

Study of school vouchers & college enrollment shows large effects for African Americans

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A new study from researchers at Harvard University and the Brookings Institution on the impact of school vouchers on college enrollments shows that the percentage of African American students who enrolled part-time or full-time in college by 2011 was 24 percent higher for those who had won a school voucher lottery and used their voucher to attend a private school.

The experimental study compared two groups of students, one group who entered private schools with the help of a voucher program in New York City in 1997, and a [control group](#) that did not win vouchers. The attrition rate from the study over a fourteen-year period was less than 1%, making it highly unlikely that attrition from the study biased the findings.

Matthew M. Chingos of the Brookings Institution and Paul E. Peterson, Director of Harvard's Program on [Education Policy](#) and Governance, tracked students entering grades K-5 who participated in a foundation-funded New York City voucher experiment begun in 1997 until they were at least 21 years of age as of the Fall of 2011. The researchers found that among African Americans, only 26 percent attended college full-time within three years of expected high school graduation if they did not receive the voucher opportunity. Among those who received the voucher, 34 percent attended college full-time within three years, or an increase of about 31 percent.

In the absence of a voucher offer, the percentage of African American students who attended a selective four-year college was 3 percent. That increased by 4 percentage points if the student received the offer of a voucher, more than doubling the percentage enrolled in a selective college.

In contrast to African-Americans, Chingos and Peterson found only a small, statistically insignificant impact on the [college enrollment](#) decision of Hispanic students. The numbers of white and Asian students participating in the school voucher program were too few to permit separate analysis. When all students are combined together, no overall impacts can be detected.

Peterson surmised that the difference between the results for African American and Hispanic students could be due in part to the greater educational needs faced by African American students. "Only 36 percent of African American students went to college either part-time or full-time if they did not receive a voucher, whereas 45 percent of [Hispanic students](#) did. In other words, African American students were at substantially greater risk of never going to college in the absence of a voucher." The authors also found that the voucher offer had a larger impact on school quality (as reported by parents) among African Americans than among Hispanic families.

"The impacts on the college enrollment decisions of African American students is striking, given the modest costs of the intervention, which came to a total of only \$4,200 per pupil over a three-year period," Chingos said. "A class size reduction intervention in Tennessee that had a similar impact cost \$12,000 per pupil," he added.

The authors also said that religious considerations may have played a greater role in the choice of a school by Hispanic families than African American ones, as Hispanics are more likely to be Catholic, the same

religious affiliation as that of the majority of private schools in New York City. African American students were especially at risk of not going on to college, note the authors, "and families sought a private school – even one outside their religious tradition – that would help their child overcome that disadvantage."

The New York School Choice Scholarships Foundation (SCSF) offered three-year scholarships or vouchers worth up to a maximum of \$1,400 annually to approximately 1,000 low-income families with children who were either entering first grade or were currently public school students about to enter grades two through five. A recipient could attend any one of the hundreds of private schools, religious or secular, within the city of New York. According to the New York Catholic archdiocese, average tuition at that time in the city's Catholic schools, the city's largest private provider, was estimated to be \$1,728, which was 72 percent of the total per pupil cost of \$2,400 at the schools (compared to total costs of more than \$5,000 per pupil in the public schools).

More information: The study is available online at www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/
Full report: ednxt.co/P3vjqy

Provided by Harvard University

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