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Review of *A Win-Win Solution*

Reviewed By

Christopher Lubienski

University of Illinois

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Summary of Review

Advocates of vouchers argue that nearby public schools will be forced to compete for students, leading to improvements for voucher users and non-users alike. Critics worry that the students who use vouchers to leave public schools will have parents with higher levels of education and be less expensive to educate, and that losing these students will cause those schools to enter spirals of decline. This new report purports to gather all available empirical evidence on the question of the competitive effects of vouchers, finding a strong consensus that vouchers help public schools. But the report, based on a review of 17 studies, selectively reads the evidence in some of those studies, the majority of which were produced by voucher advocacy organizations. Moreover, the report can't decide whether or not to acknowledge the impact of factors other than vouchers on public schools. It attempts to show that public school gains were caused by the presence of vouchers alone, but then argues that the lack of overall gains for districts with vouchers should be ignored because too many other factors are at play. In truth, existing research provides little reliable information about the competitive effects of vouchers, and this report does little to help answer the question.

Kevin Welner
Editor

William Mathis
Managing Director

Erik Gunn
Managing Editor

National Education Policy Center

School of Education, University of Colorado
Boulder, CO 80309-0249
Telephone: 303-735-5290
Fax: 303-492-7090

Email: NEPC@colorado.edu
http://nepc.colorado.edu

Publishing Director: Alex Molnar

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Review of *A Win-Win Solution*[1]

Christopher Lubienski, University of Illinois

I. Introduction

The question of using vouchers to send children to private schools at public expense has been at the center of an ongoing debate in the United States over the use of market mechanisms for organizing public education. Although there has not been the anticipated rush by states to implement vouchers since the 2002 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* affirming the constitutionality of these programs, voucher advocates have been working to highlight evidence on their beneficial effects. In fact, there are data, albeit to varying degrees, on a number of issues around vouchers, from a small handful of voucher programs. Quite often, research has focused on the question of the immediate effects of vouchers on the academic achievement of students who use them to attend private school. This is obviously an important issue, particularly if vouchers are to provide these "choosers" with access to better quality options.

Another key question is the secondary impact of vouchers: how they affect public schools and systems. Critics of vouchers have expressed concern for the non-choosers, the students remaining behind in the public schools. They worry that transferring students and funding to private schools removes resources as well as academic and social capital from schools most in need of them. Supporters, in turn, argue that vouchers will create the competitive incentives necessary to compel these same schools to become more effective. That is, the loss of some students, or simply the threat of losing students (and, of course, the government funding they bring), may be enough to force schools to make important instructional improvements, thereby benefiting all students, including those who did not choose to use a voucher.

This second, critical question is thus whether public schools and their students are harmed by or benefit from voucher programs — a question that is invariably addressed through examinations of achievement data. The answer has serious implications for our understanding of the potential role of voucher programs in American education. Consequently, a number of different individuals and teams, primarily voucher supporters, have attempted to provide some illumination, or at least some evidence, on this question.

[1] This review was originally published jointly by the Education and the Public Interest Center (EPIC) and the Educational Policy Research Unit (EPRU). This edition, republished by their successor, the National Education Policy Center, is identical in content to the original.

A recent report by Greg Forster of the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice summarized evidence on the competitive effects of vouchers on public schools.[1] (Last year, Forster released a similar report, also through the Friedman Foundation, focusing only on Ohio's voucher program.[2]) The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice publishes reports to advance the vision of the late Milton Friedman to privatize K-12 education.[3] Forster is a senior fellow at the Foundation and has written extensively for policy and popular media outlets on school choice.

This new report selects 17 studies concerning the competitive effects of vouchers in places such as Florida and Milwaukee, finding an overwhelming consensus that vouchers improve academic performance in public schools. It then discusses and dismisses three alternative explanations for the purported improvements in public schools that the author ascribes to competitive effects: whether vouchers are "creaming" or "dredging" the best or worst students, respectively, from nearby public schools; whether public schools are improving not because of voucher threats, but simply because of the "stigma" of being labeled as a low-performing school; and whether improvements in performance are simply a matter of a statistical artifact known as regression to the mean. The penultimate section of the report asks and addresses an eminently sensible question: if vouchers do indeed cause public schools to improve their performance, as he argues, then why have school systems with voucher programs not witnessed dramatic, or even noticeable, improvements in performance? The report concludes with a brief summary that points to other reasons, in addition to competitive effects, to support vouchers; it re-states the claims of a research consensus on evidence of positive secondary effects from vouchers; and it asserts that vouchers have not been shown to cause harm.

