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EVALUATION OF THE CLEVELAND SCHOLARSHIP AND TUTORING PROGRAM

SUMMARY REPORT 1998 - 2001

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1998-2001 Summary Report

Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program (CSTP) was initiated by the Indiana Center for Evaluation in the spring of 1997 near the conclusion of the first operating year of the program. From the beginning, the evaluation has examined the impact of the CSTP on the students, families, and schools that participate, and the impact on the public schools from which the scholarship students are drawn. In November 1998, the evaluation began following a cohort of first grade scholarship and public school children, with the intention of collecting longitudinal data on the impact of the program.

The present report details the findings of data drawn from the cohort from the time the students began first grade in the fall of 1998 through the end of third grade, 2001. The sample under study includes three primary groups of students for whom sufficient data were available: (1) *scholarship students*, who are further classified based on the year during which they entered the program (i.e., kindergarteners in 1998-1999, first graders in 1999-2000, second graders in 2000-2001, or third graders in 2001-2002); (2) *applicant/non-recipients*, who are public school students whose families applied for a scholarship at some point between kindergarten, 1998-1999, and third grade, 2001-2002, but who were not selected to receive a scholarship through the random lottery or because they did not meet (i.e., exceeded) the income requirement; and (3) *non-applicants*, who are public school students whose families have never applied for a scholarship at any point between kindergarten, 1998-1999, and third grade, 2001-2002. As a result, the current project includes multiple comparison groups by which scholarship students' progress is weighed.

Two additional groups, comprised of relatively fewer students than the three primary groups described above, have been identified and subjected to analysis when appropriate. These groups are: (1) *scholarship winner/non-users*, who represent a small group public school students whose families applied for and were awarded a scholarship at some point between kindergarten and third grade, but whose families elected not to use the scholarship and remained in public schools; and (2) *former scholarship students*, who were awarded, accepted, and used a scholarship at some point between kindergarten and third grade, but subsequently withdrew from the program after one, two, or three years of participation to return to public schools.

During the period covered by the current report – which represents only a portion of the ongoing multiyear, longitudinal study of the voucher program in Cleveland – data collection and analysis have been guided by three questions associated with the characteristics of students, the characteristics of classrooms and teachers with whom they worked, and the impact of the CSTP on students’ academic achievement.

Specifically, these questions are:

1. What are the characteristics of students who participate in the CSTP and how do they compare with students who do not participate?
2. What are the characteristics of the classrooms and teachers experienced by students who participate in the program, and how do they compare with those experienced by public school students?
3. What is the impact of participation in the program on students’ academic achievement, and other relevant school related variables (e.g., attendance, behavior)?

During the period from 1998-2001, the evaluation emphasized the identification of complete and representative groups of students who constitute the longitudinal sample and on collecting initial data on questions 1, 2, and 3 above. A comprehensive technical report has been prepared in which the statistical and methodological techniques of the project are explained in detail. The present report attempts to summarize the basic evaluation activities in ways that avoid technical language and that focus on the findings and their interpretation. Individuals who would like more information on the details of

the study, including the specific measures used in collecting data and their operational definitions, are encouraged to obtain the longer technical report.

The remainder of this summary provides a brief overview of the findings from the evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program conducted from fall, 1998 through spring, 2001, as well as a discussion of tentative conclusions that can be drawn from these findings. The summary is organized around the three evaluation questions noted above and for which data were collected and analyzed. Findings are frequently presented graphically rather than in tables and supplemented with narrative explanations for clarity. Several points should be made, however, prior to engaging in this discussion.

