

# Parental Satisfaction with School Choice

*Updated December 2004*

Universally, school choice parents are highly satisfied with choice schools, reporting greater discipline, more responsive staff and better educational environments than the public schools they left. That parents are satisfied with their choice schools is a valuable indicator that school choice delivers real benefits. As University of Wisconsin professor John Witte, the official evaluator of the Milwaukee choice program, recently commented on school choice research:

“There’s one very consistent finding: Parental involvement is very positive, and parental satisfaction is very positive...parents are happier. The people using vouchers are mostly black and Hispanic and very poor...they deserve the same kind of options that middle-class white people have.”

Reported by Brian Thevenot, “Recycled school data yield different results,” *Times-Picayune*, March 26, 2003.

## **Florida**

Florida’s choice programs are no exception to the general finding of parental satisfaction. Researchers studying the McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities found that participating families received better service and were safer and more satisfied than in their public schools, undercutting a common charge by school choice opponents—that private schools cannot accommodate students with disabilities:

- √ 92.7 percent of current McKay participants are satisfied or very satisfied with their McKay schools compared to 32.7 percent of public school parents.
- √ Only 30.2 percent of current participants say they received all services required under federal law from their public school, while 86.0 percent report their McKay school has provided all the services they promised to provide.
- √ In their previous public schools, 46.8 percent of McKay students were bothered often and 24.7 percent were physically assaulted, while in McKay schools only 5.3 percent were bothered often and 6 percent were assaulted.
- √ Even though the McKay program allows participants to choose schools that charge tuition above the amount of the voucher (equal to the cost of educating the child in the public schools), 71.7 percent of current participants report paying either nothing at all or less than \$1,000 per year above the voucher amount.

Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster, “Vouchers for Special Education Students: An Evaluation of Florida’s McKay Scholarship Program,” Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, Civic Report No. 38, June 2003.

## Other Programs

The Florida findings mirror similar levels of parental satisfaction with school choice in both publicly funded and privately funded programs nationwide.

### Parental Satisfaction with Choice Schools vs. Public Schools in Six Cities<sup>1</sup>

	Cleveland	Washington, D.C.	Dayton, Ohio	San Antonio	Charlotte, N.C.	New York City
<b>Choice Schools</b>	50%	46%	51%	61%	53%	42%
<b>Public Schools</b>	30%	15%	19%	35%	26%	12%

## Why Parents Prefer Choice Schools

In studies of both publicly and privately funded school choice programs nationwide, parents in choice schools show much higher levels of satisfaction than parents in public schools across a broad range of school characteristics, including:<sup>2</sup>

- ✓ Academic program
- ✓ Teacher skills
- ✓ School discipline
- ✓ Safety
- ✓ Student respect for teachers
- ✓ Moral values
- ✓ Class size
- ✓ Teacher-parent relations
- ✓ Parents' involvement
- ✓ Freedom to observe religious traditions

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers are percentages of parents surveyed that said they were "very satisfied" with their child's school, choice or public. In Washington, D.C. and Charlotte, N.C., parents were asked to grade their schools, so the chart indicates the percentage of parents that gave their child's school an 'A.' Paul E. Peterson, William G. Howell, and Jay P. Greene, "An Evaluation of the Cleveland Voucher Program After Two Years," Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance Working Paper, 1998; Paul Peterson, William Howell, and Patrick Wolf, "School Choice in Washington, D.C.: An Evaluation After One Year," February 2000; William G. Howell and Paul E. Peterson, *The Education Gap*, Brookings, 2002; Jay P. Greene, "Vouchers in Charlotte," *Education Next*, Summer 2001.

<sup>2</sup> See William G. Howell and Paul E. Peterson, *The Education Gap*, Brookings, 2002, ch. 7.