

# PROGRAM ON EDUCATION POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

A joint program of the Taubman Center for State and Local Government, Kennedy School of Government, and Center for American Political Studies, Department of Government, Harvard University



Photo by Ericka McConnell

## 1998-99 Annual Report

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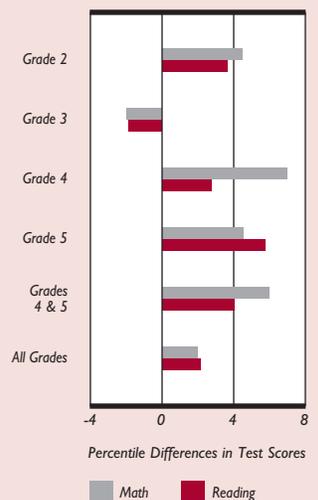
*First Rigorous Evidence on School Choice Shows Largest Gains for Older Students*

Low-income New York City students in grades two through five who received privately funded vouchers to attend private schools scored higher in math and reading tests than a control group of students after one year, according to a new study conducted by the Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG).

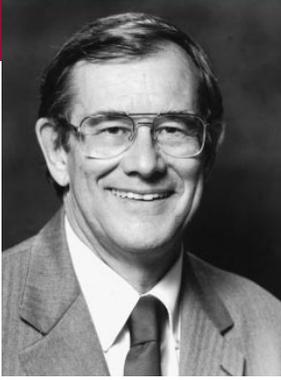
Overall, differences in test scores between the two groups were modest—around two percentile points in each subject. Larger differences, however, were observed for fourth and fifth graders—four percentile points in reading and six points in math.

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### Effects of School Choice on Test Scores



## Director's Note



The need for serious research on educational governance is as urgent as it has ever been.

Just a few decades ago, U.S. elementary and high schools led those of the rest of the world in just about every way that could be counted—graduation

rates, per-pupil expenditures, teacher-pupil ratios, and so on. But in recent decades, other countries have caught up and even surpassed the United States, despite its status as the only remaining superpower. High-school graduation rates, unsurpassed in the 1950s, have now fallen behind those of Germany, France, Canada, and others.

The problems in American schools accelerate as students “progress” through school. At age nine, U.S. children are better skilled in reading and math than they were a couple of decades ago. But beginning in the middle years of elementary school, their performance slips. To all appearances, the slide is even steeper during high-school years.

Since its founding in 1996, the Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG) has striven to better understand these trends so that they may be reversed. This report summarizes how we are pursuing our mission and describes how to obtain PEPG-related books, papers, and reports.

We are particularly proud that PEPG-related activities have culminated in six books on subjects that include school-choice programs, tracking, the black-white test-score gap and urban school reform.

PEPG is also issuing evaluations on school-voucher experiments underway in New York City, Washington, DC, Dayton, Ohio, and San Antonio, Texas. The importance of our research was underscored in 1998 by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to let stand a Wisconsin court ruling that found the Milwaukee voucher program was constitutional. Now that the courts have upheld the constitutionality of vouchers, it is important that we ascertain their effectiveness.

PEPG's first comprehensive examination of vouchers in New York City indicates that the program is producing positive results. But more work needs to be done. In addition to the PEPG studies now underway, it is important that Congress and the states sponsor large-scale evaluations of voucher programs so that we can assess whether vouchers can fulfill their promise on a greater scale.

In all of this work—and in other projects discussed in this report—our primary goal is to conduct high-quality research on the importance of educational achievement and how governance can bring this about. After reading this report, I hope you will agree that we are we are moving toward that goal.

**Paul E. Peterson**

## Program on Education Policy and Governance

Paul E. Peterson, *Director*

Jay Greene, *Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Texas at Austin*

Frederick Hess, *Assistant Professor of Education and Government, University of Virginia*

Caroline Minter Hoxby, *Associate Professor of Economics, Harvard University*

Christopher Jencks, *Professor of Social Policy, Harvard University*

Richard Light, *Professor of Education, Harvard University*

Tom Loveless, *Associate Professor of Public Policy, Harvard University*

Susan Mayer, *Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Chicago*

Meredith Phillips, *Assistant Professor of Policy Studies, University of California, Los Angeles*

Donald Rubin, *Professor of Statistics, Harvard University*

Bryan C. Hassel, *Research Associate*

William Howell, *Research Associate*

Shelley Weiner, *Program Administrator*

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### **Program on Education Policy and Governance**

Kennedy School of Government

Harvard University, Room T-308

79 JFK Street, Cambridge, MA 02138

Phone: (617) 495-7976 Fax: (617) 496-4428

Email: PEPG@latte.harvard.edu Web: <http://data.fas.harvard.edu/pepg/>

*Report Editor:* David Luberoff

*Designer:* Robert Levers

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# Closing the Black-White Test-Score Gap

By Christopher Jencks and  
Meredith Phillips

In a country as racially polarized as the United States, no single change taken in isolation could possibly eliminate the entire legacy of slavery and Jim Crow or usher in an era of full racial equality. But if racial equality is America's goal, reducing the black-white test-score gap probably would do more to promote this goal than any other politically plausible strategy.

African-Americans score lower than European Americans on vocabulary, reading, and math tests, as well as on tests that claim to measure scholastic aptitude and intelligence. This gap appears before children enter kindergarten, and it persists into adulthood. It has narrowed since 1970, but the median American black still scores below 75 percent of American whites on most standardized tests.

**Reducing the black-white test-score gap probably would do more to promote racial equality than any other politically plausible strategy.**

Reducing that gap would reduce substantially racial inequality in educational attainment and earnings—and in much that flows from them.

A generation ago, we could make no such assumption. At that time, black men with test scores above the national average earned less than two-thirds of what whites earned.

By 1993, however, black men who scored above the national average on a military aptitude test earned only 4 percent less than whites with similar scores. In this new world, raising black workers' test scores looks far more important.

