

ASK A REL RESPONSE

Research on the Impact of School Vouchers

Recently, the REL Northwest Ask A REL librarian received a request for the latest research on the effectiveness of school vouchers. As more states are implementing or considering vouchers that provide private school funding for students with disabilities, low-income students, students in low-performing schools, or students in rural areas without public schools, more attention is being paid to what the research says about the impact of vouchers on the students they are designed to assist.

The following annotated bibliography is a compilation of publicly accessible resources found in a search of research databases and websites of federally funded organizations and other research and policy centers. All abstracts have been adapted from published material.

The REL Northwest Ask A REL service is free to educators, policymakers, families, and community members in the [Northwest](#) region. Responses are tailored to meet the needs of each individual request and include copies of full-text articles from peer-reviewed journals. If you would like additional research on school vouchers or other topics, please contact reference librarian Jennifer Klump at relnw@educationnorthwest.org

Abdulkadiroglu, A., Pathak, P. A., & Walters, C. R. (2015). *School vouchers and student achievement: First-year evidence from the Louisiana Scholarship Program (SEII Discussion Paper 2015.06)*. Retrieved from Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Economics, School Effectiveness and Inequality Initiative website: <http://seii.mit.edu/research/study/school-vouchers-and-student-achievement-first-year-evidence-from-the-louisiana-scholarship-program/>

The authors evaluated the Louisiana Scholarship Program (LSP), which provides public funds for disadvantaged students at low-performing Louisiana public schools to attend private schools of their choice. LSP vouchers are allocated by random lottery at schools with more eligible applicants than available seats. The authors estimated causal effects of voucher receipt by comparing outcomes for lottery winners and losers in the first year after the program expanded statewide. This comparison revealed that LSP participation substantially reduced academic achievement. The negative impacts of vouchers were consistent across income groups, geographic areas, and private school characteristics and were larger for younger children.

Buck, S., & Greene, J. P. (2010). The case for special education vouchers. *Education Next*, 10(1). Retrieved from <http://educationnext.org/the-case-for-special-education-vouchers/>

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This article discusses research and policies regarding vouchers for students in special education.

Chingos, M. M., & Peterson, P. E. (2012). *The effects of school vouchers on college enrollment: Experimental evidence from New York City.* Retrieved from Brookings Institution website: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2012/08/23-school-vouchers-harvard-chingos>

Using a randomized experiment to measure the impact of school vouchers on college enrollment, the researchers examined the college-going behavior through 2011 of students who participated in a voucher experiment as elementary school students in the late 1990s. They found no overall impacts on college enrollment but did find large, statistically significant positive impacts on the college going of African-American students who participated in the study.

Here is a link to the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) review of this study. The WWC gave the study its highest rating: <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/singlestudyreview.aspx?sid=218>

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. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/239769976_Going_Public

The authors analyzed data collected as part of an evaluation of Milwaukee's citywide voucher program. They found several important patterns that suggest a large voucher program may not provide a long-term solution for the most disadvantaged students.

Epple, D., Romano, R. E., & Urquiola, M. (2015). *School vouchers: A survey of the economics literature* (NBER Working Paper No. 21523). Retrieved from National Bureau of Economic Research website: <https://ideas.repec.org/p/nbr/nberwo/21523.html>

The authors reviewed the empirical research on school vouchers and found that, in general, they provide insignificant effects on educational outcomes. However, the authors also found that in some settings or for some subgroups or outcomes vouchers can have a substantial positive effect.

Jabbar, H., Holme, J., Lemke, M. A., LeClair, A. V., Sanchez, J., & Torres, E. M. (2015). *Will school vouchers benefit low-income families? Assessing the evidence* (Draft ed.). Retrieved from Texas Center for Education Policy website: <http://texasedequity.blogspot.com/2015/03/will-school-vouchers-benefit-low-income.html>

This study looks at the empirical evidence of voucher programs. The authors found that the effects of school vouchers on student outcomes were generally small or insignificant. In addition, even voucher programs that targeted low-income families or those attending failing schools had serious access and attrition challenges, calling into question the equity claims of voucher proponents. The authors conclude that the research on voucher effectiveness shows mixed results—some studies show small positive effects on student achievement and some show no effects.

National Conference of State Legislatures

<http://www.ncsl.org/research/education/school-choice-vouchers.aspx>

This article provides a short summary of the research and issues regarding school vouchers. It includes links to additional research and information.

Usher, A., & Kober, N. (2011). *Keeping informed about school vouchers: A review of major developments and research*. Retrieved from Center on Education Policy website:

<http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=369>

This report examines decades of research on school vouchers and concludes that they have had no clear positive effect on student academic achievement and mixed outcomes for students overall. The authors discuss the effects on graduation rates, parental satisfaction, public school achievement, and cost to taxpayers. The report also notes that much of this research has been carried out or sponsored by pro-voucher organizations, signaling a particular need for scrutiny. In addition to this research review, the report describes voucher programs currently in existence, summarizes major court cases and referenda on vouchers from the past 10 years, and reflects on changes in the political landscape around vouchers.

Winters, M. A. (2011). *The promise of special education vouchers*. *National Affairs*, 9, 146–161. Retrieved from <http://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-promise-of-special-education-vouchers>

This essay discusses the influence of voucher programs for students with disabilities—specifically examining the results of Florida’s McKay Scholarships for Students With Disabilities program.

Wolf, P., Gutmann, B., Puma, M., Kisida, B., Rizzo, L., Eissa, N., & Carr, M. (2010). *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final report* (NCEE 2010-4018). Retrieved from U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance website:

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/>

The DC Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) is the first federally funded voucher program in the United States, providing scholarships of up to \$7,500 for low-income residents of the

District of Columbia to send their children to local participating private schools. The congressionally mandated evaluation of the program compared the outcomes of about 2,300 eligible applicants randomly assigned to receive or not receive an OSP scholarship through a series of lotteries in 2004 and 2005. This final report finds that the program had mixed long-term effects on participating students and their parents, including:

- No conclusive evidence that the OSP affected student achievement overall or for the high-priority group of students who applied from “schools in need of improvement.”
- The program significantly improved students’ chances of graduating from high school, according to parent reports. Overall, 82 percent of students offered scholarships received a high school diploma, compared to 70 percent of those who applied but were not offered scholarships. This graduation rate improvement also held for the subgroup of OSP students who came from “schools in need of improvement.”
- Although parents had higher satisfaction and rated schools as safer if their child was offered or used an OSP scholarship, students reported similar ratings for satisfaction and safety regardless of whether they were offered or used a scholarship.

In 2015, researchers Chingos and Gallagher commented on this evaluation in response to the reauthorization of the OSP program: <http://educationnext.org/evaluating-the-dc-school-voucher-program/>

Workman, E. (2012). *Vouchers, scholarship tax credits, and individual tax credits and deductions*. Retrieved from Education Commission of the States website: <http://www.ecs.org/vouchers-scholarship-tax-credits-and-individual-tax-credits-and-deductions/>

This Education Commission of the States (ECS) report examines the details of the existing voucher, scholarship tax credit, and individual tax credit and deduction policies in the United States and presents opposing viewpoints about them.

ECS also provides the latest updates of enacted state legislation and regulations on vouchers: <http://www.ecs.org/state-legislation-reports-on-choice/>