II. Findings and Conclusions of the Report

Based on a review of 17 studies, the report finds a general consensus that the competitive effects of vouchers cause public schools to improve. The report finds only one instance where vouchers did not lead to improved outcomes in public schools. In that case (a study of the voucher program in the District of Columbia), no negative effects were found, and, according to the report, the lack of a positive impact was due to "hold-harmless" provisions shielding public schools from financial losses when students used vouchers to leave for private schools.[4]

The report disputes the claim that voucher consumers are more likely to be higher- achieving, leaving public schools with students who tend to be of lower achievement or motivation. Public schools near voucher-accepting private schools would not, as others fear, enter into spirals of decline as they lose ground academically due to more motivated students (and resources) leaving.[5] The report instead concludes that the opposite happens. It claims that students of all achievement levels are equally likely to use vouchers to leave public schools. Further, it contends that the real or potential loss of students to vouchers spurs the public schools in these studies to become more effective, as evidenced by their increased test scores.

Notably, the report also concludes that vouchers "can have a significant positive impact on public schools without necessarily producing visible changes in the overall performance of a large city's schools" (p. 5). This is a key assertion, necessary to explain the counter-intuitive twin

conclusions drawn from the 17 studies: each of the reports (save one) shows a positive impact from vouchers on the public schools that are studied, but these gains are not apparent on a larger scale in the districts. This is explained as due to the fact that "the overall performance of a school system can never by itself provide a reliable guide to whether any one factor (such as vouchers) is having a positive effect" — too many variables are at play (p. 30). The report therefore concludes (as is discussed below) that it is necessary to further deregulate and expand voucher programs so that their impact can be enhanced.

Some critics of the studies marshaled in this report have suggested that other factors may also very well be at work, which might better explain the academic outcomes sometimes evident in schools near voucher programs.[6] For instance, gains in public schools may be due to changes in student composition, the shame of being classified as a failing school (a key eligibility criterion in Florida), or simply the likelihood that outlying schools on the bottom end of the performance scale are more likely to move up, as a statistical artifact. The report reviews these possibilities, provides arguments to dismiss each alternative theory, and concludes that any positive trends in student achievement must be the result of the competitive effects of vouchers alone.

While the report focuses on 17 studies to highlight the competitive effects of vouchers, it also includes additional conclusions and assertions that do not directly address the research topic, but rather are used to support the report's conclusions. For instance, it cites additional studies outside the set of 17 for the proposition that "vouchers make public schools better off financially" (p. 11). This is a key claim, since it is used to undergird the contention that there is no evidence "that vouchers harm public schools" (pp. 5, 10, 34). Similarly, although not tested in his report, the author cites his own earlier work to conclude that, even without a competitive effect, vouchers

> provide a better education to those who use them, they provide better services for disabled students, they put students into schools that are more racially integrated, [and] they improve students' civic values (p. 34).

III. Rationales Supporting the Findings and Conclusions

The conclusions in this report are based on the apparent consensus of the studies selected for review. The main finding that competition from voucher programs causes public schools to improve is drawn from analyses that show improvements in public school achievement after the introduction of voucher programs in Milwaukee, Florida, and a few other venues.

As noted below, the data available on this question generally do not allow for findings of direct causation as a result of the availability of vouchers. Instead, the analyses show an association between the emergence of voucher programs and an increase in measures of academic performance in local public schools. Researchers typically attempt to test for and eliminate other possible explanations for the patterns, thereby isolating the role of vouchers as the likely factor leading to the outcome.

It is important to note, however, that almost all the analyses the report draws on do not (nor does the report itself) identify *the ways in which student achievement is improved* in public

schools, and how those mechanisms and processes may or may not be associated with vouchers. This "black box" approach, which does not empirically consider possible mechanisms for the purported improvement process, leaves open questions about alternative explanations: It is difficult if not impossible to know the contribution to any improvement that could also be attributed to vouchers (that is, if the schools did in fact improve, and if they did so with the same students — see below). Other factors could also be at play, but these studies generally cannot identify them, since they focus almost exclusively on vouchers as the causal mechanism. This would be critical information, because it could help other schools replicate those improvements, thus benefitting students. Instead, the report, along with most of the studies cited, makes the leap that schools are rather generic organizations, where changes in external stimuli (as with the introduction of voucher threats) lead to changes in outcomes (test scores) in some automatic yet unspecified way that transpires in the "black box" of schools. In short, they lack the rigor and curiosity that might bring them to a different conclusion.

