

# School choice: Myths and realities

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## Forms of school choice

- Inside the public system – neighborhood schools, magnet schools, charter schools & inter/intra-district transfers
- Outside the public system – private schools, vouchers & tax credits, homeschooling, Education Savings Accounts
- Either inside or outside public system – virtual schools
- Availability and governing policies vary by state

## The shiny new thing -- Education Savings Accounts

- Qualifying families receive a portion of state per pupil funds for educating their child
- Dollars are deposited in a privately managed account and can be used for tuition, online ed services, and homeschool expenses
- Arizona, Florida, Mississippi & Tennessee provide ESAs for qualifying students, typically with special needs
- Nevada ESAs could be available to estimated 93% of all school-age children in the state

## School choice – Trump version

### *School choice in the president's budget:*



- \$1 billion in Title 1 earmarked for FOCUS grants
- \$267 million in charter school grants
- \$250 million for competitive grants to provide vouchers to low-income families

SOURCE: Education Week, Trump budget would slash Education Dept. spending, boost school choice, May 23, 2017

**Myth**

Public schools are losing enrollments to private, virtual & home schools.

**Reality**

Nine in ten school-aged children attend a public school – a number that has been stable for 4 decades



Private Voucher



TOTAL SCHOOL-AGE POPULATION

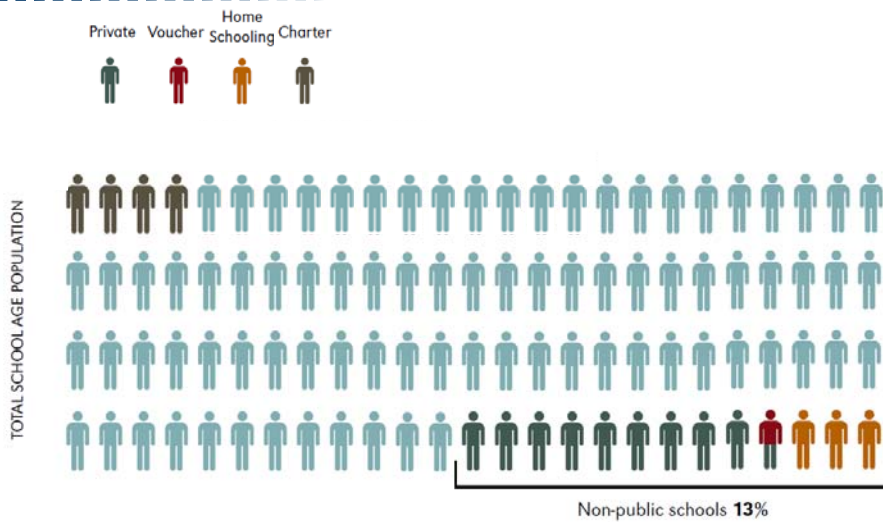
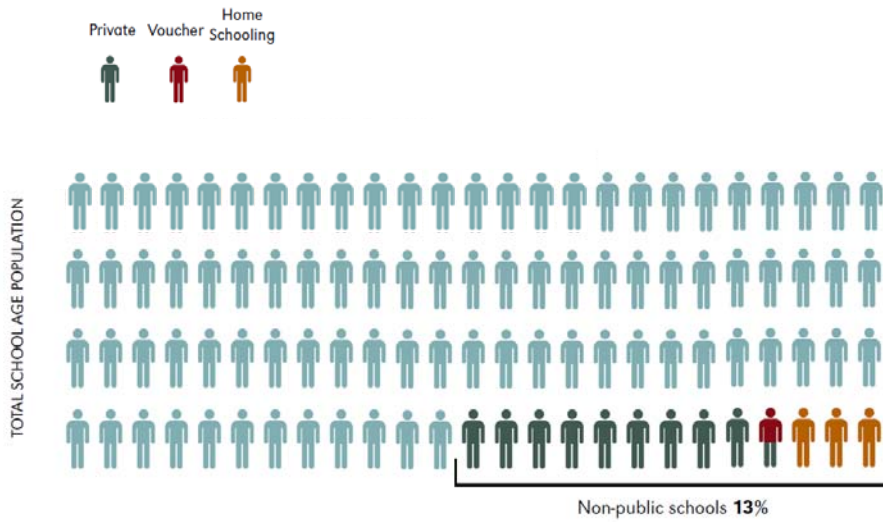


