Parent and student experiences with choice in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Thomas Stewart, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville
Patrick J. Wolf, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville

Document Type
Report

Publication Date
3-1-2009

Abstract
Scholars, advocates of various positions, and policymakers have fiercely debated whether the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), also known as the voucher or "Choice" program, has been a godsend or a scourge for the city's children. Wisconsin policymakers, concerned about that question, identified the School Choice Demonstration Project (SCDP) as the organization to help provide the answers. The SCDP is a national research organization, based in the University of Arkansas's Department of Education Reform, dedicated to the comprehensive, objective, and nonpartisan evaluation of school choice programs. We are drawn together for this project by the opportunity to examine what effects the mature MPCP is having on the students, parents, taxpayers, schools, and communities of the city and state. Our shared commitment is to carefully and faithfully follow the evidence, wherever it may lead.

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.uark.edu/scdp/47

Wisconsin’s voucher program will likely grow as Milwaukee’s did if pro-voucher Republicans remain in the governor’s office and in majorities in the Legislature. Parental choice alone doesn’t drive quality. This is the No. 1 lesson from Milwaukee, in my book. In earlier days, quality control on schools was nearly nonexistent. The idea was that if parents chose schools, that alone would drive quality. That’s probably applicable to a lot of parents, but certainly not for a lot of others. Uncontrolled quality in Milwaukee resulted in the existence of some schools that were scandalously bad. Repair, in the form of financial and educational oversight, has taken years and is still not strong enough. Just look at some of the schools that still ex Milwaukee students enrolling in a private high school in the choice program "increases the likelihood of a student graduating from high school, enrolling in a four-year college and persisting in college by 4 to 7 percentage points." It’s important to
note that the reading advantage was for just one year, and the Arkansas researchers cautioned that some evidence suggested it was due to the introduction of a new state testing requirement for private choice schools. Wolf said that while there is no overall evidence that voucher schools improved learning in Milwaukee, for Burke to say there is no evidence "is a bit of a stretch," given what the Arkansas research found. Before we close, we'll note two other studies that indicate voucher schools have an indirect impact on student learning. Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Prepared by Russ Kava. Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau One East Main, Suite 301 Madison, WI 53703. Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. The Milwaukee parental choice program (MPCP) was established in 1989 Act 336. Although the State Supreme Court denied the request, six private schools in Milwaukee and several pupils and their parents wishing to participate in the program brought an action before the Circuit Court of Dane County (Davis v. Grover) seeking to compel the State Superintendent to immediately implement the program and to prohibit the State Superintendent from imposing any requirements on participating schools beyond.