Advocates of racial equality might be more willing to accept our argument that narrowing the test-score gap is crucial to achieving their goals if they believed that narrowing the gap was really feasible. But pessimism on this front has become almost universal.

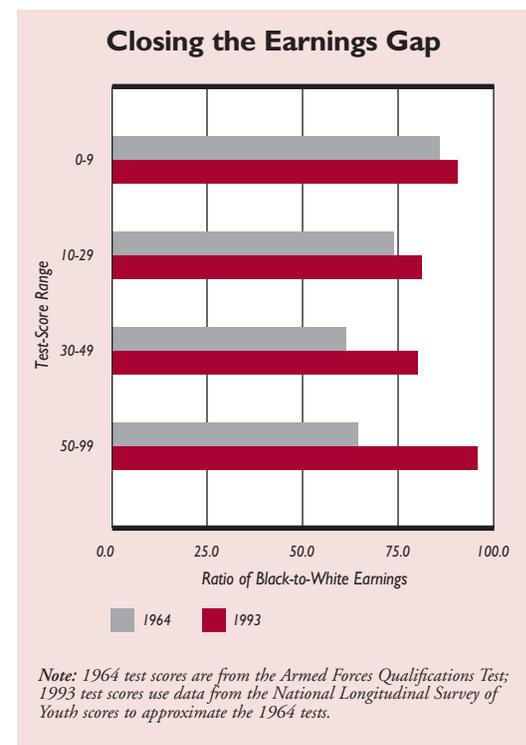
In the 1960s, racial egalitarians routinely blamed the test-score gap on the combined effects of black poverty and racial segregation. Experience since then has demonstrated that the gap shrinks only a little when black and white children attend the same schools. It shrinks only a little when black and white families have the same amount of schooling, the same income, and the same wealth.

But this does not mean that the black-white test-score gap is an inevitable fact of nature. Despite endless speculation, no one has found genetic evidence indicating that blacks have less innate intellectual ability than whites. Thus, while it is clear that eliminating the test-score gap would require enormous effort by both blacks and whites and probably would take more than one generation, we believe it can be done.

This conviction rests mainly on two facts:

First, IQ and achievement scores do respond to environmental change. Scores on IQ tests have risen dramatically throughout the world since the 1930s. The average white scored higher on the Stanford-Binet test in 1978 than 82 percent of whites who took the test in 1932.

Second, black-white differences in academic achievement have, in fact, narrowed through the 20th century. The best data come from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which has been testing 17-year-olds since 1971. From 1971 to 1996, the black-white reading gap shrank by almost half and the math gap by a third.



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# Test-Score Gap

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The United States should be conducting large-scale experiments to discover how to reduce the gap further—tests to find out exactly what are the effects of schools' racial mix, class size, teachers' test scores, ability grouping, and many other education strategies. We do such experiments to determine the effects of different medical treatments, different job training programs, and other social interventions.

But the U.S. Department of Education has shown almost no interest in this approach. The most important piece of educational research in the past generation, the Tennessee class size experiment, showed that small classes in the early grades made a big difference, especially for blacks—yet it was funded by the Tennessee legislature, not the U.S. Department of Education. Experimental assessments of other educational policies have been almost nonexistent.

We do not have a blueprint for reducing the black-white test-score gap. No one does. This is partly because researchers have devoted far less attention to the test-score gap over the past quarter century than its political and social consequences warranted. Most social scientists have chosen safer topics and hoped the problem would go away. It didn't.

We can do better.

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*Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips co-edited The Black-White Test Score Gap, a collection of essays that is available from the Brookings Institution Press.*

# Do Teacher Unions Aid Education Reform?

*In September 1998, the Program on Education Policy and Governance sponsored a national conference titled, "Teacher Unions and Educational Reform." The following article on the conference appeared in Education Week.*

*By Jeff Archer*

Teachers unions are a popular topic for debate in political circles, but they rarely are subjected to scrutiny by academics. So when a group of researchers met at Harvard University to take a scholarly look at the role teacher organizations play in school reform, many felt they were entering virgin territory.

"Everyone has an opinion on teachers organizations, but we really don't know very much about them," said [PEPG's] Tom Loveless who, along with Paul Peterson, led the conference. "There's very little empirical evidence as to what their impact on education really is," Loveless added.

Joining some two dozen university professors from across the country were representatives of the two national teachers unions and district administrators. The discussion showed that even academics have trouble reaching a consensus about teachers unions.

## Differing Views

In an analysis of teacher contracts in 11 districts throughout the country, Susan Moore Johnson, a professor at Harvard's Graduate School of Education, offered a relatively optimistic perspective. Six of the agreements could either be considered "reform contracts" or reflected some willingness by teachers to work collaboratively with administrators and share responsibility for improving student



Photo by Lydia May

*James Cibulka, University of Maryland; PEPG Director Paul Peterson; Bruce Cooper, Fordham University; Chester Finn, Jr., Fordham Foundation; Howard Fuller, Marquette University; and Ronald Henderson, National Education Association.*



*Robert Chase, president of the National Education Association, addressing the PEPG conference on Teacher Unions and Educational Reform.*

performance, she said. All of the rest were industrial-style contracts that offered little flexibility, Ms. Johnson concluded.

“The general, conventional wisdom about teachers unions is that they’re bad, they slow things down,” Ms. Johnson said. “And yet when you go to these districts, you see it’s more complicated than that. In many places, they are the ones pushing for reforms.”

But a separate paper critiquing the contract in Milwaukee painted the picture of an agreement that left little room for educational innovation.

In fact, over the past three decades, the district’s contract has grown from about 17 pages to 174, said Howard Fuller, the director of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Milwaukee’s Marquette University and a former superintendent of the city’s schools.

