

**School Choice**

**Selected Evidence Set**

**Debatable Issue**

**Does school choice improve public education?**

**These passages can be used as evidence to build arguments and counter-arguments on either side of the debatable issue.**

School Choice Improves Public Education

“When Hurricane Katrina hit in August of 2005, the public schools in New Orleans were among the worst in the country. . . . The state of Louisiana seized about 100 schools, fired about 7500 teachers, and turned over the schools to charter operators . . . . A study by Tulane University shows that under the charter school system [in New Orleans], ,student achievement is up, with 63% of students passing state assessment tests in 2014, a 300% increase since 2005. And graduation rates are up from 56% to 73%” (Suzanne Malveaux, CNN, August 27, 2015).

“As in many cities, African-American parents in Memphis are voting with their feet. This was a struggling elementary school when the state asked Freedom Prep to take it over. The charter school came in; enrollment doubled” (Lisa Starks, “In the Black Community, a Division over Charter Schools,” PBS NewsHour, November 29, 2016).

“Since 1950, while the overall number of K-12 students in America has grown 96%, the total number of teachers and staff has grown 252% and a whopping 702%, respectively. Jobs are opening for Miss Penny and Principal Jones, but it’s not working for Jennifer. The problem with the American education system remains just that: the system. The way we pay for, regulate, and organize schools does not foster innovative and entrepreneurial solutions. School districts have become bloated bureaucracies that stifle creativity” (American Enterprise Institute, Education for Opportunity: Three Ideas for Education Reform, September 24, 2014).

“I think that [with] school choice, or competition among schools, . . . it's an improvement in the efficiency of schools, and that really means that you get more achievement for the same dollar, or that if you spend more dollars, you're definitely going to get a big improvement in achievement for it. So that's one potential effect, and I think that's the one that we like to focus on the most because it's what we need the most. I think the second potential effect is that you could get schools that are more innovative or that are better matched to students' needs. And, again, that's somewhat similar to what we might see in the private sector, or you might see a company start-up that really serves consumers who have a certain niche demand” (Caroline Hoxby, professor of economics, Harvard University, “Competition, School Choice, and Public Schools,” Frontline, August, 2000).

“Sound research has demonstrated consistently that school choice policies improve public school performance.

Thirty-one empirical studies (including all methods) have examined private school choice’s impact on academic outcomes in public schools. Within that body of research, 29 studies find that choice improved the performance of nearby public schools. One study finds no significant effects. To date, no empirical study has found that school choice harms students in public schools” (EdChoice, How Does School Choice Affect Public Schools, August, 1, 2017).

“Recent research studies support this conclusion [that school choice affects public education positively.] A 2016 study by Anna Egalite of North Carolina State University looked at the impact of the Louisiana Scholarship Program (LSP) on Louisiana public schools. Egalite found, ‘The competitive threat of the LSP ranges from negligible to modestly positive in the public schools exposed to the threat of competition, with effect sizes growing in magnitude as the competitive threat looms larger.’ A 2014 study by David Figlio and Cassandra Hart of Northwestern University examined the competitive effects of the Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program on public schools. They learned that more access and variety of private schools increased the competitive pressure on public schools in the wake of the policy announcement. They state in their conclusion, ‘The fact that we observed generalized improvements in school performance in response to the competitive threats of school vouchers, even in a state with rapid population growth, suggests that voucher competition may have effects elsewhere’” (EdChoice, How Does School Choice Affect Public Schools, August, 1, 2017).

“Charter schools with a strong academic focus and no-excuses’ philosophy that serve poor black students in urban areas stand as contradictions to the general association between school-level poverty and academic achievement. These very high-poverty, high-minority schools produce achievement gains that are substantially greater than the traditional public schools in the same catchment areas. This is further evidence that school quality is a primary mediator of academic achievement rather than the racial or economic makeup of a school’s student body” (Grover Whitehurst et al, Center on Children and Families, Brookings Institute, Segregation, Race, and Charter Schools: What Do We Know? October, 2016).

“It’s an oft-used analogy in the education reform movement that failing schools are like a burning building: the forces against choice would rather leave everyone inside if everyone can’t be saved. I’ve never made the claim that choice is a panacea. But by and large, Washington’s charter program — and others like it — are success stories. They have given a generation of underprivileged students access to a quality education that has heretofore been largely out of reach” (Kevin Chavous, Chair, Black Alliance for Educational Options, New York Times, December 11, 2011).