In a related vein, the findings in the report are based on at least three other key underlying assumptions, all of which are questionable. First, the report frequently repeats the exaggerated refrain that vouchers bring choice to education, thus creating the "positive incentives we take for granted *everywhere else*" (p. 12, emphasis added). Similarly, "[t]he same Americans who have difficulty with the idea that competition improves schools have no difficulty applying the same concept *everywhere else*" (p. 12, emphasis added). In making this claim, the author casts education simply as a consumer good, one that he equates with "magazines, haircuts, dry cleaning and video games" (p. 11). He also fails to acknowledge that, while Americans typically choose private consumer goods and services, we do not choose public goods such as national defense providers, sewage systems, or courts.

Second, the report assumes that a very basic conception of the logic of competitive incentives can be effective in improving education. It assumes, advancing from the idea that education is simply another consumer good, that vouchers create incentives that force schools to improve — the premise of the report's main finding. "Colleges must provide a good education ... or else lose students. Professionals like doctors and lawyers must provide good services or else lose clients. Stores must provide good value or else lose customers" (p. 11). According to this reasoning, schools will react to the competition created by vouchers simply by becoming more effective. This assumption is reflected in the report's findings, shielding out unexplored, alternative explanations for those findings. However, the assumption is tenuous when one considers how many people hire charming, well-advertised, but bad lawyers, how many mortgage and derivative brokers *gained* clients while providing toxic products, or how many people pay to see bad movies. The connection between quality and consumer preference is not nearly as simple as this report assumes. There are different types of markets, and the role of consumer information differs greatly among them.[7] In some markets, consumers can easily acquire useful information about the quality of different options, while in other markets, such information is virtually impossible to obtain. This report makes assumptions, but fails to support those assumptions, about what types of information is readily available to education consumers.

Third, the report asserts that private schools are more effective and efficient than public schools: "educating students in private schools rather than public schools not only accomplishes better results, it also costs less" (p. 11). Setting aside the truth of this claim, it is largely a red herring,

since competition felt by public schools could result in academic improvements even if the appeal of private schools was due to religious preference or some other factor unrelated to effectiveness or efficiency. However, the report offers the assumption as a premise for the contention that because of the competition generated through vouchers, any achievement gains in public schools must be because they are trying to emulate the superior achievement in private schools. Yet the report includes no evidence for the assumption that private schools are superior, and the report's author is certainly aware of a growing body of research — much of it peer-reviewed — suggesting that they are not.[8]

IV. The Report's Use of Research Literature

Because the report is a review of other studies, the development of a comprehensive review of the research literature is critical. A review of research that presents only a subset is of little use, and if that subset is biased toward a given finding, it becomes dangerously misleading. At more than one point, the report claims to encompass "all available empirical studies on how vouchers affect academic achievement in public schools" (p. 10). However, the report never describes how studies were collected, or what criteria were used for selecting or rejecting studies from this review.

The programs reviewed in the Friedman report represent an interesting, if odd (given the inclusion of Vermont and Maine, as discussed later), assortment of voucher plans to consider for the question of competitive effects. Ten of the reports studied public school achievement in relation to Florida's voucher programs. Nine of those considered Florida's A+ program, which was ruled unconstitutional and ended in 2006;[9] and the remaining paper focused on Florida's McKay voucher program for students with disabilities.[10] Five studies examined changes in public school achievement in the wake of the Milwaukee voucher program.[11] The remaining studies focused on the Edgewood District in Texas,[12] the EdChoice program in Ohio,[13] the federally funded voucher program in Washington, D.C.,[14] and older "tuitioning" programs in Maine and Vermont.[15]

In fact, this set of studies includes some rigorous work by respected researchers. But issues of methodology, interpretation, and generalizability emerge when the research is marshaled simply to support a narrow agenda, as with the Friedman Foundation's. Then, the temptation for selectively summarizing research can distort the actual findings. Consider one example from the report.

