

RESEARCH REVIEW:

The Effects of School Choice on the Academic Achievement of Public School Students

BACKGROUND

While school choice detractors often say that voucher, tax credit, and education savings account programs harm their surrounding public schools, 20 years of research make clear that this is not the case. The American Federation for Children (AFC) Growth Fund believes in the power of competitive effects – when there are great schools in an education system, they incentivize the schools around them to be great too, in order to keep their students. And we are happy to see this theory of competitive effects bearing out in the research discussed below, which shows that when parents have more school options outside of their zoned public school, this leads to improvement in those public schools.

OVERVIEW

The competitive effects of private school choice are largely positive – of the 27 studies that examined the effects that school choice programs have on surrounding public schools: 25 found positive effects, one found negative effects, and one found no effects.

The chart on the following page provides an overview of the aforementioned research on the competitive effects of private school choice. Each of these studies investigated how private school choice programs affect the academic performance of students that attend the surrounding public schools.

STUDY YEAR	STUDY LOCATION	TYPE OF SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM	POSITIVE EFFECTS	NO EFFECTS	NEGATIVE EFFECTS
2020	Louisiana	Voucher	●		
2020	Florida	Tax Credit Scholarship	●		
2016	Ohio	Voucher	●		
2016	Texas	Private Scholarship	●		
2014	Florida	Voucher			●
2014	Indiana	Voucher	●		
2014	Florida	Tax Credit Scholarship	●		
2013	Florida	Voucher	●		
2013	Florida	Tax Credit Scholarship	●		
2011	Ohio	Voucher	●		
2011	Florida	Voucher	●		
2010	Wisconsin	Voucher	●		
2009	Wisconsin	Voucher	●		
2008	Wisconsin	Voucher	●		
2008	Ohio	Voucher	●		
2008	Florida	Voucher	●		
2007	Wisconsin	Voucher	●		
2007	Washington, D.C.	Voucher		●	
2006	Florida	Voucher	●		
2006	Florida	Voucher	●		
2004	Florida	Voucher	●		
2002	Wisconsin	Voucher	●		
2002	Maine	Voucher	●		
2002	Vermont	Voucher	●		
2002	Wisconsin	Voucher	●		
2002	Texas	Private Scholarship	●		
2001	Florida	Voucher	●		

DISCUSSION

As shown above, the vast majority of studies on both tax credit scholarship and voucher programs show that the test scores of students who remain in public schools improve after their school is challenged by competition from the launch or expansion of a nearby school choice program.

Here are a few interesting points from this research to consider:

- The 2020 competitive effects study in Florida found positive effects for all public school students and *positive competitive effects were highest for students from low-income families.*
- A study of the competitive effect of Florida's McKay voucher program for students with disabilities found *positive competitive effects for students with disabilities* who remained in zoned public schools.
- The 2008 study of competitive effects in Wisconsin found that *positive competitive effects increased as families gained more choices outside of their zoned public schools.*
- The 2008 study of the Ohio voucher program found that *positive competitive effects of the program were cumulative* – they increased with each subsequent year that the private choice program was in operation.

CONCLUSION

When this evidence of the positive competitive effects of private choice programs is considered alongside the positive academic gains private choice students experience and the fact that private school choice programs save states millions of dollars every year, it appears that the benefits of creating high quality voucher and tax credit scholarship programs are overwhelmingly positive. Essentially, this body of research demonstrates that the introduction of high quality school choice programs provides a cost-effective way to improve a school system across the board for all students.

The AFC Growth Fund is happy to share that Dr. David Figlio of Northwestern University is currently updating prior research on the competitive effects of vouchers in Ohio to include the effects of voucher programs on the college outcomes of students in surrounding public schools. We look forward to reading this and additional new research on the competitive effects of school choice, hopefully in states with school choice programs where competitive effects have not yet been studied.

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The American Federation for Children Growth Fund seeks to empower families, especially lower-income families, with the freedom to choose the best K-12 education for their children. AFC Growth Fund works in states across America to advance our mission. Our headquarters are in Washington, D.C., with state-based staff located in regional offices around the country.

We believe choice, innovation and entrepreneurship will revolutionize an antiquated K-12 system into a 21st century model where all children, especially lower-income children, have access to a quality education whether it be at a public school, private school, public charter school, virtual learning, home school or a blend of learning environments.