

Choice Is The Best Choice For Texas Education

By Chris Patterson
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Children in 49 states now use privately-funded vouchers to attend private schools, and in the District of Columbia, Milwaukee and Florida, disadvantaged children receive vouchers from the state to transfer from public to private schools. After a decade of “experiments” and “pilot programs,” there is strong and growing evidence that school choice works for all children.

School choice works for children who use vouchers. Of the 10 large, comprehensive scientific studies of voucher programs, all show academic achievement improved for some or all children. No study found that students would have been more successful in the public school they left. Comparing voucher students with their peers in public schools, researchers find *academic gains of students using vouchers result from the voucher rather than differences in students.*

Although choice benefits all children, disadvantaged children benefit most. Within just a handful of years, low-income, low-achieving students with vouchers are closing the achievement gap. Enrolled in private schools, children have more culturally diverse classmates, exhibit better citizenship skills, score higher on standardized tests, and are more likely to graduate and enroll in college. In Florida, the state provision of vouchers for children with disabilities has proven particularly successful in improving student outcomes.

However, vouchers benefit children who remain in public schools too. In areas with a high degree of school choice, student achievement in public schools is almost 30 percent higher without any increase in spending.

Because schools – public and private – perform best when they compete, school choice is proving the most effective way to improve public education. School choice is also proving the most effective way to deliver public education to all children. Allowing parents to choose the school best suited to their children’s needs – government or privately operated – promises to improve educational quality, close the achievement gap and reduce escalating education costs.

School choice has a growing role in public education today. The federal *No Child Left Behind Act* requires states to issue publicly-funded vouchers for disadvantaged students in low-performing schools. Texas, like other states, will soon be issuing publicly-funded vouchers for public school transfers and supplemental services, such as private tutoring.

Texas, unlike most other states, has experience with publicly-funded vouchers. The first system of public schools created in Texas by the 1876 Constitution allowed parents to redeem government education dollars at a school operated by a municipal government or at any school

chosen by the parents. For a time, Texans had a hybrid of government operated and private schools delivering public education. After a while, government stopped funding vouchers for private schools but the state's Constitution still permits publicly-funded vouchers. In fact, there are legal arguments that only vouchers satisfy the Texas Constitution's standards for funding public schools today.

School choice is no longer an experiment. It is widely used, closely studied, and proven the most effective way to improve student achievement and improve public schools. Unlike many reforms in public schools today, school choice has a track record with proven success.

School choice is no longer an alternative to public schools. It represents the evolution of public education; it is the best way to educate all children. School choice is legal. It meets federal requirements for *No Child Left Behind*, restores the first form of public schooling established in Texas, and best satisfies Constitutional standards for an efficient and effective system of public education.

School choice is the best choice for Texans.

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