School Choice & Educational Equity in America

May 14, 2018
AGENDA

I. My School Choice Story
II. Achievement Gaps in the U.S. Education System
III. School Choice in America: Charter Schools & Private School Choice
IV. How to Make School Choice Equitable
V. School Choice is Strongest Alongside Other High-Quality Education Policies
My School Choice Story

SCHOOL CHOICE VIA PROPERTY PURCHASE
My parents chose to move to a neighborhood with some of the strongest public schools in America.

SCHOOL CHOICE VIA LEGAL REQUIREMENTS
My sister, Tasha, had multiple learning disabilities and was failing middle school, so my parents got a lawyer and fought for the public schools to pay for Tasha’s tuition at a private school for kids with disabilities; that school saved her life.
Achievement Gaps in the U.S. Education System

**ECONOMIC**

- Students from low-income families are about **1.9 years** of learning behind middle/upper income students.

- American socio-economic achievement gaps are similar to the international gap averages (as measured by PISA) – America’s gaps are on par with gaps in the United Kingdom, Vietnam, and Israel.
Achievement Gaps in the U.S. Education System

RACIAL / ETHNIC GAPS

- African-American students are about **1.8 years** of learning behind white students
- Latino students are about **1.5 years** of learning behind white students
School Choice in America – Charter Schools

BACKGROUND
The first charter school program began in Minnesota in 1991.

NUMBERS
Today 3,200,000 students attend charter schools in 44 states and Washington, D.C.
In 2018, Puerto Rico passed America’s most recent charter school law.

CRITICISMS
Charter school teachers are not unionized and the schools are taking money from traditional public schools.
**School Choice in America – Charter Schools**

**OUTCOMES**

Student outcomes for charter school programs are mostly positive.

CREDO Summary of Significant Charter Impacts by Student Group (2013)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Math</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black</td>
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<td>Positive</td>
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<td>Black Poverty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Black Non Poverty</td>
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<td>Asian</td>
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<td>Special Education</td>
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</table>
School Choice in America – Charter Schools

OUTCOMES

• EXAMPLES:
  • BASIS charter network has the top three best high schools in America.
  • Success Academies charter network has 75% low-income students the network performs in the top 1-2% schools in New York State.

CHALLENGES

Funding disparities, lack of facilities.
School Choice in America – Private Schools

BACKGROUND
The first voucher program began in Milwaukee in 1990. Today private school choice includes vouchers, tax credit scholarships, and education savings accounts.

NUMBERS
Today there are 53 programs that serve over 440,000 students in 26 states plus Washington, D.C.

In 2018, Puerto Rico passed America’s newest private school choice law.

CRITICISMS
Private choice programs take money from public schools and use public funding for religious education.
School Choice in America – Private Schools

OUTCOMES
Student outcomes for private school choice programs are mostly positive.

• EXAMPLES:
  • Students in Florida’s Tax Credit Scholarship Program are 9-43% more likely to enroll in college than their peers in traditional public schools. (Urban Institute, 2017)
  • Students in Milwaukee, Wisconsin’s voucher program are 9-16% more likely to enroll in college than their peers in traditional public schools. (Urban Institute, 2017)

CHALLENGES
Funding disparities, highly politicized.
How to Make School Choice Equitable

INFORMATION
Wealthy parents tend to have lots of information and resources on how to choose the best schools for their kids. Low-income parents need to know about their school options for them to choose the best schools for their kids. Government and/or nonprofit organizations can provide this information online and at community centers.

• EXAMPLES:
  o American Federation for Children works with hundreds of thousands of families in seven states to provide information on private school choice options and help with application process.
  o Choice4LA works with Spanish-speaking families in Los Angeles to educate them about their public school options and help with application process.
How to Make School Choice Equitable

TRANSPORTATION
Low-income families often cannot send their kids to schools outside of their neighborhoods unless the government provides transportation; strong choice programs provide students from low-income families with school transportation to make it possible for them to participate in the program.

• EXAMPLE – Hartford, Connecticut’s school choice program provides multiple transportation options – including school busses, public bus passes, and parent stipends – for families to send their kids to different types of schools (magnet, vocational, charter, etc.)
How to Make School Choice Equitable

REGULATION
School choice programs should have preferences for students from low-income families. These safeguards are necessary to ensure that it is not only well-resourced families who have access to school choice.

- EXAMPLES:
  - 24 of 52 U.S. private choice programs are either restricted to low-income students or give preference to low-income students
  - 3 of 4 students in U.S. private choice programs come from lower-income families
  - Citizens of the World Charter Schools reserve 50% of their seats for students from low-income families
School Choice is Strongest Alongside Other High-Quality Education Policies

SCHOOL CHOICE ALONE
School choice is a powerful force for change in and of itself – by creating high-quality school options in underserved communities it empowers parents and communities that have never had that type of power. **When there are enough school options outside of tradition public schools, this puts pressure on the traditional schools to improve in order to retain funding and students.**

- 2010 study of Florida’s Tax Credit Scholarship Program suggests that increased competitive pressure faced by public schools associated with the introduction of Florida’s scholarship program led to general improvements in public school performance (Figlio, 2010)

SCHOOL CHOICE ALONGSIDE OTHER HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION POLICIES
School choice works best when implemented alongside other strong education policies – it is a powerful tool for change and equity when there are other reforms that improve all schools, including: teacher tenure reform, strong teacher preparation programs, student-based funding. School choice can spur these positive changes in outdated education systems.
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