

**Quick Hits of Voucher Research**  
**Josh Cowen**  
**Updated April 2024**  
**Comments/Additions: [jcowen@msu.edu](mailto:jcowen@msu.edu)**

**Roadmap:**

- 1. Early Studies Showed Some Success of Voucher Programs**
- 2. Followed by Essentially Null Effects on Academics in Milwaukee and DC**
- 3. And Largely Null Educational Attainment Impacts**
- 4. Huge Negative Impacts Have Appeared in DC, Indiana, Louisiana and Ohio**
- 5. Related Studies Show Most Disadvantaged Kids Less Likely To Use Vouchers, Less Likely To Stay**
- 6. And They Do Better When Returning to Public School**
- 7. Voucher Users Tend to Come From Private Schools Already**
- 8. Voucher Application Data Tell us Parents Are Looking for Academic Rigor, But There is Limited Private School Capacity for Them**
- 9. Accountability Similar to NCLB Appears to Strongly Improve Voucher Performance**
- 10. Voucher Policies Prompt New School Openings—But Many Close Quickly**
- 11. Vouchers Cause Private Schools to Raise Tuition—Often Diverting Taxpayer Funds Into Churches for New Revenue**
- 12. There Is A Modest Case for Competitive or Systemic Effects**

**Criteria for Inclusion:**

*Peer-reviewed at a major US Journal<sup>1</sup> OR a government report OR in one case a study by David Figlio because he's David Figlio and this is my list! Note: No self-referencing "working papers," no reports by EdChoice, Cato, Heritage.*

**1. Early Studies Showed Some Success of Voucher Programs**

Howell, W. G., Wolf, P. J., Campbell, D. E., & Peterson, P. E. (2002). School vouchers and academic performance: Results from three randomized field trials. *Journal of Policy Analysis and management*, 21(2), 191-217

>But see Krueger, A. B., & Zhu, P. (2004). Another look at the New York City school voucher experiment. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(5), 658-698 for a re-analysis of the NYC data from this study calling results into question.

Rouse, C. E. (1998). Private school vouchers and student achievement: An evaluation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. *The Quarterly journal of economics*, 113(2), 553-602

**2. Followed by Essentially Null Effects on Academics in Milwaukee and DC**

Witte, J. F., Wolf, P. J., Cowen, J. M., Carlson, D. E., & Fleming, D. J. (2014). High-stakes choice: Achievement and accountability in the nation's oldest urban voucher program. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 36(4), 437-456.

---

<sup>1</sup> Aka not an obscure US or international journal that solicits manuscripts and buys the author a peer-reviewed label, which is a favorite pro-voucher tactic to up the count of peer-reviewed articles on the pro-voucher side.

Wolf, P. J., Kisida, B., Gutmann, B., Puma, M., Eissa, N., & Rizzo, L. (2013). School Vouchers and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from Washington, DC. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 32(2), 246-270.

### **3. And Largely Null Educational Attainment Impacts**

Chingos, M. M., & Kisida, B. (2023). School Vouchers and College Enrollment: Experimental Evidence From Washington, DC. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 45(3), 422-436.

Chingos, M. M., & Peterson, P. E. (2015). Experimentally estimated impacts of school vouchers on college enrollment and degree attainment. *Journal of Public Economics*, 122, 1-12

Cowen, J. M., Fleming, D. J., Witte, J. F., Wolf, P. J., & Kisida, B. (2013). School vouchers and student attainment: Evidence from a state-mandated study of Milwaukee's parental choice program. *Policy Studies Journal*, 41(1), 147-168

Erickson, H. H., Mills, J. N., & Wolf, P. J. (2021). The Effects of the Louisiana Scholarship Program on Student Achievement and College Entrance. *Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness*, 14(4), 861-899

Wolf, P. J., Kisida, B., Gutmann, B., Puma, M., Eissa, N., & Rizzo, L. (2013). School Vouchers and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from Washington, DC. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 32(2), 246-270.

### **4. Huge Negative Impacts Have Appeared in DC, Indiana, Louisiana and Ohio**

Abdulkadiroğlu, A., Pathak, P. A., & Walters, C. R. (2018). Free to choose: Can school choice reduce student achievement?. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 10(1), 175-206

Berends, M., & Waddington, R. J. (2018). School choice in Indianapolis: Effects of charter, magnet, private, and traditional public schools. *Education Finance and Policy*, 13(2), 227-255

Dynarski, M., Rui, N., Webber, A., & Gutmann, B. (2018). Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts Two Years after Students Applied. NCEE 2018-4010. *National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance*.

- Third Year Report (Null Results)  
<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20194006/pdf/20194006.pdf>

Figlio, D., & Karbownik, K. (2016). Evaluation of Ohio's EdChoice Scholarship Program: Selection, Competition, and Performance Effects. *Thomas B. Fordham Institute*

Mills, J. N., & Wolf, P. J. (2017). Vouchers in the bayou: The effects of the Louisiana Scholarship Program on student achievement after 2 years. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 39(3), 464-484

Waddington, R. J., & Berends, M. (2018). Impact of the Indiana Choice Scholarship Program: Achievement effects for students in upper elementary and middle school. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 37(4), 783-808

## **5. Related Studies Show Most Disadvantaged Kids Less Likely To Use Vouchers, Less Likely To Stay**

Carlson, D., Cowen, J. M., & Fleming, D. J. (2013). Life after vouchers: What happens to students who leave private schools for the traditional public sector?. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 35(2), 179-199

Cowen, J. (2010). Who chooses, who refuses? Learning more from students who decline private school vouchers. *American Journal of Education*, 117(1), 1-24

Cowen, J. M., Fleming, D. J., Witte, J. F., & Wolf, P. J. (2012). Going public: Who leaves a large, longstanding, and widely available urban voucher program?. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(2), 231-256

Howell, W. G. (2004). Dynamic selection effects in means-tested, urban school voucher programs. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, 23(2), 225-250

Paul, K. M., Legan, N. A., & Metcalf, K. K. (2007). Differential entry into a voucher program: A longitudinal examination of families who apply to and enroll in the Cleveland scholarship and tutoring program. *Education and Urban Society*, 39(2), 223-243.

