

3 Reasons to Support School Choice

Choice is integral to a functioning market economy, but when it comes to a child's education, choice is virtually absent. Efforts to increase schooling options are condemned by individuals and organizations who believe that public education is so outstanding that it must be protected from competition. Take for example, the United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS), which declares:

Public education is under attack. [emphasis original] Corporate-backed behemoths like Walmart and Gap are pouring millions into manufacturing a new pro-corporate education reform consensus in city halls, and on our campuses.... Their goal? To privatize our public education system, turning over a major public good into private hands – in the process, demonizing teachers and their unions.

This “pro-corporate education reform” refers to school choice, a system in which the government finances a family's choice of education through vouchers (or tax credits) rather than having a family's only affordable option be to send their children to their assigned public school. Let's put the opponents' fiery rhetoric aside and look at the evidence on how school choice relates to educational outcomes, taxpayer costs, and racial segregation.

1. School choice improves academic outcomes and saves taxpayers money.

Despite some opponents' claims, school choice does not seek to privatize public schools; rather, it seeks to open them up to competition from private schools by giving families the

financial ability to attend such schools. Solid evidence suggests that attending private schools improves academic performance.

A [review of the evidence](#) on the differing educational outcomes between public and private schools finds that “the private sector outperforms the public sector in the overwhelming majority of cases.” In line with the findings of this research, a [meta-analysis of 90 studies](#) on the performance of private religious schools in comparison to public schools found that “attending private religious schools is associated with the highest level of academic achievement among the three school types, [public school, public charter school, and private religious school] *even when sophisticated controls are used to adjust for socioeconomic status.*” (emphasis added)

Allowing students to use vouchers to attend private schools would increase educational performance and attainment. Greg Forster, a senior fellow with the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, summarized the findings of studies on existing school choice programs in a [review of the empirical evidence](#):

Twelve empirical studies have examined academic outcomes for school choice participants using random assignment, the “gold standard” of social science. Of these, 11 find that choice improves student outcomes – six that all students benefit and five that some benefit and some are not affected. One study finds no visible impact. No empirical study has found a negative impact.

Six empirical studies have examined school choice’s fiscal impact on taxpayers. All six find that school choice saves money for taxpayers. No empirical study has found a negative fiscal impact.

2. School choice reduces racial segregation and benefits the poor.

School choice has been shown to benefit minorities and the poor substantially. One [Harvard study](#) examined how a school choice program in New York affected college enrollment. According to the authors, "Using a voucher to attend private school increased the overall college enrollment rate among African Americans by 24 percent." Additionally, the [National Bureau of Economic Research](#) found that among poor children, school choice increased secondary school completion rates by 15–20 percent.

Eight empirical studies have examined how school choice relates to racial segregation in schools. According to Forster, "Of these, seven find that school choice moves students from more segregated schools into less segregated schools. One finds no net effect on segregation from school choice. No empirical study has found that [school] choice increases racial segregation."

3. School choice increases the quality of public schools.

Some opponents of school choice fear that it could lead to the financial starvation of public schools, thereby worsening their performance. However, of the 23 studies that examine [how school choice affects academic outcomes](#) in public schools, 22 find that choice improves outcomes. The empirical evidence confirms the theory: *competition leads to superior results*.

Conclusion

The evidence clearly demonstrates that school choice programs are desirable and ought to be pursued on a larger scale. While opponents may try to portray school choice programs as "pro-

corporate education reform,” the reality is that these programs enable students, including the poorest kids, to achieve more than they could have in conventional public schools – and at a lower cost to taxpayers. It’s hard to understand how anyone could oppose a marketplace in education.

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