1. Unless otherwise noted, the results are based on a cohort of students who entered public or private school as first graders during the 1998-99 academic year. Data on these students were collected most recently in the spring of 2001, when cohort students were completing third grade. To the extent that this cohort of students is representative of the broader population of scholarship and public school students, which it generally appears to be, the findings can appropriately be generalized to the broader program. However, because the characteristics or experiences of this cohort may be unique in some ways from those of other students, generalizations must be made cautiously.
2. Any examination of the impacts of an educational program is a complex and difficult endeavor. This complexity is increased when the program is relatively large, encompasses a large number of schools, families, and students, and must be examined over time. Any attempt to draw broad or highly general conclusions across a range of findings requires a degree of simplification that cannot convey important nuances in the program or in the results.
3. The findings summarized below are only the most recent from an ongoing study of the Scholarship and Tutoring Program in Cleveland. As such, they represent only a snapshot of the program and the cohort of students as they were in May of 2001. Definitive, summative, or final conclusions about the program, schools, or students cannot and should not be drawn. Collectively, these conditions require that caution be exercised as findings are synthesized and conclusions drawn.

In addition, other researchers of publicly-funded vouchers, including our own earlier work, have produced differing findings and have reached vastly different conclusions.¹ We have speculated in other arenas that these divergent findings may be the result of differing methodological approaches to the study of voucher programs and to the

¹ All prior reports, from both phases one and two of the CSTP evaluation, are available through the Ohio Department of Education or through the Indiana Center for Evaluation (www.indiana.edu/~iuce/).

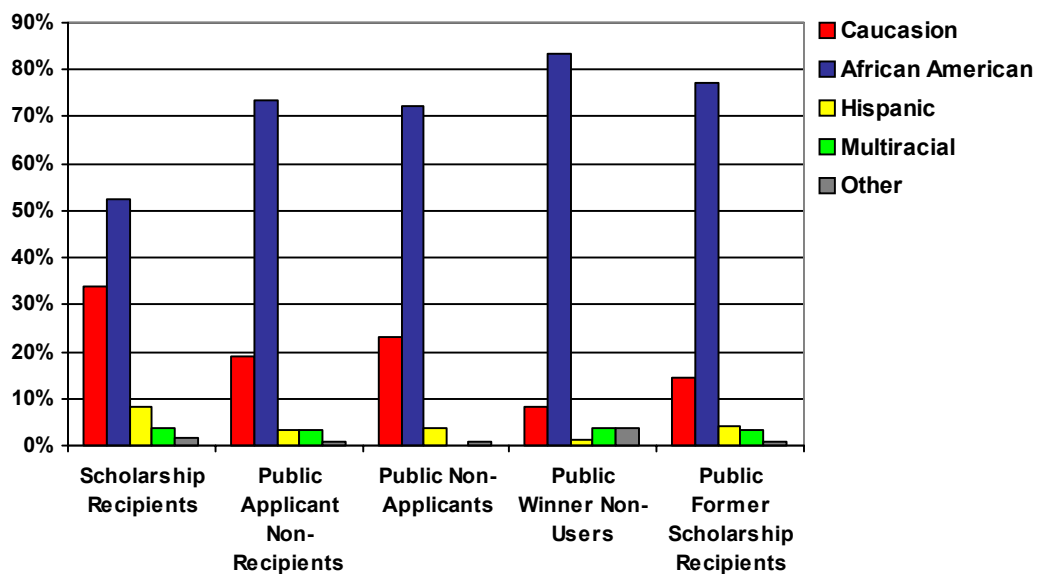
cumulative effects of education (and thus of voucher programs) that studies conducted over only three or four years may not identify (see Metcalf et al., 1999; Metcalf & Beghetto, 2001; Metcalf & Legan, 2001). The present study addresses these issues in ways that, we believe, may prove useful in reconciling these seemingly disparate results.

Evaluation Question One

What are the characteristics of students who participate in the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, and how do they compare with students who do not participate?

