

SB 183 Testimony

Chairman Shapiro and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify. I have handed out answers to six myths perpetrated, not by teachers, but by the NEA, TSTA, and organizations opposed to the freedom and benefits of school choice for both students and teachers.

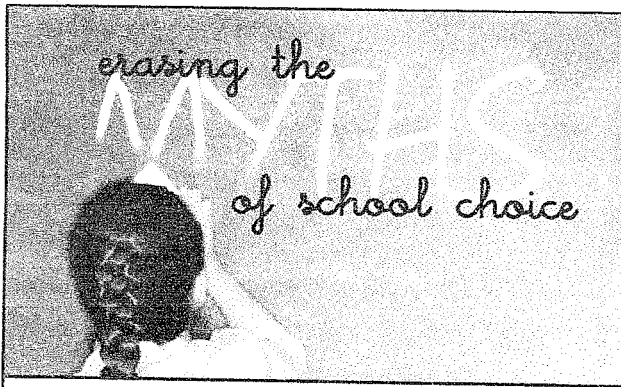
The seventh article is entitled "Why School Choice can Promote Integration". I find it the most fascinating. On the second page, I highlighted a study of seating patterns at lunchroom tables. Private school students are almost twice as likely to sit in racially mixed groups in the lunchroom as public school students.

When unions fear money being drained from ISD schools, they are focused on a government monopoly school system; not on the students and how best to teach them. You often hear, "I don't want my tax dollars spent at religious schools." Two can play that game. "I don't want my tax dollars spent at schools that can't graduate 33% of their high school students."

When school choice supporters point out the problems in the public school system, it is almost reflex for public school teachers to take the criticism personally. Teachers, please understand that we are not criticizing you. We are criticizing the economic structure of a monopoly school system. School choice will improve academic achievement in Texas, but it will also do something much more important.

It will strengthen the health and unity of families in Texas. School choice will give parents authority over the educational environment of their children. It will give them ownership and involvement in their child's education. This ownership will encourage parents to be further involved in their child's education. The children will see parents as the educational authorities in their lives. The values at school will reflect the values at home. The student will not struggle with one set of values at home and another set at school. School choice is the best thing that can happen for every child in Texas.

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PRIVATE SCHOOLS EXCLUDE DIFFICULT STUDENTS

Vouchers don't just help the "average" student; they improve educational services even for the students who are hardest to teach. Private schools are not highly selective in their admissions; they exist to serve as many students as they can. And private schools are often better equipped to handle students with disabilities or other challenging students than public schools.

The Myth: Private Schools Exclude Difficult Students

Many people are under the impression that private schools are highly selective in accepting students. Private schools are widely thought to weed out the less desirable students and select only the cream of the crop. Because of this perception, many are concerned that vouchers will "cream" the best students from public schools, leaving them with the burden of teaching the more difficult students.

Students with disabilities present a particular area of concern. There is a widespread perception that private schools do not serve disabled students. Public schools maintain a large and costly bureaucracy whose purpose is to provide special education services, but this sort of administrative infrastructure is not as visible in private schools. As a result, many people believe that private schools do not offer special education services.

The Facts: Private Schools Are Not Highly Selective

Private schools exist to serve as many students as they can. That's their mission; helping students is what they were created to do. Also, private schools benefit when they maximize their enrollments. The available evidence does not support the perception that private schools are highly selective in admissions; it points to the conclusion that private schools seek a broad student base.

In particular, private schools serve disabled students better than public schools. While private schools do not usually have large and expensive special education bureaucracies, they do provide special education services. The empirical evidence indicates that private schools have a better track record of providing necessary special education services than public school special education system does.

The Evidence: Studies Refute Exclusion in Private Schools

The available evidence indicates that private schools are not highly selective. The best empirical study on this question compared students participating in voucher programs in New York, Washington D.C. and Dayton to representative samples of the general population. It found that there were no important differences between voucher applicants and the general population on a variety of demographic and academic factors. Evaluations of voucher programs in Charlotte and San Antonio showed similar results.¹

Moreover, some school choice programs, like the Milwaukee voucher program, require every participating private school to accept all voucher students. If the number of applicants exceeds the number of available slots at a school then students are chosen by random lottery. Yet these programs with "anti-creaming" provisions have a consistent track record of success.²

Meanwhile, contrary to widespread perception, public schools do not serve all students. Public high schools expel approximately 1 percent of their students each year. Another 0.6 percent of public high school students are placed in specialized schools, so

they are not served by their neighborhood public schools.³ Additionally, 1.5 percent of all disabled students in public schools are contracted out to private schools that can better handle their special needs.⁴

The evidence also indicates that private schools do a better job of serving disabled students than public schools. Over 21,000 students participate in voucher programs exclusively serving disabled students in Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Ohio and Utah.⁵ And that figure doesn't include disabled students participating in other school choice programs.