Waddington, R. J., Zimmer, R., & Berends, M. (2023). Cream Skimming and Pushout of Students Participating in a Statewide Private School Voucher Program. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 01623737231183397.

## **6. And They Do Better When Returning to Public School**

Carlson, D., Cowen, J. M., & Fleming, D. J. (2013). Life after vouchers: What happens to students who leave private schools for the traditional public sector?. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 35(2), 179-199

## **7. Voucher Users Tend to Come From Private Schools Already**

Paul, K. M., Legan, N. A., & Metcalf, K. K. (2007). Differential entry into a voucher program: A longitudinal examination of families who apply to and enroll in the Cleveland scholarship and tutoring program. *Education and Urban Society*, 39(2), 223-243.

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction & University of Wisconsin –Madison, Applied Population Laboratory. Raw Data Source: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) 2009 <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/eis/pdf/school-finance-challenges-rev2014-09-23.pdf> (Slide 27)

## **8. Voucher Application Data Tell us Parents Are Looking for Academic Rigor, But There is Limited Private School Capacity for Them**

Glazerman, S., & Dotter, D. (2017). Market signals: Evidence on the determinants and consequences of school choice from a citywide lottery. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 39(4), 593-619

Harris, D. N., & Larsen, M. F. (2022). What schools do families want (and why)? evidence on revealed preferences from new orleans. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 01623737221134528.

Lincove, J. A., Cowen, J. M., & Imbrogno, J. P. (2018). What's in your portfolio? How parents rank traditional public, private, and charter schools in post-Katrina New Orleans' citywide system of school choice. *Education Finance and Policy*, 13(2), 194-226

Lincove, J. A., Valant, J., & Cowen, J. M. (2018). You can't always get what you want: Capacity constraints in a choice-based school system. *Economics of Education Review*, 67, 94-109

## **9. Accountability Similar to NCLB Appears to Strongly Improve Voucher Performance**

Carlson, D. E., Cowen, J. M., & Fleming, D. J. (2014). Third-party governance and performance measurement: A case study of publicly funded private school vouchers. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 24(4), 897-922

Witte, J. F., Wolf, P. J., Cowen, J. M., Carlson, D. E., & Fleming, D. J. (2014). High-stakes choice: Achievement and accountability in the nation's oldest urban voucher program. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 36(4), 437-456

## **10. Voucher Policies Prompt New School Openings—But Many Close Quickly**

Ford, M. R. (2016). Funding impermanence: quantifying the public funds sent to closed schools in the nation's first urban school voucher program. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 882-912

Ford, M. R., & Andersson, F. O. (2019). Determinants of organizational failure in the Milwaukee school voucher program. *Policy Studies Journal*, 47(4), 1048-1068

## **11. Vouchers Cause Private Schools to Raise Tuition—Often Diverting Taxpayer Funds Into Churches for New Revenue**

Hungerman, D. M., & Rinz, K. (2016). Where does voucher funding go? How large-scale subsidy programs affect private-school revenue, enrollment, and prices. *Journal of Public Economics*, 136, 62-85.

Hungerman, D. M., Rinz, K., & Frymark, J. (2019). Beyond the classroom: The implications of school vouchers for church finances. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 101(4), 588-601.

## 12. There Is A Modest Case for Competitive or Systemic Effects

Figlio, D. N., Hart, C. M., & Karbownik, K. (2023). Effects of Maturing Private School Choice Programs on Public School Students. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 15(4), 255-294.

Egalite, A. J., & Mills, J. N. (2021). Competitive impacts of means-tested vouchers on public school performance: Evidence from Louisiana. *Education Finance and Policy*, 16(1), 66-91

Figlio, D., & Hart, C. (2014). Competitive effects of means-tested school vouchers. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 6(1), 133-56.

Figlio, D. N., & Rouse, C. E. (2006). Do accountability and voucher threats improve low-performing schools?. *Journal of Public Economics*, 90(1-2), 239-255

Rouse, C. E., Hannaway, J., Goldhaber, D., & Figlio, D. (2013). Feeling the Florida heat? How low-performing schools respond to voucher and accountability pressure. *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*, 5(2), 251-81.

Winters, M. A., & Greene, J. P. (2011). Public school response to special education vouchers: The impact of Florida's McKay Scholarship Program on disability diagnosis and student achievement in public schools. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 33(2), 138-158

**Disclaimer:** This list of studies was produced by Josh Cowen at Michigan State University. I have received no funding for this list, which was originally produced at the request of a scholar at a major research university. This list is ongoing and non-exhaustive, and represents my judgment as to the status of the voucher literature as of the updated date. Email [jcowen@msu.edu](mailto:jcowen@msu.edu) Twitter: @joshcowenMSU