In the earlier phase of our work in Cleveland, we found that scholarship students were somewhat more likely to be Caucasian and of much lower income than their public school counterparts. The current results offer a somewhat different picture. As in our earlier work, a greater proportion of the students in the third grade cohort of scholarship students are Caucasian and fewer are African-American in comparison to the proportions in public schools. However, the proportion of Hispanic and multiracial students in the third grade scholarship cohort is roughly twice that of the public schools. Thus, while the cohort is more Caucasian than the public schools, it is also slightly more diverse. Figure 1 depicts minority status across groups

Figure 1. 2000-2001 Minority Status by Category and Scholarship Group



Our current findings on family income of scholarship students also contrast with our earlier findings, which found no difference between scholarship students and the public school comparison groups. Data collected in the spring of 2001 indicate that the scholarship cohort is, in general, less likely to qualify for free lunch than public school students. Moreover, students who were awarded but choose not to use a scholarship are of substantially lower income than even their public school classmates. However, current findings regarding student sex and mobility were similar to our previous findings. That is, scholarship and public school students are nearly equally male and female, and the vast majority of students in both groups have been enrolled in the same school from first grade through third grade (i.e., relatively low student mobility across all groups).

More important, a clear pattern emerges in the characteristics of students who are awarded and accept their scholarship prior to the beginning of the academic year and those who do so after the beginning of school. Students who accept their scholarship prior to the beginning of school are nearly identical to their public school classmates in family income and race, and a majority is from public schools. However, a majority of students who accept their scholarship after the beginning of the school year consist of former private school students (likely already enrolled in the private school), are of higher income, and are less likely to be African-American.

On the basis of these findings, it seems that the random lottery, held by the CSTP office each spring, generally serves to award scholarships to students who have been in public schools and who are very similar, demographically, to their peers in Cleveland public schools. However, as the beginning of the academic year approaches and then passes, some students elect not to use scholarships that they were awarded. These scholarships are then offered to other applicants to the program (who may not have been selected in the initial lottery). Students who, at this later point, are awarded and choose to use a scholarship tend to be Caucasian, from families with higher incomes than earlier awardees, and have been enrolled in private school previously.

Additional analyses, which were possible for the first time in the current phase of the evaluation, revealed that students who enter the program after first grade tend to come from families who have applied for a voucher in prior years. There is also a slight tendency for them to have been enrolled in a private school before entering the CSTP.

However, and surprisingly, the proportion of new scholarship students whose families have previously applied for a scholarship is nearly identical for former public and former private school students. It appears that many families become interested in obtaining a scholarship early in their children's schooling, and they persist in their efforts to do so over multiple years.

Finally, the variables of student gender, race/ethnicity, income, and mobility, both individually and collectively, had only very weak relationships to the achievement of students in the cohort. Higher overall academic performance was generally associated with being Caucasian, of higher estimated family income, less mobile, and female. This trend was true both for scholarship and for public school students.

Evaluation Question Two

What are the characteristics of the classrooms and teachers with whom scholarship students work in private schools, and how do they compare with the characteristics of classrooms and teachers in public schools?

As in previous years, we found both similarities and differences between public and private school classrooms and teachers. The vast majority of teachers in both types of school were fully certified, although the proportion was greater in public schools than in private. Private school teachers had more experience and had been in their current schools longer than public school teachers. Public school teachers were more likely to have completed some graduate coursework, but most teachers in both types of school had done so. Class sizes were slightly larger in private schools, but both public and private school classrooms contained a greater number of students than many would recommend (e.g., the Tennessee STAR report). Of these variables, only class size was related to student achievement and this relationship, surprisingly, was positive (i.e., larger class sizes were associated with higher academic achievement).

In addition, an interesting trend was found in the classrooms experienced by minority and non-minority students in the cohort we have studied. Minority students tend to be enrolled in smaller classes and with teachers who have more experience, regardless of whether they attend private or public schools. However, non-minority students are more

likely to work with teachers who are fully certified. These findings, while significant, may be a result of any number of factors, such as unique characteristics of the third grade classrooms, unique characteristics of schools in districts with different proportions of minority and non-minority students, differential patterns of school choice between minority and non-minority families, or schools may attempt to secure more experienced teachers and smaller classes for minority students. Future years of the study will allow us to identify patterns that may exist.

Evaluation Question Three

What is the impact of participation in the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program on student academic achievement?