Though evaluating the academic achievement of disabled students is problematic, at least one study has compared special education services in public and private schools. An empirical evaluation of Florida's McKay voucher program, which allows any disabled student in public school to receive vouchers to attend private school, compared the services participants received in each of the two institutions.

Parents reported dramatically higher rates of satisfaction with their children's academic progress as well as fewer instances of victimization and behavior problems in private schools than public schools. For example, while two-thirds of families reported that public schools failed to provide all the special education services that they were required to provide by law, just 12 percent reported that private schools didn't provide services they promised to provide. And while 47 percent of all students were bothered often by other students because of their disability in public schools, and 25 percent had been physically assaulted there because of their disabilities, only 5 percent were bothered often and 6 percent assaulted in private schools.

Even families that no longer participated in voucher programs noted that private schools served them better than public schools. Over 90 percent said that the program should continue to serve other families, even though they were no longer using it themselves.⁶

The Bottom Line

Private schools are not highly selective, and offer better educational opportunities for students who are difficult to teach, including students with disabilities.

90%

... of families no longer using the McKay voucher program for disabled students say the program should continue for others.

21,169

... students participate in the nation's five voucher programs for disabled students.

³ William Howell and Paul Peterson, *The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools*, second edition, Brookings Institution, 2006, p. 61-65. For further evidence on this issue see Jay Greene, Greg Forster and Marcus Winters, *Education Myths*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2005, p. 162-164.

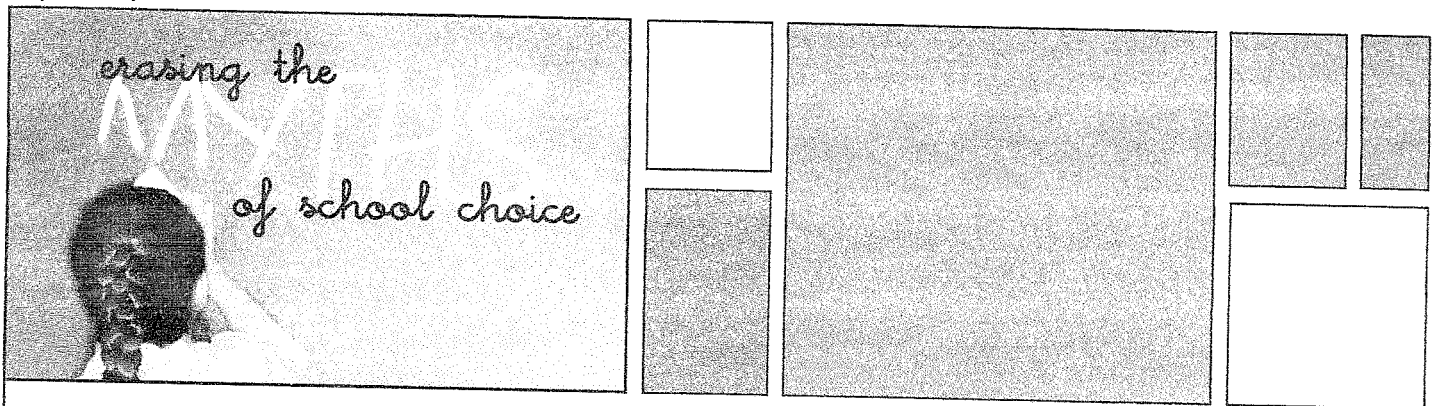
⁴ See the Friedman Foundation research review "Vouchers Deliver a Better Education" for more information.

⁵ Greene, Forster and Winters, *Education Myths*, p. 163-164.

⁶ Jay Greene and Marcus Winters, "Debunking a Special Education Myth," *Education Next*, spring 2007.

⁷ "The ABC's of School Choice," Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, 2007-08 edition.

⁸ Jay Greene and Greg Forster, "Vouchers for Special Education Students: An Evaluation of Florida's McKay Scholarship Program," Manhattan Institute, June 2003.



