



The Research Facts About Charter Schools and Vouchers

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Policy Questions

1. Does education need to improve?
2. Could expanded school choice help?
3. Do non-district choice programs primarily serve disadvantaged students?
4. Do participating students benefit?
5. Do non-participating students benefit?
6. Do parents benefit?
7. Do communities benefit?



Educational Outcomes in the U.S.

- We are 2nd globally in per-pupil education spending
- Only 71% of students graduate high school on time
- Compared to 34 developed countries our high school students are:
 - Tied for 12th in reading
 - 17th in science
 - 25th in math
- Real spending on K-12 education has more than doubled since 1970 yet NAEP scores have hardly moved
- Serious achievement gaps persist



Key Policy Question

Would educational outcomes in the U.S. improve with the expanded availability of meaningful school choice?



What Makes School Choice Meaningful?

- Rivalry: Schools are independently owned and operated (i.e. vouchers & most charters)
- Expanded Opportunity: Disadvantaged students have a reasonable chance to participate



Does Choice Reach Disadvantaged Students: Charters

- Over 54% are poor, compared to 41% of all public school students (CER 2010; NCES 2010)
- Over 52% are minorities, compared to 44% of all public school students (CER 2010; NCES 2010)
- Tend initially to be behind educationally
 - Students in grade 3 of independent charters in Milwaukee are 7 percentiles lower in reading and math (Witte et al. 2010)
- Charters overwhelmingly locate in poor urban areas so that they can serve disadvantaged students



Does Choice Reach Disadvantaged Students: 30 Voucher/Scholarship

- 20 limited to low-income students
- 5 limited to students in failing schools
- 9 limited to students with disabilities
- At least 14% of students in voucher programs have disabilities (Wolf et al. 2012) compared to 12% in public schools (NCES 2010)



Profile of Initial DC Opportunity Scholarship Program Recipients

- 90% African American
- 9% Hispanic
- Average family income of \$17,356
- 6% of mothers with college degrees
- 17% with diagnosed disability
- Average student at 33rd percentile in reading and 31st in math (Wolf et al. 2007)



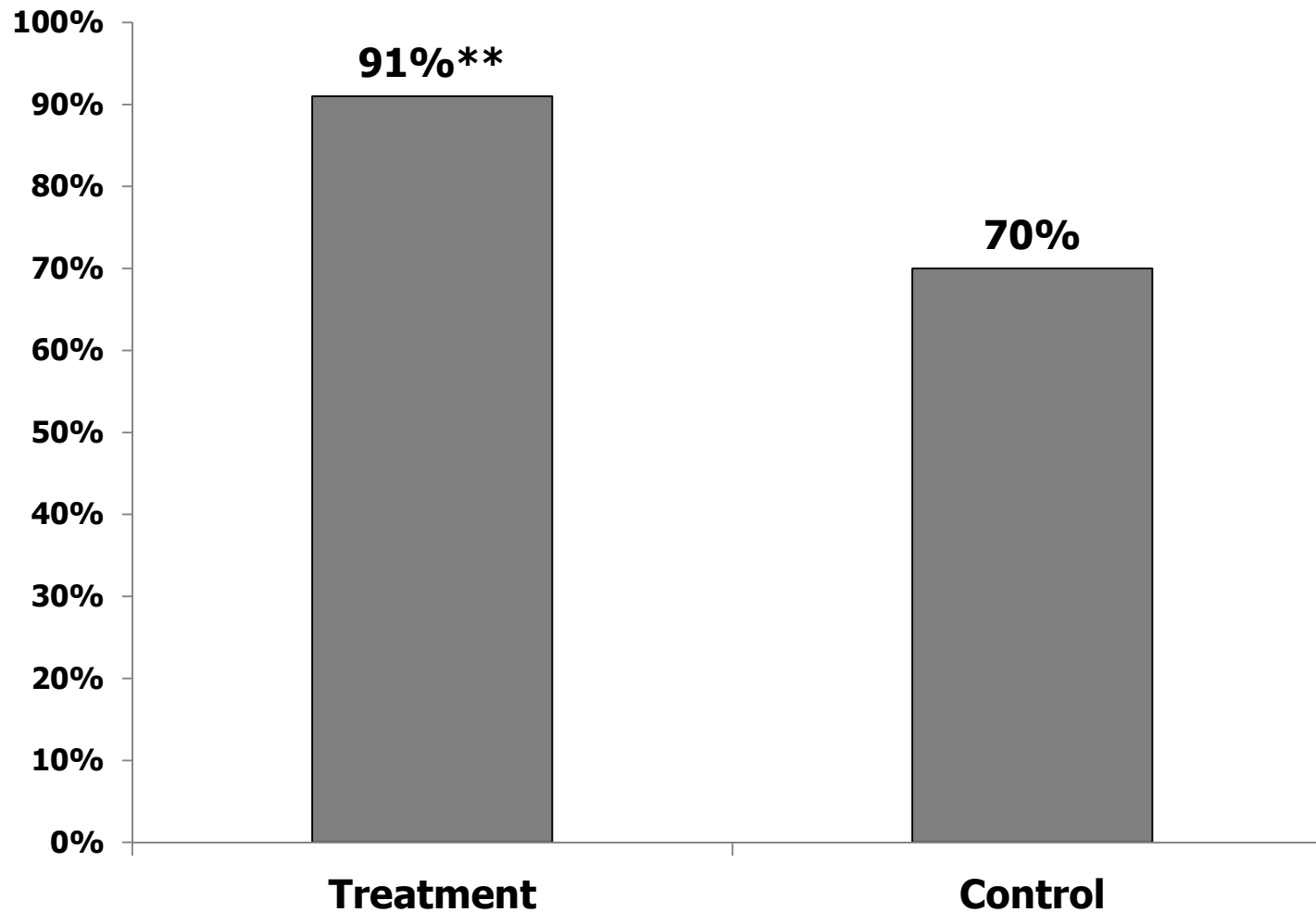
Okay, They Reach Disadvantaged
Students, but Do They Work?