The most recent results do not reveal any significant impacts of participation in the CSTP on student achievement. From the end of first grade, when the large initial differences between public school students and scholarship students no longer existed, students in all of the groups we have studied demonstrated significant gains each year. And, across groups, the general extent of achievement growth was nearly equal through second and third grade. Although it is not statistically significant in the data available to date, there is some evidence of a pattern of slightly greater annual achievement growth among students who have used a scholarship continuously since kindergarten. If this pattern continues, the achievement of this group of students may become noticeably, and meaningfully, higher than that of public school students. However, data over three to five additional years will be necessary to confirm or discount such a pattern.

As we have found in previous years, students who choose to leave the CSTP and enroll in public schools are achieving at lower levels than any other group of students in our study. This trend is found regardless of the grade at which students discontinue the program. The data available on these students over multiple years now also indicate that this pattern of comparatively low achievement continues for these students in their public schools. A notable exception to this trend is the group of students who left the program after kindergarten and have attended public school consistently since that time. These students were achieving at roughly equal levels to other scholarship and public school students at the beginning of first grade, and continue to do so. For other students who

discontinue in the CSTP, future data collection will attempt to identify potential explanations either for their persistent lower achievement, or for improvement in their achievement after attending public schools for multiple years.

Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 display the patterns of achievement for scholarship recipients, applicant non-recipients, non-applicants, and scholarship winner non-users. For these analyses, the scholarship recipient group has been further divided into four-year scholarship recipients (who have participated in the program continuously since they entered as kindergarteners in 1998-1999) and three-year scholarship recipients (who have participated in the program continuously since they entered as first graders in 1999-2000).

