



The Louisiana School Choice Parent Dilemma: When Public School is not a Viable Option

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Guiding Questions:

Louisiana Scholarship Program

1. Does the scholarship policy enable the demise of the public school system in New Orleans?
2. Does the scholarship program promote individualism vs communitarianism?
3. Does the program really have impact on students? The larger community
4. How many schools participate in the voucher program statewide?
5. How many students are impacted each year?
6. Is the lottery system really a choice or a long shot? What about the other children?
7. Since families income requirements below the 250% poverty level, have we taken in account the additional resources needed in public schools and the strain it has on families?

Economic Impact

8. What would the Louisiana economy look like if parents who sacrificed nearly \$10,000 of their disposable income could trust public schools to educate children?
9. Does the program really have impact on students? The larger community?

Overall School Improvement

10. Has the state considered allocating additional resources to failing schools where students are being pulled from? Teacher Prep? Hire Quality Teachers? Improve Safety? School Climate?

Introduction: Individualism vs. Communitarianism:

It's no secret for decades Louisiana's public education system has been under scrutiny due to consistently ranking number 49 in the country in educating our kids, disarray public education system, an increasing rate of students receiving free and reduced lunch as a result of high poverty rates and now the Louisiana Scholarship Program or "School Vouchers", a benefit to some but not all.

Louisiana is ranked the highest in the country with the most students enrolled in private school. New Orleans ranks the highest with nearly 30 percent of students enrolled in private institutions and a neighboring parish, Baton Rouge ranks third in the nation with 24.1 percent of students enrolled in private institutions. To add insult to injury, Louisiana's median income for a single family is nearly \$24,000 annually and a family four's median income is \$46,000 annually. We have traditionally and consistently held some of the largest poverty rates in the nation, particularly among African Americans, who make up more than half of the public school population, so why do we have more students enrolled in private schools and why are public dollars being taken from students who are in 49th percentile education ranking in the United States.



Problem Statement:

Many parents, poor, working class and middle class are faced with a public school choice dilemma each year, forcing many parents to have to choose pay private school tuition, with the average cost nearing \$10,000 per year for a high school senior (Archdiocese of New Orleans, 2015-16 high school data). While there are many reasons parents choose private school over public school, the majority of the reasons are simply because they aren't enough quality public school options.

Particularly in New Orleans, there are far less quality neighborhood schools for parents to select from. Policymakers should consider redirecting the nearly 41 million dollars given to the LSP to contribute to turning around failing schools by providing additional safety, more committed and qualified teachers, improve school climate, foster community and school connections.

Vouchers Alone Won't Do It: Parent Interviews:

In an interview with a parent who chose private school, she stated that her reason for sending her son to private school was a decision based upon several other factors other than academics. According to the parent, the lack of quality schools left her with no choice to make the financial sacrifice. Her main reason for sending her son to private school was structure, committed teachers safety concerns and academic expectations of the school. Since the 1980's New Orleans has seen a decline in quality schools, forcing many parents to choose private school education, who are not traditionally connected to those institutions.



Timolynn Sams, mother of a recent graduate of a private institution, who was a single mom at the time of her decision stated that "The voucher program plays a divisive role in the community, it benefits the

individual and not the whole family.” She also stated that voucher program seems as if it designed to help faith-based institutions and not schools, particularly neighborhood schools. When asked why did she send her son to a private institution?, she stated that she had concerns about the cultural competence of teachers who are being hired to teach our kids public schools, protection from her son being criminalized because he was a black male and unnecessary suspensions schools are imposing on young black males. In addition to choosing a school where there was more autonomy in school disciplinary actions and a more structured learning environments.

When asked if there was a public school in her neighborhood with qualified caring teachers, safe and provided a learning environment that seemed optimal to help her son academically be successful, would she have made the decision to send him and the answer was “yes.”

Many parents have become forced to make these financial decisions, which are not easy. According to parents, it’s a major sacrifice that takes away from being able to provide a better quality of life because funds are being expended on private tuition. They much rather send children to neighborhood schools rather than coughing up those dollars for tuition plus the additional resources needed in private institutions. Why should the private school choice be a norm in New Orleans, when we are ranked number 49 in the nation for educating our students? We must support the entire community and use a both/and approach to create system-wide change. Many see the voucher program as a micro approach rather than macro. The entire system needs to be impacted to make this a much more attractive option for parents, not to mention the double taxation parents are faced with who pay for private tuition.

The Louisiana Scholarship Program (LSP):

The Louisiana Scholarship Program also known as “School Vouchers” and “The Student Scholarships for Educational Excellence Program” provides public funds or low-income students in low-performing public schools to enroll local private schools. To date, the program provides nearly 7,200 scholarships to students in Louisiana and nearly 41 million dollars in public funds to private and parochial institutions. The program was initially piloted in 2008, and then expanded under the Jindal Administration in 2011. Approximately 121 non-public schools are participating in the 2015-16 program.

To be eligible for a Scholarship, students must have a family income that does not exceed 250% of the federal poverty guidelines and must be entering kindergarten or enrolled in a public school with a C, D, or F grade.

