

What Works Clearinghouse



Revised December 2010

WWC Quick Review of the Report “The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program Longitudinal Educational Growth Study Third Year Report”^{1,2}

What is this study about?

The study examined whether students in Milwaukee who use a voucher to attend private school have greater mathematics and reading achievement than students who attend public schools.

Academic achievement was measured using the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examinations in math and reading, the same standardized tests that are administered through Wisconsin’s accountability program.

In fall 2006, the study’s authors matched a sample of 1,926 voucher participants in grades 3–8 with comparison students from Milwaukee Public Schools, resulting in an initial sample of 3,852 matched students.³ This report analyzed the fall 2008 math and reading scores of about 2,230 of these matched students.

Analyses controlled for student demographic characteristics and student test scores from before the study’s first year. The study was not designed to ascertain the full impact of the voucher program; instead, it analyzes effects of the program over a two-year period.

What did the study find?

The authors found no significant differences between math and reading achievement of students who used a voucher to attend private school and comparison students from Milwaukee Public Schools.

Features of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

Designed to cover the full cost of attending one of its participating schools, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program gives government-funded vouchers of up to \$6,607 to low-income students to attend the secular or religious private schools of their choice.

It currently provides vouchers to approximately 20,000 students in Milwaukee and is the largest and oldest publicly funded voucher program in the United States.

WWC Rating

The research described in this report meets WWC evidence standards with reservations

Strengths: Voucher participants were matched with comparison students in the Milwaukee Public Schools on a number of observable characteristics, including baseline test scores and demographics, using a sophisticated matching procedure.

Cautions: Although the study matched students based on several observable characteristics, it is possible that there were other differences between the two groups that were not accounted for in the analysis; these differences could have influenced student achievement.

The WWC has reservations about these findings because the groups of students compared may have differed from each other in ways not controlled for in the analysis.

¹ Witte, J. F., Cowen, J. M., Fleming, D. J., Wolf, P. J., Condon, M. R., & Lucas-McLean, J. (2010). *The MPCP Longitudinal Educational Growth Study third year report* (SCDP Milwaukee Evaluation Report #15). Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, School Choice Demonstration Project.

² This is an updated version of a quick review released in September 2010, at which time the authors had not yet responded to a WWC request for information regarding the baseline equivalence of the analysis samples in the reviewed report. Subsequent to publication of the quick review, the study authors provided the WWC with the requested information, and the study rating was revised to *Meets WWC Evidence Standards with Reservations*.

³ Witte, J. F., Wolf, P. J., Cowen, J. M., Fleming, D. J., & Lucas-McLean, J. (2008). *The MPCP Longitudinal Educational Growth Study baseline report* (SCDP Milwaukee Evaluation Report #5). Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, School Choice Demonstration Project.

Quick reviews examine evidence published in a study (supplemented, if necessary, by information from author queries) to assess whether that study’s design meets WWC evidence standards. Quick reviews rely on the effect sizes and significance levels reported by study authors.

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