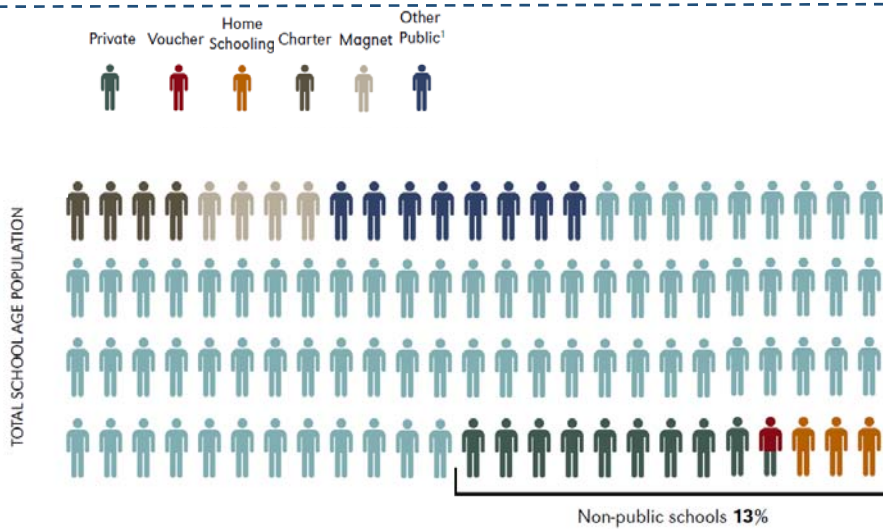
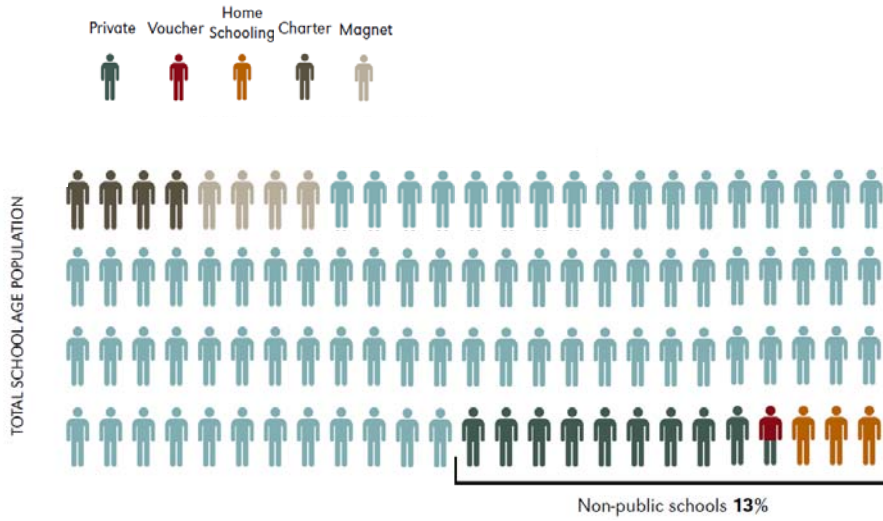
Private Voucher Home  
Schooling

