The Academic & Civic Effects of School Choice

Patrick J. Wolf, Ph.D.

University of Arkansas

School Choice in America

August 16, 2021
Nashville, TN
A Little About Me

✓ Born in Washington, DC, raised in St. Cloud, MN, 15 years a proud Arkansan

✓ My 32nd year studying school choice – Distinguished Professor of Education Policy & Endowed Chair in School Choice

✓ “Wolf is a well-known advocate of school choice. He bases his advocacy on the research.” (AERA Newsletter)
Disclaimer

The opinions expressed here are my own and do not represent the official positions of the University of Arkansas or U of A System.
Quality of Statistical Evaluations of School Choice

How do we deal with “selection bias”? 

Methods:

1. Random assignment experiments
2. Matching longitudinal studies
3. Control variables

Uncontrolled descriptive comparisons
Guide to the Review

- Only Bronze standard studies or better
- Look for the medal!
- Any private school choice program
- Positive choice findings overall = Green
- Positive for subgroups = Light Green
- Null = Yellow
- Negative = Red
Five Ways to Slice this Pie

- Participant Achievement Effects
- Participant Attainment Effects
- Competitive Achievement Effects
- Civic Effects
- Satisfaction Effects
Participant Achievement Effects
What Do We Hear About the Achievement Effects of Choice?

“...there is no evidence that students in voucher schools get higher test scores.” (Diane Ravitch, May 3, 2016)

“...seven of the nine studies [since 2015] found that voucher students saw relative learning losses.”
(Christopher Lubienski & Joel Malin, August 30, 2019)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Study</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Finding – Private School Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>All Students</strong></td>
<td>Cowen (2008)</td>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>+8 pts in reading, +7 pts in math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greene (2001)</td>
<td>Charlotte</td>
<td>+ 6 pts on combined reading and math test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rouse (1998)</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>+8 pts in math, no difference in reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Howell et al (2002)</td>
<td>DC</td>
<td>+3 pts combined reading &amp; math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wolf et al (2013)</td>
<td>DC</td>
<td>+4.8 pts in reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anderson &amp; Wolf (2017)</td>
<td>DC</td>
<td>+8.7 pts in reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Some Students</strong></td>
<td>Barnard et al (2003)</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>+5 pts in math for students leaving low-performing schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No Effects</strong></td>
<td>Webber et al. (2019)</td>
<td>DC</td>
<td>No difference in math or reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Krueger &amp; Zhu (2004)</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>No difference in math or reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bitler et al (2013)</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>No difference in math or reading by quartile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bettinger &amp; Slonim (2006)</td>
<td>Toledo</td>
<td>No difference in math or reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Negative</strong></td>
<td>Abdulkadiroglu et al. (2016)</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>-0.4 standard deviation 1-year effect on math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mills &amp; Wolf (2019)</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>4-year effects on math, reading &amp; science of -.21 to .39 SD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Questions

How can so many commentators mischaracterize the findings?

1. Include non-experimental and irrelevant studies
2. Cherry pick findings based on subject and year

What is distinctive about the Louisiana Scholarship Program?

1. Most highly regulated school voucher program
2. Only 1/3 of private schools participate
3. Schools required to administer the state test
Educational Attainment
What Do People Say About Attainment & Choice?

“The findings for both achievement and attainment are mixed, with no clear patterns.”

(Lubienski & Brewer, NEPC, 2018)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attainment Study</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wolf et al (2013)</td>
<td>DC</td>
<td>+21 percentage points - Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erickson &amp; Scafidi (2020)</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>+17 percentage points - Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowen et al. (2013)</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>+4-6 percentage points - Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren (2011)</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>+12 percentage points - Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin &amp; Pardo (2021)</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>No difference – Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin &amp; Pardo (2021)</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>+8 percentage points – College Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chingos, Monarrez &amp; Kuehn (2019)</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>+6 percentage points – College Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erickson &amp; Scafidi (2020)</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>+19 percentage points – College Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolf, Witte &amp; Kisida (2019)</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>+4-6 percentage points – College Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chingos &amp; Peterson (2015)</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>+5-6 percentage points for Blacks – College Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheng &amp; Peterson (2021)</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>+8 percentage points for mod-dis. – College Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erickson, Mills &amp; Wolf (forthcoming)</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>+8 percentage points for H.S. aps – College Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chingos (2018)</td>
<td>DC</td>
<td>No difference – College Enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chingos, Monarrez &amp; Kuehn (2019)</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>+1-2 percentage points – Bachelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wolf, Witte &amp; Kisida (2019)</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>+3 percentage points for elem. aps – Bachelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheng &amp; Peterson (2021)</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>+5-7 percentage points for mod-dis. – Bachelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chingos &amp; Peterson (2015)</td>
<td>New York City</td>
<td>+2-3 percentage points for Blacks – Bachelor’s Degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why Might Choice Affect Attainment More Than Test Scores?

