

Fall 2003

Cities on a Hill

Washington, D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams wins Urban Innovator Award



Mayor Williams delivers his acceptance speech.

On July 8th the Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute honored Washington, D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams with its Urban Innovator Award for his support of school choice and for improving city administration in the District of Columbia. CCI Chairman and former Indianapolis Mayor Stephen Goldsmith served as the master of ceremonies at the event, held at the National Press Club. Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist, a CCI Advisory Board member, presented Mayor Williams with the Urban Innovator Award.

Mayor Norquist, a vocal champion of Milwaukee's school voucher program (the nation's oldest and largest publicly funded school voucher program) commended Mayor Williams for coming to the "conclusion that the consumers—the parents of D.C.—needed more power in the equation so that quality would matter." Mayor Norquist observed that voucher competition in Milwaukee improved all schools, not just private schools. "We have better public schools, we have better parochial schools, and we have better and more private schools" because parents and students have more educational options.

continued on page 2

Contents

WASHINGTON, D.C. MAYOR ANTHONY WILLIAMS WINS URBAN INNOVATOR AWARD	1,2
ROAD TO NOWHERE: STUDY REVEALS K-12 EDUCATION A DEAD END FOR MANY STUDENTS	1,3
STUDY FINDS FLORIDA VOUCHER PROGRAM IMPROVES PUBLIC SCHOOL PERFORMANCE	3
RESEARCH SHOWS CHARTER SCHOOLS OUTPERFORM REGULAR PUBLIC SCHOOLS	4

Road to Nowhere: Study Reveals K-12 Education A Dead End for Many Students

In America's increasingly hi-tech, service-oriented economy, students who fail to graduate from high school prepared to attend a four-year college are much less likely to gain full access to our country's economic, political, and social opportunities. Indeed, one critical measure of the success of public education in America is the number of students in the K-12 system that have a realistic option of attending a four-year college.

On September 17, the Center for Civic Innovation released *Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States*, by Manhattan Institute Senior Fellow Jay P. Greene, Ph.D., and Senior Research Associate Greg Forster, Ph.D.

This study estimates the percentage of students in the public high school class of 2001 who actually possess the minimum qualifications for applying to four-year colleges. The study notes that to be "college ready" students must pass three crucial hurdles: they must graduate from high school, they must have taken certain courses in high school that colleges require for the acquisition of necessary skills, and they must demonstrate basic literacy skills. The study also estimates national high school graduation rates and college readiness rates for various racial and ethnic groups, as well as by region and state.

continued on page 3

Urban Innovator Award *continued from page 1*



David Brennan, Ohio school choice advocate, speaks to some other award attendees.



Robert Novak (right) shares his thoughts on school choice.

Mayor Williams gratefully accepted the Manhattan Institute award and said that his efforts to improve education were part of a long-term plan to revitalize the nation's capital. He said that he hoped to use education reform—including school vouchers—to draw D.C.'s depleted middle class back into the city. "You can't have a city that's going to survive, let alone prevail, if you don't have a solid middle class," Mayor Williams said. "To me, introducing and injecting choice and competition [into the D.C. public school system] is the only way we're going to start reversing that tide and reversing that trend and bringing back on a long-term sustainable basis that middle class."

Mayor Williams was the fifth recipient of the Urban Innovator Award. Previous award winners were Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley (2002), Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown (2001), St. Paul Mayor Norm Coleman (2001), and Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley (2000).

Left: Mayor Stephen Goldsmith, Master of Ceremonies.



Left to right: Mayor Norquist, Mayor Williams, and Mayor Goldsmith discuss their perspectives on education



CCI Executive Director Henry Olsen greets the National Press Club audience.

Study Finds Florida Voucher Program Improves Public School Performance

The study found that Florida's low-performing schools are improving in direct proportion to the challenge they face from voucher competition. The report showed that schools facing direct competition from vouchers made the greatest improvements, improving by 9.3 scale score points on the FCAT math test, 10.1 points on the FCAT reading test, and 5.1 percentile points on the Stanford-9 math test relative to Florida public schools that were not in any low-performing category.



Governor Jeb Bush

Much research shows that school vouchers benefit the students who receive them. However, relatively little work has been done on the effect of vouchers on the students who remain in low-performing public schools. In August CCI released a new report, *When Schools Compete: The Effects of Vouchers on Florida Public School Achievement*, by Manhattan Institute Senior Fellow Jay P. Greene, Ph.D., and Research Associate Marcus A. Winters, that shows that vouchers can benefit even students who do not use them.

