

measurable improvement and only one found a negative impact.

We are unaware of studies examining student performance in relation to educational choice strictly within the special needs student population. However, students with special needs would have been eligible for many of the programs studied above.

What follows is a summary of social science research on this topic; citations to these studies are contained in [Texas School Finance: Basics and Reform](#) (58):

- A 1998 peer-reviewed study by MIT scholars found that math scores of Milwaukee school choice participants improved by 1.5 – 2.3 percentage points.
- A 1999 peer-reviewed study by UT Austin and Harvard scholars found that, in Milwaukee, reading scores of students in the fourth year of their choice program had improved by 6 percentile points; math scores improved by 11 points.
- A 2002 study by Stanford economists found that programs in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Arizona improved public school district achievement in reading, math, science, and social studies.
- A 2003 peer-reviewed study by scholars at Johns Hopkins, Columbia, and Harvard found a 3-percentile point increase in math scores for African-American children and stated that choice programs have “greater potential benefit for children in lower-scoring schools.”
- A 2001 study in *Education Next* (a non-profit journal) found that choice students in Charlotte, NC, scored 5.9 percentile points higher on math tests and 6.5 percentile points higher on reading tests.
- A 2010 peer-reviewed study from Harvard University scholars found that New York public school students in choice programs improved their math and reading scores. Math scores of students who came from low-performing public schools increased by 4-5 percent; reading scores increased by 2-3 percent.
- A 2010 study by the Federal Department of Education found that the school choice program in Washington, D.C. had no impact on student test scores, but increased high school graduation rates from 70 percent to 82 percent.
- A 2008 peer-reviewed *Policy Studies Journal* article confirmed the reading score improvement from the 2001 *Education Next* study, but did not find a change in the math scores.
- A 2006 Brookings Institution study found that African-American students in Washington, D.C., Dayton, OH, and New York, NY, scored 6 percentile points higher on their Iowa Tests than students who remained in their former school.
- A 2012 joint study by the Brookings Institution and Harvard University looked at New York’s school choice program. They found that college enrollment by African-American school choice students increased by 25 percent. They also found that African-American enrollment in selective colleges (which have an average SAT of 1100 or greater) more than doubled.

The Facts

- An ESA program for all students in special education or with

504 status in Texas would make educational options available for approximately 609,000 students.

- The financial impact to a child’s school district of the student using an ESA would be more favorable than the impact if a child moved to another district, as many special needs families already do in search of better options.
- Thirty-six percent of surveyed private schools in Texas said they would or probably “would be interested in participating in an ESA program that would serve only students with special needs.”
- In a survey of Florida’s McKay scholarship program for students with special needs, “92.7% of McKay participants are satisfied or very satisfied with their McKay schools; only 32.7% were similarly satisfied with their public schools.” The average private school tuition in Texas in 2015 was \$7,847.98, well within reach of the amount (approximately \$7,800) that would have been provided by an ESA that year.
- Eighty-six percent of parents participating in Florida’s McKay program said their scholarship school has provided all the services they promised to provide. Only 30 percent said they received all federally mandated services from their previous school.

Recommendation

Promote educational excellence in Texas and provide options for vulnerable students by adopting Education Savings Accounts for Texas students with special needs.

Resources

- [The Education Debit Card: What Arizona Parents Purchase with ESAs](#) by Lindsey Burke, Friedman Foundation (Aug. 2013).
- [ESA Handbook: A Parent’s Guide](#), Arizona Department of Education (Aug. 2014). This work explains the Arizona ESA (absent recent expansions) in detail.
- [ESA Parent Handbook](#) by the Nevada State Treasurer (Jan. 2016). This work explains the Nevada ESA in detail.
- [Texas School Finance: Basics and Reform](#) by Michael Barba, Kent Grusendorf, Vance Ginn, and Talmadge Heflin, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Mar. 2016).
- [Children in Need: Special Needs Students in Texas Would Benefit From Education Savings Accounts](#) by Emily Sass and Stephanie Matthews, Texas Public Policy Foundation (May 2017).
- [How School Choice Affects the Achievement of Public School Students](#) by Caroline Hoxby, Hoover Institution Press (2002).
- [Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Final Report](#) by Patrick Wolf, Babette Gutmann, Michael Puma, and Brian Kisida, U.S. Department of Education (June 2010).
- [School Choice and Climate Survey](#), Grand Prairie ISD (Dec. 2014).
- [The Moral Case for School Choice](#) by Michael Barba and Kent Grusendorf, Texas Public Policy Foundation (Sep. 2014).
- [A Win-Win Solution: The Empirical Evidence on School Choice](#) by Greg Forster, Ph.D. (May 2016).
- [Vouchers for Special Education Students: An Evaluation of Florida’s McKay Scholarship Program](#) by Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster, Manhattan Institute (June 2003).
- [Exploring Texas’s Private Education Sector](#) by Andrew Catt, Ed-Choice (Jan. 2017).