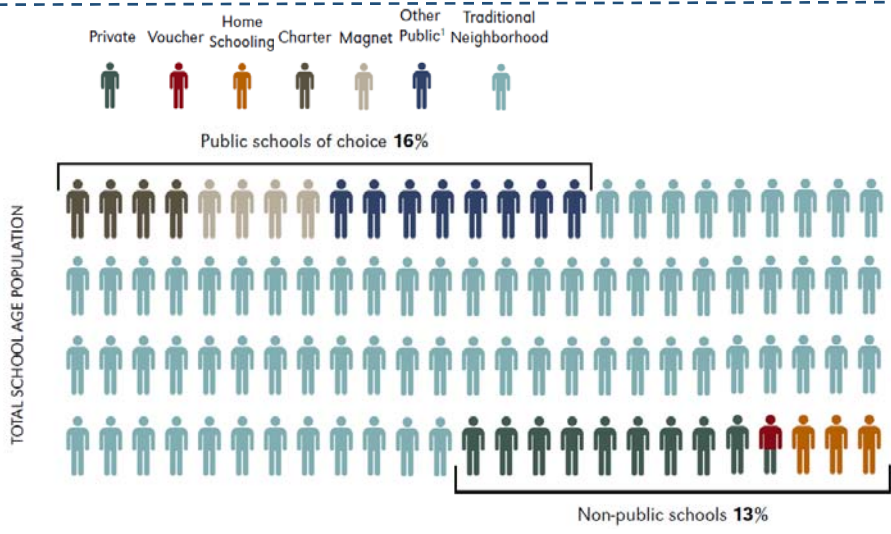
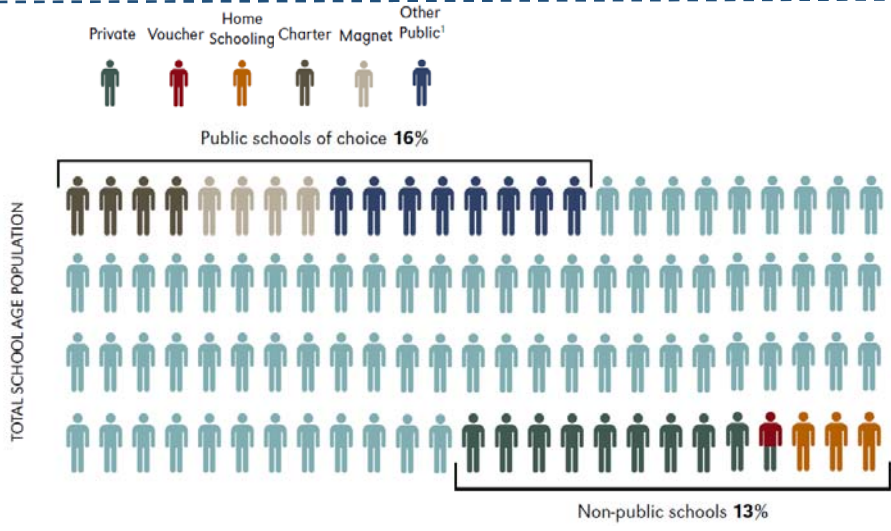


TOTAL SCHOOL-AGE POPULATION









**Myth**

Voters and parents want more school choice.

**Reality**

It's complicated.

**Public opinion**

- **68%** of voters favor 'the concept of school choice.' (*AFC, 2017*)
- **71%** of public school parents want 'a good quality neighborhood school'; **29%** say they want 'more choices of schools' (*AFT Sept 2017*)
- **45%** of Americans support universal vouchers when told they would provide 'wide choice'; support falls to **28%** when told vouchers would use 'government funds' (*EdNext, 2017*)



**Myth**

Public schools are designed to be 'one size fits all.'

**Reality**

The most choices are available within the public school system.

