Competition in education does NOT lead to better student outcomes

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What kinds of competition already exist?

- **Public sector**
  - Magnet and focus schools
  - Open enrollment
  - Interdistrict choice programs

- **Private sector**
  - Private schools
Purpose:

- Broadly, to “break the link between residential location and school attendance zones in order to reduce the geographic constraint inherent in traditional public schooling” (Goldhaber, 2002)
Adding new competition

- Public sector
  - Charter schools
- Private sector
  - Voucher programs
Arguments for school choice

- Arguments of proponents:
  - Giving parents more control over educational decisions would lead them to choose good schools for their children
  - Competition between schools for students will help reduce inefficiencies in the delivery of education and, in doing so, improve educational outcomes
Competition

- Underlying assumption: some schools are currently doing a better job of educating students than other schools
- Schools will have to improve if they are forced to compete for students
  - The free market, under certain conditions, guarantees efficiency but not equity
Parental Control

- Underlying assumption: parents know how to, and will, choose “good” schools for their children
- There is a correlation between “who chooses” and higher SES
- Parents must be able to obtain relevant information
There is “much evidence that people make choices about all kinds of things, including schools, for all sorts of reasons, only some of which have to do with the assumed purposes of these services or institutions. People choose cars because of their color, doctors because of their office location, schools because of their uniforms. Some people—many people—make critical life decisions with hardly a thought.” (Gintis, 1995)
Do school choice reforms work?

- Looking at school-level data from Michigan’s standardized testing program, Bettinger compared charter school students with their public school peers.
  - Found that the test scores of charter schools do not improve and may actually decline relative to those of public school students.
Charter schools - assumptions

- Autonomy leads to efficiency
  - questionable
- Market accountability will ensure quality education
  - Ineffective charter schools will resist closing
- Everyone is able to attend
  - Associated transportation costs, etc.
Florida A+ Accountability Plan

- Students in low-performing schools given vouchers to be redeemed at an eligible public or private school.
- Green (2001) argued that early evidence from the program suggested that there were significant improvements in test scores in those schools threatened with vouchers.
Florida A+ Accountability Plan

- In a critique of Green’s evaluation, Camilli and Bulkley (2001) highlighted that he failed to include adjustments for selection bias and aggregation problems.
- But…it is difficult to distinguish between “voucher effects” and other effects of the plan.
Vouchers - concerns

- Choice will lead to greater inequities among students
- Choice will lead to a loss of support for traditional public schools
In the context of voucher programs, only those students whose families are able to subsidize the balance private-school tuition not covered by the voucher will benefit.

With charter schools, only students whose families are able to offer them the necessary transportation will benefit.

Relationship between “who chooses” and SES.
Public School Support

- School choice will cost public schools support both financially (with voucher money following the student to private school) and on the individual level (concerned parents who could be participating are instead spending their energies on a new charter school).
Benefits for some?

- Studies show that minority students living in urban areas disproportionately benefit from enhanced schooling options.
- Private schools tend to benefit some types of schools more than others:
  - NYC, Dayton and DC
  - Suggests that they are not far more efficient than public schools.
Conclusions

- Some evidence indicated a positive effect, some indicates a negative, and some indicates none at all.
- There is no “one-size-fits-all” solution.