Mr. Fuller said the increasing strength of the teachers unions has coincided with gains in per-pupil spending and with a drop in student-teacher ratios. But overall, he said, the collective-bargaining process there has worked at odds with school reform. “It is the contract that is the central most defining document that will determine what will and what will not happen in a district,” he argued.

### **Power Shifts**

Many participants agreed that teachers unions’ ability to shape policy has changed in recent years, but some disagreed about whether they’re getting stronger or weaker.

For example, a case study of the Michigan and Pennsylvania state teachers unions concluded that after two decades of successfully pushing for better salaries and working conditions, the unions find themselves defensively fending off school-choice initiatives and efforts to rein in their strength at the state and local levels. In both states, the study found, activist Republican governors have successfully pushed their own education agenda by either ignoring the teachers unions or exploiting a public perception that unions stand in the way of reform.

“Both the governors and the unions have an incentive to fight,” said David Plank, one of the study’s authors and a professor at Michigan State University.

But another paper suggested that the unions are gaining an even greater influence as they work more on professional issues at the national level. Through their role in such bodies as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, the unions are helping to set high standards and to determine who can become a teacher, said Dale Ballou, an economics professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He predicted that such efforts produce greater teacher shortages and a push for higher salaries.

*Reprinted with permission from Education Week. Vol. 18, No. 6, October 7, 1998.*

## **Effects of Collective Bargaining**

Collective bargaining in public schools:

- Increases teachers’ pay
- Provides better fringe benefits
- Improves teachers’ working conditions
- Creates more job protection
- Reduces diversity in instructional methods
- Increases instructional costs
- Increases average students’ test scores
- Reduces low- and high-ability students’ test scores
- Increases high-school dropout rates

*Source: Joe Stone, “Collective Bargaining and Public Schools: A Critical Survey of the Evidence,” a paper presented at PEPG’s Conference on Teacher Unions and Educational Reform that is available on request.*

# The Tracking Debate

By Tom Loveless

Would low-income and minority students be helped if schools eliminated tracking—the policy of grouping students with other students of similar ability?

Prominent researchers and prestigious organizations—including the Carnegie Corporation and the NAACP—have made this claim, arguing that minority and low-income students are disproportionately assigned to lower tracks, where they learn less than they would have learned in untracked classes. Several states—including California, Massachusetts, and Nevada—have encouraged middle and high schools to end tracking and to group students of varying abilities in the same academic classes.

Yet surveys also show solid support for tracking among teachers, students, and parents (including African-American parents). And across the country when local school districts have moved to reduce or eliminate the use of tracking, they often turn otherwise placid communities into hotbeds of controversy.

## In Support of Tracking

Despite the passionate advocacy for and against tracking, the more than 700 studies of tracking in existence do not provide convincing evidence that tracking has a negative effect on the achievement of African-American, Latino, or economically disadvantaged students. In fact, the most recent studies—which often draw on data from two national surveys that have followed tens of thousands of students in the 1980s and 1990s—offer three significant findings that generally support tracking policies.

First, high-track students learn significantly more than low-track students, even when researchers control for prior achievement and other pertinent influences on achievement.

The magnitude of the difference is striking—on average, outweighing even the achievement difference between the student who stays in school until the senior year and the student who drops out.

Second, race and tracking are only weakly related. Indeed, after controlling for prior achievement and test scores, black students are overrepresented in high tracks, which means that black students may suffer if tracking is abolished.

Third, recent research strongly suggests that while detracking may narrow the gap between high and low achievers, it does so in part by lowering test scores for high-achieving and average students. Moreover, researchers at Johns Hopkins University found that all students in heterogeneously grouped algebra classes, including the lowest-ability students, did not learn as much as students of all abilities in tracked algebra classes.

**The data do not support the charge that tracking is inherently harmful.**

The data, therefore, do not support the charge that tracking is inherently harmful, and there is no clear evidence showing that abandoning tracking for heterogeneously grouped classes would provide a better education for any student. However, except for high-achieving students, the data also do not support the claim that tracking benefits most students or that heterogeneous grouping significantly depresses achievement.

## Principles for Future Policymaking

Given the inconclusive evidence, three principles should guide future policymaking on tracking. First, individual schools, not the courts, state legislatures, or state education officials, must have the latitude to make decisions about the best way to educate students, including whether tracking or heterogeneous grouping works best for their pupils. Second, tracked schools must ensure that tracking works well for all students, particularly low-track students. Third, with untracked schools now in greater abundance, well-designed studies—particularly those that assign students at random to tracked and untracked schools—should be conducted to assess whether detracked schools can deliver on the promise of both equity and high achievement or whether tracked schools can provide a good education for all their students.

Photo by Marsha Stewart



*Tom Loveless is the author of The Tracking Wars: State Reform Meets School Policy, a forthcoming book on the politics of tracking from the Brookings Institution Press.*

# The Unintended Consequences of School-Finance Reform

Since 1970, 32 states have passed laws designed to equalize per-pupil school spending in poor and rich school districts. In a new working paper, Caroline M. Hoxby notes that such programs often produce negative unintended consequences.

The programs—which were sometimes ordered by state courts and sometimes passed by legislatures acting on their own initiative—generally take two forms. Some provide “carrots”—extra state aid to ensure that all school districts meet some minimum amount of spending. Others use “sticks”—limits or restrictions on how much localities can spend above state-mandated minimums.

The different schemes can have dramatically different effects. Hoxby finds, for example, that “carrot” schemes never fully equalize spending because that would require massive increases in state spending, which would require politically unpalatable increases in income and sales taxes. In contrast, schemes that use “sticks” can equalize spending because they usually redistribute property-tax revenues from richer to poorer communities.

