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School Vouchers Help Low-income Minority Students Earn a College Degree

Experimental study finds enrollment gains for New York City's Black and Hispanic students

Cambridge MA – A break early in life can result in large gains later on. Certainly that is the case for many low-income minority students in New York City. A new study conducted by Matthew M. Chingos of the Brookings Institution and Paul E. Peterson of the Harvard Kennedy School finds that minority students who received a school voucher to attend private elementary schools in 1997 were, as of 2013, 10 percent more likely to enroll in college and 35 percent more likely than their peers in public school to obtain a bachelor's degree.

These results emerge from a randomized evaluation that traced the effectiveness of a New York City school voucher program over the course of more than 17 years (1997-2013). The study is scheduled for publication in the *Journal of Public Economics*, a major economics journal which has released the study on its website.

The vouchers were awarded in 1997 to approximately 1,000 families by the School Choice Scholarships Foundation, a New York City non-profit organization. Vouchers were awarded to families, with all children in grades one through five receiving a voucher if the family was selected. Over 20,000 applications for vouchers were received, and about 1,300 students received a voucher. A randomly selected group of applicants who did not win the lottery constituted the control group for the evaluation.

To calculate the latest information on voucher impacts upon college enrollment and bachelor's degree attainment, Chingos and Peterson utilized data from the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) to glean information on college enrollment and attainment for 99 percent of all participating students.

Effects for all students are positive and small but the estimates are not precise enough to draw any conclusions. For the small number of non-minority students (those who are not African American or Hispanic), statistically insignificant, negative impacts are estimated.

For disadvantaged minority (African American and Hispanic) students, sizeable, statistically significant, positive impacts are observed. Forty-six percent of the control group enrolled in either a two-year or a four-year college for at least one term. That percentage increased to 51 percent among those who made use of a voucher, an increment of 10 percent.

Bachelor's degree attainment was 9 percent for the minority members of the control group; it increased to 12 percentage points among those who used a voucher, an increment of 35 percent.

These results are based upon the assumption that impacts observed among all those offered a voucher are concentrated on the 79 percent of voucher winners who made at least some use of the voucher.

The study also found that vouchers had a significant impact on the likelihood that students born in the United States would attend college and receive a bachelor's degree. They were 18 percent more likely to enroll in college and 61 percent more likely to obtain a bachelor's degree if they made use of a voucher. No statistically significant impacts were observed for immigrants, however.

The research paper "Experimentally Estimated Impacts of School Vouchers on College Enrollment and Degree Attainment" is being published by the *Journal of Public Economics*: <http://authors.elsevier.com/a/1QKaUAlw9Ks0T>

A copy of the working paper can be viewed and downloaded from the PEPG's research webpage at: http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Papers/PEPG15_01_Chingos_Peterson.pdf.

About the Authors

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Established in 1996 under the direction of Paul E. Peterson, the PEPG has distinguished itself as a significant contributor to the systematic analysis of education policy and governing arrangements. Located within Harvard University's Government Department and the Kennedy School of Government's Taubman Center for State and Local Government, PEPG continues to fulfill its core missions to provide high-level scientific training for young scholars who can make independent contributions to scholarly research; foster a national community of reform-minded scientific researchers; and produce path-breaking studies that provide a scientific basis for school reform policy.

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