

**To Choose or Not to Choose:**

An Analytical Look at the Data Collected by Witte and Associates Concerning the  
Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

By

Rayana Gonzales

An Applied Research Project  
Political Science

Submitted to the Department of Political Science  
Southwest Texas State University  
In Partial Fulfillment for  
the Requirements for the Degree of

**MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

Summer 2001

FACULTY APPROVAL:

Patricia M. Hill

Al. Golden

Howard K. Lohoff

*To my Family,  
especially my Brother,  
for all his kindness.  
Thank You.*

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	
Vouchers on the Vanguard	2
Research Purpose	3
Organization of Research Project	4
<b>Chapter Two: Vouchers, Vouchers, and Vouchers</b>	
Types of Vouchers	5
Vouchers in the Courts	8
Politics of Vouchers	12
<b>Chapter Three: Economist View of Vouchers</b>	<b>14</b>
Privatization	14
Privatization with Vouchers	15
Market Approach to Education	17
Fairness	18
<b>Chapter Four: Educator View of Vouchers</b>	<b>20</b>
Vouchers Violate Equality	20
Separation of Church and State	20
Accountability	21
Admission to Segregate	21
Problems with Market Approach Theory	22
Weak Evidence	23
<b>Chapter Five: Current Experience with Vouchers:     The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP)</b>	<b>25</b>
Movement behind MPCP	25
The Original MPCP	24
Participating Private Schools	27
Governing of Participating Schools	30
Tuition	31
Other Characteristics of Participating Private Schools	32
MPCP Amended	33

## **Chapter Six: Conceptual Framework & Methodology**

Conceptual Framework	34
Methodology	35
Research Technique	35
Data Source	36
Treatment	37
Dependent Variables	37
Operationalization	39
Statistical Method	39
Threats to Validity	39

## **Chapter Seven: Results** **40**

Reading Test Scores	40
Math Test Scores	42
Overall Analysis	43

## **Chapter Eight: Conclusion** **44**

Strengths of Research	44
Research Weakness	44
Problems with Research Results	45

## **Bibliography** **47**

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to observe the effects of participating in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program on the students' achievement in Reading and Mathematics. Literature surrounding the voucher debate is reviewed through the viewpoint of an economist and that of an educator. This unique approach is followed by an explanation of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. An analytical look at data collected from the Milwaukee program is provided. This is accomplished by comparing the standardized reading and math test scores, from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) data set, of participants previous to entering the choice program to ITBS test scores collected after different years of participation. The time range of participation is from one year to five years; however, not all students continued participation in the program after the first year. An explanation concerning the unexpected results concludes this study.

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Public schools fail to keep up with public expectations, which lead the public to lack confidence in public schools.' Parents of inner-city students are especially dissatisfied with their children's low performing schools (Bingham & Felbinger, 1999). This strong public dissatisfaction has led policy makers to search for a solution to improve education. These policy makers and parents have turned to school vouchers as the solution (Witte, 2000).

Economist Milton Friedman first introduced the idea of school choice in the early 1960s. He argued that the government was an inefficient provider of education but acknowledged that in many instances parents would not be able to finance their children's education. His solution to this problem was vouchers. Friedman argued that vouchers permitted lower income parents to choose a school more suitable to their child's needs. Since parents had a vested self-interest in their child's education they would be sure to choose the best education suitable for their child. Friedman's ideology lacked the political support necessary to promote such a program (Friedman, 1962; Good & Branden, 2000).

This ideology has resurfaced to the front lines of education reform discussion. Voucher advocates have lobbied state legislatures to implement voucher initiatives only to have the programs defeated in the polls. Using tax dollars to provide a private education to students has been met with harsh opposition with the exception of vouchers targeted to low-income students. Advocates believe this is to change with George W. Bush, a voucher advocate, winning the presidency. The important thing is to analyze the impact vouchers have on improving education before declaring

---

<sup>1</sup> However, students' performance on standardized test has not fluctuated significantly over time (House, 1995).

them the "silver bullet" to educational problems. If vouchers can improve private schools and public schools then it is time for public policy to embrace vouchers in order to provide opportunity to students (Christie, 2001; Goldstein, 2001).

### **Vouchers on the Vanguard**

The 2000 Presidential election brought educational vouchers back into the limelight. George W. Bush embraced vouchers and incorporated them into his education agenda for the election campaign. Vice-President Al Gore attempted to dance around the issue but by the middle of his campaign peer pressure kicked in and he had to deal with the popularity of vouchers<sup>2</sup>. With voucher programs on the ballots in both California and Michigan it was difficult for the nation to ignore economist Milton Friedman's vision (Miller, 2000).

The implementation of school choice in the form of government vouchers is on President Bush's educational agenda. President Bush has proposed to provide vouchers to provide federal funding to cover the cost of private education for students in schools that are chronically failing. The federal government would set the standards and depend on the states to enforce the standards. President Bush believes choice will allow these disadvantaged students a deserved opportunity to succeed in school<sup>3</sup> (Dewar, 2001; Simpson, 2001; Schneider, 2001).

Businessmen see vouchers as an answer to the labor shortage. Businesses not only need literate workers to compete in a global economy, but they need technically literate workers. People become literate in school. Therefore, businessmen need schools to properly educate students in order to compete. This explains President Bush and other Republicans' fervor behind standards and

---

George W. Bush and Dick Cheney are avid school-choice supporters. Even the Vice-President's running mate, Senator Joe Lieberman was a former supporter of school-choice.

<sup>3</sup> A lack of congressional support caused President Bush to abandon the voucher portion of his education policy.

accountability in schools. Bush's motto, "No child left behind," signifies efficiency and competitiveness by investing in human capital (Schneider, **2001**).

Voters at the polls rejected the voucher initiatives in California and Michigan by more than a 2 to 1 ratio. These initiatives would have provided publicly funded vouchers for students to attend private schools. This defeat led to a shift in President Bush's lead on providing federally funded vouchers. Voucher opponents interpreted voters' rejection of vouchers as a significant shift in public opinion and a clear message to the pro voucher camp. Thus far no state ballot initiative relating to vouchers, tax credits, or tax deductions for private schools has passed. In **2000** thirty-seven states failed to pass legislation creating voucher or tax-credit programs or to amend previously enacted voucher or tax-credit programs (Christie, **2001**; Goldstein, **2001**).

However, vouchers targeted to serve low-income students in poor performing urban districts have been implemented in Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Florida.<sup>5</sup> Private schools are restricted from requesting any additional payment to the voucher amount from parents. Furthermore, participating schools cannot require voucher students to participate in religious instruction, prayer, or worship (Christie, **2001**).

## **Research Purpose**

A growing trend towards privatization and an effort to improve American education has caused policy makers to seriously consider Friedman's proposal of government vouchers for elementary and secondary education. Advocates hope that vouchers will improve public education. This research explores the effects school choice, via government vouchers, on the academic success

---

<sup>4</sup> Alaska, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

of participants. The purpose of this research is to determine the impact of targeted government vouchers on student achievement in the areas of reading and mathematics. Specifically, this research focuses on the impact the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) had on the academic performance of students during their participation in the program. This should offer insight into the effects government vouchers have on students' academic achievement and contribute to the academic debate surrounding school choice.

### **Organization of Research Project**

This project explores the potential success government vouchers have on improving students' academic performance. It does so by evaluating data collected on the participants of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). This data is evaluated using a formal hypothesis to assess the relationship between student performance on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)<sup>6</sup> and participation in MPCP. The next chapter defines three common types of vouchers; the courts take on vouchers and briefly examine the politics related to vouchers. Chapter three evaluates vouchers from the standpoint of an economist by focusing on aspects of privatization, the ideal of market approaches and fairness. Chapter four describes the standpoint of educators on vouchers focusing on equality, religion, segregation, and fairness. Chapter five reviews the current experience with vouchers by looking at the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). Chapter six outlines the conceptual framework and methodology used to evaluate the MPCP data. The evaluation results for the MPCP are presented in chapter seven. The final chapter summarizes conclusions drawn based on the evidence of the Milwaukee program.

---

<sup>5</sup> Florida will only issue vouchers to students who are attending low performing public schools.

<sup>6</sup> The Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) is a standardized test used in various public schools to assess students' mastery of reading and math for the appropriate grade level. These **test**s are conducted on an annual basis in May.

## Chapter Two

### Vouchers, Vouchers, and Vouchers

The purpose of this chapter is to explain three main types of vouchers, the courts stance on vouchers and the politics surrounding vouchers. An explanation of various voucher programs creates a better understanding of the complexities associated with the voucher debates. The courts play an important role in interpreting judicial issues surrounding the types of vouchers implemented, specifically the establishment clause. Chapter two concludes with an explanation of the political dynamics surrounding the voucher movement.

