlled studies of the links between vouchers and student achievement ... are mildly positive in virtually every case ... [T]he weight of evidence is definitely toward positive effects [except for] middle-school boys in the District of Columbia.”

A Primer on America’s Schools, Terry Moe, Ed., Hoover Institution Press, 2001.

More recently, in April 2002, Brookings Press published a new contribution to school choice research. In The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools, the most comprehensive study on vouchers conducted to date, William Howell and Paul Peterson, with co-authors Patrick Wolf and David Campbell, report that **African American students participating in voucher programs perform better than their public school peers**. According to John E. Brandl, dean of the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, “This is the most important book ever written on the subject of vouchers.”

Other new research involves Maine and Vermont, where tax-supported school choice programs have existed for more than a century. The Milton and Rose D. Friedman

Foundation recently issued research that finds positive outcomes from those two programs (see below).

State-Sponsored Evaluations

Ohio, Wisconsin and **Florida** each hired evaluators to review choice programs for low-income children and children at under-performing public schools in those states.

- **Ohio** hired the Indiana University Center for Evaluation to study Cleveland's choice program. Kim Metcalf, Ph.D., is the lead researcher.

"[T]he limited, but statistically significant positive impact of the program on students' academic achievement [in Cleveland], particularly as they progress beyond the early primary grades, is consistent with work in Milwaukee, New York, Washington, D.C., and Dayton, Ohio."

"Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship Program," Indiana Center for Evaluation, September 2001.

- **Wisconsin** hired University of Wisconsin Prof. John Witte to evaluate the Milwaukee program. In a book published in 2000, he observed:

"Choice can be a useful tool to aid families and educators in inner city and poor communities where education has been a struggle for several generations ... If programs are devised correctly, they can provide meaningful educational choices to families that now do not have such choices. And it is not trivial that most people in America ... already have such choices."

The Market Approach to Education - An Analysis of America's First Voucher Program, Princeton University Press, 2000.

- **Florida** hired a research team directed by Florida State University to evaluate the impact of the A+ Opportunity Scholarship Program on public schools. Jay P. Greene, Ph.D., was the lead researcher.

"By offering vouchers to students at failing schools, the Florida A-Plus choice and accountability system was intended to motivate those schools to improve ... The results show that [low-performing] schools ... achieved test score gains more than twice as large as those achieved by other schools ... [T]he performance of students on academic tests improves when public schools are faced with the prospect that their students will receive vouchers."

"An Evaluation of the Florida A-Plus Accountability and School Choice Program," Florida State University, The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, and Harvard University Program on Education Policy and Governance, February 2001.

Other Studies of State Programs

- Since the 19th century, the Maine and Vermont choice programs have provided tax-supported school choice to students in communities with few or no public schools. Until 1961 (Vermont) and 1981 (Maine), options available to students included private religious schools. Options now available include non-religious private schools, other public schools and, in some cases, out-of-state private schools.

In a study of the Maine and Vermont programs, Christopher Hammons, Ph.D., identified a range of positive impacts. These included: higher levels of academic achievement in areas where competition for students was greatest; benefits from a competitive environment that were not limited to specific demographic groups; and significant cost savings to Maine and Vermont taxpayers.

“The Effects of Town Tuitioning in Maine and Vermont,” 2002, available at www.friedmanfoundation.org.

- The Harvard University Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG) has conducted several reviews of Cleveland’s scholarship program. Its most recent report says the Cleveland program “has won a strong endorsement from the low-income families participating in it. Parents of voucher recipients are more likely to be ‘very satisfied’ with nearly every aspect of the schools they attend than are parents of students in the Cleveland public schools. Test scores in math and reading have risen in ... the two schools newly established in response to the [program]...”
“An Evaluation of the Cleveland Voucher Program After Two Years,” June 1999, available at www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg/.
- Princeton University economist Cecilia Rouse, who analyzed test scores of students in the Milwaukee program, reported that “being selected to participate in the [Milwaukee’s] choice program appears to have increased the math achievement of low-income, minority students by 1.5-2.3 percentile points **per year** (emphasis added).”
“Private School Vouchers and Student Achievement: An Evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, May 1998.
- Scholars at the University of Texas-Austin (Jay P. Greene) and Harvard University (Jiangtao Du and Paul Peterson) found statistically significant gains in math and reading scores for students in the Milwaukee program three years.
“Effectiveness of School Choice: The Milwaukee Experiment,” *Education and Urban Society*, February 1999.
- Harvard economist Caroline M. Hoxby investigated the impact on public schools of vouchers in Milwaukee. She concluded: “Overall, an evaluation of Milwaukee suggests that public schools have a strong, positive response to competition from vouchers.... [S]chools that faced the most potential competition from vouchers had the best productivity response.”
“School Choice and School Productivity (Or, Could School Choice be a Tide that Lifts All Boats?),” *Education Next*, Winter 2001.

- The Urban League of Greater Miami and others hired education researcher Carol Innerst to identify whether Florida schools took steps to avoid “failing” designations. Based on documents from schools throughout Florida, she said the Florida choice program “instilled in the public schools a sense of urgency and zeal for reform not seen in the past, when a school’s failure was rewarded only with more money....”
 “Competing to Win: How Florida’s A+ Plan Has Triggered Public School Reform,” Urban League of Greater Miami, Collins Center for Public Policy, Floridians for School Choice, James Madison Institute, Center for Education Reform, April 2000.

Privately Financed School Choice Programs

Privately financed K-12 scholarship programs exist in many cities. Most benefit families with limited incomes. Scholarly journals have published studies of programs in four different cities, where researchers used high-quality random assignment methods to measure changes in academic achievement due to vouchers.

- Researchers from the University of Wisconsin, Harvard University and Georgetown University evaluated programs in **New York City, Washington, D.C., and Dayton, OH.**

“[T]he average, overall test-score performance of African American students who switched from public to private schools was, after one year, 3.3 NPR [national percentile ranking] points higher and, after two years, 6.3 NPR points higher ... The school voucher intervention, after two years, erases about one-third of” the difference in black and white test scores. “No ... positive or negative [effects] were observed for students from other ethnic groups who switched from public to private schools.”
The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools, Brookings Institution Press, 2002.

- The program in **Charlotte, NC**, was evaluated by The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.

“[P]roviding low-income families with scholarships has significant benefits.... This finding is consistent with the results from similar evaluations ... in New York, Washington, D.C., and Dayton, Ohio as well as the results of evaluations of publicly funded school choice programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland. Receiving a scholarship to attend private school improves scores on standardized math tests by between 5.9 and 6.2 [NPR] points and ... on standardized reading tests by between 5.4 and 7.7 [NPR] points....”
 “The Effect of School Choice: An Evaluation of the Charlotte Children’s Scholarship Fund Program,” The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, August 2000.

Note to editors:

- Last year a General Accounting Office report summarized a selected set of findings found in a limited group of studies. The GAO acknowledged that its report omits information about recent studies, including several cited above.
“School Vouchers — Publicly Funded Programs in Cleveland and Milwaukee,” GAO-01-914, August 2001.
- The Summer 2002 issue of Education Next contains an informative description and analysis of several recent publications on school choice research.
“Data Vacuum — Only Larger Voucher Experiments Will Yield Answers,” available at www.educationnext.org.