

New Findings from the Cleveland Scholarship Program:

A Reanalysis of Data from the

Indiana University School of Education Evaluation

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(Executive Summary)

In March 1995 the State of Ohio established the Cleveland Scholarship Program (CSP) that provided families up to \$2,250 toward the cost of attending the private school of their choice. The program was initially limited to children in grades kindergarten through grade three. Nearly 2,000 students participated in the first year of the scholarship program, which began in September 1996. Most students came from public schools or were just beginning school; only about 25 percent of the students had previously been attending private schools.

Two evaluations of the first year of CSP have been conducted. The initial study, undertaken by Harvard University's Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG), surveyed a cross-section of parents participating in the program as well as those who initially applied but did not participate. PEPG found much higher levels of parental satisfaction with Cleveland's choice schools than with the city's public schools. The PEPG research team also obtained test score data from 263 students attending the two newly established choice schools, the Hope schools. PEPG found significant test score gains at the Hope schools in all four grades.

In March 1998 the Indiana University School of Education released its evaluation of CSP. This evaluation found no effect of the first year of the scholarship program on the test scores of 94 third-grade students attending choice schools other than the Hope schools. However, the evaluation performed by the Indiana University evaluation suffers from several limitations, including the use of implausible second-grade test scores supplied by the Cleveland Public Schools.

In April 1998 the data from the Indiana University evaluation were made available, making it possible to address some of the deficiencies of the original evaluation by:

- 1) incorporating the Hope school test results into the analysis;
- 2) using more appropriate statistical techniques; and
- 3) reporting results based on analyses that both include and exclude the doubtful second-grade data collected by the Cleveland Public Schools before the beginning of the choice experiment.

When the implausible second-grade test scores are removed from the regression analysis, choice-school effects are positive in all subject domains. Scholarship students score 4.1 normal curve equivalent (NCE) points higher in language, 4.5 points higher in science, 2.5 points higher in reading, 2.5 points higher in social studies, and 0.6 points higher in math. All but the math results are statistically significant.

If the doubtful second-grade test scores are included in the analysis, results remain positive in all domains except math. The magnitude of the effects is not as great. Even so, the choice-school effects in language arts are 2.4 NCE points and, in science, 2.7 points. These effects are statistically significant.

These new findings from the Indiana University evaluation can hardly be definitive, because the results depend upon a data set suffering from deficiencies mentioned above. But even the most conservative estimate finds positive choice-school effects in two subject domains.

This conservative estimate finds choice-school effects in Cleveland comparable to those observed in Milwaukee at the end of the first year of its choice program. School choice is not a magic bullet. One cannot expect to observe more than modest learning gains in the first year of attendance at a choice school. It takes time for children to adjust to a new setting and take advantage of whatever opportunities a school can provide. It will be of interest to learn whether the effects in Cleveland will accumulate over time, as happened in Milwaukee.