Figure 2. Reading Achievement: 1998 to 2001

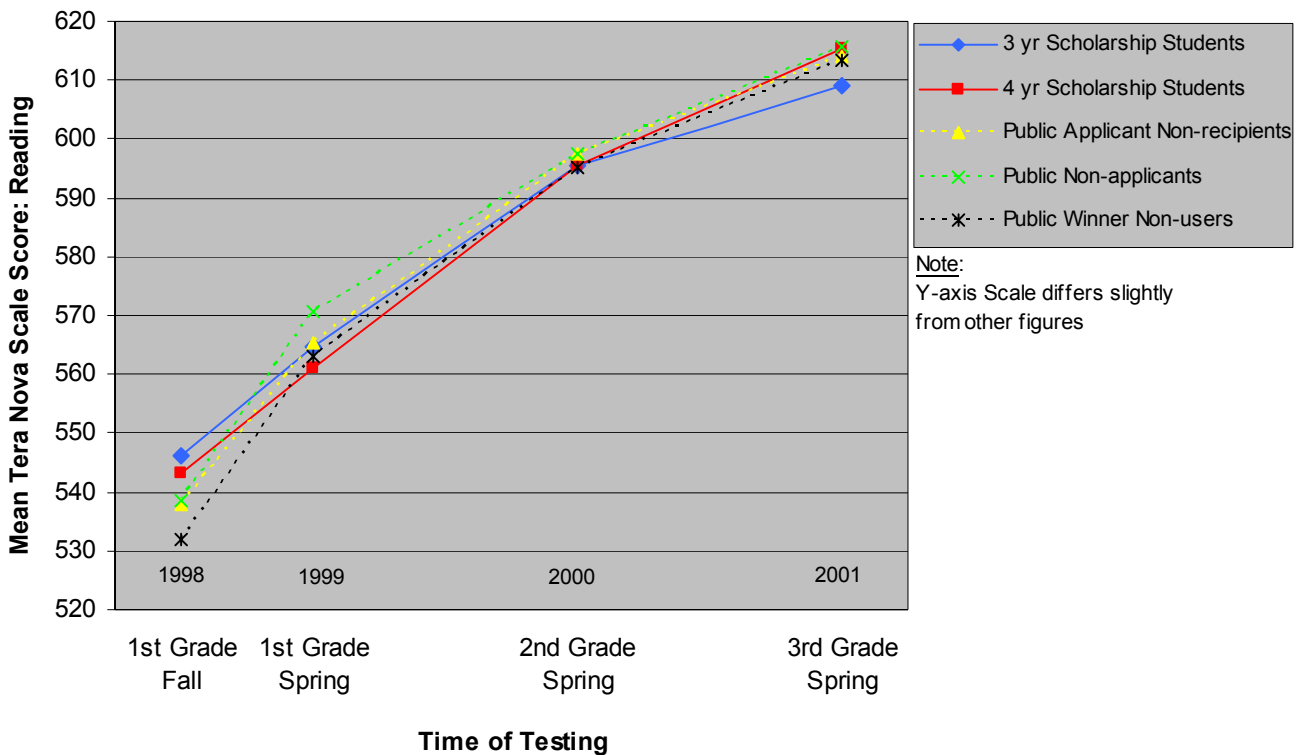


Figure 3. Language Achievement: 1998 to 2001

