

Summary of the 2014 Department of Education Study on DC Vouchers¹

Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: An Early Look at Applicants and Participating Schools Under the SOAR Act

This study demonstrates that the DC voucher program is flawed: it continues to fund religious education, it fails to help students in failing schools, and it fails to serve students in the poorest of DC's communities.

DC Voucher Schools are Predominantly Religious – The program threatens the principle of church state separation. 62% of DC voucher schools are religious. “A higher share of participating schools than non-participating private schools is religiously affiliated (64 percent versus 29 percent).” (p. 10) When that data is weighted by the number of students served in each school, the religiously-affiliated schools rise to 81% of all voucher schools. (p. 29, Appendix C)

Most Vouchers Do Not Cover the Cost of Private School Tuition – The voucher program can ultimately only help those students whose families have the means of covering extra costs of tuition and fees associated with private school education. 68% of high schools and 62% of K-8 schools charged tuition rates above those of the cap on each student's voucher. (p. 9)

Vouchers Do Not Actually Help Kids Most in Need – If the program's true goal is to lift up kids in poverty and provide them greater educational opportunities, it fails to do so. While 69% of students who applied for the DC vouchers lived in wards 1, 5, 7, and 8 (the least affluent areas of the city), only 40% of DC voucher schools are located there. Thirty out of the fifty-three voucher schools were located in the four most affluent wards. (pp. 11, 18) Many voucher students in DC do not even come from a public school labelled as being “in need of improvement” but come from other public or even private schools. And, “[s]tudents were less likely to enroll in a private school with an OSP scholarship if their parents were unemployed or not working full time.” (p. 21)

DC Voucher Schools Educate Less Minorities than Public Schools – Participating voucher schools have a higher percentage of white students – 35% as opposed to public schools with only 6%.(p. 11)

Almost a Quarter of Voucher Students Don't Actually Use Vouchers - Only 72% of applicants actually use the voucher to enroll in private school. (p. 19) Only 72% of those students who receive vouchers who are currently attending participating private voucher schools actually use those vouchers. (p. 21) Moreover, 35% of those applicants in districts zoned for “schools in need of improvement” did not actually use their vouchers. (p. 21)

Most Families Don't Actually Want Vouchers - Only 3-4% of all eligible voucher students in DC applied from 2011-2013. (p. 14)

¹ U.S. Dep't of Ed., *Evaluation of the D.C. Scholarship Program: An Early Look at Applicants and Participating Schools Under the SOAR Act*, (2014), available at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20154000/pdf/20154000.pdf>.