**Most states offer parents  
a choice of public school**



- **43** states & DC allow for charter schools
- **38** states & DC have magnet schools
- **33** states allow for voluntary intra-district transfers
- **43** states allow for inter-district transfer, some with qualifiers
  
- Altogether 65% of public school students have an option of public schools

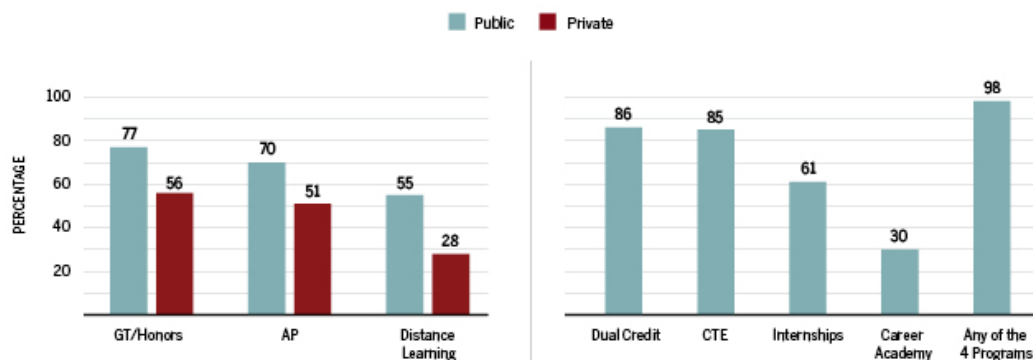
## Busting the Myth of ‘One Size Fits All’ Public Schools”

- Access to choice of public school
- Access to program choices inside traditional public schools
- Personalizing learning to better serve students’ interests and needs



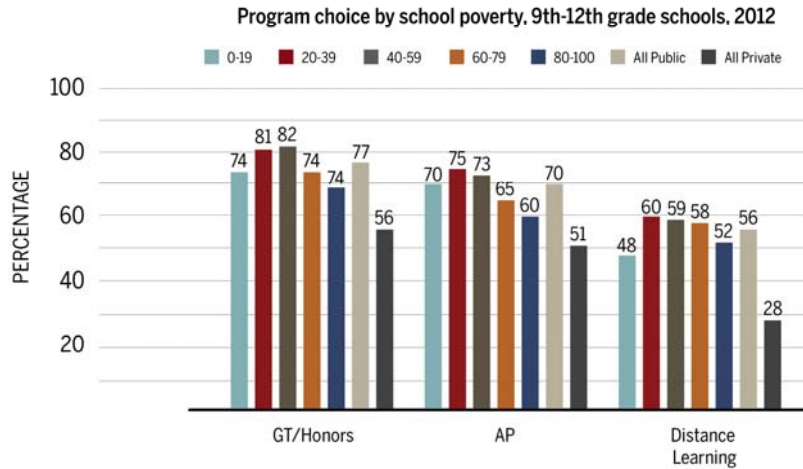
## Public high schools provide more program choices than private schools

Program choices offered by public and private high schools, 2012



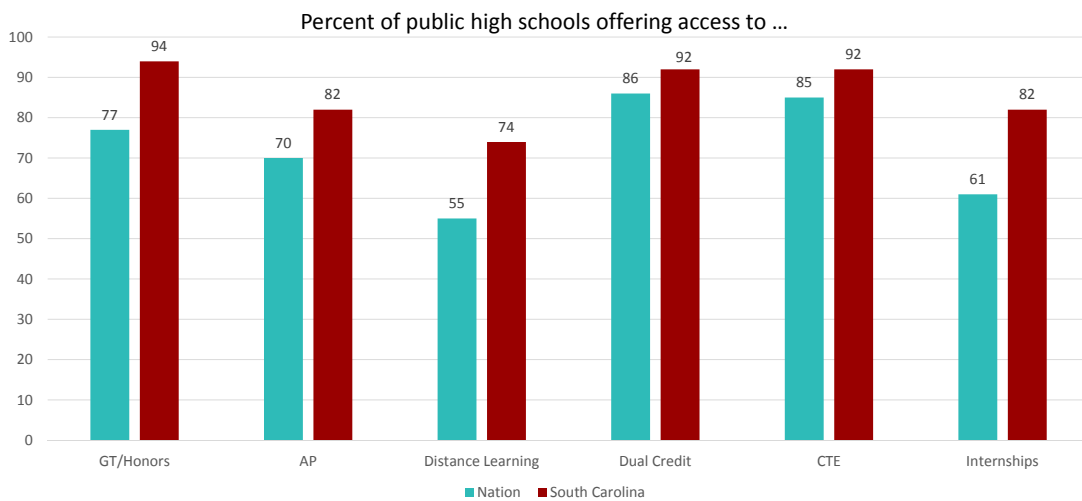
SOURCE: CPE analysis of SASS 2012 data. 2017