PRIVATE SCHOOLS ARE HOSTILE TO TOLERANCE AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Private schools do a better job of promoting civic values like tolerance and volunteerism to their students than public schools. Empirical research shows that students in private schools and in voucher programs are more likely to engage in political activities, volunteer in their communities, and be tolerant of the rights of others than students in public schools.

The Myth: Private Schools Are Hostile to Tolerance and Democratic Values

Many people believe that private schools, especially those operated by religious groups, fail to teach values like tolerance for others or the importance of civic duties. Opponents of school choice claim that voucher programs therefore undermine the values of democratic society and could even threaten social stability. One critic even told a state legislature that “voucher programs could end up resembling the ethnic cleansing . . . in Kosovo.”¹

Public schools, on the other hand, are perceived as institutions where children learn good civic values. Because public schools are government-run, many people assume that they must be more devoted to teaching the values of the community. As one social theorist put it: “Public schools are not merely schools for the public, but schools of publicness: institutions where we learn what it means to be a public.”² Often, public schools are described as the “foundation of democracy,” even though there were no public schools until the 19th century.

The Facts: Private Schools Do a Better Job of Instilling Civic Values

In reality, students at private schools are more tolerant of the rights of others, more likely to vote, and more likely to be volunteers than students at public schools. There are several possible reasons why private schools may be better at promoting democratic values. Research shows that private schools are simply better at teaching students than public schools; the same qualities that make them better at teaching subjects like math could also make them better at teaching values like tolerance.³ These schools may also provide a cultural base for students to develop and embrace their personal identities. Studies have shown that individuals who are secure with their cultural identities are more likely to tolerate those who belong to other cultures.⁴

Private schools also benefit from being legally permitted to have a point of view on controversial subjects, something that isn't permitted in public schools. This allows private schools to handle controversial issues in a more straightforward manner, and may help convey a tangible sense of what tolerance and civic duty require in practice. While it may seem counterintuitive that private schools would provide stronger democratic values, the empirical evidence supports the conclusion that vouchers would benefit the teaching of civic values to America's youth.

The Evidence: Studies Show Private School Students Are More Tolerant and Have a Greater Sense of Civic Duty

Patrick Wolf of the University of Arkansas conducted a systematic review of all empirical studies comparing civic values in public and private schools. Among 23 findings based on random assignment (using lotteries to admit applicants to voucher programs) or other highly rigorous methods, Wolf reports that 12 found better civic values in private schools, while 10 found no visible difference and only one found better civic values in public schools. Among

36 other, more basic findings, Wolf reports that 21 found private schools had better civic values, while 13 were neutral and two found better values in public schools.⁵

The most frequently studied issue was social tolerance; students were asked to identify their "most disliked" group and then asked whether members of that group should be allowed to hold public rallies, have books in the library sympathetic to their views, etc. Wolf reports that among 21 analyses of the effects of private schooling on tolerance, 11 showed benefits to private education, while nine were inconclusive and one showed benefits to public schools.

Regarding political participation, Wolf identifies six findings, five of which found a significant increase in political activity as a result of private schooling, while the other study was inconclusive. Wolf also reports on 14 analyses of volunteerism between public and private schools. Eight of these showed benefits from private schools, five showed no visible effect, and one found a benefit from public schools. A similar pattern emerges across findings on other subjects.

Some critics claim that these effects can be attributed to Catholic schooling, and therefore cannot be expected at all private schools. To address this concern, Wolf conducted a separate analysis excluding studies that focus exclusively on Catholic schools or on Latinos (who predominantly attend Catholic schools). This left 45 findings on civic values; 22 of which found a private school advantage, 20 of which found no visible difference, and three of which found that public schools have an advantage in teaching civic values.

The Bottom Line

Empirical research shows that private schools and voucher programs improve democratic values. By enabling students to attend private schools, vouchers help increase the importance of tolerance and civic duty among America's youth.