The latter programs, however, generally achieve that equality by reducing overall statewide per-pupil expenditures because they make it difficult, if not impossible,

**Some programs designed to equalize spending in rich and poor school districts actually reduce total spending in poorer school districts.**

for communities to spend more than state-mandated minimums on education. In their most stringent form, as in California and New Mexico, these limits can

even reduce total per-pupil spending in poorer school districts. The data suggest, moreover, that stringent school finance equalization programs do not improve student test scores and that they increase dropout rates.

In addition, because such programs make it nearly impossible for some communities to express their preference for more spending on schools, they generally lead to higher enrollments in private schools and depressed house prices in more affluent communities.

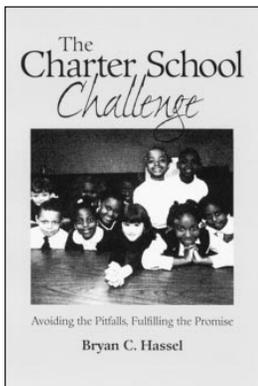


Photo by Lydia Akry

Caroline M. Hoxby, Associate Professor of Economics, Harvard University

*For more information on the effects of school finance equalization programs, see “All School Finance Equalizations Are Not Created Equal,” a PEPG working paper that is available on request.*

## The Charter School Challenge



Because they appear to sidestep both political stalemate and the practical difficulty of implementing widespread change—the traditional barriers to improvement in American public education—charter schools hold great promise as an

educational reform. Consequently, they have become a national phenomenon—with laws allowing their establishment now on the books in more than 30 states.

Despite widespread praise for charter schools, established groups—such as teacher unions, state education officials, and local school boards—generally have resisted passage of laws allowing charter schools; when unable to stop those laws entirely, these groups have moved to water them down. In some states, for example, local school boards must approve new charter-school applications—a policy that makes it difficult for charter schools to be truly independent or innovative.

In *The Charter School Challenge: Avoiding the Pitfalls, Fulfilling the Promise*, a book to be published later this year, Bryan C. Hassel investigates the extent of these obstacles. After providing a broad overview of how charter laws have been adopted nationwide, Hassel examines charter-school policymaking in Colorado, Georgia, Massachusetts, and Michigan. He then reviews implementation of charter laws in the four states.

In general, charter-school officials reported considerable autonomy, but found themselves constrained financially because of high start-up costs, unfunded facilities expenses, and a lack of economies of scale. In addition, Hassel found a mixed picture concerning the reform's potential for positive impacts on the broader education system. He found, for example, that school districts often respond negatively to the presence of charters, directing their energies toward making life difficult for the new schools rather than toward improving their own offerings. Finally, Hassel offers policy recommendations for legislatures adopting or amending charter-school laws. The proposed policies, he notes, would

increase charter schools' autonomy, provide them with sufficient resources, and enhance their potential to have a positive influence on district-run schools.

*The Charter School Challenge: Avoiding the Pitfalls, Fulfilling the Promise will be available from the Brookings Institution Press.*

## The Politics of Urban School Reform

Almost everyone agrees that America's urban schools are in trouble. But while this agreement has fostered widespread support for aggressive school reform, much of what ails urban education is actually the result of too much reform, not too little, argues Frederick Hess in his new book, *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform*.



Hess, who studied reform efforts in 57 urban school districts, explains that political incentives drive school superintendents to promote change—to demonstrate that they are “making a difference.”

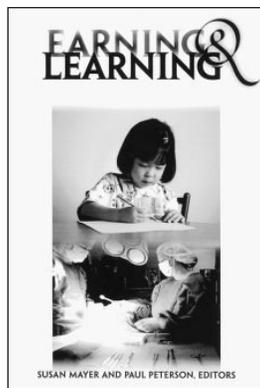
According to Hess, superintendents have to act quickly, both because their tenure is usually three years or less and because urban communities are eager to see educational improvement. As a result, the typical urban district launched a significant new reform approximately every three months, a phenomenon that Hess calls “policy churn.”

Such rapid change, particularly in hard-to-manage urban school districts, makes it difficult to demonstrate short-term improvements. Instead, the rapid succession of reforms distracts teachers and principals from meaningful efforts to refine classroom teaching while seldom resulting in successful long-term changes. In fact, Hess argues, policymakers' pursuit of the “right” structure or the “best” pedagogy has drawn valuable resources away from the more mundane—and important—questions of how to implement, refine, and sustain a particular approach in their particular district.

Hess explains that previous research on high-performing schools suggests that the best schools are characterized by focused, long-term leadership and an ability to develop expertise in specific approaches to teaching and learning. Rather than look to reformers and consultants who promote “new and improved” remedies for educational problems, Hess argues, policymakers need to make institutional and organizational changes that can cultivate such disciplined leadership.

*Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform* is available from the Brookings Institution Press.

## Earning and Learning: How Schools Matter



Education is one of the largest sectors of the U.S. economy—yet scholars, educators, policymakers, and parents do not agree about what the money spent on education really buys. In particular, they disagree over how much education improves children's ability to learn and whether the things children learn in school truly improve their chances for success as adults. If schooling increases how much students know and what they know does pay off later, then it is important to ask what schools can do to increase students' learning and earning.

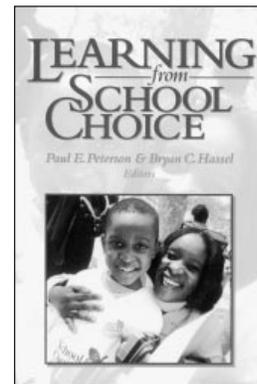
*Earning and Learning: How Schools Matter*, a forthcoming book of essays co-edited by Susan Mayer and Paul E. Peterson that grew out of a PEPG-sponsored conference on Meritocracy and Inequality, examines many of these questions. In particular, the essays examine how the amount of schooling and school quality affect earnings and other life outcomes. They also explore the effect on learning of particular aspects of schooling, for example, the age at which children begin school, classroom size, and curriculum or structural reform—such as national or statewide examinations and school choice. Surprisingly, the authors found that most innovations have similar impacts on student test scores—about 0.2 of a standard deviation, or about one-fifth the current difference between black and white test scores.

