

**AN EVALUATION
OF THE CLEVELAND VOUCHER PROGRAM
AFTER TWO YEARS**

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(Executive Summary)

In 1996 the Cleveland Scholarship Program (CSP) provided scholarships to 1,996 students in grades kindergarten through grade three who came from low-income families. Students could use these scholarships at any participating Cleveland private school, secular or religious. The program continued into the 1996-97 and 1997-98 school years. Approximately 3,000 students participated in the program in its second year and 3,674 students in the third year. This evaluation reports the results from a survey undertaken during the summer and fall of 1998. This survey collected information from random samples of two groups:

1. parents of children in grades 1 to 4 who previously had been attending a public school but switched to a private school with a CSP scholarship;
2. parents of children who had attended public schools in grades 1-4 during the 1997-98 school year.

The evaluation also reports test-score results for students attending the Hope schools, two private schools established in response to the creation of CSP.

The main findings from the evaluation are as follows:

- Parents of voucher recipients were more satisfied with many aspects of their school than were parents of students in Cleveland public schools. Nearly half of the parents in choice schools reported being "very satisfied" with the academic program of their child's school, as compared to less than 30 percent of public-school parents. Half of the scholarship parents were "very satisfied" with school safety, as compared to just over 30 percent of public-school parents. With respect to school discipline, about half of the scholarship parents were very satisfied, versus only a quarter of public-school parents. The differences in satisfaction rates were also large when parents were asked about the teachers' skills, the teaching of moral values, and class size.
- Test score results in mathematics and reading show substantial gains for CSP students attending the two Hope schools, which were established in response to the creation of CSP. Between the fall of 1996 and the spring of 1998, these students, on average, gained relative to the national norm 7 percentile points on the reading test and 15 percentile points in math. The bulk of these improvements occurred during the program's first year – although no incremental gains were observed in year two, initial gains were maintained.
- Parents of voucher recipients report lower levels of disruption in their child's school. For example, only 12 percent of the parents of voucher recipients report fighting as a problem at their child's school, whereas 27 percent of public-school parents say this is a problem. Racial conflict is said to be a problem by 10 percent of the public-school parents but only 5 percent of the voucher parents. Similarly, 13 percent of public-school parents, but just 3 percent of voucher parents, claimed that vandalism was a problem at their child's school.

- Public-school parents report just as high levels of involvement in school activities and the education of their children at home as do the parents of scholarship recipients.
- School mobility rates among voucher recipients and students in Cleveland public schools were statistically indistinguishable from one another. Ninety-six per cent of the parents of public-school students, and 92 percent of parents of voucher recipients, reported that their children had remained in the same school throughout the 1997-98 school year. Seventy-nine percent of the scholarship parents and 77 percent of the public-school parents said their children would attend the same school next year.
- Voucher recipients were more likely to be African American. They also were economically more disadvantaged than the average public-school family; they had lower incomes, were more likely to be single parent families, and less likely to have their children in a program for gifted students. In other respects, however, voucher recipients were more advantaged than most families in Cleveland public schools. Mothers of voucher recipients had more education, attended religious services more frequently, and were less likely to have a child in a special education program.

CSP is the first program in the country to offer state-funded scholarships that can be used at both secular and religious private schools. CSP scholarships covered up to 90 percent of a school's tuition, or a maximum of \$2,250, the balance coming from the child's family or another private source. The maximum amount provided about a third the per pupil cost of Cleveland public schools, which in 1997 was reported to be \$6,507.

The Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance issued a report on the first year of the CSP in the fall of 1997, which was subsequently published in revised form by the Brookings Institution Press in 1998. (Jay P. Greene, William G. Howell, and Paul E. Peterson, "Lessons from the Cleveland Scholarship Program," in Paul E. Peterson and Bryan C. Hassel, eds., *Learning from School Choice*.) This document reports the results from a follow-up evaluation undertaken at the end of CSP's second year.

Based on the information contained in this report, the authors recommend that the Cleveland Scholarship Program should be continued and expanded by the State of Ohio.