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IN EDUCATION



US DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION RELEASES NEW EVALUATION OF DC OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP

Calls to reactivate program grow

JUNE 23, 2010 The United States Department of Education yesterday released a new study of the Washington DC Opportunity Scholarship (OSP) voucher program. The evaluation was conducted by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance and reports present objective information on the conditions of implementation and impacts of the program. *The Washington Post* today ran an editorial citing the study's findings and calling for Education Secretary Arne Duncan to reactivate the program, which has been closed to new enrollment since last year.

The evaluation compares the outcomes of 2,300 eligible students who either applied and were offered an OSP scholarship or applied and were declined for a scholarship. Data was collected on three outcomes and the new study compares data through spring 2009.

Key findings:

- No conclusive evidence that the OSP affected student achievement
- OSP significantly improved students' chances of graduating from high school
- OSP raised parents', but not students', ratings of school safety and satisfaction

As the foremost advocate for educational choice in the state, School Choice Ohio welcomes another piece of the emerging picture of voucher effectiveness nationwide. "The more these programs are studied, the better view we have of what works," said SCO Executive Director Chad Aldis. "Only by knowing what works can parents make informed choices and policymakers make informed decisions."

The full text of the evaluation report can be downloaded at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20104018/index.asp> and the full text of the editorial from *The Washington Post* is printed below.

Opportunity denied; D.C.'s voucher program is increasing graduation rates. It deserves to be revived.

Washington Post 6-23-10

STUDENTS AWARDED vouchers to attend private schools in the District had significantly better chances of graduating from high school, and parents who sent their children to schools using scholarships were happy with having a choice of good, safe schools. These latest findings on D.C. school vouchers underscore the value of this program and show how wrong-headed it is to deny future students this opportunity.

The final report on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program was released Tuesday by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute for Education Sciences. Although there was no conclusive evidence that the program affected student test scores, researchers found important benefits in graduation rates and parental satisfaction. The graduation rate for students who were offered scholarships was 82 percent, compared with 70 percent for those not in the program. Few things are more critical to future success than graduation, so it's hard to discount the difference that vouchers made for the low-income students participating in the program. It's also hard for those blessed with the resources to choose among good schools to truly appreciate the dilemma of parents powerless to affect their children's education.

More than 3,700 students -- most of them black or Hispanic -- have been awarded scholarships, which provide up to \$7,500 for private-school tuition, since the program's start in 2004. Students currently enrolled, an estimated 1,300, will be allowed to continue until they graduate from high school. But for reasons that have more to do with opposition from teachers unions than what's good for children, no new students are being accepted. Education Secretary Arne Duncan last year signaled the program's demise by rescinding scholarships already offered, and congressional Democrats refused to reauthorize the program. These findings should prompt them to reconsider. Said former D.C. Council member Kevin P. Chavous, chairman of the Black Alliance for Educational Options, "The results of the study demonstrate what we've known for years: [The program] is making a difference for students who need our help the most."