School Choice Boosts Educational Attainment

- How far you go in school enhances life outcomes
- Key benchmarks: high school (HS) graduation, college enrollment, college graduation
- Results for schools of choice:
 - KIPPsters complete college at four times the rate for low-income students (KIPP Nd)
 - Florida charters increase HS grad rates by 7-15 percentage points, college enrollment by 8-10 (Booker et al. 2008)
 - Milwaukee voucher program increases HS grad rate, college enrollment & persistence by 4-7 percentage points (Cowen et al. 2012)
 - DC Scholarship use boosts HS grad rate by 21 percentage points (Wolf et al. 2010)

Impact of DC Scholarship Use on High School Graduation Rates (Wolf et al. 2010)



**Statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level.



School Choice and Student Test Scores

- Three truisms about test scores:
 1. They are lower in new schools
 2. They drop slightly when kids switch schools
 3. They are hard to move a long ways quickly
- Choice schools must deliver high and sustained value-added to have a clear positive effect on test scores in the short run



Charter Schools and Test Scores

Overall results mixed (Betts & Tang 2011)
but most likely positive when:

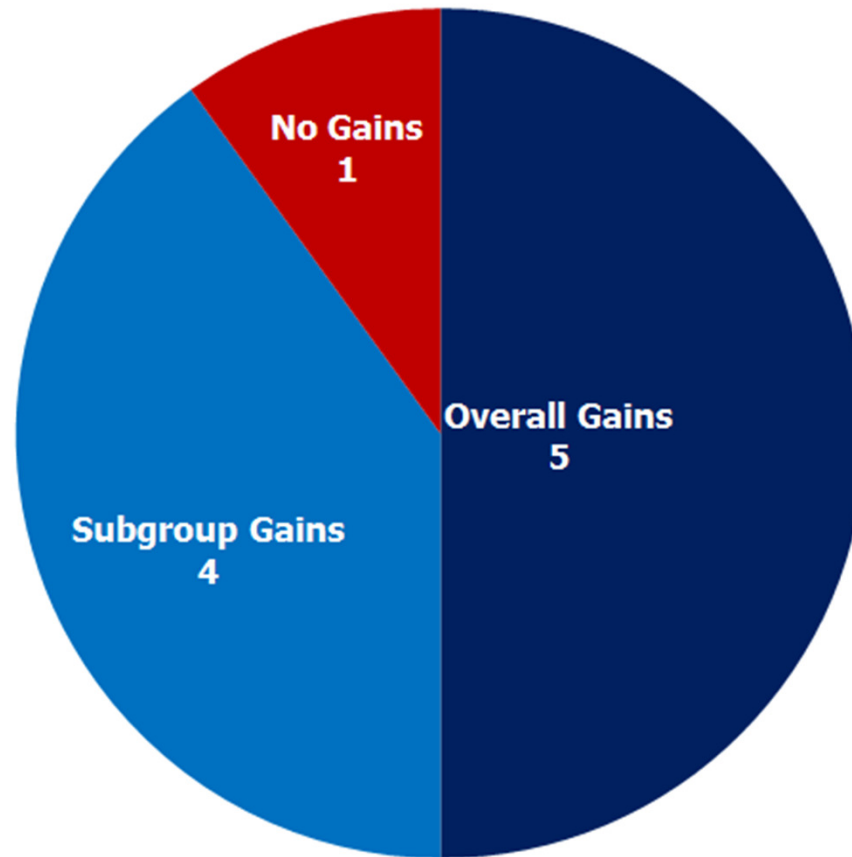
1. Level is elementary or subject matter is math (Betts & Tang 2011)
2. School is well-established (e.g. Tuttle et al. 2010 KIPP study)
3. Student has been there awhile
4. Student is disadvantaged (CREDO 2009)
5. School was urban (Betts & Tang 2011)



Vouchers and Test Scores

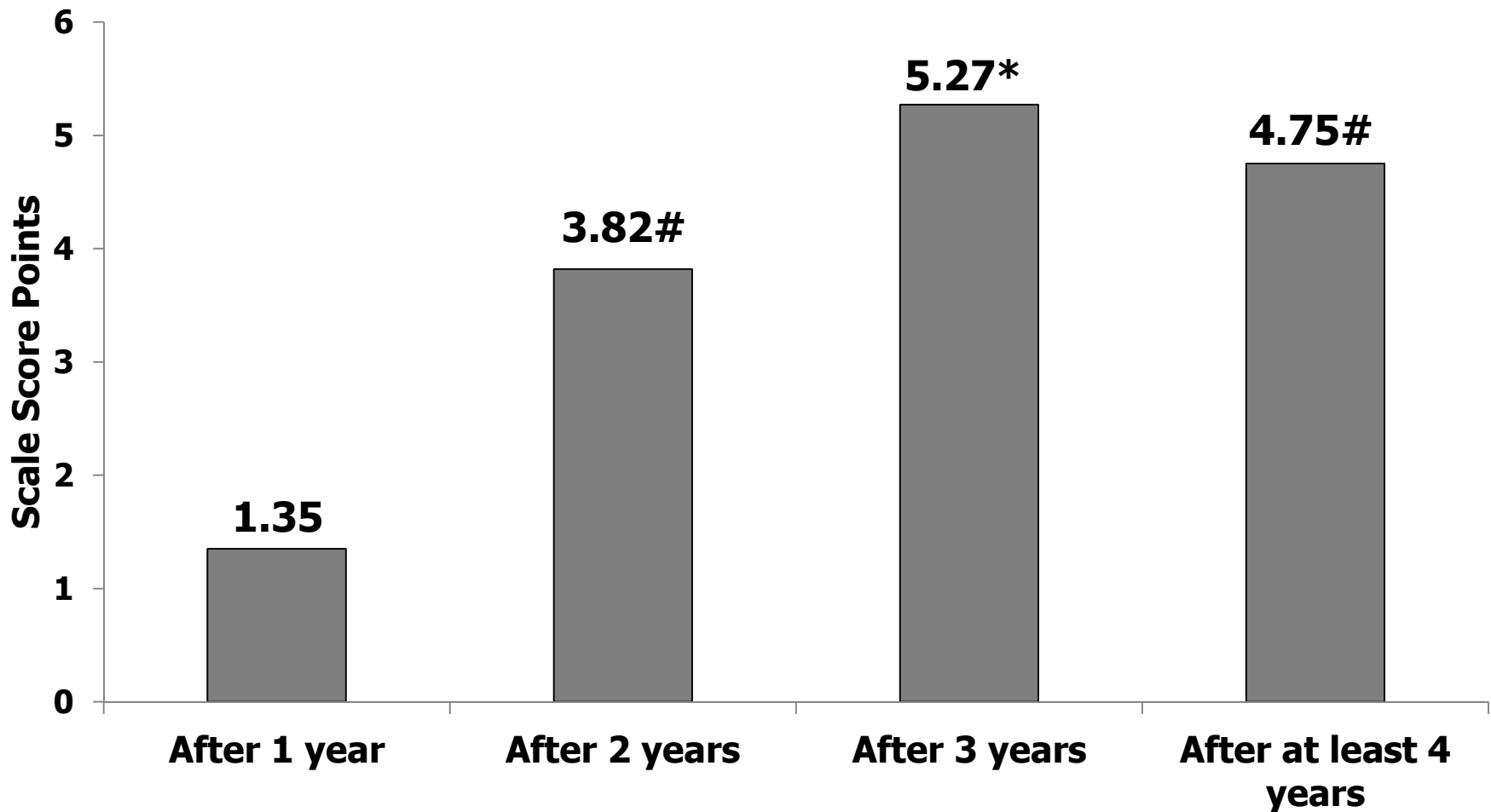
- All or some subgroups of students tend to show gains eventually
- Confirmed in 9 of 10 “gold standard” studies of 6 cities by 7 different research teams (Wolf 2008)
- Equal to about an extra month of learning per year
- Exact pattern of positive results varies but no negative effects found