STUDIES COMPARING CIVIC VALUES IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS

| Subject | Studies Finding a Private School Advantage | Studies Finding No Difference | Studies Finding a Public School Advantage |
|-------------------------|--|-------------------------------|---|
| Tolerance | 11 | 9 | 1 |
| Volunteerism | 8 | 5 | 1 |
| Political Participation | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| Other | 7 | 3 | 0 |
| Total | 31 | 19 | 2 |

EMPIRICAL STUDIES FINDING . . .

| | Private Schools or Voucher Programs | No Visible Difference | Better Civic Values in Public Schools |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Top Quality Studies | 12 | 6 | 1 |
| All Empirical Studies | 31 | 19 | 2 |

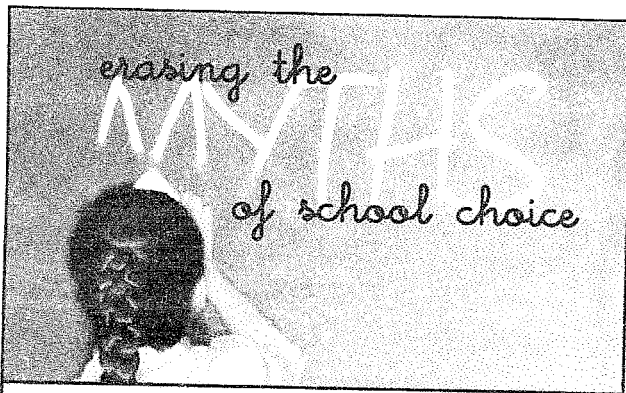
¹ David Berliner, quoted in *EIA Communicator*, Educational Intelligence Agency, May 10, 1999.

² Benjamin R. Barber, "Education for Democracy," *The Good Society*, Spring 1997, p.1.

³ See the Friedman Foundation research review "Vouchers Deliver a Better Education" for more information.

⁴ John L. Sullivan, James Pierson, and George F. Marcus, *Political Tolerance and American Democracy*, University of Chicago Press, 1982.

⁵ Patrick Wolf, "Civics Exam," *Education Next*, Summer 2007.



VOUCHERS WILL LEAD TO INCREASED SEGREGATION

Private schools in voucher programs are less racially segregated than their public school counterparts. Vouchers break down neighborhood barriers and draw students together; providing a more integrated school experience. The empirical research shows that vouchers put students into less segregated schools.

The Myth: Vouchers Will Lead to Increased Segregation

Opponents often claim that vouchers will lead to racial segregation. They argue that white parents would use vouchers to choose segregated schools. Many believe that private schools create a segregated environment compared to public schools, and perpetuate a system of inequality.

Unfortunately, some research uses flawed methods to measure segregation. Under one common research method, a school that is 98 percent white is considered perfectly integrated if it is in a school district that is also 98 percent white. This is regarded as complete integration even if its neighboring district is 98 percent minority. Researcher Jay Greene sums up this method best: "The schools are well integrated, given that they are horribly segregated."

For some, the idea of vouchers leading to racial segregation dates back to southern segregationists in the 1950s. Then, educational vouchers were briefly viewed as a way to maintain segregation in the classroom. Though the idea quickly fizzled out, the stigma that vouchers will divide schools by race continues in the minds of many Americans.

The Facts: Private Schools Break Down Racial Barriers

The modern school choice movement has no connection to segregationists—quite the contrary. School choice is now disproportionately a minority-supported issue.¹ Private schools in voucher programs are required not to discriminate. And if this historically fleeting association is a justification for rejecting vouchers, then we might as well oppose highways because Hitler built the autobahn.

Public schools are heavily segregated. In the current government school system, school attendance is determined by where students live. As a result, it is difficult for public schools to avoid reproducing the segregation that arises from housing patterns. Efforts to desegregate public schools, such as busing students to different districts or the establishment of magnet schools, are unpopular with families and have been unsuccessful in substantially reducing racial segregation in public schools. As a result, it seems unlikely that desegregation will be a reality in public schools in the near future.

While public schools must adhere to district lines, private schools are able to draw from a much wider range of students. And parents are more likely to trust private schools to handle the challenges of a multiracial environment; federal data confirm that racial disruptions are less common in private schools than in public ones.² This gives private schools an opportunity to create a more diverse student body. Indeed, studies have shown that private schools are pulling ahead of public schools when it comes to integration.

The Evidence: Research Shows Private Schools in Voucher Programs are Less Segregated than Public

In order to get an accurate measurement of segregation in schools, segregation must be defined in a way that measures the racial composition of the school by an objective standard. One method is to compare each school to its metropolitan area rather than

to its district or municipality (which may itself be drawn with segregated boundaries). Another method is to measure racial homogeneity—for example, measuring the percentage of schools that are at least 90 percent white or minority. Research based on these methods shows that private schools in voucher programs are less racially homogenous and more closely resemble their metro areas than public schools.