#### Types of Vouchers

The lack of an uniformed definition of educational vouchers causes confusion and uncertainty when discussing the topic. Polling on vouchers reveals the general public is not sure where they stand on the government providing money for students to have a choice in education. This uncertainty is due, in part, to the varying programs classified as voucher programs. Each possesses certain characteristics that may be favorable or unfavorable to the public (Gorman, 2000). It is important to know the rules and regulations of voucher programs in order to make an informative decision concerning one's support (Witte, 2000).

To further confuse the situation the terms voucher and school choice are often used interchangeable. Vouchers are but one form of school choice. There are three basic types of vouchers: controlled, private, and government. Controlled vouchers permit parents to choose which school their children attend within their assigned school district. Private vouchers are monies raised through private and corporate donations, which enable students to attend private schools.

Government vouchers give parents a voucher for a predetermined amount, which permit the parent to choose a participating public or private school for their child (Peterson, 1995a).

Controlled vouchers in East Harlem were used in the 1970s. Students in the area improved dramatically. The initiator of this program, Sly Fliegel, argues that providing parents with choice causes schools to respond accordingly and offer a better quality of education. Critics argue school choice did not cause the academic improvements; instead the decrease in class size and an increase in administrators' autonomy caused the academic improvements (Peterson, 1995a).

J. Patrick Rooney founded CHOICE, a private voucher program, charitable trust in 1991. This trust raised money to provide one-half of the tuition for private school for students who qualify for federal free lunch program. Recipients are required to make additional tuition payments and incur other related expenses, such as textbooks. These private vouchers are issued on a first come, first serve basis and can be used in any private school, regardless of religious affiliation. Participants in CHOICE have shown to perform better on the SAT than non-CHOICE students (Peterson, 1995a). These scholarship recipients' possess special characteristics that are not comparable to the average public school student. They have an increased motive to succeed because the families pay a portion of the tuition. Furthermore, they are a self-selected group interested in improving their academic success. Hence, claims of success cannot be generalized to the public voucher system (Bingham & Felbinger, 1999).

There are several forms of government vouchers: (1) vouchers limited to low-income students to attend secular private schools; (2) vouchers limited to low-income students to attend private school regardless of religious affiliation; (3) vouchers for students regardless of income to be used at any private school; and (4) vouchers for all students, not to be limited by income or affiliation of school, and parents may pay any tuition difference the voucher does not cover.

Voucher programs designed for low-income students to attend secular participating private schools are overall the least controversial type of government voucher. This is due to the concept of giving parents who otherwise would not be able to afford private education a choice. Public schools that serve the low income are often poorer in quality. Hence many students are trapped in inferior public schools. Higher income people have the ability to move to an area with a better school or pay private tuition. Most middle class families move to areas with better public schools (Chase, 2000). Most importantly the use of secular schools eliminates the arguments surrounding the establishment clause. An example of this type of voucher program is the original Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). Here students whose parents' incomes consist of no more than 175% of the national poverty line and are students in the Milwaukee Public School system are able to choose to attend a participating private school. The results of this voucher program have been mixed. Some evaluators deem it successful while others have marked it a failure (Witte, 2000; Witte, Sterr & Thorn, 1995; Peterson, 1995a). The author's interpretation of this program's success is covered in chapter seven.

Voucher programs targeted at low-income students to attend either secular or parochial schools are facing harsh opposition. Opponents feel the use of public funds to support a religiously oriented school violates the establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution (Bingham & Felbinger, 1999). However, they ignore the fact that restricting parochial schools from participation violates the free exercise clause of the same Constitution (Morken & Formicola, 1999). To date there is little data collected concerning this types of voucher **program**.

Voucher programs for students regardless of income, to be used at any private school, have been used in Maine and Vermont where rural school districts lack elementary schools or high

schools.? No data examining these voucher programs has been collected. Opponents feel this type of voucher will drain public schools of much needed revenues. Thus far, income has been used as a qualifier limiting vouchers to low-income participants for private and public voucher programs (White & Williams, 2000; Koch, 1999).

Permitting parents to pay the additional tuition, which the voucher does not cover, is the type of vouchers Friedman (1962) supported. With this all students, regardless of parental income, would be able to use the voucher at any school the parent chooses. This is by far the most radical form of voucher and a largely opposed form of choice. By allowing parents to add to the voucher value private schools would be able to increase the amount of tuition charged in order to dissuade undesirable students. However, this type of voucher would permit market theory to be accurately tested by permitting real choice for students and parents and allowing schools to compete for students (Vassallo, 2000).

### **Vouchers in the Courts**

The Courts response to voucher programs has been mixed due to two variables: the variation in voucher programs implemented and the different provisions set by state constitutions. As mentioned before there are several types of voucher programs and for every type of program there is a variation of the **rules** and regulations that guide the enactment of the voucher program. Furthermore, states have different Constitutions causing even greater variation when deciding the legality of voucher programs (White & Williams, 2000).

Over the years Courts have been faced with the task of deciding how to deal with the constitutionality of public assistance to religiously affiliated schools. In *Everson versus Board of*

---

<sup>7</sup> Students in rural areas of Maine and Vermont are now limited to attending public schools in other school districts or secular private schools.

*Education of Ewing Township* (1937). the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously held that the First Amendment barred taxation to provide support to religious activities or institutions. The Court did approve state funding for transporting students to religiously affiliated schools. This was viewed as a service such as fire and police protection. Furthermore, the Court emphasized that the government could not impede citizens right to exercise a religion of their choice. However, money could not be directly given to the religiously affiliated schools (White & Williams, 2000).

The idea of neutrality has emerged from the Courts beginning in 1971 with the *Lemon* test. It was devised from the U.S. Supreme Court case *Lemon versus Kurtzman*. Rhode Island and Pennsylvania permitted the state to directly pay the salaries of teachers in private schools as long as secular subjects were taught. The Court struck down the law using a three-part test set as the guide in deciding Establishment Clause cases: (1) Does the law have a secular purpose?; (2) Does it have the "primary effect" of advancing or inhibiting religion?; and (3) Does it cause an "excessive entanglement with religion?" The Court reasoned that it would be difficult for teachers to avoid teaching faith and morals therefore causing the use of state funds to pay for the salaries of religiously affiliated teachers unconstitutional (White & Williams, 2000).

*In Mueller versus Allen* (1983) the U.S. Supreme court ruled that state tax deductions for educational expenses is constitutional, since the money is not directly transferred to the religious school, but to the parents. This established the *Mueller* analysis, which focuses on how the money gets to the religious schools in order to determine constitutionality. Since payments are given to parents voucher appear to be ideal. Parents circumvent the connection between church and state. The voucher is given to the parent who then chooses which school to utilize the voucher eliminating the need for the government to give money directly to the school the parent has chosen. Redemption restrictions are placed on the voucher; only institutions of education can redeem the

value of the voucher (Morken & Formicola, 1999).

In 1990 a Federal District Judge, Solomon Oliver Jr., ruled that the voucher program enacted by the Ohio Legislature violated the Ohio Constitution.<sup>8</sup> He stated that the legislation had "the effect of advancing religion through government sponsored religious indoctrination" (Wilgoren, 1, 1999). He believed that permitting government sponsored vouchers provided financial incentive for students to attend religious schools. Judge Oliver based his decision on the fact that a majority of parochial schools include systematically the doctrine of their faith in instruction. When reviewing the parochial schools handbooks he found their primary objective of education was to "communicate the gospel message of Jesus." Judge Oliver also found that certain parochial schools required all students to attend religion classes and prayer sessions (Wilgoren, 1, 1999; White & Williams, 2000).

Later, in *Jackson versus Benson* (1998) Warner Jackson, the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association and others brought suit that the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) violated the First Amendment of the US Constitution by allowing religious schools to participate in the choice program. The Institute for Justice defended the state's action on the three grounds: MPCP was designed to equalize educational opportunity; the state required institutional accountability and MPCP gave aid directly to parents not the institutions. Milwaukee's attorney, on behalf of major John Norquist, filed one of six amicus briefs to the Milwaukee Supreme Court. Mayor Norquist is a major advocate of choice; it is his belief that parental school choice will revitalize the city. In this brief Milwaukee's attorney argued MPCP was designed to pressure the public schools into improving and to provide low-income parents with educational alternatives. He reasoned that public schools would only respond to this type of pressure (Morken & Formicola, 1999).

---

<sup>8</sup> The Ohio legislature was forced to include religious schools in the voucher program because the suburban secular schools were not willing to take the low voucher amount causing a majority of participating schools to be religious.

