

What Works Clearinghouse



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WWC Quick Review of the Report “The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program Longitudinal Educational Growth Study Third Year Report”¹

What is this study about?

The study examined whether students who use a voucher to attend private school have greater mathematics and reading achievement than students who attend public schools.

The study analyzed data on more than 2,200 elementary and middle school students from public and private schools in Milwaukee.

Academic achievement was measured using the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations in math and reading, the same standardized tests that are administered through Wisconsin’s accountability program.

In fall 2006, the study’s authors matched each voucher participant with one comparison student from Milwaukee Public Schools.² Math and reading scores of a subsample of these matched students were measured through fall 2008 to determine the effect of voucher participation.

Analyses controlled for student demographic characteristics and student test scores from before the study’s first year.

What did the study find?

The authors found no significant differences between math and reading achievement of students who used a voucher to attend private school and comparison students from Milwaukee Public Schools.

Features of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

Designed to cover the full cost of attending one of its participating schools, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program gives government-funded vouchers of up to \$6,607 to low-income students to attend the secular or religious private schools of their choice.

It currently provides vouchers to approximately 20,000 students in Milwaukee and is the largest and oldest publicly funded voucher program in the United States.

WWC Rating

The research described in this report does not meet WWC evidence standards

Cautions: The authors do not provide evidence that the subsamples of voucher recipients and public school comparison students analyzed in this study were initially equivalent in math and reading achievement.³ Also, some voucher participants had been in private schools for several years before the matching occurred. Therefore, differences in test scores do not capture the full impact of the voucher program.

The WWC does not consider these results to be conclusive because it could not verify from data presented in the study whether the voucher- and comparison-group students were initially equivalent in math and reading achievement.

¹ Witte, J. F., Cowen, J. M., Fleming, D. J., Wolf, P. J., Condon, M. R., & Lucas-McLean, J. (2010). *The MPCP Longitudinal Educational Growth Study third year report* (SCDP Milwaukee Evaluation Report #15). Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, School Choice Demonstration Project.

² Witte, J. F., Wolf, P. J., Cowen, J. M., Fleming, D. J., & Lucas-McLean, J. (2008). *The MPCP Longitudinal Educational Growth Study baseline report* (SCDP Milwaukee Evaluation Report #5). Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, School Choice Demonstration Project.

³ At the time of publication, the WWC had contacted the corresponding author for additional information regarding the equivalence of the analysis samples at baseline and no response had been received.

Quick reviews examine evidence published in a study (supplemented, if necessary, by information from author queries) to assess whether that study’s design meets WWC evidence standards. Quick reviews rely on the effect sizes and significance levels reported by study authors.

The WWC rating applies only to the summarized results, and not necessarily to all results presented in the study.