Taken together, the findings suggest that to be effective school reform must combine several of the strategies now being proposed. Teachers' union leaders may be correct in saying that more investment is needed in early education and that class sizes should be further reduced. But so may those reformers who ask for establishment of national or state standards, a more demanding curriculum, and greater school choice.

*Earning and Learning: How Schools Matter* will be available from the Brookings Institution Press.

## Learning from School Choice

While educators, parents, and policymakers are still debating the pros and cons of school choice, it is now possible to learn from choice experiments in public, private, and charter schools across the country. *Learning from School Choice*, a new book edited by Paul E. Peterson and Bryan C. Hassel, examines these early school-choice programs and considers the larger implications of choice and competition in education.



In the book, which grew out of a PEPG conference on school choice, Peterson makes a strong case for school choice in central cities, and Hassel offers the case for charter schools. John E. Brandl presents his vision of school governance in the next century. Other contributors—

economists, political scientists, and education specialists—provide case studies of the experience with voucher programs in Indianapolis, San Antonio, Cleveland, and Milwaukee; survey charter schools; analyze public-school choice; discuss constitutional issues; and discuss the effects of private education on democratic values.

*Learning from School Choice* is available from the Brookings Institution Press.

# New York City Voucher Program (continued from front cover)

## PEPG Evaluates School-Choice Programs in Washington, DC and Dayton, Ohio

In addition to the New York City program, PEPG is evaluating privately funded school-choice programs in Washington, DC and Dayton, Ohio.

In both Washington, DC and Dayton, where privately funded school-choice programs began in 1998, PEPG researchers compared applicants who already were attending private schools with those who were attending public schools. The private-school students generally felt safer at school and were more likely to say that their teachers cared about students and that the teaching in their schools was “good.” In contrast, public-school students were more likely to report that there was a lot of cheating and gang activity at their schools. Parents tended to confirm these student reports.

Scholarship applicants from private schools also scored significantly higher on math and reading tests than applicants from public schools (even after numerous family background characteristics were taken into account). The differences in scores were larger for older students, a result consistent with findings from New York City.

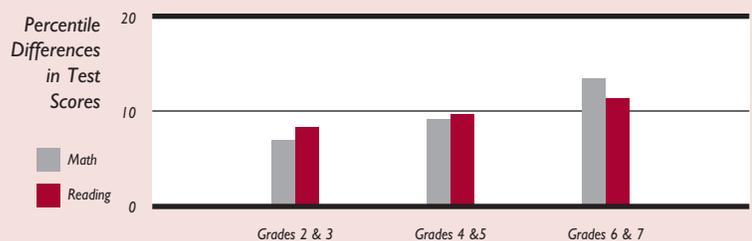
In addition, PEPG has been asked to evaluate an important school-choice program in San Antonio, Texas, where a private business foundation is offering vouchers to any interested low-income student in the 14,000-student Edgewood district. Because this program is potentially large, it offers a unique opportunity to assess the impact of school choice on public schools.

*For more detailed findings, see “Initial Findings from an Evaluation of School-Choice Programs in Washington, DC and Dayton, Ohio,” a PEPG working paper that is available at <http://data.fas.harvard.edu/pepg/>.*

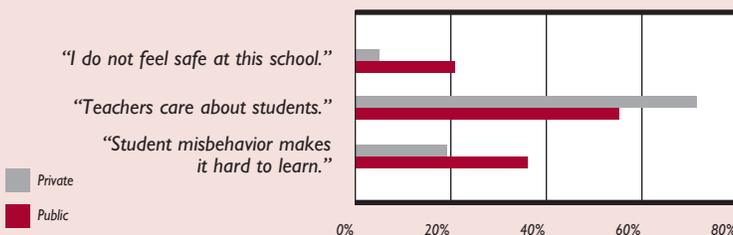
PEPG director Paul Peterson, one of the study’s principal investigators, pointed out that the effects on children in grades four and five were “comparable to the effects observed when class size is sharply reduced.” He added that although the first-year effects are “promising,” it remains to be seen whether “they are sustained and enlarged in subsequent years.” He noted, for example, that if student test scores continue to rise at the first-year rate, then within five years minority students in the program would close the test-score gap with white students from similar economic backgrounds, a long-standing and elusive policy goal.

The study is one of the first school-choice evaluations to use a randomized field trial such as those regularly used in medical research. In New York, 1,200 low-income students received a \$1,400 per-year scholarship for three years from the privately funded School Choice Scholarships Foundation. Since more than 20,000 public-school students applied for the scholarships, PEPG researchers—working with Mathematica Policy Research, a well-known evaluation firm—were able to randomly assign applicants to a test group (those who received a scholarship) and a control group (those who applied but did not receive a scholarship). PEPG then tested students before the program began and again after one year of the program.

### Low-Income Students in Private Schools Have Higher Test Scores in Washington, DC and Dayton, Ohio



### Fifth- and Sixth-Grade Students in Washington, DC Say Private Schools Are Safer and Have Teachers Who Care About Students



Other findings from the study were as follows:

- Parents of scholarship users were much more satisfied with their children's education. Nearly half gave their school an "A"; only one-eighth of the control group did. Similarly, 58 percent of the scholarship parents expressed the highest satisfaction with "what's taught in school" compared with 18 percent of the control-group parents.
- Receiving a scholarship reduced the racial isolation of minority students. Eighteen percent of scholarship parents said less than half of those in their child's classroom were of minority background compared with 11 percent of control-group parents. Of the control-group parents, 37 percent said all the students in the classroom were minority compared with 28 percent of the scholarship parents.
- Compared with control-group parents, scholarship parents were more likely to report that the following were not serious problems at their children's school: students destroying property, being late for school, missing classes, fighting, cheating, and engaging in racial conflict.