LSP Vouchers are awarded through a lottery, based upon the number of seats available in local private schools. According to Education Next, nearly 5,000 students used LSP Vouchers to enroll in private schools, with 90 percent of the students of being African-American and living less than 250 percent of the federal poverty line. While LSP Vouchers cover tuition, it does not provide any supplemental income for additional costs including books, uniforms, lab and technology fees and extra-curricular activities. There are 117 schools participating in the LSP voucher program, with the majority of them being Catholic Schools.

Average Cost of Private School Tuition in New Orleans:

- The average cost of sending a senior student to a high school in New Orleans is approaching \$10,000 a year, according to an analysis of 2015 tuition and fees from the Archdiocese’s Office of Catholic Schools.
- There are 22 archdiocesan high schools in the area.
- The most expensive school for a senior to attend is Academy of Sacred Heart in New Orleans. Including fees, the cost is \$16,300 for the 2015-16 school year.
- Other schools costing at least \$10,000 for seniors are Holy Rosary High School (New Orleans),

- De La Salle High School (New Orleans) and Holy Cross (New Orleans).
- The least expensive high school in the area is St. Katherine Drexel Preparatory School (New Orleans). Including fees, the cost is \$7,600 for the 2015-16 school year.
- The only other school in the area less than \$8,000 is St. Charles Catholic high School in LaPlace (\$7,975). *Policy Fellowship Program*

Policy Recommendations:

The design of the current school voucher should be reexamined and designed to impact system-wide change versus focusing on individual change. While there is a case to be made about the school voucher assisting low income families, according to research, the overall success of students receiving the Louisiana Scholarship Program have been only miniscule wins and not contributing a system-wide change that will have a greater impact on the larger community and Louisiana economy.

Our recommendation is to redirect MFP Dollars being used for the LSP to equip failing schools with additional resources to improve student achievement, increase health and safety standard, hire quality and caring teachers and build a solid positive structural learning environment in neighborhoods. This will support the entire community and give parents more viable public school options, thus increasing disposable income to benefit their overall quality of life. The redirection of public funds to support public schools will eliminate double taxation to parents paying for private school tuition and give working and middle class families more disposable income to enhance their quality of life and boost the Louisiana economy.

Sources:

- The Louisiana Scholarship Program | The Minimum Foundation Program (MFP) Guide, Orleans Public Education Network | The Times Picayune – Danielle Drelinger Author – Louisiana Voucher Progress | Public Affairs Research Council – Guide to State Budget Crisis Research Brief 2014 | Archdiocese of New Orleans Catholic Schools Index | Parents of Private School Students

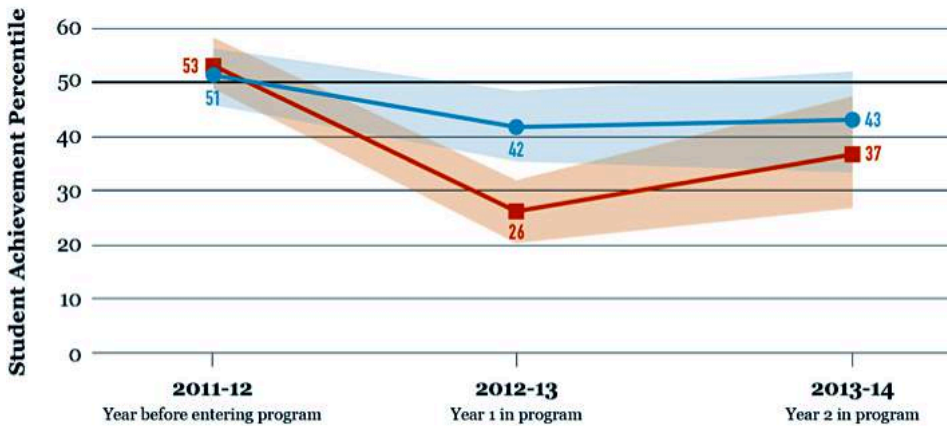
Appendix I: 2015-16 Tuition and Fees for High Schools in Archdiocese of New Orleans

1	High School	Total Cost	Base Tuition	Fees	Breakdown of Fees
2	Sacred Heart, New Orleans (grades 9-12)	\$16,300	\$16,300	0	no fees
3	Holy Rosary, New Orleans	\$11,825	\$9,950	\$1,875 (including senior fee)	\$450 (registration); \$700 (student services); \$500 (technology); \$225 (senior fee)
4	De La Salle, New Orleans	\$10,728	\$8,500	\$2,228 (including senior fee)	\$450 (registration); \$1328 (enrollment); \$450 (graduation, seniors); \$100 Ring Mass (juniors); \$100 (8th grade Mass)
5	Holy Cross, New Orleans (grades 9-12)	\$10,425	\$8,000	\$2,425 (including senior fee)	\$1,725 (general); \$750 (new student registration); \$500 (returning student registration); \$200 (senior graduation); \$50 (8th grade graduation)
6	Archbishop Hannan, Covington	\$9,705	\$7,550	\$2,155 (including senior fee)	\$400 (registration); \$475 (technology); \$280 (building); \$300 (new construction debt); \$115 (student activities fee); \$95 (academic and testing) \$70 (athletic program support); \$420 (senior)