As the Friedman report notes, Stanford economist Martin Carnoy and colleagues released a report in 2007 on the possible competitive effects that vouchers had on public schools in Milwaukee. According to the Friedman report's summary, the Carnoy *et al.* report's findings confirmed the existence of a beneficial competitive effect from the voucher program:

> [T]heir analysis "confirms the earlier results showing a large improvement in Milwaukee in the two years following the 1998 expansion of the voucher plan to religious schools." Before 1998, religious schools were excluded from the Milwaukee program, so many fewer students participated. When religious schools were admitted to the program in 1998, participation increased dramatically (p. 17).[16]

Although the report quotes Carnoy *et al.*, it does not provide a page number for the quote, so readers are unlikely to read this "finding" in context.[17] In fact, this context, as well as a full reading of the relevant research, presents a different perspective than the one portrayed in the report.

Indeed, Carnoy *et al.* conducted two analyses. The first, which the Friedman report highlights and includes among the 17 reviewed, did confirm a competition effect, but the researchers were simply attempting to replicate earlier research. The second, which the Friedman report notes but does not include among the 17, found no competition effect.

The approach used by Carney and his colleagues, replicating an earlier study using the same data, is common — used to check data and methods, especially when the initial research is controversial or has been conducted by investigators who have drawn criticism in the past for their methodological choices or advocacy positions, as was the case here.[18] But while the report quotes part of Carnoy *et al.*'s findings, it fails to summarize the complete finding from their first analyses. The two sentences following the passage quoted in the Friedman report would have greatly helped readers understand the conclusions reached by Carnoy and his colleagues:

> *However*, we also confirm that *little positive improvement took place in later years* even as enrollment declined in Milwaukee's neighborhood schools and the number of voucher applications continued to increase. *This raises questions about whether traditional notions of competition among schools* explain these increased scores in the two years immediately after the voucher plan was expanded.[19]

In other words, the competitive effect posited by voucher advocates did not appear to be having the anticipated impact.

Despite this point, the Friedman report suggests that the researchers need not have gone further with the second part of the study, even though the first analysis was only a replication and the authors explicitly raised questions about the very conclusions that the Friedman report tries to draw from their study.

But Carnoy and his colleagues also offered a second analysis, presenting results of their own original research, which took into account factors such as proximity, supply and demand. That is, instead of simply looking for impact on the entire Milwaukee school system (which the Friedman report later warns against), the researchers took a more sophisticated approach by examining factors thought to be important in creating competitive conditions.[20] The approach used in earlier studies was to compare the school district as a whole to other schools in Wisconsin that did not experience competition from vouchers.[21] Carnoy *et al.* used a more sensitive set of factors, such as nearness to private schools with space for voucher students, allowing them to determine which public schools faced the most competition and would thus be more likely to feel the competitive effects of vouchers.[22] From their second, more original and nuanced analysis, Carnoy *et al.* find as follows:

> [T]est score gains are generally *not* significantly related to various indicators of direct competition… [not] the number of private schools within a mile of a public school, nor the

relative number of voucher places nearby, nor the relative number of voucher applications from the public school.[23]

Curiously, the Friedman report notes — but never quotes — this second analysis, dismissing it as unnecessary in light of the first, less sophisticated, analysis.

This treatment is particularly important because the Carnoy study is one of the few independent studies among the reviewed 17, and it appears to have been misrepresented. In fact, interesting patterns emerge from a closer analysis of the set of 17 studies. Only two were published in independent peer-reviewed journal. Three were published by the pro-voucher Hoover Institution's journal *Education Next*. Seven were released by other school choice advocacy organizations.

In fact, the majority of the included studies were produced from a very small group of people largely associated with these same school choice advocacy organizations. For instance, more than half of the 17 reports were authored or co-authored by either Forster (the author of the current report), his previous co-authors on the topic, or others who have published through the Friedman Foundation. Further, all but three of the 17 reports were from this group or by authors who are affiliated with other pro-voucher organizations such as the Hoover Institute or Harvard's Program on Educational Policy and Governance. The remaining three remaining studies, authored by scholars at Stanford, Princeton, and Wisconsin-Madison, are the most rigorous (that is, more likely to use student-level data) and find the most modest effects for choice.

Also noteworthy is the inclusion of the centuries-old "tuitioning" programs in Vermont and Maine, which existed long before Milton Friedman conceived of voucher policies in the modern sense. The tuitioning programs were adopted for convenience, so that towns did not have to build new schools. But they were included in the new report, nonetheless, probably because a report (by the Friedman Foundation) produced results that supported the pro-voucher thesis.[24] The new report seems to assume that the magic of competition is both generic and universal, generalizing findings on demographic differences in Washington to Florida schools, and imputing competitive effects of vouchers to a program that was created almost a century before anyone had actually thought of the modern concept of private school "vouchers."