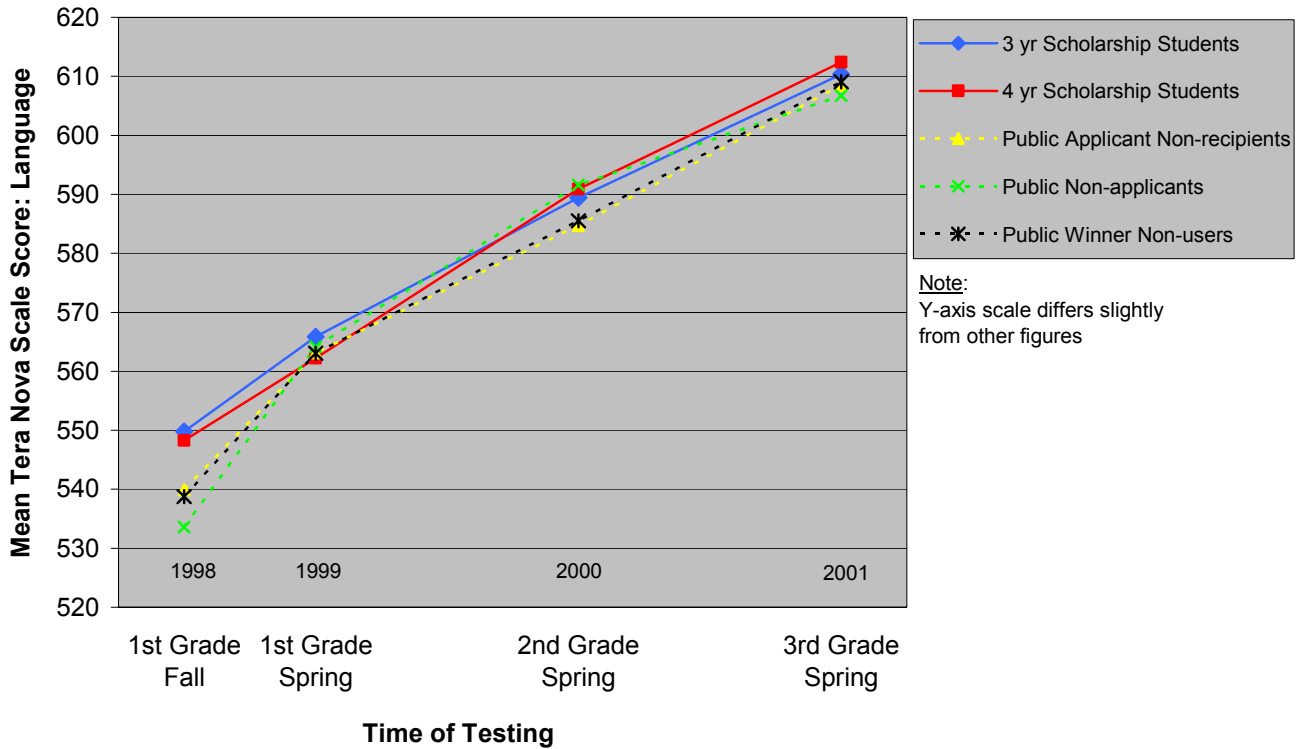


Figure 4. Mathematics Achievement: 1998 to 2001

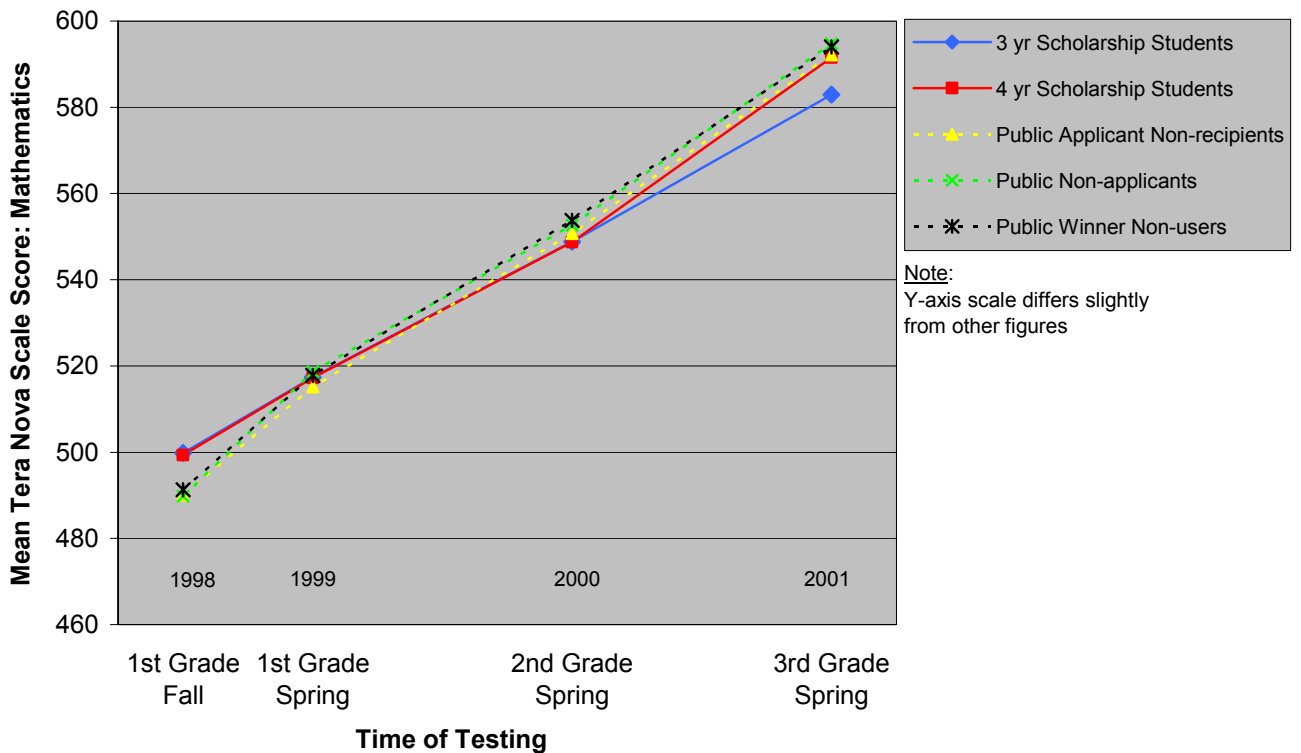
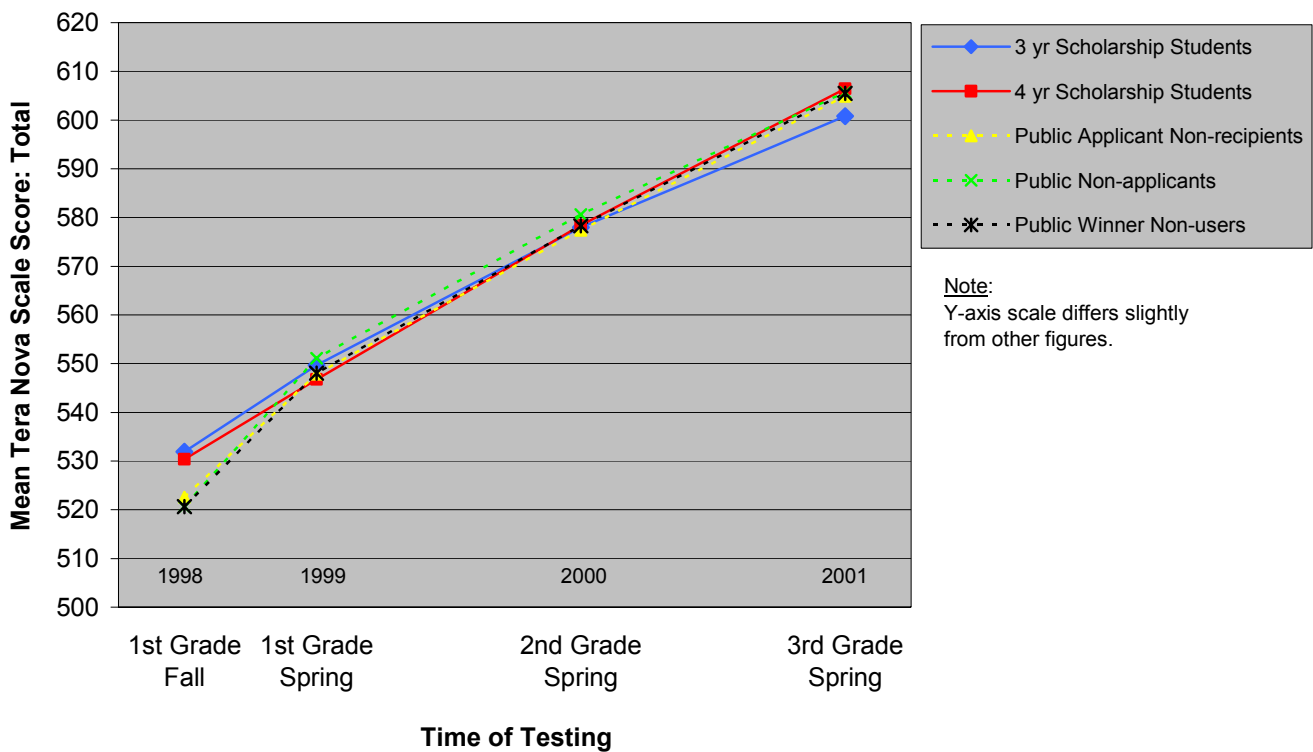


