

Forward Institute

"Evidence before Ideology"

For Immediate Release: Study analysis shows voucher schools have no significant effect on high school, college attainment -Parental factors more important.

The complete analysis is attached, and may be found on the Institute's website:

www.forwardinstitutewi.org

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In February 2012, the School Choice Demonstration Project (SCDP) at the University of Arkansas released a study aimed at discerning whether Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP; voucher) school students in Milwaukee, who were enrolled in 8th and 9th grade in 2006, had higher graduation rates and college attainment rates than matched peers in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).

An updated version of the SCDP study was published in the Policy Studies Journal (PSJ) recently. This updated study resulted in a minimal change of the overall results. There were, however, important specific variables which saw changes in significance. Most importantly, the new report conclusions ignored the statistical significance of gender, parental factors, and test scores that positively affected graduation rates and college attainment, while at the same time overstated the non-significant effect of voucher schools. The non-significant results are still being used by voucher advocates as evidence of success in the voucher school program, placing ideology over evidence in the ongoing debate over voucher schools.

The SCDP study authors acknowledge the studies shortcomings. First, that the ideal study involving a randomized trial is not practical. Second, the study is only able to examine exposure to the voucher schools, as students who started in an MPCP school at 8th grade may have switched to an MPS school prior to graduation. That student would be counted as an MPCP graduate, and vice versa. There is no accounting for which students switched at what point and to/from what school. Third, only 44% of the MPCP sample remained in a voucher school through grade 12. The study authors have also remained silent on the mischaracterization of their study findings by Milwaukee voucher school advocates.

It is important to underscore the most significant findings of this study that have gone unreported and omitted to advance the ideology of voucher school expansion. There is no significant effect of voucher school exposure on high school graduation rates when controlling for demographics and test scores. In addition, when factoring in parental characteristics, the effect of voucher school exposure on high school and college attainments disappear completely. What is maintained is the high significance of gender (female), math and reading scores, and parental college education. It should be made clear that based on this study, voucher schools have no impact on educational attainment when factored with demographics and parental factors. It is not accurate to conclude that voucher school students have higher graduation and attainment rates than MPS students. The data do not support that conclusion.