Achievement Impacts of Vouchers from 10 Experiments



Impact of DC Scholarship Use on Increasing Reading Test Scores (Wolf et al. 2010)

Note: Sample after at least 4 years excludes 289 students who graduated out of study



*Statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

#Statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level.



Competitive Effects of Charters on Achievement in TPS*

- Relatively few studies
- Vary dramatically in quality
- More rigorous studies generally show that competition boosts achievement in TPS (Gray 2009; Sass 2006; Hoxby 2003)
- Positive effects are modest in size

*TPS is Traditional Public Schools



Competitive Effects of Vouchers on Achievement in TPS

- **10 studies in Florida – All positive** (Greene & Winters 2003; West & Peterson 2005; Chakrabarti 2004; Figlio & Rouse 2004; Rouse et al. 2007; Figlio & Hart 2010...)
- **6 studies in Milwaukee – All positive** (Hoxby 2001; Greene & Forster 2002; Chakrabarti 2008; Carnoy et al. 2007; Greene & Marsh 2009)
- **2 studies in Ohio – Mix of positive and no effects** (Carr 2009; Forster 2008)
- **1 study in DC – no effects** (Greene & Winters 2006)



Overall Assessment of the Competitive Effects of School Choice

- “The above evidence shows reasonably consistent evidence of a link between competition (choice) and education quality. Increased competition and higher educational quality are positively correlated.” (Belfield & Levin 2002)
- Strongest when choice is extensive, options are high-quality, and dollars all travel with student (Moe 2008)
 - All apply to choice environment in Florida and Milwaukee
 - Not in DC -- program capped and public system held harmless



Voucher Programs Increase Parental Satisfaction with Schools

- Especially regarding curriculum, safety, parent-teacher relations, academics, religion
- Confirmed by all five “gold standard” studies that asked the question (e.g. Wolf et al. 2010; Howell & Peterson 2006; Greene 2001)
- Impacts are large & only slightly attenuate
- DC parents who graded schools A or B:
 - 80% of voucher users
 - 50% of control group (Wolf et al. 2007)



Choice Programs Often Advance the Public Purposes of Education

- 21 empirical studies reveal private or charter school advantage in promoting civic values (Wolf 2007)
- Evidence strong for political tolerance, voluntarism, political knowledge
- Parents report being empowered by the DC OSP (Stewart & Wolf 2011)
- Vouchers tend to have slight but positive effects on racial segregation as minority students move to lower-minority private schools (e.g. Greene et al. 2010)



Summary of the Research on School Choice

1. Choice programs disproportionately serve disadvantaged students
2. They deliver a variety of educational benefits to students under many circumstances
3. They tend to spur affected public schools to improve somewhat
4. Parents love them!
5. They tend to enhance and not undermine the public purposes of education



For More Information

<http://www.uark.edu/ua/der/SCDP.html>

<http://www.uark.edu/ua/der/People/wolf.php>

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