V. Review of the Report's Methods

Because the report is a review, it does not use a methodology per se, other than the unspecified selection process for the inclusion of reviewed studies. However, it is worth discussing the conclusions drawn by the included studies in the context of the standards and limitations that typically guide this type of review of research.

In the past, the author of this Friedman report has repeatedly held up randomized studies as the "gold standard" for "empirical" research.[25] Because the nature of the competition question effectively precludes the use of randomization — studying competitive effects by randomly assigning schools or students to be affected by, or shielded from, voucher competition — none of

the 17 studies meets that purported highest quality standard.[26] (Indeed, the author even indicates that one of the studies he uses in support of his thesis had serious shortcomings.)

Consequently, the studies cited in the report necessarily use less rigorous methods to study voucher effects. These methods involve constructing an appropriate comparison group with which to contrast gains at public schools believed to be affected by vouchers, and controlling for demographic and other factors that might confound the results. As the report acknowledges:

> Student outcomes are affected by so many different influences — including demographic factors (income, race, family structure, etc.), school factors (type of school, teacher quality, etc.) and intangibles such as the level of enthusiasm parents and teachers invest in a child's education (p. 13, parentheses in the original).

However, the studies do not account for all of these possible variables, so general claims about the effects of vouchers based on those analyses are tenuous, at best. Indeed, when comparing schools with markedly different populations, there are too many possible influences on a school's or a student's achievement to be certain which ones may be the cause of a relative gain (or loss) for a student, much less a school. The research designs that can realistically be applied to this question of competitive effects can only control for observable factors, and not for other important influences such as motivation, perseverance, or commitment to education.

The report contends that it is "cumbersome" to collect demographic data on students, so we should "consider what the broader body of evidence indicates about this question" (p. 25). Oddly, though, it then cites only an unspecified subset of studies on Florida, arguing that scores improved in the public schools, although there was "no movement of students in these schools" (p. 25). This is an amazing claim — that student populations were completely stable in these schools — and no evidence or support is offered.

VI. Review of the Validity of the Findings and Conclusions

In addition to the above concerns about assumptions, use of literature, and methodological limitations, there exist good reasons to question the validity of the report's conclusion that competition from vouchers causes public schools to improve their academic achievement. It is worth noting that this finding comes from an organization that bills itself as "the nation's leading voucher advocates" (p. 4). Because of its announced agenda on this issue, publications such as this would benefit greatly from undergoing a blinded peer review prior to publication, which would likely identify problems with data, methods and interpretations. Such peer review is typical in university-based research in order to instill some objective measure of quality. The arcane (but key) details in these types of research reports can often require a fair degree of trust from readers who lack technical methodological expertise.

Moreover, the report makes an argument for the immediate effects of vouchers on the students who use them, contending that "[s]chool vouchers…are among the most prominent and successful reforms in the education field" (p. 10). This is followed by the claim that there is "a substantial body of random-assignment research on the academic achievement of students who are offered vouchers, and it consistently finds that vouchers improve student achievement" (p.

13). Once again, on closer inspection, this "body of research" is not so "substantial," having been written mostly by the same group of advocates the report cites for its competition claims, and having been questioned and challenged by other scholars.[27]

Likewise, when discussing the impact of voucher programs, the report contends that "vouchers make public schools better off financially" — citing another report put out by the Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice.[28] I have reviewed the Foundation's prior work on this topic and found these conclusions to be more ideological than evidence-based.[29] In fact, the claim defies the basic logic of competition advanced by the Friedman Foundation: if public schools are generally made better off financially when they lose students to vouchers, then they have a disincentive to improve perform in order to keep students, rather than the positive competitive effects described and endorsed in this and other Friedman reports.

Anticipating that the report's conclusions themselves might be in question, the author attempts to disprove what he sees as three of the most likely alternative explanations for improvements in public school achievement. For one of these, the statistical phenomenon called regression toward the mean, the author repeats a flawed argument he has made previously[30] and that I have reviewed previously.[31] Readers may want to consider that earlier discussion.