- Parents care more about attainment
- Private schools educate the whole child
- Attainment is more malleable
- No evidence that private schools have lower standards for graduation
Competitive Effects:
All Silver Standard
What Do People Say About Choice’s Effect on Public Schools?

“Do charter schools, school vouchers and online schools really hurt our neighborhood public schools? You bet they do.”

(Network for Public Education, 2017)

“Is it not possible that giving poor kids a way out will force the public schools to improve?”

(Senator Joe Biden, September 30, 1997)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greene (2001)</th>
<th>Florida</th>
<th>Positive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West &amp; Peterson (2005)</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figlio &amp; Rouse (2006)</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winters &amp; Greene (2011)</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figlio &amp; Hart (2011)</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chakrabarti (2013)</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figlio, Hart &amp; Karbownik (2021)</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammons (2002)</td>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egalite (2014)</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forster (2008)</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forster (2008)</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carr (2011)</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figlio (2016)</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoxby (2011)</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chakrabarti (2008)</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green &amp; Marsh (2009)</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egalite (2014)</td>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greene &amp; Forster (2002)</td>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray, Merrifield, &amp; Adzima (2014)</td>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob &amp; Dougherty (2014)</td>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mader (2010)</td>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowen &amp; Trivitt (2014)</td>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Civic Values

School Choice Rally
Statehouse

ABC Columbia
Civic Outcomes

- **Political Tolerance** – willingness to extend constitutional rights to disliked groups
- **Political Participation** – involvement in civic activities
- **Civic Knowledge and Skills** – familiarity with the workings of government & the ability to communicate with officials
- **Voluntarism and Social Capital** – unpaid involvement in improving one’s community
What Do People Say About Civic Values & School Choice?

“Public governance of our schools matters for the health of our democracy.”
(Diane Ravitch and Carol Burris, Washington Post, November 4, 2018)

“...voucher programs could end up resembling the ethnic cleansing now occurring in Kosovo.”
(David Berliner, Legislative Testimony, May 1999)
All Findings on Private School Choice & Civic Outcomes

Civic Values

- Public Advantage: 3
- No Significant Advantage: 34
- Private Advantage: 56
Parent Satisfaction
All Findings on Private School Choice & Parent Satisfaction

Civic Values

- Public Advantage: 2
- No Significant Advantage: 1
- Private Advantage: 27

Legend:
- Red: Public Advantage
- Yellow: No Significant Advantage
- Green: Private Advantage
Parent Satisfaction Rates

![Graph showing parent satisfaction rates by school type and time period]

- **Learning pod/microschool (supplemental)**: 78% (Spring 2021), 75% (Fall 2020), 68% (Fall 2019)
- **Private school**: 78% (Spring 2021), 72% (Fall 2020), 63% (Fall 2019)
- **Learning pod/microschool (core)**: 72% (Spring 2021), 65% (Fall 2020), 58% (Fall 2019)
- **Homeschool**: 66% (Spring 2021), 63% (Fall 2020), 61% (Fall 2019)
- **Charter public**: 60% (Spring 2021), 53% (Fall 2020), 53% (Fall 2019)
- **District public**: 57% (Spring 2021), 50% (Fall 2020), 48% (Fall 2019)

Sample sizes:
- District public: 1,169-1,172
- Charter public: 127-128
- Homeschool: 184-185
- Learning pod/microschool (core): 91-92
- Private school: 578-579
- Learning pod/microschool (supplemental): 454-455
Summary: Private School Choice

✓ Tends to increase or have no effect on participant test scores
✓ Consistently drives participants to higher levels of educational attainment
✓ Helps the students left behind in public schools
✓ Boosts civic outcomes
✓ Makes parents happy
School Choice

It makes an Olympic-sized difference for kids!