

SCHOOL CHOICE SUCCEEDS

When school voucher programs are instituted, it stimulates public schools to improve. That, at least, is what the Florida experience shows.

In Florida, if a school receives two failing grades in a four-year period, its students can elect to go elsewhere.

Performance is measured by standardized tests, and students who choose to use a voucher can attend either a private or public school. The result, a new study concludes, is that the forced competition has had the effect of improving poorly performing public schools.

The study, available online at www.educationnext.org, was conducted by Manhattan Institute researchers Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters. The peer-review study was independently affirmed by Cornell researcher Rajashri Chanrararti.

What the researchers found was that those public schools that had failed twice within a four-year period, or once within a three-year period, quickly made significant improvement. On the other hand, those public schools that were previously threatened by voucher competition (because they had failed once), but were no longer threatened (because four years had expired since their first failure), posted a decline in academic performance.

It is obvious from the Florida case that the worst fear of the public school industry—a mass exodus of students to private schools—has not materialized. What has happened is that competition has worked to everyone's benefit.