**If student test scores continue to rise at the same rate, minority students in the school-choice program will close the test-score gap with white students within five years.**

- Parents reported that classes attended by scholarship students had three fewer students than classes attended by students in the control group; the size of the school attended was 30 percent smaller.
- Scholarship students were less likely than control-group students to have access to a library, cafeteria, nurse's office, child counselors, and special programs for non-English speakers and students with learning difficulties.
- Fifty-five percent of the scholarship parents reported that their child had at least an hour of homework a day compared with 36 percent of the control-group parents. Scholarship students were more likely than control-group students to report having difficulty with homework but were less likely to say their work was marked and returned to them.
- There were no significant differences in expulsion and suspension rates between scholarship and control-group students.
- School-choice effects remained significant for the older students even after adjusting for differences in class size, school size, parental communications, and the presence of discipline problems in schools.
- School choice reduces test-score differences among students, producing greater equality in educational outcomes.

*For more information, see "An Evaluation of the New York City School-Choice Program: The First Year," a PEPG working paper that is available at <http://data.fas.harvard.edu/pepg/>.*

# Private Schools, Integration, and Civic Values

By Jay P. Greene

Ever since Horace Mann described the “common school,” one stated goal of American education has been to bring students of different backgrounds together in schools where they could be taught values essential to the proper functioning of our democratic system.

The public-school system was developed in large part to ensure that students of different backgrounds would mix with one another, learn to tolerate and respect one another, and learn the virtues of participation in political and community activities. Private schools, it was feared, would segregate students and promote the factious and insular views of particular groups.

Curiously, the fervent belief in the importance of public education in fostering good citizenship has been subject to little empirical examination. Do public schools actually provide more integrated experiences for students? Do public schools actually better teach students the virtues of tolerance and political and community participation? I recently conducted two studies, which suggest that contrary to long-held assumptions, private schools tend to serve these civic goals better than public schools.

The first study observed a random sample of public- and private-school lunchrooms in two cities and recorded where students sat by race. Such data are significant because, unlike aggregate statistics for schools, they suggest the extent to which the goals of integration, mutual respect, and understanding are actually being achieved.

The study found that about half of the public-school students sat in racially mixed groups far less than the almost two-thirds of private-school students who sat in such groups. Religious private schools, moreover, were particularly successful in attracting a racially diverse group of students and facilitating their mixing in the lunchroom. The data, therefore, suggest that private schools are achieving the goal of integration better than public schools.

Why might this be the case? Perhaps because public schools tend to assign students to schools based on where they live, they replicate and reinforce racial segregation in housing patterns. In contrast, private schools, based on voluntary association for a common purpose, tend to more easily transcend racial segregation in housing.

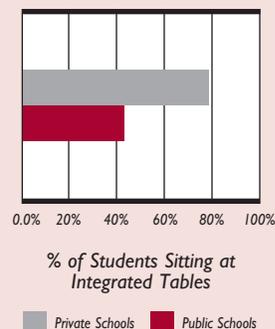
The second study found that even after controlling for a variety of socioeconomic factors, Latinos who attended private school were significantly more likely to vote in presidential elections, join civic organizations, and tolerate the political activities of their least-liked group. Considering that public education is thought to be especially important in imparting American civic values to immigrants, it is striking that Latinos, an ethnic group with a large proportion of recent immigrants, are better socialized to these values in private schools.

These findings have important implications in the debate over school choice. Some oppose offering vouchers for students to attend private schools on the basis that such vouchers will promote segregation and undermine essential civic values. Yet this research suggests that school choice may actually increase integration and enhance civic values.

*The studies, which are part of a forthcoming book on private schools and civic values, are available on request.*

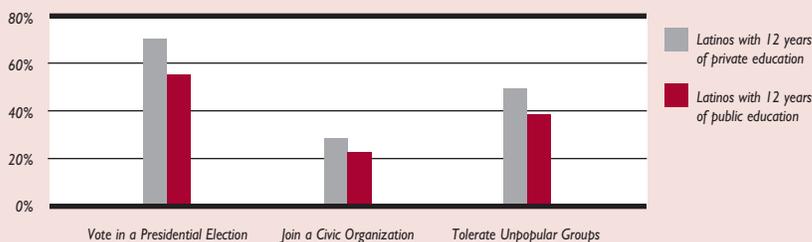
**Contrary to long-held assumptions, private schools tend to serve civic goals better than public schools.**

**Private School Lunchrooms Are More Integrated**



Note: Figures are adjusted for socioeconomic differences.

**Latinos Who Attended Private School Are More Involved in Civic Life**



# Randomized Experiments and Education: Can We Learn from Medical Research?

*PEPG is hosting a universitywide faculty seminar comparing the role of evaluation in medical and educational practice and innovation. The seminar is being coordinated with a conference to be held in the spring at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In the following essay, which is extracted from a longer article that appeared in the Chronicle of Higher Education, PEPG Director Paul Peterson reviews some of the issues discussed in the seminar.*

Few doubt that inner-city education desperately needs improvement. Yet there is little consensus on what to do. Phonics, better prepared teachers, instruction solely in English, single-sex schools, or the elimination of tracking students according to ability levels have all been peddled as answers.

If such reforms were new drugs, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) would reject every one of them because they have not been tested in a well-designed, large-scale, scientifically conducted experiment. In the physical sciences, such experiments generally require the researcher to alter one condition or factor while keeping all others constant. When humans are involved, such experiments are harder to perform—both because ethical considerations preclude research that might harm the subjects and because it is virtually impossible to hold all but one human factor constant.

