

School Choice: The right choice for Pennsylvania's students

Nationwide there are 26 programs in 14 states that provide school choice through vouchers or tax credit scholarships. Policymakers who care about education have asked: do they work? Do students benefit academically from vouchers? Nine independent, random assignment studies evaluated the voucher programs and concluded ~~that~~ that some or all of the participants benefited academically from using a voucher to attend a private school. The evidence to date suggests that school voucher programs benefit many of the disadvantaged students and parents that they serve.¹

Consider the results of two long standing school voucher programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland:

	<u>Math Test Scores*</u>	<u>Reading Test Scores*</u>	
Milwaukee ²	10.7 NPR gain after 4 yrs.	5.8 NPR gain after 4 yrs.	
Cleveland ³	15 NPR gain after 2 yrs.	7 NPR gain after 2 yrs.	* NPR - National Percentile Rank

The study of the Washington, DC program looked at the impact of vouchers on certain subgroups. African American students had the most notable positive results. Their student test scores showed a **9.2** NPR gain in just two years.

School vouchers have made a difference for thousands of students; but success can be measured by more than academic test scores.

For more than a century, Catholic parochial and diocesan schools have educated students with high standards, strong motivation and effective discipline in a nurturing atmosphere. Catholic schools offer a challenging academic program that fosters excellence and a high quality of student performance. Catholic schools aim to develop each student as a ~~whole~~ whole person+. academically, of course, but also spiritually, physically and emotionally.

- Currently, 171,000 students are enrolled in 530 Catholic schools in Pennsylvania.
- Most Catholic high schools boast graduation rates **at or near 100%** for non-transferring students.
- Of those graduates, over **90%** go on to attend either a two or four-year institute of higher learning.

Pennsylvania's Catholic schools have enough empty seats to enroll over **50,000 more students** immediately.

National Center for Education Statistics of the U.S. Department of Education found that parents with a choice are significantly more satisfied with their child's teachers, academic standards, order and discipline, staff interaction, and the school overall.⁴ In 2007, 79% of parents of students in parochial or nonsectarian private schools reported being happy with their child's education; only 52% of parents with students in assigned public schools said the same.

Academic performance is very important; but to many parents, so is safety, discipline, respect, dignity, faith, and an atmosphere that supports and upholds the same values they impart to their children at home. All parents should be able to consider this when choosing an educational path for their child. Financial realities often preclude parents from having that choice. Parents who pay their school taxes deserve some benefit from those taxes, in the form of some assistance in the exercise of their right to choose a nonpublic school, if that is best for their children.

A school choice program that includes both vouchers and an increase in EITC scholarships is a step in the right direction toward expanding those opportunities to more students.

¹ Patrick J. Wolf, [School Voucher Programs: What the Research Says About Parental School Choice](#), *Brigham Young University Law Review*, Volume 2008, No. 2.

² Jay P. Greene, Paul E. Peterson, and Jiangtao Du, [Effectiveness of School Choice: The Milwaukee Experiment](#), *Education and Urban Society*, January 1999; vol. 31, 2: pp. 190-213.

³ Paul E. Peterson, William G. Howell, Jay P. Greene, [An Evaluation of the Cleveland Voucher Program After Two Years](#), Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University, June 1999

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program (NHES), 2007, http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2010/2010004/figures/figure_9.asp