In a 4-2 ruling the Wisconsin Supreme Court held the Milwaukee program legal on all counts. The court reasoned it was the states' responsibility to eliminate government preference not to constrain individual's religious preferences. Based on the *Everson* criteria the court found that the MPCP sought to provide public funds to benefit the students not the private schools. By doing so the state did not attempt to improve nor hinder religion but to provide choice for students and parents. The court also found the participation of religious schools in MPCP did not violate the *Lemon* test because the exchange of funds between the government and religious institutions was for a secular reason, education. MPCP provided low-income families with equal footing (Morken & Formicola, 1999; White & Williams, 2000).

The ruling caused opponents of school vouchers to react fast. The Superintendent of Education claimed the Milwaukee Public School System was in severe financial trouble and threatened to raise taxes. The state Department of Public Instruction threatened to increase state and federal regulations on participating private schools. These increase regulations would cause many parochial schools to refrain from participation in order to preserve their autonomy. None of these actions materialized (Morken & Formicola, 1999).

However, the Supreme Court of Maine found *Bagley versus Raymond School District* (1999) unconstitutional. This case was similar to *Jackson* in reference to using vouchers in private schools. However, in Maine the original voucher plan permitted the inclusion of religious schools in the voucher program. In 1981 the state legislature amended the voucher program excluding schools with any religious affiliation from participating in the voucher program. Parents who wanted to send their children to religious schools sued the school district and state department of education stating their Constitutional rights were violated. The Maine court applied the Lemon test and found the voucher program in violation of the second prong of excessive entanglement. The court

reasoned that even though the school was chosen by the parent this did not override the fact that the tuition would be paid directly to the religious school making the program unconstitutional (White & Williams, 2000).

The constitutionality of using taxpayer money to send children to parochial schools was left unclear when the United States Supreme Court declined to hear three cases (Milwaukee, Maine and Vermont) challenging separate voucher programs. Opponents and supporters of school vouchers were disappointed at this news and both interpreted the decision as one that supported their views. The conflict surrounding voucher programs will continue even if the U.S. Supreme Court chooses to hear a case, because the Court's interpretation will be so closely tied to the heard case making it difficult to apply to other voucher programs (Koch, 1999; Viteritti, 1999; White & Williams, 2000).

### Politics of **Vouchers**

The politics of vouchers like other politically charged topics could be summarized by the famous words of Lasswell, "who gets what, when, and how" (1958). There is plenty of 'evidence' to support either side of the voucher issue. Different people benefit from different voucher programs. This is where battling out program descriptions will be vital. Each side will fight to secure their self-interest (Witte, 2000).

Pro-voucher Republicans and status quo Democrats illustrate this partisan battle. Their positions on the voucher issue appear to conflict with their traditional viewpoints on other topics. Normally Democrats lead the way for progressive change while Republicans fight to reserve existing institutions of power. However, when one looks at the interest groups associated to each side the apparent switch becomes clear.

Teacher unions who traditionally support the Democratic Party are opposed to vouchers.

According to Bingham and Felbinger (1999) teachers overwhelmingly believe voucher programs will decrease the revenues received by the public schools. Teachers are concerned that falling public school funding will decrease teacher and administrators salaries. Salaries pose the largest expense in public schools. In addition, private schools may draw from unconventional sources for teachers (decreasing demand for current teachers potentially reducing salaries). Furthermore, hard earned benefits like generous sick leave policy and paid training may be threatened by voucher funded school administrators. Not surprisingly self-interested teachers and administrators oppose school vouchers.

Republicans, who are supported by the religious right, favor school vouchers. They argue that providing government support for parents to send their children to parochial schools permits true religious freedom. Limiting choice to public and non-sectarian schools violates the free exercise clause (Morken & Formicola, 1999)

Witte (2000) maintains that if targeted government vouchers evolve into universal voucher programs it is unlikely that the results would favor the poor. Universal voucher programs shift the program focus from helping needy, to the general population. Everyone including those who can already afford to send their child to private school would benefit from universal vouchers. Vouchers would then provide educational subsidies for those who are not in financial need further pulling money out of public schools. The maturation of the voucher program will be shaped by the compromised made in creating a common agenda on how to subsidize private school tuition (Gorman, 2000).

## Chapter Three

### Economist **View of** Vouchers

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the use of vouchers through the view of an economist. For Economist, vouchers are a tool of privatization. By compromising between an open market and a government monopoly vouchers enable parents to make choices and schools to respond to these choices. An explanation of market approach to education is also provided in this chapter. The topic of equality is further addressed, based on an economic prospective.

#### Privatization

The public's distrust of government has increase over the years. Many view government as inefficient and ineffective. This has brought on the cry of restructuring. Economists have suggested privatization as solution to lacking government service. Through privatization the government is forces to compete with private industry in order to provide services. Most recently privatization has included city garbage collection, accounting, and transportation (Shields, 1988; Henig, 1999; House, 1998).

Privatization is the key to ending government monopolies. In the private sector profits are the main motivator for efficient production. In order for a private company to stay in business it is necessary to reduce waste to a minimum. This is done in hopes of pricing out the competition. Privatization does not create better citizens but it rewards individuals for being informed consumers. There are several techniques of privatization: load shedding, contracting, franchise, volunteer, co-production, user fees, and revenue centers (Apostolou & Crumbley, 1992).

This ideology has been brought over into the educational sphere. Individuals reason if

privatization can improve government services in other formerly monopolistic areas why should it exclude education. Educational choice would cause school, private and public, to compete. It is through this competition that schools will improve (Henig, 1999).

In the area of education opponents of vouchers feel school recipients would not be held responsible. However, contracting does not excuse contractors from responsibility. In fact contracting promotes efficiency and stimulates the economy. Since contracts are short term the service provider must ensure the satisfaction of the client or risk losing the contract (Shields, 1988).

### **Privatizing with Vouchers**

Vouchers are viewed a step towards privatizing education. By ending the government monopoly on education the private sector would be able to compete. This competition is presently prevented because most parents cannot afford to pay the tuition of private education on top of the taxes they pay to fund the public school system (Hakim, Seidenstat, & Bowman, 1994).

Milton Friedman was the first to introduce the idea of educational vouchers, in 1955, as the solution to reduce the inefficiencies of public schools and break the government's monopoly on education (Witte, 200). School vouchers are designed to increase educational opportunities for students and parents. When parents are able to choose their child's school the educational performance of public schools will improve.

Voucher systems are a compromise between free market and government involvement. The government's role in this arraignment is limited to setting the rules. Recipients of the vouchers are able to exercise choice in the market. These subsidies to consumers allow lower-income individuals to exercise the buying power necessary to have the market serve their needs (Murphy, 1996).

Market theory is not private versus public; instead it is the end of a government monopoly. Choice offered in an open market promotes competition, which leads to efficient production and allocation of goods and services. Instead of the government dictating to consumers what they can have the market offers consumers choice based on their buying power. It is this ability to decide where to spend one's income that empowers consumers to affect the market's production (Murphy, 1996).

Because public schools generally cost more than private school and often do not produce the same results, proponents of vouchers believe greater efficiency would occur if education were fully privatized. This position however fails to consider the selection bias of private school. Private school students possess different characteristics than those in public schools. They may be easier to teach and schools can expel problem students (Bingham & Felbinger, 1999).

Proponents of school vouchers feel this form of privatization will enhance the efficiency of education by creating competition among education providers. This in turn would lead to a reduction in educational cost and improved services. Further, consumer's needs are better satisfied by choice. Parents will also be more likely to participate in the education process (Bingham & Felbinger, 1999).

A study was conducted to estimate the achievement of students attending **public** schools versus the achievement of those attending private schools. It was found that private school students generally score higher on achievement test and are more likely to attend post-secondary schools (Bingham & Felbinger, 1999). Advocates believe allowing parents to remove their children from poor performing public schools will motivate these schools to become more competitive thus improving (Koch, 1999).

The voucher system would feed into the supply side of economics by encouraging new

schools to develop and meet the needs of parents' regardless of income. These new schools would compete with existing schools in order to attract students and the voucher. This voluntary exchange would better match individuals' needs. The schools would be more inclined to respond to parents and parents would be more inclined to invest time and money in the schools (Henig, 1994).

### **Market Approach to Education**

If a choice system were implemented it is expected that participants would migrate between the public and private school systems (Bingham & Felbinger, 1999). When students migrate from public to private schools, public school funding would fall to reflect the loss. Proponents of vouchers maintain this potential to lose money will motivate public schools to improve the education they provide.