The solution is the randomized field trial (RFT), which has become the staple of medical research. In an RFT, a reasonably large number of individuals are randomly assigned to one of two groups. One group is then exposed to the factor under investigation (say, a new drug), while the other, the control group, is not. If we have enough subjects, we can assume that the two groups, on average, are similar except that one is exposed to the factor under investigation. Thus, we can attribute significant differences in average outcomes between the two groups to exposure to the factor under investigation.

*Continued on following page*



Photo by PhotoDisc

***If education reforms were new drugs, the FDA would reject every one of them for lack of supporting evidence.***

Today, it is impossible to market a new medical product without demonstrating, by means of an RFT, that the product both is effective and does not cause side effects that would make the cure worse than the disease. To be sure, such trials do not ensure that every medical product is safe for everyone. But few of us would want to return to the days before RFTs when doctors routinely used treatments that did not work or did more harm than good.

Unfortunately, few educational reforms have been tested in an RFT. Notable exceptions include PEPG's evaluations of school vouchers in New York City and Tennessee's experiment on the effects of reducing class size.

Admittedly, randomized experiments in education are not always possible, and not all RFTs produce clear results. While we cannot ignore these issues, the answer is not to forgo randomized experiments. Instead, as in medicine, we need to conduct more of them in different places with varying kinds of students.

This brings up the matter of cost. In medical research, pharmaceutical companies are willing to spend the millions of dollars required for RFTs because the FDA won't approve new drugs without such experiments. Thus, the companies cannot make a profit on their drugs without paying for the tests.

In the case of vitamins and other products that cannot be patented, however, companies do not have the financial incentives to conduct tests so few randomized field tests are conducted. The same problem applies in education.

Four steps would help overcome this problem. First, major foundations need to demonstrate the power of RFTs by helping to finance evaluations of widely discussed innovations. Second, state departments of education should routinely sponsor RFTs when they consider introducing an educational innovation. Third, Congress should require that the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) devote a significant proportion of its funding for research and evaluation to RFTs. Finally, DOE should provide its stamp of approval on educational practices only after they have survived RFTs.

This would be a costly undertaking, involving hundreds of millions of dollars. But we now spend over \$300 billion dollars on educational practices that have not been systematically evaluated. So the eventual benefits would far outweigh the costs.

Some will object that children should not be subject to experimentation. But we are experimenting on them now, when we subject them to faddish reforms that we implement before careful study. Advances in science have always depended on disciplined inquiry. In education, just as in medicine, we need hard facts, not untested guesses.

# New Publications

## Books

Hassel, Bryan C., *The Charter School Challenge: Avoiding the Pitfalls, Fulfilling the Promise*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, forthcoming.

Hess, Frederick, *Spinning Wheels: The Politics of Urban School Reform*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1999.

Jencks, Christopher, and Meredith Phillips, eds., *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998.

Loveless, Tom, *The Tracking Wars: State Reform Meets School Policy*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, forthcoming.

Mayer, Susan, and Paul E. Peterson, eds., *Earning and Learning: How Schools Matter*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, forthcoming.

Peterson, Paul E., and Bryan C. Hassel, eds., *Learning from School Choice*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998.

## Articles and Reports

Hess, Frederick, "As the Policy Churns: Toil and Trouble for Urban School Reform," *Education Digest*, vol. 64, no. 2, October 1998.

Hess, Frederick, "Reconsidering the Promise of Systemwide Innovation for Urban Districts," *Educational Forum*, vol. 62, no. 3, spring 1998.

Hess, Frederick, "Reconsidering the Relevance of Input Equity," *Virginia Journal of Social Policy and the Law*, vol. 6, no. 2, fall 1998.

Hess, Frederick, "The Urban Reform Paradox," *American School Board Journal*, vol. 185, no. 2, February 1998.

Hess, Frederick, and Robert McNergney, "Electronic School: Fitting Technology to Local Educational Needs," *American School Board Journal*, vol. 185, no. 1, January 1998.

Hoxby, Caroline, "Do Immigrants Crowd Disadvantaged American Natives Out of Higher Education?," in F. Bean and D. Hamermesh, eds., *Help or Hindrance? The Economic Implications of Immigration for African Americans*, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1998.

Hoxby, Caroline, "How Much Does School Spending Depend on Family Income? The Historical Origins of the Current School Finance Dilemma," *American Economic Review*, vol. 88, no. 2, May 1998.

Hoxby, Caroline, "Tax Incentives for Higher Education," *Tax Policy and the Economy*, vol. 11, 1998.

Loveless, Tom, "The Tracking and Ability Grouping Debate," *Fordham Report*, vol. 2, no. 8, August 1998.

Loveless, Tom, "Uneasy Allies: The Evolving Relationship of School and State," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, vol. 20, no. 1, spring 1998.

Loveless, Tom, "The Use and Misuse of Research in Educational Reform," *Brookings Papers on Education Policy*, 1998.

Loveless, Tom, and Jasin, Claudia, "Starting from Scratch: Organizational and Political Obstacles Facing Charter Schools," *Education Administration Quarterly*, vol. 34, no. 1, February 1998.

Peterson, Paul E., "Building the Case: What Evaluation Has to Say About School Choice," *Philanthropy*, vol. 12, no. 4, September/October, 1998.

Peterson, Paul E., "Top Ten Questions Asked About School Choice," *Brookings Papers on Education Policy*, 1999.

Peterson, Paul E., "Vouchers and Test Scores," *Policy Review*, January/February 1999.

Peterson, Paul E., and William Howell, "What Happens to Low-Income New York Students When They Move from Public to Private Schools," in D. Ravitch and J. Viteritti, eds., *City Schools: Lessons from New York*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, forthcoming.

## Working Papers

Greene, Jay, Joseph Giammo, and Nicole Mellow, "The Effect of Private Education on Political Participation, Social Capital, and Tolerance: An Examination of the Latino National Political Survey."