“Florida is home to the McKay Scholarship Program for Students with Disabilities, which provides vouchers to students with special needs to attend a private school of choice. Researchers Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters examined the impact of the McKay program on the students who remained in the public school system and found outcomes akin to the competitive pressure boost resulting from the tax credit scholarship program. Greene and Winters found statistically significant increases in the test scores of students with disabilities who remained in the public system as more private schools entered the McKay program, suggesting ‘that schools were serving those students better when they faced more competition from the McKay program’” (Lindsey Burke, Heritage Foundation, The Value of Parental Choice in Education: A Look at the Research, March 18, 2014).

“School choice also increases parents’ involvement in their children’s education. In an evaluation of the DCOSP, researchers Stephen Q. Cornman, Thomas Stewart, PhD, and Patrick Wolf detailed dramatic increases in parental involvement as reported by the parents: ‘Our research suggests that one of the most positive consequences of the OSP is that parental involvement with their child’s education has increased. Parents of high school, middle school and elementary students across both cohorts in the first and second year of the OSP emphatically stated that their parental involvement had dramatically increased when their children entered the OSP program’” (Lindsey Burke, Heritage Foundation, The Value of Parental Choice in Education: A Look at the Research, March 18, 2014).

“Thirty-three empirical studies (including all methods) have examined school choice’s effect on students’ academic outcomes in [district-run] public schools. Of those, 31 find choice improved public schools. One finds no visible effect. One finds a negative effect” (Greg Foster, Friedman Foundation for Education Choice, A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice, May, 2016).

“Eleven empirical studies have examined school choice’s effect on civic values and practices, such as respect for the rights of others and civic knowledge. Of those, eight find school choice improves civic values and practices. Three find no visible effect from school choice. No empirical study has found that school choice has a negative effect on civic values and practices” (Greg Foster, Friedman Foundation for Education Choice, A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice, May, 2016).

School Choice Does Not Improve Public Education

“Whatever you think about the merit of charter schools versus public schools, merit is no longer driving the debate. What’s driving the debate is money. The charter movement is now part of the growing privatization of public education, and Wall Street sees an emerging market. . . . There’s a potential gold rush here. Public education from Kindergarten through high school pulls in more than $500 billion in public, taxpayer funds every year” (Bill Moyers, “Public Schools for Sale?” Moyers & Company, April 15, 2014).

“I’ve never thought of public education as an industry. The [charter school] entrepreneurs see it as an industry. . . . But I think what’s at stake is the future of American public education. . . . I don’t want to see us lose public education. . . . It is one of the foundation-stones of democracy. So an attack on public education is an attack on democracy” (Diane Ravitch, education historian, New York University, “Public Schools for Sale?” Moyers & Company, April 15, 2014).

“The problem with letting the entrepreneurs do it is they know nothing about education. . . . The highest performing nations in the world don’t have charter schools and do not have voucher schools. The highest performing nations in the world have a very fine, very equitable public school system. I was in Finland not long ago. They aim to have a very equitable school system. It doesn’t matter where you go in that country, you will find a good school. That’s what we should be aiming for. You aim for equity, you will get excellence” (Diane Ravitch, education historian, New York University, “Public Schools for Sale?” Moyers & Company, April 15, 2014).

“While they receive public funding, charter schools are actually owned and operated by private entities, and they have a shockingly divisive impact. A study by Penn State University, published in 2011, determined that charter schools lead to segregation. While in public schools only 36% of black kids attend schools considered hyper-segregated (meaning schools which have a minority population of 90 - 100%), in charter schools that number doubles to 70%. . . . A write-up of the Penn study declares, ‘After two decades, the promise of integrated charter schools has not held up. It might be that, in some instances, school choice is actually a deterrent to integration’” (Anya Parampil, “The Rise of the Charter Schools,” On Contact with Chris Hedges, August 13, 2017).

“[Chris Hedges:] We should also mention that charter schools are a great mechanism for busting the teachers’ unions. [Diane Ravitch:] Right. That’s why the Walton Family Foundation is involved. The Walton Family, which owns Wal-Mart, and is not unionized, has committed to spending $200 million a year over five years to support charter schools” (“The Rise of the Charter Schools,” On Contact with Chris Hedges, August 13, 2017).

“Some have argued that competitive incentives induced by school choice will lead to better educational outcomes. However, there is little evidence to support this claim. Sweden has had an educational voucher system since 1992, but its achievement levels on international tests have been falling for two decades. Chile has had such a system since 1980, and there is little evidence of improvement in achievement relative to countries at similar levels of income. Cleveland, Milwaukee, and the District of Columbia have issued vouchers to low-income families, but sophisticated evaluations find no difference between achievement in private voucher schools and public schools with similar student populations. Students from low-income families in Louisiana who have used vouchers to shift from public to private schools have experienced striking reductions in achievement gains relative to similar students in public schools” (Henry Levin, professor of economics and education, Columbia University, US News, January 30, 2017).