The report also attacks the notion that the improved test scores in public schools, as found in the reviewed studies, might be due to choice selection effects. In particular, the report rejects the possibility that more advantaged students stay in public schools, while more difficult-to-educate students use vouchers to enroll in private schools:[32] "vouchers would have to be attracting participants disproportionately from among the lowest performing students. Instead of taking away the best students, as so many opponents of vouchers claim, on this theory vouchers would be taking away the worst students" (p. 24). However, the report names none of these "so many opponents of vouchers" and the very theory that Forster now dismisses *has* been made by a voucher *proponent* — namely, this new report's author himself, Greg Forster — when he tried to explain away higher public school achievement in another study: "A much more likely explanation for [these] results is that when students enter private schools, they tend to have test scores a little lower than other students of their race and socioeconomic status."[33]

In truth, and setting aside the rhetorical inconsistency of this particular author, readers should understand that the rules of any given voucher policy, combined with neighborhood demographics and other factors, are likely to change the nature of the group receiving vouchers. So the voucher system in one district may draw disproportionately from lower-scoring students, while vouchers in another district may do the opposite. Each system should be empirically studied before drawing firm conclusions about its effects.

In rejecting the above explanation, the Friedman report includes no data on the demographic composition of the private schools accepting vouchers in these studies, but takes the position that the "best available analyses of this question have found voucher applicants to be very similar to the population of students eligible for vouchers in terms of demographics and educational background" (p. 11). To support this, the report cites studies of voucher programs in Washington, New York and Dayton — not "direct evidence" on Florida, Milwaukee or the vast majority of the other cases used in this report. Furthermore, the report does not address other

"direct evidence" on voucher applicants indicating that there are differences from non-applicants in terms of parental education level, for instance,[34] not to mention the "unobservable" factors such as motivation that distinguish applicants from non-applicants.

The report also questions the possibility that public schools improve not because of voucher competition, but because of the "stigma" of being labeled as a failing school (which, in some programs such as the Florida A-Plus program, make the school's students eligible to receive vouchers).[35] The report cites evidence from Florida, where a labeling device was in place both before and after the voucher program was introduced, to show that vouchers had an effect above and beyond the stigma effect. One problem with this approach is that two separate time periods are compared, so other factors besides vouchers might also have an impact on achievement. Furthermore, the most sophisticated examination of this question in Florida found the labeling device had a larger impact on achievement than did the competitive effect of vouchers, contrary to the Friedman report's contention.[36] Nevertheless, the report claims that "there do not seem to be reasonable grounds for attribut-ing the positive results from the A+ program to a stigma effect" (p. 26).

Finally, the report notes the obvious response to its main contention: if vouchers are having such a beneficial impact, then why are the urban districts with voucher programs still performing at a low level? "Among those who wish to distract the public from this large body of high-quality scientific evidence, one of the most common strategies is to complain that public schools in places like Milwaukee are still failing to educate so many of their students" (p. 30). Although the report never says so, this complaint has come most prominently from notable voucher *supporters* who are starting to question their faith in vouchers in view of their less-than stellar track record.[37] The report ignores this — indeed, it includes no citations in support of this claim — and simply argues that there are too many variables to discern the impact of a voucher program on a district (an admonition the report otherwise discards when making claims about voucher effects). Still, this is an interesting question, and the fact that it is a legitimate question strongly suggests that the competitive effects of vouchers are indeed quite modest and difficult to attribute to them.

All this is not to say that vouchers have no effect on the performance of public schools threatened by vouchers. Indeed, some reputable scholars cited in the Friedman report have found a beneficial impact in some instances. But such reputable findings suggest a much more mixed and modest impact than what the new report would have us believe.

VII. The Report's Usefulness for Guidance of Policy and Practice

Ultimately, the Friedman report responds to the concern about the lack of an overall impact on urban districts that house voucher programs in a very different way than have those voucher supporters who have come to conclude that the impacts of these programs have been much less substantial than expected. Instead, this report recommends expanding voucher programs so that their purported effects may be increased.[38] In many ways, this logic is similar to that of market fundamentalists who, in the face of a global economic crisis widely considered to be caused by deregulated markets, are arguing that the remedy is further deregulation and more

markets. The new report also suggests expanding voucher programs in ways that would remove their focus on providing more equitable access for disadvantaged children, blaming the means-tested criteria and "limits on families' ability to supplement" vouchers for their failure to have a larger impact.[39] In doing so, the report does not directly confront the fact that both the Florida and Milwaukee programs were expanded, and evidence — including Forster's own data on Florida[40] — indicates that any positive effect of the programs on public school performance diminished after the programs were expanded.

