

Comparing School Choice and Public School Students

The record of the state's parental choice programs summarized below relies on DPI data and high quality scholarship.

It includes comparisons for Milwaukee between private school choice students and *all MPS students*, that is, between students from low- and low/middle income families and MPS students from all income levels, including high achieving MPS students at selective admission schools.

These are not apples and apples. The comparisons are skewed against private choice students, who enter the program at or often below MPS achievement levels. *Nonetheless, they outperform traditional public school students on average after several years.* Further, as we show, the gap is widening.

We also present comparisons involving students at public schools and private schools in the Racine and statewide parental choice programs.

We also describe the considerable scholarly research on other benefits, such as less crime, higher graduation rates, and greater civic involvement.

Academic Highlights

- Private school choice students often enter the program behind public school peers in academic achievement. Their subsequent path is one of academic growth.
- Private school choice students outscore Milwaukee and Racine public school students from all income levels.
- Low-income private school choice students outside of Milwaukee and Racine outscore public school students from all income levels in several categories.
- On average, private school choice students outscore public school students from all income levels on the college-readiness ACT test.
- Underscoring the importance of growth, a state achievement gap favoring private choice students and public students has widened in recent years.
- Private school results come despite taxpayer per pupil funding that is about 60 percent of public school spending for the time periods described (increased to about 70 percent beginning in 2023-24).

Comparisons

For 2022-23, the latest year available, Tables 1 and 2 compare Milwaukee and Racine choice students from low- and low-middle income families with public school students from all income levels (MPCP and RPCP eligibility is at or below 300% of the Federal Poverty Limit).

Table 3 compares *all* public school students with low-income students in the statewide, Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP) where eligibility is at or below 220% of the FPL.

Table 4 compares WPCP students with public school students at or below 185% of the FPL.

Tables 1-4 highlight a clear advantage for private school choice students in the Basic, Proficient, and Advanced categories.

Table 1. MPCP Students vs. All MPS Students, English Language Arts & Math

	ELA Below Basic	ELA Basic	ELA Proficient & Advanced	Math Below Basic	Math Basic	Math Proficient & Advanced
MPCP	40%	38%	22%	51%	32%	17%
MPS	52%	31%	18%	64%	25%	12%

Table 2. RPCP Students vs. All RUSD Students, English Language Arts & Math

	ELA Below Basic	ELA Basic	ELA Proficient & Advanced	Math Below Basic	Math Basic	Math Proficient & Advanced
RPCP	33%	41%	26%	43%	35%	23%
RUSD	48%	32%	20%	60%	27%	14%

Table 3. WPCP Students vs. All Statewide Students Outside Milwaukee & Racine

	ELA Below Basic	ELA Basic	ELA Proficient & Advanced	Math Below Basic	Math Basic	Math Proficient & Advanced
Choice	18%	37%	45%	24%	37%	39%
Public	22%	35%	43%	27%	31%	43%

Table 4. WPCP Students vs. Economically Disadvantaged Statewide Public Students Outside Milwaukee & Racine

	ELA Below Basic	ELA Basic	ELA Proficient & Advanced	Math Below Basic	Math Basic	Math Proficient & Advanced
Choice	18%	37%	45%	24%	37%	39%
Public	39%	37%	24%	46%	32%	22%

ACT Scores

Even with an apples to oranges comparison, private school choice students do better than public school students. For at least the last eight years, private choice students from low-income and low-middle income families have scored higher than public school students from all family income levels on the college-readiness ACT test. Table 5 shows the most recent results.

Table 5. Composite ACT Scores, 2022-23

Program	2022-23
MPCP	16.9
MPS (all income)	15.84
RPCP	16.8
RUSD (all income)	16.02
WPCP	20.7
Statewide	16.24

Growth

Research in the 1990s, and again in the early 2010s, found that students in the MPCP were at lower achievement levels than average MPS students. This makes Table 1 above noteworthy. It shows MPCP students, on average, achieving **at higher levels than all MPS students**. While data are not available on students entering the RPCP and WPCP, it is reasonable to assume they, too, were at or below their peers. This underscores the significance of comparisons in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

Figures 1-2 below show that in Milwaukee, the current year comparison (2022-23) follows a *pattern of years of growth for choice students and decline for public schools students*. The figures track the percent of students scoring proficient and advanced between 2016-17 and 2022-23 (no testing in 2019-20 due to COVID). Trends are similar in this period for the RPCP and WPCP.