Schools threatened with the prospect of vouchers showed the second greatest improvements, making relative gains of 6.7 scale points on the FCAT math test, 8.2 points on the FCAT reading test, and 3.0 percentile points on the Stanford-9 math test. Low-performing schools not in immediate threat of voucher competition, i.e. that have never received any grade other than a D, or that have received at least one D since FCAT grading began, produced small and indistinguishable gains, respectively, relative to Florida public schools that were not low performing.

In short, the study confirmed what many researchers have long suspected: low-performing schools can make substantive improvements when faced with competition for students. Florida Governor Jeb Bush hailed the Manhattan Institute's findings, saying "This independent study validates results we've seen in schools across the state. Florida's A+ Plan for Education is working, driving achievement and accountability. We remain committed to supporting and enhancing parental choice to provide additional incentives for public schools to use their resources more effectively to meet the needs of students."

Access this report at: www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_02.htm

Road to Nowhere *continued from page 1*

The study's findings paint an unsettling portrait of American K-12 education. Only 70% of all students in public high schools graduate, and only 32% of all students leave high school qualified to attend four-year colleges. Minority groups in particular are poorly served by public education; only 51% of all black students and 52% of all Hispanic students graduate high school, and only 20% of all black students and 16% of all Hispanic students leave high school college ready. The graduation rate for white students was 72%; for Asian students, 79%; and for American Indian students, 54%. The college readiness rate for white students was 37%; for Asian students, 38%; for American Indian students, 14%.

Due to their lower college readiness rates, black and Hispanic students were found to be seriously underrepresented in the pool of minimally qualified college applicants. Only 9% of all college ready graduates are black and another 9% are Hispanic, compared to a total population of 18-year olds that is 14% black and 17% Hispanic.

The study estimates that there were about 1,299,000 college-ready 18-year-olds in 2000, while the actual number of persons entering college for the first time in that year was about 1,341,000. This indicates that there is not a large population of college-ready graduates who are prevented from actually attending college. The portion of all college freshmen that is black (11%) or Hispanic (7%) is very similar to their shares of the college-ready population (9% for both). The study concludes by observing that the main reason these groups are underrepresented in college admissions is that these students are not acquiring college ready skills in the K-12 system, rather than inadequate financial aid or affirmative action policies.

Access this report at: www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_03.htm

The image shows the cover of an Education Working Paper. The title is "Education Working Paper" and the date is "Jul 1, 2003". The subtitle is "Public High School Graduation and College Readiness Rates in the United States". The authors listed are Jay P. Greene, Ph.D., Dennis Holzman, Research Intern, and Greg Forster, Ph.D. The paper is published by the Manhattan Institute. The cover also includes a small logo for the Manhattan Institute and a note that the paper is a free download.

Research Shows Charter Schools Outperform Regular Public Schools

On July 16, CCI released *Apples to Apples: An Evaluation of Charter Schools Serving General Student Populations*, by Manhattan Institute Senior Fellow Jay P. Greene, Ph.D., Senior Research Associate Greg Forster, Ph.D., and Research Associate Marcus A. Winters. Charter schools—public schools that are exempt from many of the cumbersome regulations that apply to regular public schools—are a widespread but poorly studied form of education reform. Although there are nearly 2,700 charters nationwide, policymakers and parents have little empirical evidence to use to decide if charter schools are providing a better education.

Such evidence is hard to come by because many charter schools deliberately target students underserved by traditional public schools, such as juvenile delinquents. This hinders researchers' efforts to draw a fair comparison between charters and regular public schools—comparing targeted charters to regular public schools is like comparing apples and zebras. The key component of this study is that it compares “untargeted” charter schools serving the general population to their closest neighboring regular public school. This study is the first national empirical study of charter schools that compares test scores at charter schools and regular public schools serving similar student populations.

Even though charter schools often labor under severe financial constraints, the study found that charter schools offered modest but significant test score improvements compared to regular public

schools. After measuring test score improvements in 11 states over a one-year period, the study found that charter schools serving the general student population outperformed nearby regular public schools on math tests by 0.08 standard deviations, equivalent to a benefit of 3 percentile points for a student starting at the 50th percentile. These charter schools also outperformed nearby regular public schools on reading tests by 0.04 standard deviations, equal to a benefit of 2 percentile points for a student starting at the 50th percentile.

The study's strongest results came in Florida and Texas. In Texas, charter schools achieved year-to-year math score improvements 0.18 standard deviations higher than those of comparable regular public schools, and reading score improvements 0.19 standard deviations higher. These benefits are equivalent to 7 and 8 percentile points, respectively, from the 50th percentile. Florida charter schools achieved year-to-year math and reading score improvements that were each 0.15 standard deviations greater than those of nearby regular public schools, equivalent to a gain of 6 percentile points for a student starting at the 50th percentile.

Access this report at:

www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_01.htm

4

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