## High-poverty public schools provide more program choices than private schools overall



SOURCE: CPE analysis of SASS 2012 data. 2017

## Program choice –South Carolina style



SOURCE: original analysis of SASS, 2012. CPE, 2017

## Other findings



- Middle school students more likely to have extracurricular opportunities in the arts in public schools
- Public schools more likely to provide before/after school care, tutoring, or enrichment activities
- Over 20 state ESSA plans call for personalized learning plans and/or multiple pathways to graduation

### ***Myth***

Providing parents choices will improve educational opportunity.

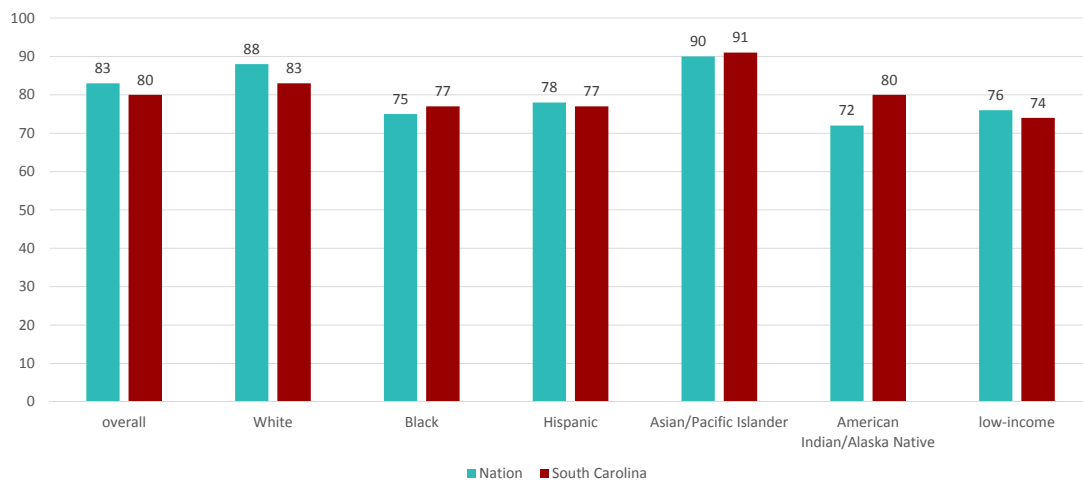
### ***Reality***

The overall results for school choice are mixed.

## What do we know about public schools?

- High school graduation rates are at historic highs and gaps are narrowing
- Math performance has steadily increased over the last two decades
- College going is about  $\frac{3}{4}$  overall and gaps are narrowing

## On-time high school graduation Public schools 2014-15

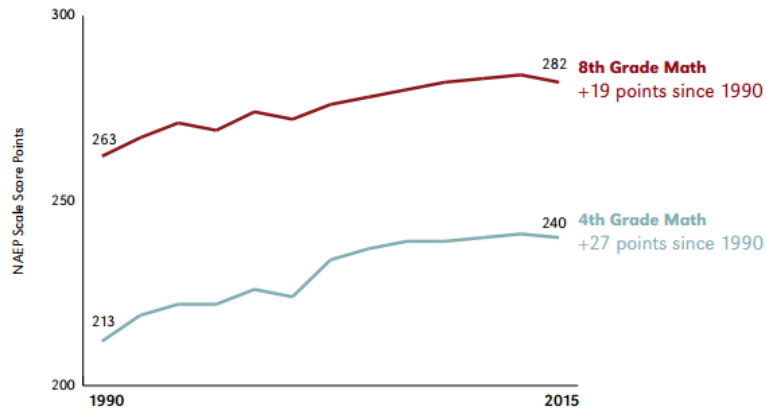


SOURCE: NCES, 2017

## Public school student gains in math 1990-2015

Today's public 4<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> graders perform about two years ahead in math compared to their peers in 1990.

