The Competitive Effect of School Choice Policies on Performance in Traditional Public Schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

David Arsen, Ph.D.
Michigan State University

Yongmei Ni, Ph.D.
University of Utah

The Great Lakes Center for Education Research & Practice
PO Box 1263
East Lansing, MI 48826
Phone: (517) 203-2940
Email: greatlakescenter@greatlakescenter.org
Web Site: http://www.greatlakescenter.org

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This policy brief reviews research on what impact the competition introduced by vouchers and charter schools has upon the effectiveness and efficiency of traditional public schools (TPSs). Only recently has such research been possible in the U.S., as choice options became sufficiently widespread to elicit competitive responses from TPSs. We summarize conflicting theoretical predictions about how competition affects students who do not actively choose, and we identify features of policy design, implementation and local settings likely to influence the nature of competition. We find that results from available empirical studies are mixed and do not yet allow for firm conclusions about the effects of competition on traditional schools and non-choosing students. The review notes methodological challenges and possible lines of future research.

We recommend that policymakers exercise caution when assessing predictions that school choice policies will benefit students who are not active choosers, since the evidence in support of this claim is not yet strong or conclusive.