In Cleveland, 19 percent of voucher recipients attended schools that fell within ten percentage points of the racial makeup of the metropolitan area. Only 5 percent of public schools met this criterion. Furthermore, 61 percent of public school students attended racially homogenous schools, compared to only 50 percent of private school students.³

In Milwaukee's public schools, 58 percent of elementary school and 44 percent of secondary school students attend racially homogenous schools. At participating private schools, this number was reduced to 50 percent, and 29 percent, respectively.⁴

In Washington D.C., 85 percent of public school students attend racially homogenous schools, while 47 percent of students at participating private schools.⁵

More recently, Greg Forster of the Friedman Foundation calculated a "segregation index" by measuring the difference between the racial composition of each school and the racial composition of the area's school-age population. Using these data, he used statistical analysis to compare segregation levels between voucher-participating private schools and public schools. He found that these results showed less segregation in private schools. In Milwaukee, private schools were 13 points less segregated than public ones. In Cleveland, the difference was an 18-point drop in segregation from public to private schools.

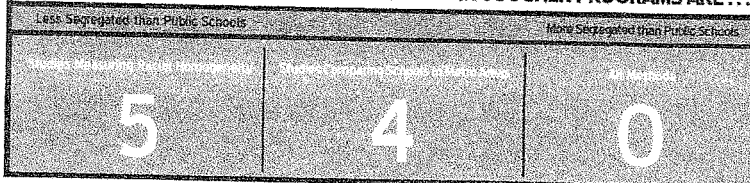
The Bottom Line

Public schools are heavily segregated because they reproduce segregated housing patterns. Empirical research shows that vouchers break down racial barriers, putting students in less segregated schools.

STUDIES COMPARING SEGREGATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND IN VOUCHER PROGRAMS

| Authors | City | Year | Student Group |
|------------------------|-----------------|------|---|
| Fuller & Mitchell | Milwaukee | 2000 | Public elementary students were more likely than students in participating Catholic elementary schools to be in racially homogenous schools (64 v. 38 percent). |
| Greene | Cleveland | 2005 | Public elementary students who were less likely than elementary and middle school voucher recipients to attend schools with racial composition similar to that of the metro area (19 v. 27 percent), the public school students were also more likely than voucher recipients to attend racially homogenous schools (61 v. 50 percent). |
| Fuller & Mitchell | Milwaukee | 2000 | Public school students were more likely than students in participating private schools to be in racially homogenous schools in both elementary schools (58 v. 50 percent) and secondary schools (44 v. 29 percent). |
| Fuller & Greiveldinger | Milwaukee | 2002 | Public school students were more likely than students in participating private schools to be in racially homogenous schools in both elementary schools (58 v. 50 percent) and secondary schools (44 v. 29 percent). |
| Greene & Winters | Washington D.C. | 2005 | Public schools differed from the racial composition of the metro area by a smaller amount on average than participating private schools (40 v. 47 percentage points), while voucher students were more likely than students in participating private schools to attend racially homogenous schools (43 v. 47 percent). |
| Forster | Milwaukee | 2007 | Public schools score higher than participating private schools on an index of segregation by 13 points (each point is equal to one percentage point difference between the schools' percent white and the metro area's percent white). |
| Forster | Cleveland | 2007 | Public schools score higher than participating private schools on an index of segregation by 18 points (each point is equal to one percentage point difference between the schools' percent white and the metro area's percent white). |

EMPIRICAL STUDIES FINDING PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN VOUCHER PROGRAMS ARE ...



¹ See "The ABCs of School Choice," The Friedman Foundation for School Choice, p. 60-62.

² See Jay P. Greene, "Civic Values in Public and Private Schools," in Learning from School Choice, p. 99.

³ Jay Greene, "The Racial, Economic and Religious Context of Parental Choice in Cleveland," paper presented at the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management meeting, November 1999.

⁴ Howard Fuller and Deborah Greiveldinger, "The Impact of School Choice on Racial Integration in Milwaukee Private Schools," American Education Reform Council manuscript, August 2002.

⁵ Jay Greene and Marcus Winters, "An Evaluation of the Effects of D.C.'s Voucher Program on public School Achievement and Racial Integration After One Year," Manhattan Institute, January 2005.