Friedman saw vouchers as a way to allow unsatisfied students in poor performing schools a way out. He argued that a free-market approach to education would lead to improvements in public schools because of the threat of competition. Public schools would fear losing funds to private schools thus forcing public school administrators to better respond to the needs of the parents and students in their school. The government monopoly on education provides no incentives for public schools to improve. Market approaches to education would end this security and force public schools to respond to consumers illustrated by providing better services (Friedman, 1962).

Economist believe consumers know what works best for themselves and will follow their self-interest (Shields, 1989). With this in mind, parents will invest time and resources in order to choose the best school for their child. Allowing parent to choose their child's school provides them with the necessary motivation to invest their time and energy. With present public schools parents are "assigned" a school for their children to attend. Since there is no personal investment in this

assignment parent is less likely to participate in school related activities. Instead parents view their role as a limited one with only the obligation to send their child to learn (Friedman, 1962; Meeks al. 2000).

Empowering parents with the ability to move their child from public school and taking the money to be used to educate the student will cause public schools to become more responsive to the parents (Koch, 1999). This competition created by giving all students the ability to attend private schools will be the motivating factor in improving public schools. Low-income parents will have economic power to express their (dis)satisfaction with their child's school (Koch, 1999).

## **Fairness**

The market approach to education would be fairer for childless and small families. They would no longer subsidize the education of other individual's children through property taxes (Witte, 2000). America's original education system was based on parent's directly paying for their children's education. The idea of community funded education was developed in response to compulsory attendance laws. Many parents were unable to abide with the mandate for financial reasons. This resulted in a communal payment for education. This reallocation of individual's wealth is possibly one of the greatest welfare programs in America (Witte, 2000)

The American education system is neither based on equity or efficiency. It promotes individuals to accept services they may not have chosen. It forces others to pay for services they do not partake in. **Furthermore**, producers are restricted to what types of services they can offer, due to government restrictions (Witte, 2000).

Friedman's original argument was that under the current system good schools tend to be in property rich school systems. The families that reside in property rich school districts generally live

in fairly expensive homes. At any rate they were homes out of the price range of most low-income families. Thus the property tax based school systems, excluded children of low economics from quality schools. Under Friedman's vision of a voucher low-income families would just have to raise the money for transportation; something within their reach versus purchasing a new home. Thus vouchers increased equity (1962). Permitting parents to choose their child's school regardless of religion affiliation is the true sense of fair. It is only through this that all people will be presented with the level playing field necessary to compete in our global market (Viteritti, 1999).

The market approach is the best method to desegregate because it provides equal access. Allowing all families to make educational choices for their children open opportunity previously limited only to wealthier families. The market approach also permits a voluntary desegregation instead of traditional methods that often place an uneven burden on minorities.<sup>9</sup> Issuing vouchers valued for predetermined dollar amount would ensure that students in each would get a comparable sum of money to apply to their education needs. This funding method is far more equitable than the property tax rate many public schools operate with (Asher, Fruchter, Berne, 1996).

---

<sup>9</sup> This burden is often in the form of a multi-hour bus ride to a school outside of the student's neighborhood

## **Chapter Four**

### **Educator View of Vouchers**

The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the idea of a voucher program through the views of an educator. Focusing on the ideas of equality, religion, admissions and weak empirical evidence the arguments against vouchers commonly held by educators are presented. Furthermore the realities of other market approach services offered in the inner city are covered. Traditional anti-voucher education argument actually claims that voucher will increase the woes of our educational system.

#### **Vouchers Violate Equality**

A market approach to education would further economic stratification. Families with more wealth to invest in their child's education would do so by sending them to elite private schools where other wealthy students would surround them. Middle and low-income students would only have enough market power to attend poorer schools, with larger classes taught by low-salaried teachers. America is a democratic society based on equality of opportunity. Education is viewed as a stepping-stone towards success. To base individuals ability to acquire education on their parents' finances is to block equal access to success (Witte, 2000).

#### **Separation of Church and State**

Constitutional scholars have held fast in their belief that giving any aid to parochial schools clearly violates the establishment clause of the First Amendment to the US. Constitution. The Supreme Court has repeatedly supported this ideology. Allowing states to establish individual legal

standards used to evaluate church and state entanglement further complicates the issue. Many states opt to include more stringent criteria in their state constitutions. This is where voucher programs are tangled in the establishment clause (Viteritti, 1999).

### **Accountability**

The idea of giving money without regulations or audits has found sharp opposition from taxpayers. Private school administrators argue that allowing the government to regulate private schools would be asking the government to recreate the problems of public education in the private schools (Koch, 1999). Most voucher schools do not accommodate secondary education; due to the high cost related to this type of education (Sykes, Plank & Arsen, 2000).

Unlike public schools, private schools have control over their budgets. Private schools also make rules locally; where public schools are forced to perform within bureaucratic rules and regulations (Koch, 1999).

### **Admission to Segregate**

Opponents of vouchers claim that one main hole in the pro-voucher argument is that of admissions. Opponents of vouchers connect the success of private schools with their ability to "choose" whom they will and will not educate (Koch, 1999). A vast majority of private schools depend on admission test that determine the intelligence of the potential students. This in itself permits private schools and **unleveled** playing field. Private schools choose whom they accept; often discriminating against difficult to educate students, or those with special needs.

Public schools do not have the luxury of choosing their students. They must accept all students, even hard to educate students. **These** students are often the most expensive to educate as

well. Providing special education to qualified students is a major concern of educators. It is reported that over seventy percent of private school lack special education programs. This alone proves negative for private schools to comply with the lottery-based mandated acceptance (Koch, 1999).

The method of a lottery acceptance infringes upon the traditional rigorous admission standards most private schools have previously implemented. Several private education advocates feel this compromise in admission standards will damage the education offered by such private schools. There is even more controversy concerning the promised permission granted to voucher students to refrain from religious instruction (Koch, 1999).

Parents participating in voucher programs complained that their child was pre-screened by the private schools using the students previous test scores. Parents complained that schools blocked parents' participation by requiring registration fees up to \$350. On top of this "other fees were instituted. Including tuition fees. Participating private schools were not required to admit handicapped students. This type of student is the most expensive to educate (Doerr, Menendez, Swornley, 1996).

It was found that approximately one-third of voucher schools in the Milwaukee program were giving preferences to students from the parish. This was a direct violation of the stipulation of the voucher program mandating selection on a lottery basis (Koch 1999).

### **Problems with Market Approach Theory**

Voucher advocate boast that market choice will improve inter-city schools because the competition will cause public schools to change. Witte (2000) notes, however, that proponents fail to realize how market choice in other aspects of inter-city life has not improved things. Such as

private entrepreneurs have not invested capital in the inner city without heavy subsidies so it would be naive to think they would in the area of education (House, 1999; Witte, 2000).

Misunderstanding of the economic system, education system, how they fit together, and misdirecting economic concepts has led non-educators to want to apply the structure of businesses on schools. According to House (1999) market and economic concepts can be properly applied to education while others would only lead to ill fortune. The important task is knowing which concepts can be properly applied to education and which cannot (House, 1998).

According to Bingham and Felbinger (1999) schools in small school districts do not have the chance to compete with other schools because a single school board governs them. Efficiency gains may not occur as great as predicted due to the lack of perfect information provided to parents. Parents may also be forced to choose schools for non-academic reasons such as distance, religion, and social segregation (Bingham & Felbinger, 1999).

Opponents rightfully argue that it is difficult for public school to improve if they are losing money to voucher. The education of the democratic process is better fostered by an education that is protected from **competition**. Market oriented education may not produce the same success at a "free-market" economy because parents are not 'perfectly' informed about their options. If poor performing public schools are replaced by poor performing private schools the tax payers will be less inclined to pay the necessary capital in order to build new public schools; therefore, leading to an education deficit (Koch, 1999; Rosen, 1999).

### **Weak Evidence**

Opponents believe vouchers should not be permitted to siphon public funds from struggling public schools, especially since the evidence supporting the idea that students' performance

improves with the use of vouchers is weak. Opponents of school vouchers believe advocates have a not-to-hidden agenda of using targeted vouchers as the springboard for an universal voucher program. Voucher supporters do not deny their broader agenda to universal implement vouchers (Koch, 1999).

Statistical evidence supporting a superior private school effect is weak. Inner-city private schools suffer from the same problems of large class sizes, unqualified teachers, lack of parental involvement and out dated curriculum. In some cases private schools have larger problems because of their limited funding and the lack of community support (Carnoy & Rothstein, 2001).

