

What Works Clearinghouse

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WWC Quick Review of the Report “Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After Three Years”[†]

What is this study about?

The study examined whether the *Opportunity Scholarship Program*, which offers vouchers to students to attend private schools, improved the reading and math achievement of low-income students.

The study analyzed data on about 1,500 K–12 students in the District of Columbia who applied for vouchers through the program in either 2004 or 2005.

Each year, if the number of eligible applicants exceeded the number of vouchers available, vouchers were awarded through a random lottery.

The study measured the effect of the program by comparing the achievement of students who were offered a voucher through the lottery to the achievement of students who entered the lottery but were not offered a voucher.

Student achievement in reading and math was measured using a standardized test administered three years after the lottery was conducted.

Features of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program

\$7,500 voucher to attend a participating private school, renewable up to five years

For students with family income below 185% of the poverty line

Preference given to students in low-performing public schools

Voucher may be applied to tuition, school fees, and transportation

WWC Rating

The research described in this report is consistent with WWC evidence standards

Strengths: The study is equivalent to a randomized controlled trial because the groups of students contrasted in the study were formed by random lottery.

Cautions: More than 30% of the approximately 2,300 initial study participants were not able to be tested and are excluded from the analysis.

What did the study authors report?

The study found that, after three years, students who were offered vouchers to attend private schools had reading scores about one-eighth of a standard deviation greater than control group members. This is roughly equivalent to 3.1 months of additional learning over three school years.

The authors found no statistically significant differences in math scores between students who were offered vouchers and those who were not.

[†]Wolf, P., Gutmann, B., Puma, M., Kisida, B., Rizzo, L., & Eissa, N. (2009). *Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts after three years* (NCEE 2009-4050). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

WWC quick reviews are based on the evidence published in the report cited and rely on effect sizes and significance levels as reported by study authors. WWC does not confirm study authors' findings or contact authors for additional information about the study.

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