Greene, Jay, and Nicole Mellow, "Integration Where It Counts: A Study of Racial Integration in Public and Private School Lunchrooms."

Hess, Frederick, Robert Maranto, and Scott Millman, "Coping with Competition: How School Systems Respond to School Choice."

Hoxby, Caroline, "All School Finance Equalizations Are Not Created Equal."

Peterson, Paul E., and Jay Greene, "Assessing the Cleveland Scholarship Program: A Guide to the Indiana University School of Education Evaluation."

Peterson, Paul E., Jay Greene, and William Howell, "New Findings from the Cleveland Scholarship Program: A Reanalysis of Data from the Indiana University School of Education Evaluation."

Peterson, Paul E., Jay Greene, William Howell, and William McCready, "Initial Findings from an Evaluation of School-Choice Programs in Washington, DC and Dayton, Ohio."

Peterson, Paul E., Jay Greene, William Howell, and William McCready, "Initial Findings from an Evaluation of School-Choice Programs in Washington, DC."

Peterson, Paul E., David Myers, and William Howell, "An Evaluation of the New York City School-Choice Scholarships Program: The First Year."

## Papers from the Conference on Teacher Unions and Educational Reform

Ballou, Dale, and Michael Podgursky, "Teacher Unions and Education Reform: Gaining Control of Professional Licensing and Advancement."

Boyd, William, David Plank, and Gary Sykes, "Swimming Against the Current: Teachers' Unions in Hard Times."

Cibulka, James, "The NEA and School Choice: Regime and Institutional Perspectives."

Cooper, Bruce, "Teacher Unions, Politics, and Organizational Adaptation: An International Perspective."

Fuller, Howard, George Mitchell, and Michael Hartmann, "The Educational Impact of Teacher Collective Bargaining in Milwaukee, Wisconsin."

Johnson, Susan Moore, and Susan Kardos, "Thirty Years of Collective Bargaining in Public Education: Taking Stock of Its Promise for School Reform."

Kerchner, Charles, "Organizing Around Quality: Examples and Policy Options from the Frontiers of Teacher Unionism."

Stone, Joe, "Collective Bargaining and Public Schools: A Critical Survey of the Evidence."

Vinovskis, Maris, "Teacher Unions and Educational Research and Development."

## Ordering Information

Many working papers are available at no charge on the World Wide Web at <http://data.fas.harvard.edu/pepg/>.

All working and conference papers may also be ordered for \$5 (\$3.50 for order of 3 or more papers) from the Program on Education Policy and Governance, Room T-308, Kennedy School of Government, 79 JFK St., Cambridge, MA 02138. Orders must be prepaid with a check payable to Harvard University.

# How Do Public Schools Respond to Charter Schools?

For the foreseeable future, the vast majority of students will attend traditional, district-based public schools rather than charter or private schools. Accordingly, charter schools could have their greatest impact not by providing education alternatives for those who attend them, but by stimulating innovation in traditional public schools.

To see if this is the case, Frederick Hess, Robert Maranto, and Scott Millman have been studying the public-school impact of charter schools in Arizona, which currently has more than 200 charter schools, more than any other state.

The researchers asked teachers in districts with a large number of charters and those in districts with few or no charters to comment on changes in schooling between 1994 and 1997. They found that teachers in districts with higher rates of charter competition were much more likely to have made significant and apparently positive changes during that time.

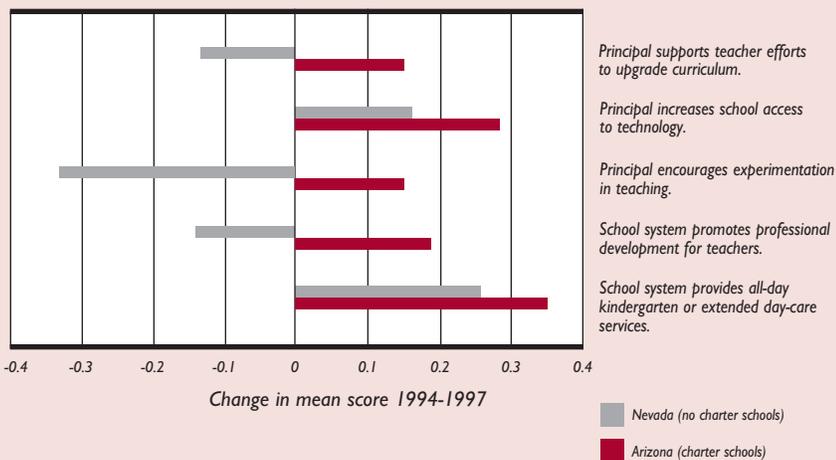
The study made a similar comparison of Arizona and Nevada, where there are few charter schools. On eight of ten items studied, the Arizona teachers reported greater improvement between 1994 and 1997 than did their counterparts in Nevada. Indeed, on six of these items, Nevada teachers reported that their schools had deteriorated; Arizona teachers reported no deterioration.

Finally, the researchers interviewed approximately 30 Arizona educators—including charter-school operators, state and local education officials, and leaders of the state's education union. They found that public schools have reacted to competition in several ways. Facing rapidly growing enrollments, some districts have done nothing, especially when charter schools served "at-risk" students. Other districts, however, have altered their programs by, for example, offering all-day kindergartens, opening magnet schools, or increasing the use of phonics in reading instruction. Finally, charter-school operators claim that some districts tried to squash competition through practices such as refusing to accept transfer credits from charter schools or pressuring local zoning officials to prevent use of a building for a new charter school.

Taken together, the researchers claim, the survey data and the interviews suggest that charter schools have caused significant behavioral changes in Arizona's traditional public schools.

*For more information, see "Coping with Competition: How School Systems Respond to School Choice," a PEPG working paper that is available on request.*

**Impact of Charter Schools on Public Schools**



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