



**Summary of Center on Education Policy's Report: Keeping Informed about School Vouchers,
A Review of Major Developments and Research**
August 2011

With private school vouchers likely to become a controversial issue during the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Center on Education Policy (CEP) reviewed voucher research over the past decade to provide updated information for policymakers and educators about the status of voucher programs and their major findings. Here's a report summary prepared by NSBA's advocacy team.

Background

With the changes in gubernatorial and legislative leaderships in most states after the 2010 midterm elections, the interest in vouchers has spiked with at least 30 states introducing bills that would use taxpayers' funds to pay for private school tuition for some students. Over the past decade, new programs have been implemented in Washington, D.C., Ohio, New Orleans, Indiana and Douglas County (CO), even in light of voters across the country consistently defeating such proposals on referenda in California, Michigan and Utah.

Summary of Findings

The CEP report found:

- Vouchers do not have a strong effect on students' academic achievement – Additional evidence from long-term studies of programs in Milwaukee, Cleveland and D.C. further demonstrated that vouchers are not proven to be effective.
- Voucher proponents have de-emphasized their rationales to justify vouchers based on student achievement and shifted their emphasis to the value of choice, parent satisfaction and graduation rates.
- Voucher programs are moving beyond serving traditionally low-income families to reaching middle-income families in broader geographic areas.
- Much of the new research in the last decade was concluded by organizations supporting vouchers.

Synthesis of Findings in Select Studies

The performance of voucher students is similar to that of public school students. Here are some examples:

- The growth rate of voucher students in the Milwaukee program was similar to that of their peers in public schools.
- The overall achievement of students in the Cleveland voucher program did not differ significantly from that of comparable public school students.
- Low-income students who were awarded vouchers in the D.C. program showed no significant differences in reading and math achievement from those who did not receive vouchers.

Students in voucher programs tend to graduate at a higher rate than their peers in public schools. However, these studies faced limitations that could make these findings less than conclusive.

- Studies of Milwaukee and D.C. found higher graduation rates among voucher students than among public school students. However, researchers were unable to determine whether vouchers were the reason why the graduation rates were higher, noting that parents of voucher students are likely to be more motivated to support and encourage their children's education. In addition, the findings from the D.C voucher program were based on parent surveys, not student data.

Public schools most affected by vouchers experienced more gains in student achievement than other public schools.

- The report acknowledged that it is difficult to conclude causation that public schools improved because of voucher competitions, because in many of the cities or states with voucher programs, a variety of reforms are underway to improve public schools.

Parents of children who receive vouchers are generally more satisfied with their schools.

- However, studies conducted by the U.S. Department of Education found that students who received vouchers in the D.C. program did not report greater satisfaction or improved safety conditions in their schools.

The CEP report also reviewed major voucher court cases and referenda across the states over the past decade as well as made recommendations on future research and policy issues for consideration. Read the entire report [here](#).

For the latest voucher developments and research, also visit NSBA's [Voucher Strategy Center](#).