

COMMONWEALTH ★ ★ ★ POLICY CENTER ★ ★ ★

Answering Objections to School Choice

“I recently had a conversation with someone about school choice. He’s an administrator in the Jefferson County Public School system who cares about his students and will remain nameless. He was concerned about the issue of school choice and ended our conversation by saying, ‘School choice doesn’t help black or brown people. Until I see the evidence that it helps black and brown people, I’m not supporting school choice.’ As a black and brown person, I can empathize with his concern. However, I’d like to provide the evidence he asked for and respond to several other objections that are commonly raised against school choice.”

Justin Warriner (Church Outreach – Louisville Field Representative)

Objection 1: School choice has a systemically racist origin.

- a. It is said that school choice policies were exploited to create ‘segregation academies’ after the Supreme Court integrated public schools in 1954.¹
- b. There are two problems with this objection:
 1. America’s public schools have changed since 1954, and the arguments for school choice have changed as well. School choice advocates are not concerned by racial integration in public schools. They’re concerned by poor academic performance and progressive political advocacy.
 2. Many 20th c. advocates for school choice also supported racial integration (e.g. Milton Friedman,² who believed that school choice would end segregation).³

Objection 2: School choice produces inequitable outcomes for racial and ethnic minorities.

- a. How many black students are novices (below grade level)⁴ in math? 57% in high school⁵ and middle school⁶ 53% in elementary school.⁷
- b. How many black students are novices in reading? 47% in high school.⁸ 48% in middle school.⁹ 44% in elementary school.¹⁰
- c. In summary: most black students in public school are below grade level in math. Almost half are below grade level in reading.
- d. How can charter schools help? Nationwide studies have shown that Black and Hispanic students in charter schools do far better in reading and math than their public school peers.¹¹

Objection 3: School choice will hurt public schools.

- a. Even though many states have adopted voucher programs, 81.9% of American children attend public schools.¹² School choice policies do not result in a majority of students leaving for charter or private schools.

- b. School choice allows parents to choose which school is best for their children. For many students, that will mean remaining in their local public school.¹³ Students who are benefitting from the subsidized public education are unlikely to leave.

Objection 4: Many districts already have school choice provisions.

- a. This was an objection raised by Jefferson County Public Schools District 6 Board Member Corrie Shull.¹⁴
- b. JCPS has a school choice policy, but it only permits parents to choose from existing JCPS schools. Some JCPS schools perform better than others, but the whole system is struggling. School choice vouchers provide access to charter schools, private schools, and homeschooling.

Objection 5: Voucher programs for minority students are often followed by universal voucher programs that benefit privileged students.

- a. This was an objection raised by State Rep. Tina Bojanowski (D-Louisville).¹⁵
- b. A state can have multiple voucher programs, including one that is universal and others that are intended for specific demographics. These can include students with disabilities, low-income students, students who have parents in the armed forces, etc.
- c. Some studies suggest that voucher programs disproportionately benefit wealthy students.¹⁶ However, in the case of Arizona, 45% of applicants came from wealthy families. We don't yet have an accurate sample size. Low-income individuals who take advantage of these programs benefit greatly from them.

¹<https://southernspaces.org/2019/segregationists-libertarians-and-modern-school-choice-movement/>

²<https://www.educationnext.org/segregation-and-school-choice-movement/>

³<https://newlearningonline.com/new-learning/chapter-9/self-managing-education-more-recent-times/friedman-on-school-vouchers>

⁴<https://www.kentuckyteacher.org/leaderswhip/commissioners-comments/2019/05/novice-the-academic-emergency-room/>

⁵https://www.kyschoolreportcard.com/organization/20/school_accountability/proficiency/mathematics?year=2023

⁶https://www.kyschoolreportcard.com/organization/20/school_accountability/proficiency/mathematics?year=2023

⁷https://www.kyschoolreportcard.com/organization/20/school_accountability/proficiency/mathematics?year=2023

⁸https://www.kyschoolreportcard.com/organization/20/school_accountability/proficiency/reading?year=2023

⁹https://www.kyschoolreportcard.com/organization/20/school_accountability/proficiency/reading?year=2023

¹⁰https://www.kyschoolreportcard.com/organization/20/school_accountability/proficiency/reading?year=2023

¹¹<https://ncss3.stanford.edu/executive-summary/full-executive-summary/>

¹²<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2023/acs/acs-55.pdf>

¹³<https://ncss3.stanford.edu/executive-summary/full-executive-summary/>

¹⁴”A Forum on School Choice: In the Spirit of Deliberative Democracy” (panel, Kentucky Youth Advocates, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY, December 4, 2023).

¹⁵”A Forum on School Choice.”

¹⁶https://grandcanyoninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/GCI_Analysis_Universal-Vouchers-Help-High-Income-Earners-the-Most_Nov_6_2022.pdf