In 1996 Peterson obtained Witte's Milwaukee data and published his own study after adjusting the data for what he called "obvious mishandlings" (Peterson, 1995a). Peterson used a "quasi-experimental design to compare the achievement of students who were chosen, in a lottery, to participate in the choice program. The results showed participants making gains in math but not reading (Peterson, 1995a; Carnoy & Rothstein, 2001).

Cecilia Rouse, a Princeton economist, reworked the same data and found participants made mild gains in math but none in reading. In a second study she controlled for the class size of participating schools and found choice students in smaller classrooms made larger gains in test scores than those in larger classrooms. These results were duplicated when Rouse analyzed data on a voucher program in New York City (Bracey, 2000; Carnoy & Rothstein, 2001).

## Chapter Five

### Milwaukee Parental Choice Program

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). Beginning with the movement behind the program. Then taking a look at the original MPCP. Followed by a description of participating private schools. Also addressing the racial make up of participating choice schools. Then reviewing governing practices of the participating schools, focusing on administration and the classroom. The value of the MPCP voucher is discussed followed by a description of the characteristics of participating schools then finally a briefing on MPCP amended.

#### Movement behind MPCP

The Milwaukee Public School System serves 100,000 students with an overall fifty percent dropout rate. Seventy percent of the students are African-American. One out of every five African-American high school students drop out of school and one in eight Anglo High School students drop out school (Moe, **1995**). Despite the poor performance of students no teacher had been fired from **1985-1990** nor had any new teacher been denied tenor". Even though performance in Milwaukee public schools is low the cost has significantly risen. A University of Wisconsin study found one-half of central Milwaukee public school teachers send their children to private schools. Teachers that send their children to public schools attend magnet schools (**Hakim, Seidenstat & Bowman, 1994; Moe 1995**).

These alarming facts gave way to a search for improvement. This is where private schools

---

"The average grade point for MPS students is 1.62; which is equivocal to a D+.

were examined. In 1990, State Representative Polly Williams, a liberal black Democrat, introduced the Milwaukee Educational Choice bill. Representative Williams received significant support from Governor Tommy Thompson, a conservative white Republican. This unique combination of support placed an unreal force behind bringing choice to Milwaukee parents and students (Hakim, Seidenstat & Bowman, 1994; Carnoy & Rothstein, 2001). By promoting the Choice program Representative Williams placed herself at odds with democratic colleagues. Her response to their dissatisfaction with her actions was "If liberals in the party are so good for blacks, why are we in such bad shape?...Basically I see the Democratic Party as being a leech that lives off black folks" (Regan 1991). This break with the Democratic Party among young blacks is common when discussing voucher programs (Koch, 1999).

### **The Original MPCP**

The "original" Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) began in 1990 for public school students, who met specified criteria, to attend secular private schools. In order to qualify the family income may not exceed 175 percent of the national poverty line. Participating students must have attended a Milwaukee public school the previous school year. When grades are oversubscribed the student must be chosen by random selection" (Koch, 1999). The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program allows economically **disadvantaged**<sup>12</sup> students to use a set amount of money as full payment of tuition to a choice school (Morken & Formicola 1999). As part of the Choice legislation the Milwaukee state Department of Public Instruction appointed Dr. John Witte of the University of Wisconsin at Madison to independently evaluate the MPCP (Carnoy & Rothstein, 2001). The Milwaukee Program is the first government funded voucher program with

---

<sup>11</sup> This only applies when they do not already have a sibling in MPCP .

<sup>12</sup> Fifty-nine percent of participating families were found to receive some form of public assistance.

data covering multiple years, making it one of the most closely watched experiments in America (Bingham & Felbinger 1999).

Parents of the choice students were given written and verbal information about all participating schools with their MPCP application. The parents were also told about the schools expectations of the student's performance and the parent's participation. The schools participating in MPCP were on a whole racially diverse. They served different student populations using various methodologies. They provided different choices for parents and students (Witte. 2000).

### **Participating Private Schools**

In 1990, ten private schools notified the Department of Public Instruction of their interest in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Seven of these schools decided to participate in MPCP come fall. All but twenty-four of the participants enrolled in five of the seven schools. The five main participating schools were Bruce Guadalupe Community School, Harambee Community School, Juanita Virgil Academy, Urban Day School, and Woodlands School. The other two schools were Lakeshore Montessori and SER Jobs for Progress; these schools served different educational purposes. All participating schools were secular and provided no religious instruction. The participating schools were not representative of private schools as a whole (Witte, 2000).

In 1992 five additional schools participated in MPCP; yet, they only served forty-seven choice students. During the 1994-1995 school year only 830 of the 1450 available spaces were filled. Twelve of the city's twenty-three non-religious private schools participated. In 1996 three of these schools closed, for various reasons. No more than twelve schools participated in the Milwaukee program at once (Doerr, Menendez, Swomley, 1996; Witte, 2000).

For the first five years four schools<sup>13</sup> enrolled a vast majority of choice participants. Well before MPCP all four schools were Catholic Schools. These schools convened to community schools when the Catholic Church ended subsidies due to declining enrollment (Witte, 2000).

Urban Day, the largest school, was formerly St. Michael's Catholic School. Urban Day is located at the center of Milwaukee's inner city and enrolls close to 500 African-American students. The school receives most of its funding from the corporate community. This permits the administrators to provide up-keep for the building. However, Urban Day does not have a play ground. Representative Polly Williams was on the school board prior to Milwaukee Parental Choice Program's beginning (Witte 2000).

Harambee Community School, formerly St. Elizabeth's Catholic School, is located on the edge of the central city. A majority of its students are African-American. The building was in poor condition in 1991 when it opted to participate in the MPCP, but was later remodeled. Prior to MPCP Harambee was going to close for financial reasons; however, the income generated by the Milwaukee program has allowed the school to remain open (Witte, 2000).

Bruce Guadalupe, again a former school affiliated with the Catholic Church, serves a predominately Hispanic population. The school has a long history of bilingual education. Prior to participating in MPCP the school faced bankruptcy and closure. Bruce Guadalupe has been forced to move several times in an effort to stay open (Witte, 2000).

Woodlands School also had a Catholic connection. This school served as a laboratory school for a Catholic teaching college, Alverno College. Woodlands comprised primarily of middle class Anglo students. Without the financial support of Alverno College Woodlands School faced serious financial problems (Witte, 2000).

---

<sup>13</sup> Bruce Guadalupe Community School: Harambee Community School, Urban Day School, and Woodlands School

Sixty-three choice students attend the Juanita Virgil Academy. Not much data was collected on this participating school because it closed after one semester of participation for financial reasons. Most of the sixty-three choice students returned to the Milwaukee Public School System. The Juanita Virgil Academy proves the idea that poor performing schools will close as opposed to poor performing public schools. The students in the Academy may have fallen behind a few months but that is a minimal loss when compared to the number of years students loose in failing public schools (Morken & Formicola, 1999; Witte, 2000).

The ages of MPCP participants were four years old to nineteen years old. The racial makeup of participants was mixed, but mostly minority. However, this diversity was not reflected in the schools. In 1999 eight of the schools were predominately African-American, one school predominately Hispanic and the remaining schools predominately Anglo. This racial pattern was due to specialty services offered by the schools (i.e. bilingual education). Parents of participants do not oppose integration but it is not a priority of theirs (Witte, 2000).

Participating schools varied in the racial makeup of their served populations. The four participating Montessori schools were primarily Anglo. Their main motivation for participation in MPCP was to racially integrate their schools. SER Jobs for Progress, Exito, and Learning Enterprising are alternative schools designed for specific populations. SER Jobs for Progress is a predominately Hispanic middle and high school. For most of these students this was their last alternative before dropping out. The school was located near the south side in a converted department store. Exito was another school for at risk youth in middle school. It was founded in 1992 by the former principal of Bruce Guadalupe. Learning Express was designed to provide day care for infants and children while their parents went to school in the same building. The school also served other at risk youth. Participating schools were also diverse in their attendance and

governing policies. Attendance in the alternative schools was low (Witte, 2000).

### Governing of Participating Schools

Although expulsion rates were not recorded it was found that schools went through the same channels of discipline for choice and non-choice students. When principals were asked if they would continue to participate in MPCP if the government restricted expulsion practices, they responded 'no.' Principals agree that they rely on parents to cooperate applied. School policy made it clear that it is the parents' responsibility to be involved in the child's education (Witte, 2000).

With the exception of Bruce **Guadalupe**,<sup>14</sup> schools participating in the MPCP were self-governing units. They varied on patterns of governance. Some schools had various empowered stakeholders while others had unregulated directors. Most schools had board of directors, which included a variety of people. By-laws along with written procedures and responsibilities guided their administrative procedures. Many of the private schools had task oriented committees, including fundraising, admissions, and expulsion (Witte, 2000).