Figures 1 and 2 do not purport to represent that the levels attained are adequate. Higher proficiency scores are desirable and attainable. What the figures do show is a clear advantage for choice students.

Figure 1

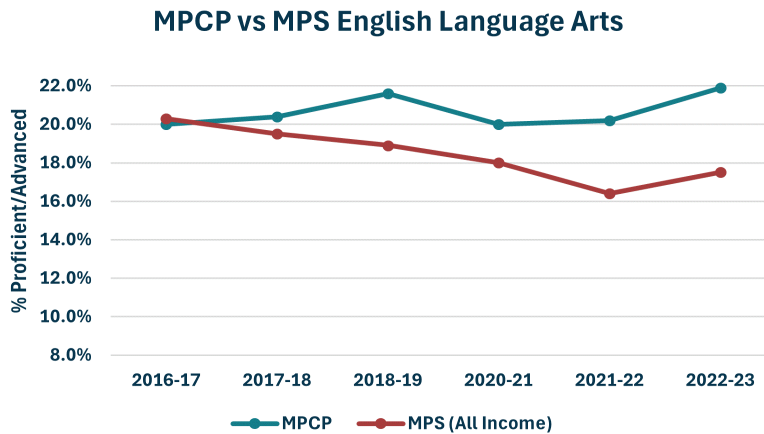
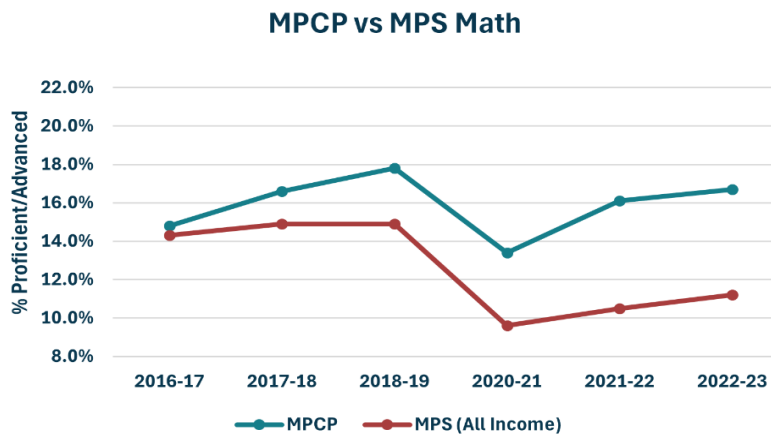


Figure 2



Non Academic Gains

Academic results above tell an incomplete story. High quality research identifies significant benefits beyond academic achievement gains in the MPCP.

Patrick Wolf, Ph.D., is recognized among the nation’s leading scholars in the field of educational choice policy. He directed a large team, including John Witte from the University of Wisconsin, that studied the MPCP.

- In a study for the Annenberg Institute at Brown University, Wolf and others found that: “As of 2018, [Milwaukee choice] students have spent more total years in a four-year college than their MPS peers. The MPCP students in the grade three through eight sample attained college degrees at rates that are statistically significantly higher than their matched MPS peers.”
- A separate study, with Corey DeAngelis, Ph.D., in the *Journal of Private Enterprise*, examined “the effects of Milwaukee’s school voucher program on adult criminal activity and paternity suits ... We find that exposure to the program ... is associated with a reduction of around 53 percent in drug convictions, 86 percent in property damage convictions, and 38 percent in paternity suits. The program effects tend to be largest for males and students with lower levels of academic achievement at baseline.”

Positive findings extend far Milwaukee.

- In “The School Choice Journey: School Vouchers and the Empowerment of Urban Families,” Wolf and other authors provide an in-depth chronicle of 110 families in Washington, DC's Opportunity Scholarship Program. The book “provides a realistic look at how urban families experience the process of using school choice vouchers and transform from government clients to consumers of education and active citizens.”
- In a study released earlier this year, Wolf and colleagues find that “students who attend private schools have, on average, better civic outcomes than students who attend public schools.” Their statistical meta-analysis was published in the journal *Educational Psychology Review*. They write: “The evidence is especially strong that private schooling is correlated with higher levels of political tolerance and political knowledge and skills. Religious private schooling is strongly associated with positive civic outcomes. Claims that private schooling imperils democracy are inconsistent with this empirical evidence.”