They are reading about a half year ahead.



Source: National Assessment of Educational Progress 2015. 10 points on the NAEP scale is about one year's worth of learning.

## What do we know about magnet schools?

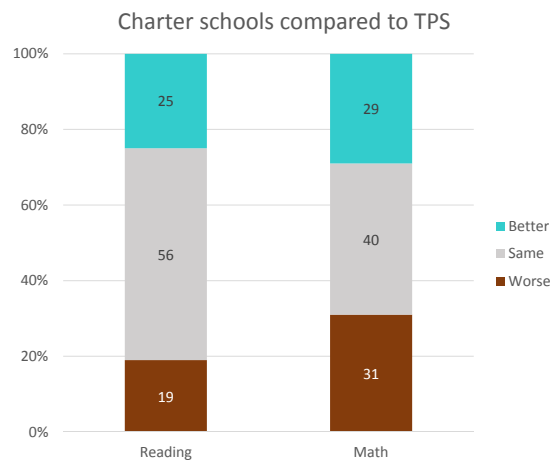
- Some studies show higher performance for magnet school students while others show similar results. No studies found negative impact.
- Several studies show higher graduation rates for magnet students – especially in Career Academies.

## What do we know about charter schools?

- Charter schools on average outperform TPS in reading; produce about the same results in math
- Low-income black and Hispanic students & ELLs tend to gain, while white, Asian and higher-income students on average perform worse in charters

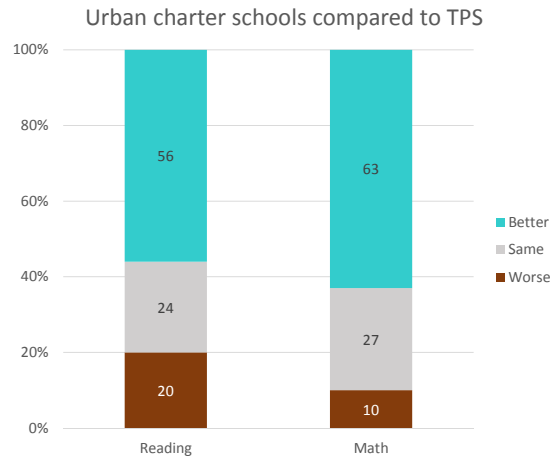
SOURCE: CREDO, 2013

## What do we know about charter schools?



SOURCE: CREDO, 2013

## What do we know about charter schools?



SOURCE: CREDO, 2015

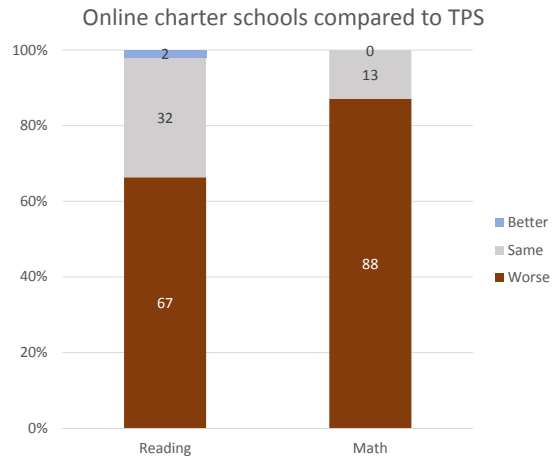
## What do we know about virtual charters?