Uniforms were often mandated. Teachers were in control of their classrooms. Students were well behaved and quiet. The faculty and staff of participating MPCP students had great autonomy to do what they saw fit. Strict rules were enforced concerning student conduct in the classroom. Private school teachers reported they enjoyed their autonomy because it allowed them to do what they do best, teach. Furthermore, the tight control over students allowed teachers to spend the class time teaching versus disciplining (Witte, 2000).

## **Tuition**

Four of the seven beginning schools had severe financial problems prior to participation. The normal tuition cost of each participating school varied. Most were under \$1,000 for the first child, and lower for the second and third child. One school had a sliding scale based on the parent's income. However, the Montessori schools cost up to four times more than the other participating schools (Witte, 2000).

For most private schools the voucher amount surpassed the normal tuition charged. A study of tuition payments in 1993-1994 found that Catholic schools averaged \$1,628 while secular schools average \$4,693. Since many of the participating voucher schools were former Catholic schools their tuition rates are still relatively low for secular schools. With the voucher increase in 1995 choice students were profit makers for a majority of participating private schools.<sup>15</sup> The tuition they received from choice students surpasses the amount paid by tuition paying students (Witte, 2000).

Although the voucher amount was high compared to participating school's tuition it was deemed too low by other secular schools. This caused several secular schools in Milwaukee not to participate in MPCP. The increase in the voucher value to \$4,000 per **year** may be what led to an increase in private schools enrolled in MPCP. It is expected that more schools will participate as the value of the voucher **increases**.<sup>16</sup> The state is at risk of losing about seven million dollars in state funds. This amount increased when MPCP was amended to allow religious schools (Doerr, Menendez, Swomley, 1996).

---

<sup>14</sup> Bruce Guadalupe was taken over by the United Community Center in 1991.

<sup>15</sup> In 1990, the voucher amount equaled \$2,446. By 1995, it increased to \$4,600.

<sup>16</sup> In the 1995-1996 school year eighteen private schools participated in MPCP.

## **Other Characteristics of Participating Private Schools**

Parental involvement was required at most schools as a condition of school membership. This ranged from fundraising to chaperoning trips. Requiring volunteering led to constant parental presence and participation. This presence and participation permitted parents an opportunity to see what is going on in their child's school life. Furthermore, parents formed close bonds with the teachers and other parents fostering a community. This community reflected in the behavior of students (Asher, Fruchter & Berne, 1999; Doerr, Menendez, Swomley, 1996; Witte, 2000).

Private schools are able to hold cost down because they pay their teachers and staff below public school level and they lack any unionized representation. Teachers constantly complained about these low salaries and limited resources but stressed how they enjoyed autonomy in their classroom. Many teachers were still forced to quit because they could not cover their personal expenses. The low wages caused great turnover among private school teachers. Therefore if private schools could charge more in tuition in order to increase teachers' salaries and retention, they would. The pay increase would cause a continual rise in tuition (Doerr, Menendez, Swomley, 1996; Witte, 2000).

The curriculum of participating choice schools varied. Most schools offered music and/or dance classes on top of a normal curriculum. Two participating schools offered daily Spanish classes and another French classes. Some schools offered cultural enrichment classes such as African History. Other schools catered to bilingual students developing special curriculum for the students (Witte, 2000).

Classrooms decreased in size as the grade level increased. With these smaller classrooms teachers were better able to provide students with individual instruction. Small class sizes also

permitted teachers to tailor their classes in order to meet student's special needs (Witte, 2000).

### **MPCP amended**

In 1995, the initial rules and regulations defining the qualification<sup>5</sup> for participants in MPCP were amended to allow religious schools to participate. This increased the number of participating nonpublic schools to eighty. Fifty of these schools were religiously affiliated; a majority of these were Catholic schools. The number of allowable participants also increased to 15% of the total enrollment of the Milwaukee Public School system. This qualified 15,700 students to partake in the choice program (White & William, 2000).

The Milwaukee Legislature also passes legislation to eliminate any further program related data collection. The reasoning behind eliminating social scientist to examine this unique experiment was not provided (Witte, **Sterr** & Thorn, 1995; Morken & Formicola, 1999). Furthermore, students participating in the choice program are no longer required to take standardized reading test and standardized math test (Carnoy & Rothstein, 2001).

## Chapter Six

### Conceptual Framework & Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the framework used to address the research question: Does student participation in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program impact student achievement in the areas of reading and mathematics. Furthermore, the methodology chosen to evaluate the data collected is explained and justified. An explanation of the technique used to analyze the data is provided along with the source of the data.

#### Conceptual Framework

The research uses a formal hypothesis as a conceptual framework. The formal hypothesis has been chosen as the conceptual framework because the research purpose is explanatory. In allowing the students Math scores and Reading scores to be dependent variables and participation in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program as the independent variable the formal hypothesis becomes the organizational tool guiding the research results (Shields, 1998). Table 1 links the formal hypothesis conceptual framework to the related material. The following equation summarizes the conceptual framework:

$$\text{STP}_{\text{Read}} = f(\text{TRE})$$

( + )

$$\text{STP}_{\text{Math}} = f(\text{TRE})$$

( + )

Where:

$\text{STP}_{\text{Read}}$  = Student performance in Reading

$\text{STP}_{\text{Math}}$  = Student performance in Math

$\text{TRE}$  = Treatment (Participation in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program)

The hypothesis proposes a positive relationship between student performance on standardized reading and math test and participation in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program.

Table I: Formal Hypotheses linked to literature

<b>Formal Hypothesis</b>	<b>Scholarly Support</b>
H1: There is a positive relationship between student performance on standardized reading test and on standardized math test and vouchers in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP).	Greene, Peterson, Du, Boeger & Frazier (1996); Witte, Sterr & Thorn (1995); Witte, Thorn & Pritchard (1995); Witte, Thorn, Pritchard & Claiborne (1995)

## Methodology

Methodology utilizing a control group would have been ideal for such an analysis; however, no such group could be properly matched to the treated group. Therefore a pre-test post-test design was utilized to measure the effects of treatment on student achievement on reading standardized test and math standardized test. The reading scores and math scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills prior to student's participation in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program are compared to the test scores collected after participation in the Milwaukee program. As described below, this data was extracted from the extensive data set compiled by Witte and associates.

The mean reading score of participants before entering a choice school was compared to the mean reading score of participants after one year of participation in the Milwaukee program. This was repeated for test scores available after two, three, and four years of participation. There were less than thirty post-test scores collected after five years of participation; therefore, eliminating any comparison. This comparison was repeated in the same method for the mean math score of participants.

## Research Technique

The research technique used to address the research question is aggregate data analysis. The use of existing data was decided because of the exasperating cost related to acquiring data on vouchers. Another advantage to utilizing already gathered data is the technique does not effect the treatment being studied (Babbie, 1998).

## Data Source

Data on Milwaukee Parental Choice Program collected by Witte and associates, as part of a grant, was used in this study. Witte and associates gathered available reading test and mathematic test scores from the State of Wisconsin for the participants attending a choice school (Witte, 2000). This included the reading test scores and math test scores of participants before attending a choice school and the reading test scores and math test scores of participant after each year the participant attended a choice school. Not all participants had recorded reading and math pre-test scores and/or post-test scores.<sup>17</sup>

This study used a portion of the data collected by Witte and associates, who were funded by a Milwaukee state grant. Several data sets were provided for anyone's use. These data sets covered the first six years of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. These data sets include: survey responses from participants' parents, test data and school characteristics. This information was collected from 1990 until 1995.

The test data was used in order to evaluate the effects MPCP had on the academic achievement of participants on standardized reading tests and standardized math tests. The Witte and associates test data was extracted from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) tape.

Test data was organized annually in the following categories: MPS control group, any choice, and private school choice enrolled. The any choice category provided the pre-test reading and math scores. This category encompassed test scores for any student who applied to the choice program at any time. It was necessary to carefully scan and choose only those students who participated in MPCP. Private school choice enrolled is where the post-test reading and math scores were found for choice participants. These scores included test scores for all participating choice students, regardless if they had previous test scores recorded (Witte al, 1995).

In order to accurately compare participants reading and math pre-test scores to their reading and math post test scores the participants identification numbers were matched. Then the

---

<sup>17</sup> For some participants the choice school was their first school experience, eliminating the existence of previous test scores for reading or math.

identification numbers and test scores were recorded in a separate spreadsheet. This was repeated for every year post-test scores were available. Upon completion the data in the spreadsheet was transferred into SPSS 10.0 for statistical analysis.

