Impact of School Choice on Standardized Test Scores and the Achievement Gap

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Undergraduate Research Expo 2022
April 13, 2022
So, what is school choice? What is the history? Why is it controversial?

School Choice

- A program in which students are given their choice of school to attend, outside their neighborhood public school
- First introduced in America in the 1950s and 1960s as part of massive resistance to desegregation
- Controversy stems from a financial perspective, as programs utilize tax credits, which drain money from underserved public schools
  - These programs can install various fees that help to further fund the school

What is the achievement gap?

- The disparity in academic performance between groups of students, notably students from higher-income and lower-income households
- Shows up in grades, standardized-test scores, dropout rates, among other success measures
Methods

Lamar University Library Journal

Google Scholar

15 Journal articles, 2010-2021


Keywords

“School choice” + “attainment,” “Private school vs. public school,” “Public schools + test scores,” “Private schools+ test scores,” “Achievement gap + private school + public school,” “Effects of a private school on test scores,” “Effects of a private school on the achievement gap,” “Effects of public school on test scores,” & “Effects of public school on the achievement gap.”
Methods & Research Questions

- An exploratory study based on existing literature.
- Analyzed each article for correspondence and contradictions to hypothesis.
- Studies that contradicted the goal of the research were assessed to identify the difference.
- The study addresses the following research objectives:
  1) Identify the impact school choice has on test scores.
  2) Identify the impact school choice has on the achievement gap.

*Hypothesis:* School choice programs have a positive impact on test scores, thus, consequently a negative impact on the achievement gap.
Findings

Impact of school choice programs on test scores

- CTE schools had positive and significant impacts on ELA and math scores
- Impact of charter schools on language arts and math results was considerable and beneficial
- Private high school students, overall, scored higher on academic examinations
The average test score is higher in school choice programs compared to public schools.

Findings

Impact of School Choice on the Achievement Gap

Before analyzing the impact, it is important to understand the demographics and requirements of school choice programs.

• Unlike public schools, school choice programs can instill monetary requirements.
• There is a strong correlation between family SES and students attending school choice programs.
  ◦ Affluent families who send their children to private schools are less interested in devoting efforts to advocate for better public schools
School choice programs attract families with higher income, allowing those students to be more academically prepared.

Findings

Impact of School Choice on the Achievement Gap

School choice programs have a significant, negative impact on the socioeconomic achievement gap.

- High-SES families are more able to afford education provided by school choice programs
- As such, these students continue to excel while students unable to afford school choice programs continue to be underserved
  - Thus, the socioeconomic achievement gap widens
School choice programs had greater levels of educational attainment by age 23 than public high school students.

Implications

- Differences are direct result of public schools' lack of resources
- The sole dependence on public money results in widespread underfunding in public schools
- These programs have greater access to a variety of resources
  - Resources create a positive impact on test scores
    - Contributes to the achievement gap, as private institutions and families with higher SES continue to be better positioned to succeed academically.
    - Public institutions and low-income families, on the other hand, are continually underserved and left behind in the fight against inequity.
## Recommendations & Future Studies

### Recommendations

- It is vital we support our public schools.
- The lack of support in public education directly translates to a lack of support in families with a lower-SES background.
- Without the proper support, we allow families to become further victims of systemic/generational poverty.  
  *What does this support look like?*
- Ensuring equitable access to resources is provided.
- Establishing a need-based funding program that better supports schools who are under-served.

### Future Studies

- Our research was strictly based on published literature. We recommend further studies in this domain to further assess the extent to which school choice programs impact test scores and the achievement gap.
Selected References


Thank you!

I would like to give a special thank you to my mentor, Dr. Singh. I would also like to thank Dr. Bahrim and Ms. Jenna and the OUR Department for their support and opportunity to conduct this research project!