- Average math gains for online charter students equivalent to **180 fewer days** of learning compared to TPS
- Average reading gains equivalent to **72 fewer days** of learning

SOURCE: CREDO, 2015



## What do we know about virtual charters?



SOURCE: CREDO, 2015

## What do we know about open enrollment?

### *Fordham Institute study of Ohio found:*

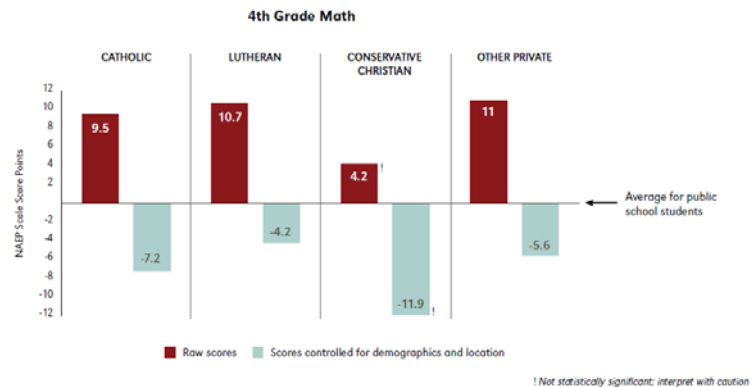
- Associated with 'modest but positive' test-score gains
- African American enrollees appear to make substantial gains
- Open enrollment throughout high school increases probability of on-time graduation

SOURCE: Lavertu & Carlson, Interdistrict Open Enrollment in Ohio, Fordham Institute, June 2017

## What do we know about private schools?

- Private schools on average tend to outperform public schools on NAEP but the gap has been narrowing
- When controlling for student demographics, gaps between public & private disappear in math

## What do we know about private schools?



SOURCE: Lubienski & Lubienski, 2014

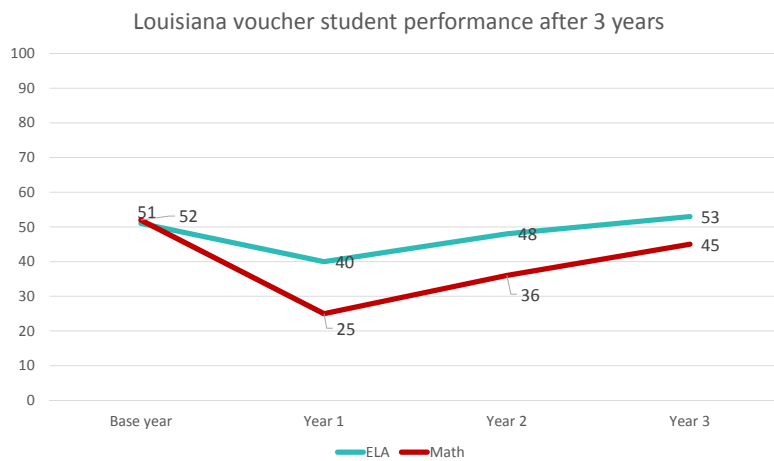
## What do we know about vouchers/ tax credits?

- Some studies report test score gains for low-income, African American students; most show similar performance.
- Several studies have found voucher recipients are more likely to graduate from high school.

## What do we know about vouchers/ tax credits?

A major study of Louisiana's statewide program shows that voucher students lost academic ground two years later, but regained some of it by year three.

Newer studies of voucher programs in Indiana, Ohio and DC show negative results.



SOURCE: Mills & Wolf, Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, June 26, 2017

## What do we know about homeschooling?



## What does the data say about school choice?

- Two-thirds of students are able to choose a public school outside their attendance zone.
- Traditional public schools offer an abundance of program options.
- No reason to conclude choice in and of itself will produce better outcomes.
- Non-public school choice without accountability should come with warning labels.

## What can school boards do?

- Establish opportunities for sharing lessons learned between your traditional, magnet and charter schools.
- Provide an adequate infrastructure for monitoring your students in virtual schools.
- Establish policies for granting and revoking charters based on academic performance & financial integrity.

## Thank you!



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