

JANUARY 4: THE HEADLINE IN THE DECEMBER 25 METRO SECTION OF THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH—SCHOOL VOUCHER STUDY REFUTES FOE’S CLAIMS—DOESN’T MATCH THE CONTENT OF THE ARTICLE.

The headline should have said, “The school voucher study claims to refute foe’s claims.” The article provides some content that refutes the Fordham Institute bankrolled, non-peer reviewed “study.”

A December 30 article in the [Dayton Daily News](#) provides additional content that gives readers pause regarding the validity of the “study”.

The Fordham folks seem to be worried about the potential outcome of the EdChoice voucher litigation and thus are attempting to control the public narrative.

Advocates debate study showing private school vouchers help public schools too

[LOCAL NEWS](#)

By [Eileen McClory](#), Staff Writer

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School choice group lauds academic findings; opponents criticize study’s methodology; lawsuit ongoing

A new study from Ohio State University includes findings that EdChoice private school voucher use has benefitted the public school districts where the students in question live.

School choice advocates connected with the study said it’s proof that school competition works, while some advocates of public school districts questioned the study’s methodology.

The study, from Ohio State’s Stéphane Lavertu and John J. Gregg, looked at the effects of EdChoice vouchers, which allow families in specific school districts or under certain income levels to use state funds to send their children to a private school. Lavertu is an Ohio State University public policy professor and Gregg is a graduate student focusing on education public policy.

The study found that EdChoice vouchers led on average to 10-15% lower student enrollment in public schools than there would have been without EdChoice. But racial and ethnic segregation declined, even as total district spending remained the same and district achievement improved, the study said.

On academics, the study found that the average district exposed to performance-based EdChoice saw their student achievement, as measured by performance index on state tests, go from the second percentile statewide to the sixth percentile.

The findings were stronger with the EdChoice program that targets low-performing school districts. Results from the income-based EdChoice voucher program were inconclusive.

Lavertu thanked The Fordham Institute, a pro-school choice research institute, “for making this project possible.” Fordham wrote the forward on the study and published it on their website, saying the findings are a win for EdChoice, plus many types of schools.

“District students are not left as ‘collateral damage’ when parents have more education options and decide to pursue them,” wrote Chad Aldis, Fordham’s vice president for Ohio policy, and Aaron Churchill, Ohio research director, in the foreword to the OSU study. “Quite the contrary: the increased competition seems to stir traditional public schools to undertake actions that benefit district students.”

A lawsuit currently pending in Ohio is challenging the constitutionality of the EdChoice voucher program. The study seems to be at least partly in response to the lawsuit, as Churchill and Aldis reference it in their foreword.

William Phillis of the Ohio Coalition for Equity & Adequacy of School Funding, which is part of the lawsuit against EdChoice, said the study has not yet been peer reviewed. He said Fordham is biased in favor of private and charter school funding. Phillis is part of the group who originally sued the state over the way Ohio funds schools on property taxes.

Stephen Dyer of Vouchers Hurt Ohio, the group suing the state against EdChoice, criticized the look at the minority population using vouchers.

Most of the kids using vouchers come from big-city districts, Dyer said, meaning they’re less likely to be white. He said instead of comparing the EdChoice voucher population to the state at large, it should be compared to the school district the students are coming from. Dyer added the study shows that Ohio relies heavily on property taxes, which has previously been ruled unconstitutional.

Overall, EdChoice is a bad policy, Dyer argued.

“If you took what is going on in Ohio and took it to some impartial policy person in Norway or something, who had never heard of this, they would say, why are you giving more money to this?” Dyer said.

This is not the first research on the impact of Ohio’s EdChoice voucher system. [A 2016 study from Northwestern University](#) found that Ohio students who attended private schools via vouchers performed worse on state tests than comparable students who remained in struggling public schools.

Like the OSU research, that study said the EdChoice program caused slight improvement in the struggling public schools’ test performance due to increased competition. But the negative impact on the test scores of students who used the vouchers was found to be much sharper.

[A new study shows EdChoice vouchers can benefit public school districts \(daytondailynews.com\)](#)

School voucher study refutes foes' claims

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OSU professors reviewed 13 years of program data

Anna Staver

State Bureau USA TODAY NETWORK

While a Franklin County judge considers whether Ohio's school voucher program is constitutional, a new study from two Ohio State University professors refutes several claims made by opponents of the EdChoice program.

"When we see these broader societal trends, society jumps to assumptions about who is at fault. We do this so naturally..." OSU Professor Stephane Lavertu said. "Blaming the voucher programs for larger trends in these city school systems, that's a mistake that we are making and the study is pretty clear."

He and professor John Gregg reviewed the data on 47 participating school districts over 13 years of Ohio's EdChoice program (2006-2019) and came to four major conclusions about its financial and academic impacts on "the average public school district exposed it."