Figure 5. Total Achievement (Average of Reading, Language, and Mathematics): 1998 to 2001



Summary

Across the evaluation findings from these early years of students' experience in the CSTP, there is little that is provocative. Scholarship students enter the program with somewhat different academic and demographic characteristics than students who attend public schools. Public school teachers are more likely to have completed graduate coursework, particularly up to the masters' level, than are private school teachers. Class size and teacher experience, at least for the samples of classrooms we examined, were quite similar between public and private schools. Furthermore, student academic achievement, a factor watched closely by those on both sides of the voucher issue, presents no clear or consistent pattern than can be attributable to program participation.

One finding that emerged, however, should not be overlooked. By the end of third grade in 2001, the current cohort of scholarship students, as a whole, is comprised of fewer minority students and their families tend to have higher incomes in comparison to their peers in public schools. More important, however, is the finding that this difference in the

ethnic/racial and socioeconomic composition of the groups likely is a result of the students who enter the CSTP from private schools after the start of each academic year. Students who entered the CSTP from public schools tend to accept the award prior to the beginning of the school year, and they are statistically equivalent to their classmates who remained in public schools (approximately 80% minority and 87% from families eligible for free lunch). In contrast, students entering from private schools tend to be offered and accept the award after the beginning of the school year, and they differ significantly from their peers in public schools in terms of minority status and family income (approximately 46% minority and 54% from families that would meet the Federal requirements for free lunch eligibility).

