Vouchers in Milwaukee: What Have We Learned From the Nation’s Oldest and Largest Program?

Deven Carlson
University of Oklahoma
Background and History

• Milwaukee Parental Choice Program oldest and largest urban school voucher program
  • Begun as a pilot in 1990—340 students in 7 schools
  • Today about 25,000 students in over 100 schools
  • What have we learned from this program in the 20+ years of its existence?

• Early evaluations
  • Mixed results—Witte; Greene, Peterson, and Du; Rouse
  • Little evidence of cream skimming
  • Early evaluations ended by 1996-97
  • No evaluation until 2006-07
    • Very little monitoring
MPCP Growth and Evaluations

![Graph showing the growth and evaluations of MPCP over academic years.](Image)
New Legislation

- MPCP reauthorized several times between 1996-97 and 2004-05, but none authorized evaluation of the program
- Changed with 2005 Wisconsin Act 125
  - Raised cap on student participation to 22,500
  - Specified eligibility criteria and voucher value
    - 175% of federal poverty line
    - Voucher worth approximately $6,500—participating schools must accept as full tuition
  - Mandated five-year evaluation of the program
A New Evaluation

• Legislation mandated comparison of test scores of representative sample of MPCP participants and comparable group of MPS students
  • Both MPCP and MPS required to provide evaluators with those scores

• Permitted wide variety of questions to be addressed
  • Who uses the program? Who leaves the program?
  • Effect of the program on student outcomes
    • Achievement test scores
    • Attainment
  • Effects of accountability policy on participating private schools
    • Unintended, but possible because of...
More Legislation

- 2009 Wisconsin Act 28—Additional requirements phased in over 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years
  - Requirements for 2009-10 were administrative fee and more rigorous certification for new schools
  - Starting in 2010-11 schools had to test all students in grades 3-8 & 10 in reading and math with WKCE
    - Submit results to DPI for public reporting by school
  - Additional requirements regarding academic standards, teacher certification and instructional hours

- New legislation created complications for evaluation, but facilitated analysis of accountability policy
Nuts and Bolts of the Evaluation

• Sample selection
  • Random Sample of MPCP Students
  • “Comparable” group of MPS students
    • Randomization not possible
    • Matched MPS sample
      • Census tract—neighborhood effects
      • Baseline test scores
      • Demographic variables
Nuts and Bolts of the Evaluation

• Data
  • Final matched sample consists of 5,454 students evenly split between MPCP and MPS
    • Surveyed during baseline year
      • Several avenues of inquiry
    • Tested during baseline year (2006-07) and four subsequent school years
  • Additional data collected as well
    • School (and sector) of attendance
    • Demographic characteristics
What Did We Learn?

- Evaluation provided insight into several dimensions of the operations and effects of the MPCP
  - Characteristics of participants
  - Characteristics of students who leave the program
    - Academic performance of these students upon return to MPS
  - Effects of the program on student outcomes
    - Achievement test scores
    - High school graduation and college enrollment and persistence
  - Role of accountability policy
  - Discuss each in turn
    - Implications for statewide expansion
Who Uses a Voucher?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>MPS Enrollment</th>
<th>MPCP Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learner</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Baseline WKCE-Reading (z-score)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Baseline WKCE-Math (z-score)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Carlson, Cowen, and Fleming 2013
Who Uses a Voucher?

- A couple things to keep in mind when interpreting who uses a voucher
  - Not every MPS student eligible for MPCP
  - Private school record-keeping imperfect for free/reduced lunch eligibility, ELL status, and Special Education status
- Represent best estimates
- Other work from project has shown—relative to matched MPS sample—MPCP parents to be more religious and more educated
  - Lower average income, but might be a function of eligibility criteria
Who Leaves the MPCP?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>MPCP Sample</th>
<th>MPCP Leavers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Reduced Lunch</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learner</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Baseline WKCE-Reading (z-score)</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
<td>-0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Baseline WKCE-Math (z-score)</td>
<td>-0.27</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Carlson, Cowen, and Fleming 2013
Achievement of Leavers

Graph shows mean residuals from estimation of equation (3) without MPS indicator.
Effect of MPCP Participation on Student Achievement

- Statistical analysis of effect of MPCP participation on student achievement
- Present two sets of results—one that does not account for parental characteristics and one that does
- Smaller sample for results accounting for parental characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Reading-No PC</th>
<th>Math-No PC</th>
<th>Reading- PC</th>
<th>Math- PC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>0.020</td>
<td>-0.044</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>-0.039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.029)</td>
<td>(0.027)</td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
<td>(0.032)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>-0.038</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>-0.061*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.030)</td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
<td>(0.035)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>0.050</td>
<td>-0.057</td>
<td>0.062</td>
<td>-0.072*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.033)</td>
<td>(0.037)</td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>0.125***</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>0.173***</td>
<td>0.089**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.040)</td>
<td>(0.039)</td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
<td>(0.046)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<0.01; **p<0.05; *p<0.10, two-tailed.
Effect of MPCP Participation on Student Achievement

- Noticeable difference in results between 2009-10 and 2010-11
  - What could be responsible?

- Accountability policy introduced in 2010-11 school year
  - Testing of all voucher students with WKCE in reading and math
  - Public reporting of scores by school

- Are the differences we observe produced by introduction of accountability policy?
  - Examine in two ways
Accountability Analysis

• Create dataset of all students who were in the same sector (MPS or MPCP) in 2008-09, 2009-10, and 2010-11

• Perform two analyses
  • Using just MPCP students, compare each student’s 2010-11 score to his/her 2009-10 and 2008-09 scores
  • Compare change in MPCP students’ scores from 2009-10 to 2010-11 to change in MPS students’ scores over those two years
    • MPCP students experienced change in accountability policy
    • Accountability policy was constant for MPS students
Accountability Analysis Results

• Compared to their 2009-10 scores, MPCP students’ 2010-11 scores were significantly higher
  • No difference between 2008-09 and 2009-10 scores

• Change in MPCP students’ scores from 2009-10 to 2010-11 was much greater than change in MPS students’ scores
  • No differences in the changes from 2008-09 to 2009-10 for students in the two sectors

• Differences we saw between 2009-10 results and 2010-11 results are likely attributable to accountability policy
Summary of Research

• Some differences between voucher users and overall MPS student body

• Students who leave MPCP and return to MPS more disadvantaged than average voucher user
  • Perform better upon return to MPS

• Little overall difference between MPCP students and matched MPS students in achievement over time

• Differences that emerged in 2010-11 likely attributable to accountability policy
Relevant Policy Topics

- Scope of expansion
  - Current and future

- Amount and type of accountability

- Student populations in each sector

- Need to have honest conversation on these topics
Thank You!

- Email: decarlson@ou.edu