### **Treatment**

The treatment received by participants is their participation in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. This consists of at least one year of attending a participating private school. However, the amount of treatment received by each participant varied from one year to five years. Three hundred and thirty-six participants attended a choice school for at least one year and only four attended a choice school for five years.

### **Dependent Variables**

The dependent variables consist of the participant's Reading and Math scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills before and after participation in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). This variable was collected on an annual basis by the state of Milwaukee. It is measured according to the National Percentile Ranking, meaning their raw scores are reported in percentages compared to other students of the same grade within the United States. These scores were translated into Normal Curve Equivalents because the National Percentile Rankings are not interval level data causing difficulty in evaluation (Witte, Sterr, & Thorn, 1995).

Table 2: Operationalization of Conceptual Frameworks

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Data Source</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Direction of Relationship</b>
<b>Dependent</b>			
<b>Reading</b>			
Student performance in reading after first year of treatment	Witte, Sterr, & Thorn (1995)	National Percentile Ranking	
Student performance in reading after second year of treatment	Witte, Sterr, & Thorn (1995)	National Percentile Ranking	
Student performance in reading after third year of treatment	Witte, Sterr, & Thorn (1995)	National Percentile Ranking	
Student performance in reading after fourth year of treatment	Witte, Sterr, & Thorn (1995)	National Percentile Ranking	
<b>Mathematics</b>			
Student performance in mathematics after first year of treatment	Witte, Sterr, & Thorn (1995)	National Percentile Ranking	
Student performance in mathematics after second year of treatment	Witte, Sterr, & Thorn (1995)	National Percentile Ranking	
Student performance in mathematics after third year of treatment	Witte, Sterr, & Thorn (1995)	<b>National Percentile Ranking</b>	
Student performance in mathematics after fourth year of treatment	Witte, Sterr, & Thorn (1995)	National Percentile Ranking	
<b>Independent</b>			
One year of Treatment (Participation in MPCP)	Witte, Sterr, & Thorn (1995)	Yes	+
Two years of Treatment (Participation in MPCP)	Witte, Sterr, & Thorn (1995)	Yes	+
Three years of Treatment (Participation in MPCP)	Witte, Sterr, & Thorn (1995)	Yes	+
Four years of Treatment (Participation in MPCP)	Witte, Sterr, & Thorn (1995)	Yes	+

## **Operationalization**

The actual numbers related to the reading and math scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills are used in this analysis. Table 2 provides the definition, data source, direction of relationship, and how they are operationalized.

Reading and math test scores from the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) are used in this analysis. These test scores are collected after one, two, three and four years of treatment. It is predicted that the treatment will have a positive relationship with the students' performance on the reading and math tests regardless of the number of participating years.

## **Statistical Method**

The statistical technique used is the paired-samples t Test procedure. This statistical procedure eliminates the need to calculate the difference between the pairs and then evaluate the significance of the differences. This technique was chosen in order to evaluate the difference between pairs of observations so the effect of the voucher program on participant's achievement can be measured (Norusis, 2000).

## **Threats to Validity**

Critics may bring up maturation, since there is a time lag between the recording of pre-test scores and post-test scores. However, the standardized reading and standardized math test give are grade appropriate. Meaning the test matures along with the tested students eliminating problems of maturation. These standardized reading and math test are specially designed to evaluate the level of mastery by the student test taker according to their appropriate grade level. Furthermore, the test scores are then ranked against students of the same grade nationally.

Changes in the tested material controls for any pre-test threats to validity. Issuing different pre-test and post-test eliminates a pre-test threat to validity. Every year new reading and math tests are designed and the same version of the test is given to students of the same grade. This is done to permit accurate comparisons of the students' mastery.

## Chapter Seven

### Results

The purpose of this chapter is to encapsulate the quantitative results of the research collected. The data is organized in a tabular format and reflects the analytical component of the statistical analysis. The mean of the pre-test and the mean of proceeding years are used to assess the academic progress of students in reading and mathematics.

#### Reading Test Scores

Table 7.1 contains the four comparisons of the reading scores. It further reflects the number of observations (N), the mean pre-test reading score, the mean post-test reading score and the t statistic.

**Table 7.1 Reading Test Score Comparisons**

	N	Mean		t
		Pre-Test	Post-Test	
First Year Reading Scores	336	40.15	36.85	-3.479**
Second Year Reading Scores	192	39.13	37.46	-1.392
Third Year Reading Scores	112	40.19	37.77	-1.351
Fourth Year Reading Scores	<b>44</b>	40.25	39.86	-0.145

\*\*Significant at  $\alpha < .01$

The first row of table 7.1 illustrates the results from comparing the mean reading pre-test score to the mean reading score after one year of participation in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program for three hundred and thirty-six participants. Lacking pre-test **and/or** post-test reading scores eliminated several participants from the evaluation. The average pre-test reading score is

40.15 and the average reading scores after one year of attending a choice school is 36.85. These averages indicate a negative relationship between the pre-test reading scores and the post-test reading scores. Instead of the students reading scores improving after one year of private school they declined. This was proven to be a statistically significant drop.

The second row of table 7.1 states the results from comparing the mean reading pre-test score to the mean reading score, after two years of participation in MPCP. With only one hundred and ninety-two complete comparisons, the results were found to be statistically insignificant. The difference between the reading pre-test scores and the reading post-test scores, after two years of MPCP participation, reduced from the first year.

The comparison of mean reading post-test scores, after three years of participating in the choice program, to the mean of reading pre-test scores is located in the third row of table 7.1. On average the hundred and twelve participants that had pre-test and post-test reading scores available had **higher** scores on pre-test reading than the post-test reading. However, no statistical significance was found when comparing these test scores.

The lack of significance held true for the fourth row of data found on table 7.1. Here students pre-test mean reading scores are compared to their post-test mean reading scores, after four years of participation. It is during this fourth that the number of participants with pre-test reading scores and post test reading scores plummets to forty-four.

The post-test reading scores do not surpass the pre-test reading scores; however, the mean post-test reading scores increase every year. For instance, the post-test reading scores after two years of participation are 0.61 points higher. This progress continues with a 0.92 increase in post-test scores after three years of participation.<sup>18</sup> After the fourth year of participation the reading post-test scores increase by 3.01 points. Illustrating that the mean post-test reading scores may not have significantly increase compared to the reading test scores before they entered the choice school, but the mean reading test scores of the participants did increase annually.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> This is true when comparing the post-test reading scores of the third year of participation with the post-test reading scores after the first year of participation.

<sup>19</sup> Reading post-test scores for the fifth year of participation were not compared to the pre-test reading scores because the sample group was less than 30 participants.

## Math Test Scores

Table 7.2 reflects four comparisons of math test means. It states the number of observations (N), the mean pre-test scores, the mean post-test scores, and the t statistic. This information is used to evaluate the changes in math mean test scores. The math pre-test and math post-test scores of participating students are compared in this table. This information is organized in a tabular format indicating the relevant statistics between the relationships of pre-test and year of participation in the choice program.

Table 7.2 Math Test Score Comparisons

	N	Mean		t
		Pre-Test	Post-Test	
First Year Reading Scores	311	41.32	38.47	-2.766**
Second Year Reading Scores	184	40.87	39.37	-1.122
Third Year Reading Scores	108	42.94	39.36	-1.954
Fourth Year Reading Scores	42	42.38	42.33	-0.015

\*\*Significance at  $\alpha < .01$

Only the comparison between pre-test math scores and post-test math scores after one year of attending a choice school proved to be significant. However, there was a negative relationship between the math pre-test scores and math post-test scores. There were three hundred and eleven Milwaukee Parental Choice Program participants who had recorded pre-test math scores and recorded post-test math scores after the first year of participation.

The number of available pre-test math scores and post-test math scores declined to one hundred and eighty-four after the second year of participation. The 1.5 decline in the mean post-test math scores proved to be of no statistical significance. This held true for the comparisons on the

post-test math scores after the third year of participation and after the fourth year of participation. The number of available pre-test post-test comparisons also declined to one hundred and eight for the third year and forty-two for the fourth year.<sup>20</sup>

Although the mean post-test math scores of participants were lower than the mean pre-test math scores there was improvement among the post test scores after two years of participation and four years of participation by 0.9 points and 3.86 respectively. Showing the largest increase in test scores to be found after the fourth year of participating in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program.

### **Overall Analysis**

It is difficult to accurately evaluate the impact of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program had on participants' academic achievement in reading and mathematics. Since the change in mean reading and mean math scores was found to be insignificant a logical conclusion is the students maintained their previous level of **achievement**. This can be interpreted in two ways. The first being, attending private schools did not significantly **improve** the academic achievement in reading and mathematics of choice participants. The second being, participants did not decline significantly in their knowledge of reading and mathematics after participating in the choice program. Again it is a matter of interpretation.

