

School Choice & Educational Equity in America

May 14, 2018



AMERICAN FEDERATION
for Children

The nation's voice for educational choice

www.FederationforChildren.org

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

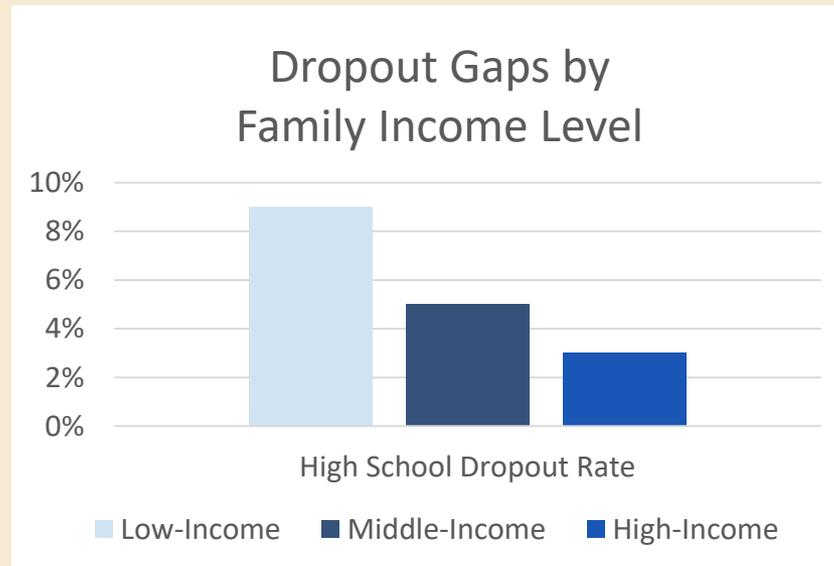
My sister, Tasha, had multiple learning disabilities and was failing middle school, so my parents got a lawyer and fought for the public schools to pay for Tasha's tuition at a private school for kids with disabilities; that school saved her life.



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

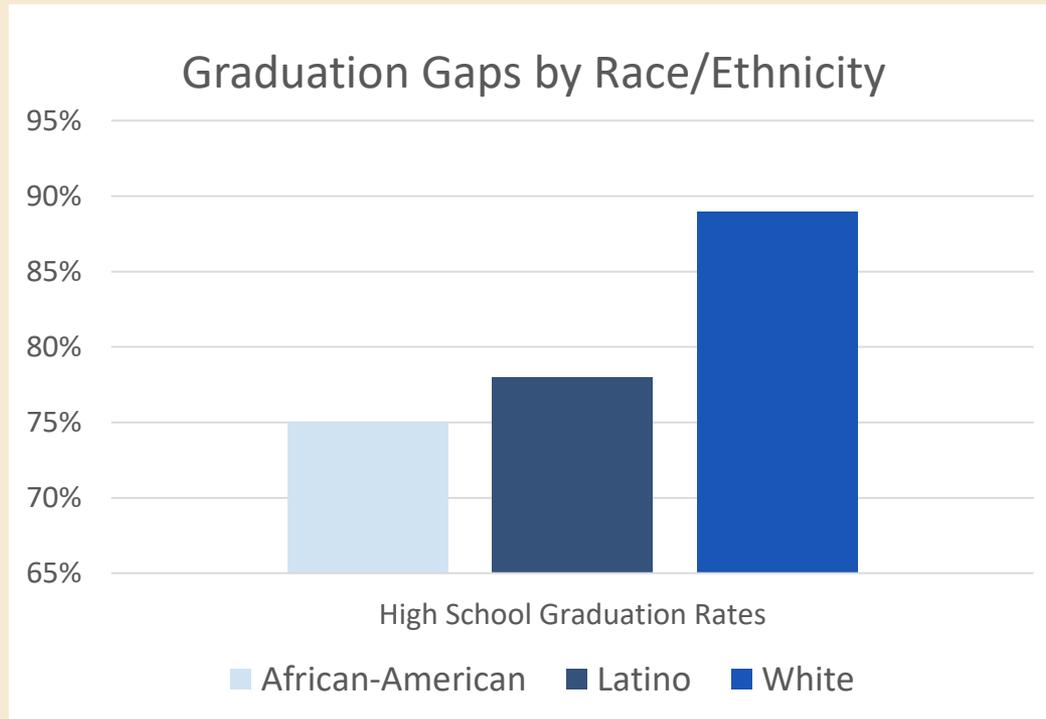


- American socio-economic achievement gaps are similar to the international gap averages (as measured by PISA) – America's gaps are on par with gaps in the United Kingdom, Vietnam, and Israel

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)

Student Group	Reading	Math
White	Negative	Negative
Black	Positive	Positive
Black Poverty	Positive	Positive
Black Non Poverty	Similar	Similar
Hispanic	Similar	Similar
Hispanic Poverty	Positive	Positive
Hispanic Non Poverty	Negative	Negative
Hispanic ELL	Positive	Positive
Hispanic Non ELL	Positive	Similar
Asian	Similar	Negative
Students in Poverty	Positive	Positive
English Language Learners (ELL)	Positive	Positive
Special Education	Similar	Positive

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:**
 - **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.
 - **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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