Here is what the OSU researchers found:

Racial segregation in public schools decreased

Ohio's EdChoice scholarship program gives vouchers to kids in districts that the state says are struggling academically.

The state paid out more than \$2 billion in public dollars to private schools over the past decade, and one of the accusations made by critics is that too many of these scholarships go to more affluent families and white families.

"The private school voucher program is resegregating our schools, and that is unfair, unlawful and unconstitutional," said Richmond Heights school board member Nneka Jackson when the Ed-Choice lawsuit was filed in January 2021.

The lawsuit said that enrollment in her suburban Cleveland district was about one-quarter white and three quarters Black before the EdChoice program expanded in 2005. But the percentage of white students had dropped to 3% when the lawsuit was filed even though four in 10 city residents were white.

Lavertu said the statewide data tells a different story.

"Certainly, at the state level, minority

students are more likely to have vouchers,” he said. “Statewide, we know that disproportionately they go to non-white students.”

In fact, the OSU study found that 56% of students who took a scholarship in 2019 were Black, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaskan Native.

So, why the discrepancy between the overall data and Richmond Heights?

Anomalies exist in any system, Lavertu said. “We can only say what happens on average. That’s the limitation of statistical work like this.”

And he thought it was important to keep in mind that segregation in public schools has been rising for decades. It’s called white flight, and this exodus to the suburbs was happening long before the school voucher program started.

“Ohio’s voucher program was actually working against those forces,” he said.

Public education advocates disagreed.

What the study failed to account for, according to former state lawmaker and education policy analyst Stephen Dyer, is that the student population of voucher-eligible schools is 65% to 75% minority.

“They are making wild claims based on scant evidence of those claims being factual,” Dyer said. “Two-thirds of the kids getting vouchers have never been in the public school system.”

He thinks the EdChoice system is a way to subsidize private school tuition.

But Ohio Senate President Matt Huffman, R-Lima, told the USA TODAY Ohio Bureau that opponents of the voucher program use these “isolated examples” because “if you light the fuse that says racism then everyone is supposed to run for cover.”

“You can find pockets of some sets of facts to prove anything,” he said. “I can’t take most of the things they say seriously if they are willing to make these kinds of arguments publicly.”

Schools don’t lose money when kids take EdChoice scholarships

EdChoice scholarships are funded by the state and that per-pupil funding is what districts used to lose when a student took a voucher. Districts kept all the money generated from local property taxes.

One of the complaints from some districts is that prior to the funding formula change in 2021 they had to pay out more money than the state sent them every time a student took a voucher.

But Lavertu’s study found that overall school districts that lost students to the EdChoice program saw a 12% increase in local per-pupil revenue.

“I haven’t done the calculation for every district,” Lavertu said. “But on net, that’s not what we find.”

What they did find that Dyer found particularly interesting was that Ed-Choice makes school districts lean more heavily on those local dollars.

“Last time I checked that was unconstitutional,” Dyer said. “They may not have realized it, but they admitted that.”

Students who stay in public school don't do worse

The lawsuit sitting before the Franklin County judge didn't expressly say that districts are harmed academically by the voucher program, but this was something Lavertu looked into.

“The average student in an EdChoice district experienced an increase in district-wide achievement...,” according to the study. “Unfortunately, we are unable to determine how much the positive effect is due to student learning gains as opposed to changes in student composition.”

But one of the criticisms of Ohio's performance-based voucher program is that students who take these scholarships may score lower on standardized tests.

Cincinnati Enquirer analysis of nearly 2.5 million test scores from 2017-2019 found that 88% of the cities analyzed had public districts that achieved better state testing results than their neighboring private schools.

Who funded this study?

One significant criticism of Lavertu's findings is that the Fordham Institute—a conservative organization that's long supported school vouchers—paid for the study. But Chad Aldis, Fordham's vice president for Ohio Policy, said the institute didn't know what it would find when it commissioned the study.

“We wanted to know what is the role that EdChoice has played and that is something that has not been explored in this depth before,” Aldis said. “If those criticisms (about segregation and learning loss) are true, they raise concerns for us.”

He told Lavertu and Gregg to “dig into the data” without any strings attached.

“For me, my professional reputation is everything,” Lavertu said. And he stands behind his findings.

OSU reviews every contract made with outside groups and “they make sure that I have control over the study.” Lavertu said he wouldn't sign on the dotted line if an institution wanted to manipulate his results.

“Don't get me wrong, there are other funders I've had that have tried to do it,” he said. “It's just not Fordham.”

Anna Staver is a reporter for the USA TODAY Network Ohio Bureau, which serves the Columbus Dispatch, Cincinnati Enquirer, Akron Beacon Journal and 18 other affiliated news organizations across Ohio.