

School Vouchers and the Students Who Use Them

What the research says

The Rev. Senator James Meeks has proposed legislation that would create a school voucher program in Illinois. Parents whose children attend the lowest-performing public schools in Chicago would be given the opportunity to instead send their children to a private school, should they see fit. Similar pilot school voucher programs have been created throughout the country and have been thoroughly researched.

Studies using random assignment, the gold standard of social science, consistently find that **students using vouchers have higher academic achievement than students who applied for vouchers but lost a random lottery**. Listed below are all ten random assignment studies of school voucher programs: 6 find statistically significant gains when measuring the outcomes for all students; three others found significant gains with important subgroups of students, particularly African Americans. **No study has found that any group of students has done worse as a result of using a school voucher.**

Random Assignment Study	Location	Result
Jay Greene, Paul Peterson and Jiangtao Du, "School Choice in Milwaukee: A Randomized Experiment," in <i>Learning From School Choice</i> , eds. Paul Peterson and Bryan Hassel, Brookings Institution, 1998.	Milwaukee	After four years, voucher students had reading scores 6 Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE) points higher than the control group, and math scores 11 points higher. NCE points are similar to percentile points.
Cecilia Rouse, "Private School Vouchers and Student Achievement," <i>Quarterly Journal of Economics</i> , May 1998.	Milwaukee	After four years, voucher students had math scores 8 NCE points higher than the control group. NCE points are similar to percentile points.
Jay Greene, "Vouchers in Charlotte," <i>Education Next</i> , Summer 2001.	Charlotte	After one year, voucher students had combined reading and math scores 6 percentile points higher than the control group.
William Howell and Paul Peterson, <i>The Education Gap</i> , Brookings Institution, 2002.	New York	After three years, black voucher students had combined reading and math scores 9 percentile points higher than the control group.
William Howell and Paul Peterson, <i>The Education Gap</i> , Brookings Institution, 2002.	Washington D.C.	After two years, black voucher students had combined reading and math scores 9 percentile points higher than the control group.
William Howell and Paul Peterson, <i>The Education Gap</i> , Brookings Institution, 2002.	Dayton	After two years, black voucher students had combined reading and math scores 6.5 percentile points higher than the control group.
John Barnard, Constantine Frangakis, Jennifer Hill, and Donald Rubin, "Principal Stratification Approach to Broken Randomized Experiments: A Case Study of School Choice Vouchers in New York City," <i>Journal of the American Statistical Association</i> , June 2003.	New York	After one year, voucher students had math scores 5 percentile points higher than the control group.
Alan Krueger and Pei Zhu, "Another Look at the New York City School Voucher Experiment," <i>American Behavioral Scientist</i> , January 2004.	New York	The voucher students had higher scores, but the results did not achieve statistical significance. Subsequent analysis has demonstrated that this occurred because the study used inappropriate research methods that violate the norms of the scientific community; if legitimate methods are used, the positive results for vouchers become significant.
Joshua Cowen, "School Choice as a Latent Variable: Estimating 'Complier Average Causal Effect' of Vouchers in Charlotte," <i>Policy Studies Journal</i> , November 2007.	Charlotte	After one year, voucher students had reading scores 8 percentile points higher than the control group and math scores 7 points higher.
Patrick Wolf, Babette Gutmann, Michael Puma, Brian Kisida, Lou Rizzo, and Nada Eissa, "Evaluation of the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years," U.S. Department of Education, March 2009.	Washington D.C.	After three years, voucher students were performing at statistically higher levels in reading--equivalent to 3.1 months of additional learning. No statistically significant differences in math scores have been detected.

The table and text above was adapted from "Monopoly vs. Markets: the Empirical Evidence on Private Schools and School Choice," originally published by the Foundation for Educational Choice. For more information, go to www.edchoice.org and www.illinoispolicy.org.