“Where school choice has shown powerful effects around the world is the systematic separation of students by ethnicity, social class and religion. Sweden’s vouchers have increased segregation by social class and immigrant status. Chile’s voucher system has produced one of the most segregated systems of schools in the world by family income. In the [Netherlands](https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/netherlands), studies of the school choice system have pointed to school separation of students by ethnicity, immigrant status and family income. A [Brookings Institution study](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/ccf_20161021segregation_version-10_211.pdf) found that U.S. charter schools are more segregated racially and socio-economically than public schools in surrounding areas. [The Program for International Student Assessment](https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/2016-12-06/2015-pisa-scores-are-no-surprise), an important triennial study of international student performance, finds school segregation by social class is associated with school choice” (Henry Levin, professor of economics and education, Columbia University, US News, January 30, 2017).

“Competition produces winners and losers; I get that. . . . But I’ve come to realize that this brand of school reform is a great deal only if you live in a wealthy neighborhood. You buy a house, and access to a good school comes with it. Whether you choose to enroll there or not, the public investment in neighborhood schools only helps your property values. For the rest of us, it’s a cynical game. There aren’t enough slots in the best neighborhood and charter schools. So even for those of us lucky ones with cars and school-data spreadsheets, our options are mediocre at best” (Nathalie Hopkinson, New York Times, December 4, 2011).

“Competition improves supermarkets, restaurants — why shouldn’t this model apply to schools? It seemed to me that anyone who denied this idea didn’t understand basic economics. But the more I read, the more I realized that the empirical evidence for choice and market forces improving educational outcomes is thin at best. I found that disappointing and also puzzling, and I have spent some time thinking about why that theory doesn’t match current reality. Here’s what I think the biggest problem in thinking of schools as a classical market. Econ 101 models assume consumers observe product quality. But schools are complicated goods, and quality, particularly a school’s long-run quality, is hard to judge for many parents. It takes a lot of time to figure out whether this school and these teachers are serving my child well. Unlike restaurants or supermarkets, where quality can be judged at the moment of the purchase, school quality reveals itself later” (Joshua Goodman, professor of economics, Harvard University, Harvard Graduate School of Education, The Problem with Choice, November 29, 2016).

“The NAACP acknowledges that some charter schools are clearly offering students more opportunities than neighborhood public schools. But it argues that loose regulations in many states have allowed charter schools to exclude the neediest students and to continue operating despite consistently poor performance. The task force also argues that the push to expand charter schools, coupled with a lack of coordination and planning about where those schools are located and whom they serve, has in some cities resulted in a disjointed education landscape that leaves students with no guarantee they can attend a school close to home” (Emma Brown, Washington Post, July 26, 2017).

“The fundamental mistake of free-market economic thinking . . . is the fallacious belief that the choices we make in a market situation necessarily meaningfully reflect our ‘preferences.’ But what my choices say about my preferences depends on what those choices are to begin with. Defenders of free markets argue, for example, that people’s ‘choice’ to work in unsafe conditions [shows that they prefer unsafe jobs](http://www.slate.com/blogs/moneybox/2013/04/24/international_factory_safety.html) with high pay to safe jobs with low pay. But choice does not occur in a vacuum. Choices only tell us something significant about preferences to the extent that they are meaningful choices. ‘Would you rather be stabbed or shot?’ is not a meaningful choice. Sophie’s Choice was not a meaningful choice. Thus in order to understand how much meaning to attribute to choices, it’s necessary to understand *how choices are structured.* Likewise, if we create a private, for profit, school system, I might have to choose between sending my child to FedEx Junior High to have them train to pack boxes, or Burger King Junior High to have them train to flip Whoppers. If I decide to pick FedEx, that doesn’t mean we have a school system that reflects my freely-made choices. My real choice would be to have taxpayer money paying for arts programs, English classes, and math, rather than being handed directly to the CEO and shareholders of FedEx. But that choice hasn’t been made available to me on the free market” (Nathan J. Robinson, Current Affairs Magazine, November 30, 2016).

“‘You can’t overstate how devastating charter schools and DeVos’s political influence has been for Detroit and the state of Michigan,’ Hammer said. ‘So if the nation is going to experience what Michigan has experienced, it’s frightening.’ ‘The perverse thing about the charter movement, and they’ve been very self-conscious in their political tactics, is to exploit the desperation of parents in inner cities,” he continued. ‘Everyone knows we don’t have the silver bullet for how to provide effective public education. But rather than treating that as a collective obligation for us to figure out, there is the privatization of the public school system. Trying to run a traditional model, where schools are a public good and require a certain amount of public support and public resources, in parallel with a charter system is a death by a thousand cuts. It’s a way that will guarantee the destruction of the traditional public schools but not place anything effective as an alternative’” (Allie Gross, Vice News, December 19, 2016).