This report both ends and begins — in its title — with the notion that voucher programs do no harm; that these programs represent a "win-win" in that they help students who use vouchers and help the public schools that those students leave. This claim is common in voucher advocacy,[41] often used as a defensive device when results are smaller than anticipated — "everyone wins, and even if they don't, nobody loses." Or, as expressed in this report: "No empirical study has ever found that vouchers had a negative impact on public schools" (p. 5; see also p. 34). In truth, the record is very thin. While many studies have examined the effects of vouchers on students who use them, few of any quality have been designed to measure the effects of vouchers on individual students who do not use them. We do not know how individual students, and particularly non-choosers, are affected by voucher programs. And this new report does not help answer that question.

In the end, what this report offers is an overview of studies, the majority of which dealt with one state (Florida) where the voucher program has been terminated when it was ruled to be unconstitutional.[42] However, the overview seems designed to build a pro-voucher argument rather than an even-handed presentation of research.

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16 Forster, G. (2009). *A win-win solution: The empirical evidence on how vouchers affect public schools*. Indianapolis, IN: Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice. p. 17; quoting Carnoy, M., Adamson, F., Chudgar, A., Luschei, T. F., & Witte, J. F. (2007). *Vouchers and public school performance: A case study of the Milwaukee parental choice program*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

17 The quote is from page 2 of Carnoy *et al.*'s Executive Summary.

18 Caroline Hoxby conducted the initial study on this case, but some of her other work on school choice has been criticized when other researchers were unable to replicate her findings or uncovered errors in the data, methods or both; see

Rothstein, J. (2007). Does competition among public schools benefit students and taxpayers? A comment on Hoxby (2000). *American Economic Review, 97*(5), 2026-2037.

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21 The voucher program was limited to Milwaukee. However, this is a questionable basis for comparison. Competition can be generated by other factors besides vouchers. For instance, private schools can attract students from more affluent families, in suburban districts, for example, and districts have been losing students to charter schools since the state passed authorizing legislation in 1993.

22 The Friedman report indirectly acknowledges this same point. In later explaining why vouchers do not seem to have a discernable impact on districts, the report argues *against* using the whole district as a basis for gauging the impact of vouchers: "the overall performance of a school system can never by itself provide a reliable guide to whether any one factor (such as vouchers) is having a positive effect." (p. 30)

23 Carnoy, M., Adamson, F., Chudgar, A., Luschei, T. F., & Witte, J. F. (2007). *Vouchers and public school performance: A case study of the Milwaukee parental choice program*. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute. p. 2, emphases and parentheses in the original.

24 Hammons, C. (2002). *The effects of town tuitioning in Vermont and Maine*. Indianapolis, IN: Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice.

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see also Forster, G. (2005, May 12). "F" for failure. *National Review Online*. Retrieved Dec. 22, 2005, from http://www.nationalreview.com/comment/forster200505120815.asp.

26 I would disagree with his elevation of randomization as the sole type of methodology that meets the highest standards; see

Lubienski, C., Weitzel, P., & Lubienski, S. T. (2009). Is there a "consensus" on school choice and achievement? Advocacy research and the emerging political economy of knowledge production. *Educational Policy, 23*(1), 161-193.

27 For example, see
Krueger, A. B., & Zhu, P. (2004). Inefficiency, subsample selection bias, and nonrobustness: A response to Paul e. Peterson and William g. Howell. *American Behavioral Scientist, 47*(5), 718-728.

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Metcalf, K. K., & Tait, P. A. (1999, September). Free market policies and public education: What is the cost of choice? *Phi Delta Kappan, 81,* 65-75.

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28 Forster, G. (2009). *A win-win solution: The empirical evidence on how vouchers affect public schools*. Indianapolis, IN: Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice. Citing:

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32 Recall, however, that no data on private school achievement or composition were included in the Friedman report.

33 Forster, G. (2005, May 12). "f" is for failure. *National Review Online*.

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38 One wonders if Forster would apply this same logic to other educational programs such as Head Start or class-size reductions.

39 Forster, G. (2009). *A win-win solution: The empirical evidence on how vouchers affect public schools*. Indianapolis, IN: Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice. p. 31.

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42 As was Arizona's program last month.

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E-MAIL ADDRESS:	club@illinois.edu
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