---

<sup>20</sup> **Math post-test scores for the fifth year of participation were not compared to the pre-test math scores because the sample group was less than 30 participants.**

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the strengths of the research concerning the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. The weaknesses of this study are also addressed. The problems with the research findings are made clear as well as a clarification of the failure to prove the hypothesis.

#### **Strengths of Research**

The main strength of the research is in the methodology chosen to evaluate Milwaukee Program's affect on participants' academic achievement measured in standardized test. Relying only on participants' scores eliminated several outside threats to validity. Another strength is in the measuring tool. Utilizing standardized reading and math test scores provided a fair measurement of the students' achievement. Furthermore, the time frame of the study included multiple years. This provided a look into the effect of time of treatment on students' achievement in the areas of reading and math.

#### **Research Weakness**

There are three main weaknesses in this study: the limited number of pre-test scores of participants, testing for achievement only in reading and math, and qualification restrictions placed on participating schools. Since many choice participants were in preschool no pre-test scores were available. This affected the number of available pre-test scores. Several students who were in higher grades did not take standardized test before entering the choice school. This further decreased the number of available pre-test scores.

Limiting testing to reading and math eliminated measuring any achievement gains in other subjects. Students were not just instructed in reading and math, instead a portion of their curriculum was devoted to science, social studies, and other subjects. The students' aptitudes in these areas was

not measured therefore only looking at student achievement in reading and math.

Finally, qualification restrictions were placed on participating schools. The participating choice schools were not representative of private schools on a whole, nor were they representative of private schools in Milwaukee.

### Problems with Research Results

The evidence appears to support the idea that participation in choice schools actually causes students to perform poorer on standardized test. However, these generalizations can not be made for the following reasons: (1) parents were not really allowed to "choose"; (2) participating private schools were not a proper representation of private schools as a whole; and (3) participation in program was limited to a small select population.

Participating parents were not allowed to maximize their choosing potential. Parents were limited to secular participating private schools, which comprise of 10% of the private schools in Milwaukee. This limitation restricted parents from choosing a private school they believe would improve their child's academic performance.

Participating private schools are not representative of the general private school population. According to Koch private secular schools comprise of 22.9% of all private schools (1999). Not only are the participating schools parts of the secular minority but also three of the four were on financial brink prior to participating in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. It was reported that participating schools often had poor facilities. Many lacked playgrounds and had severely limited classroom space (Bingham & Felbinger, 1999). These conditions are not often associated with private schools.

Most importantly participation was limited to a small number of students. No more than 1% of the Milwaukee Public School population could participate regardless of qualifications. These small numbers proved significant when analyzing the data at hand. The Milwaukee legislature not only imposed limitations on the number of permitted participants but also placed financial qualifications. The participants' family income could not exceed 175% of the national poverty line.

A further restriction placed on the choice program was that no more than **49%** of their total enrollment could consist of choice students. (The Milwaukee legislature increase the percentage to 65% in **1994**) (Witte, Sterr, & Thorn, **1995**). These specified regulations prevented the data collected from the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program to be generalized to other potential voucher programs.

## **Bibliography**

- Apostolou, Nicholas G., and D. Larry Crurnbley. 1992. *Handbook of Governmental Accounting and Finance*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Archer, Jeff. 2000. "Positive Voucher Audit Still Raises Questions." *Education Week*. (16 February): 3.
- Bingham, Richard D., and Claire L. Felbinger. 1999. *Evaluation in Practice: A Methodological Approach*. New York: Longman Publishing.
- Babbie, Earl. 1998. *The Practice of Social Research*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Bracey, Gerald W. 2000. "Small Classes 1, Vouchers 0." *Phi Delta Kappan*. Vol. 82, No. 4. (December): 331-332.
- Carnoy, Martin and Richard Rothstein. 2001. "Do School Vouchers Improve Student Performance?" *American Prospect*. Vol. 12, No 1. (January): A42-A46.
- Chase, Bob. 2000. "The Real Choice." *NEA Today*. Vol. 19, No 1. (September): 5.
- Christie, Kathy. 2001. "Stateline: Déjà vu All Over Again." *Phi Delta Kappan*. Vol. 82, No. 5. (January): 346-347.
- Confessore, Nicholas. 1999. "Runaway Vouchers." *American Prospect*. Vol II, No. 3 (December): 25.
- Dewar, Helen. 2001. "Differences Hold Up Education Plan." *Washington Post*. (23 July): A02.
- Doerr, Edd, Albert J. Menendez, and John M. Swornley. 1996. *The Case Against School Vouchers*. Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books.
- Friedman, Milton. 1962. *Capitalism & Freedom*. University of Chicago Press.
- Goldstein, Andrew. 2001. "Setback for Vouchers." *Time*. Vol. 156, No. 26. (December/January): 142.
- Good, Thomas and Jennifer S. Branden. 2000. *The Great School Debate: Choice, Vouchers, and Charters*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Gorman, Siobhan. 2000. "The Road Ahead for School Vouchers." *National Journal*. Vol. 32, No 52/53. (23 December): 3974-3975.
- Hakim, Simon, Paul Seidenstat, and Gary W. Bowman. 1994. *Privatizing Education and Educational Choice*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger.

- Henig, Jeffrey R. *Rethinking School Choice: Limits of the Market Metaphor*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- House, Earnest R. 1995. *Schools for Sale: Why Free Market Policies Won't Improve America's Schools, and What Will?* New York: Teachers College Press.
- Koch, Kathy. 1999. "School Vouchers." *CQ Researcher*. Vol 9., No. 13. (9 April): 281-304.
- Lasswell, Harold. 1958. *Who Gets What, When, How*. Cleveland: Meridian Books.
- Meeks, Loretta F., Wendell A. Meeks, and Claudia A. Warren. 2000. "Racial desegregation: Magnet Schools, Vouchers, Privatization, and Home Schooling." *Education & Urban Society*. Vol. 33, No. 1. (November): 88-101.
- Miller, John. 2000. "Choice's Tough Road." *National Review*. Vol 52, No. 17. (11 September): 41-44.
- Murphy, Joseph. 1996. *The Privatization of Schooling*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, Inc.
- Norusis, Marija. 2000. *Guide to Data Analysis: SPSS 10.0*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Peterson, Paul E., 1995a. "A Critiques of the Witte Evaluation of Milwaukee's School Choice Program." Center for American Political Studies Occasional Paper 95-2, Littauer Center, Department of Government, Harvard University.
- Peterson, Paul E., 1995b. "The Milwaukee School Choice Plan: Ten Comments on the Witte Reply." Center for American Political Studies Occasional Paper 95-3, Littauer Center, Department of Government, Harvard University, (March).
- Rosen, Harvey S. 1999. *Public Finance*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Irwin/McGraw-Hill.
- Schneider, William. 2001. "Readin', Writin', and Competitiveness." *National Journal*. Vol. 33, No. 5. (February): 370.
- Shields, Patricia. 1988. "Less is Less: Fiscal Issues in Human Services." *Public Administration Quarterly*. Vol. 12, No. 1. (Spring): 60-91.
- Shields, Patricia. 1998. "Pragmatism as a Philosophy of Science: A tool for Public Administration." *Research in Public Administration*. Vol. 4. 1999-230.
- Simpson, Michael D. 2001. "Vouchers on Trial." *NEA Today*. Vol. 19, No. 5. (February): 18.
- Sykes, Gary, David Arsen, and David Plank. 2000. "The Michigan Experience: School Choice and School Change." *Education Week*. Vol. XIX, No. 22. (9 February): 38 & 41.

Vassallo, Philip. 2000. "Empowering Parents with School Choice Will Pave the Road for Educational Reform in Public Schools." *Insight on the News*. Vol. 16, No. 44. (27 November): 46.

Viteritti, Joseph P. 1999. *Choosing Equality: School Choice, the Constitution, and Civil Service*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

White, Charles and Charles F. Williams. 2000. "School Voucher Plans Raise Key Church-State Issues." *Social Education*. Vol. 64, No. 1. (January/February): 56-62.

Wilgoren, Jodi. 1999. "U.S. Judge Rejects a Voucher System Used in Cleveland." *NEW YORK Times*. (21 December): 1.

Witte, John F., Troy D. Sterr, and Christopher A. Thorn. 1995. "Fifth-year report: Milwaukee Parental Choice Program." Madison, WI: Department of Political Science and The Robert La Follette Institute of Public Affairs.

Witte, John F. 2000. *The Market Approach to Education: An Analysis of America's First voucher Program*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.