Therefore, it seems that the random lottery, held by the CSTP office each spring, generally serves to award scholarships to students who have been in public schools and who are demographically similar to their peers in Cleveland public schools. However, as the beginning of the academic year approaches and then passes, some students elect not to use scholarships that they were awarded. These scholarships are then offered to other applicants to the program (who may not have been selected in the initial lottery). Students who, at this later point, are awarded and choose to use a scholarship tend to be Caucasian, from families with higher incomes, and enrolled in private schools at the time of the award.

The findings and the conclusions that we have attempted to draw are preliminary. They represent only the first of what are to be multiple sets of findings drawn on students over a period of several years. As a result, the findings are incomplete and understandably inconclusive. Yet, information can be gained about the ways in which a choice program, or schools more generally, influence the early school experience of children.

Closing Thoughts and Future Directions

The recent ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court upholding the constitutionality of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program has removed a cloud of doubt about the program's future that has loomed over it since its inception. Many analysts and researchers now speculate that other states will propose new voucher programs, and that existing programs, particularly Cleveland's, will now thrive. Even opponents of such programs have increased their calls for sound, empirical research on these programs that can inform the re-ignited policy debate.

The longitudinal study that is being conducted in Cleveland represents the longest running evaluation of a publicly-funded voucher program that has ever been conducted. As such, it affords a unique opportunity to examine the characteristics, operation, and impacts of such programs over time. The data that have been collected thus far, and that are reported above, represent work done through spring of 2001. However, the evaluation continues.

At the present time, two key additional data collection activities have already taken place. Students in the cohort, who were enrolled in fourth grade during the 2001-02 year, were administered the standardized achievement test by the evaluation team in April of 2002. These tests are currently being scored and these data will be integrated into the existing data set. As a result, we will shortly have available an additional year of achievement data for these students. Furthermore, plans are underway to conduct testing of the cohort as they complete fifth grade in the spring of 2003.

In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with random samples of parents and guardians of both public and private school students in Cleveland during late spring and early summer of 2002. These extensive interviews included a range of critically different groups of families, each of which possesses unique attributes which may influence their perceptions of schools and school choice. Sampling across grades 2, 4, and 8, interviews were conducted with families who:

1. Had been awarded and were using scholarships to send their children to private schools (representing what we have called *winner users*),
2. Had applied for, but were not awarded scholarships and had enrolled their children in public schools (representing what we have called *applicant non-recipients*),
3. Had applied for and were awarded scholarships, but who chose instead to enroll their children in public schools (representing what we have called *winner non-users*),
4. Had never applied for scholarship, and who had enrolled their children in public schools (what we have called *non-applicants*), and importantly,
5. Had chosen to enroll their children in charter schools (referred to as community schools in Ohio).

Data drawn from these interviews will provide insights into the criteria by which families make decisions about their children's education. The inclusion of families of charter school students and the explicit inclusion of scholarship winner non-users represents a new approach to this type of study of school choice.

The recent Supreme Court ruling and the renewed importance of rigorous research on this issue raise a number of new questions. For example, will applications to the Scholarship and Tutoring Program in Cleveland increase dramatically because the stability and future of the program are now secure? Anecdotal evidence from past years suggests that some families elected not to pursue or use a scholarship because of the program's uncertain legal status. Relatedly, will private schools respond to the ruling by creating more classrooms for scholarship students, or will new private schools open or elect to participate in the program? Will the characteristics of families who apply for scholarships change? It is not unreasonable to believe that previous uncertainty about the program may have led to a disproportionate number of applicants to be families whose children already attended private schools. These families would not have to worry about losing their scholarship if the program were discontinued. In contrast, many families whose children were in public schools may have been interested in a scholarship for private school enrollment, but chose not to risk the disruption of moving their children back into public schools if the program was discontinued.

What are the long-term impacts of vouchers on schools, families, or students? Answers to this question and a range of others can be found. The ongoing work in Cleveland is one step toward this goal, as is the work of other researchers in other parts of the country. But it will take time, careful study, and patience to obtain the evidence that will be required by policy makers and families as the future of school choice unfolds.