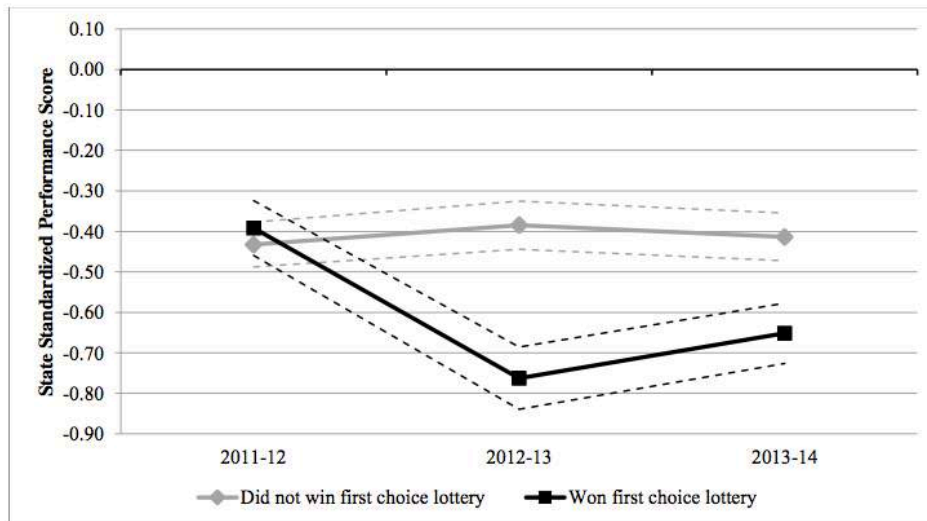
7	Ursuline, New Orleans (grades 9-12)	\$9,650	\$9,300	\$350	\$350 (registration fee)
8	Cabrini, New Orleans	\$9,643	\$8,200	\$1,443 (including senior fee)	\$743; \$250 (seniors); \$550 (new student registration); \$450 (returning student registration)
9	St. Scholastica, Covington	\$9,400	\$8,650	\$750 (including senior fee)	\$400.00 (registration); \$350 (senior fee)
	Brother Martin, New Orleans	\$9,360	\$9,010	\$350	\$350 (registration)
	Archbishop Rummel, Metairie	\$9,355	\$7,650	\$1,705 (including senior fee)	\$300 (registration), \$700 (building), \$480 (basic fee bill), \$225 (senior)
	St. Mary's Dominican, New Orleans	\$9,135	\$8,985	\$150 (including senior fee)	\$150 (senior fee)
	Pope John Paul II, Slidell	\$9,025	\$7,350	\$1,675 (including senior fee)	\$300 (registration); \$450 (building use); \$200 (drug testing); \$400 (technology); \$200 (junior fee); \$325

Appendix II: Results from LSP Students, Years 1 & 2

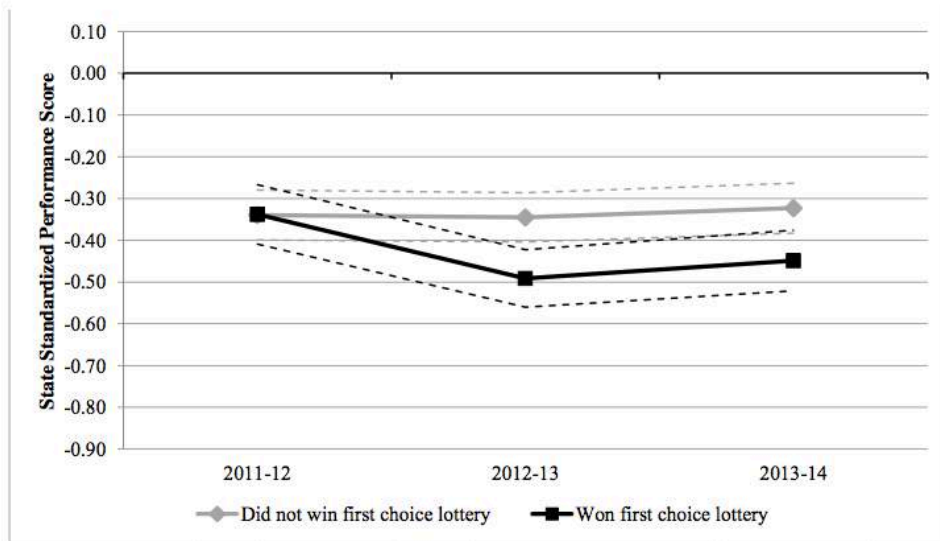
Courtesy of NOLA.com / Times-Picayune: "Louisiana voucher students did worse at new schools, study says," Danielle Dreilinger, February 22 2016



After one year in the voucher program, students' test scores went down compared to those of their peers who stayed in public school. The blue line is for English exams and the orange for mathematics.



Louisiana students who applied for private school vouchers started behind compared to the rest of the state. Some students were not matched with a private school. Their math scores, shown here, increased slightly over the next two years. Students who entered the voucher program, which promised better academics, did much worse.



Louisiana students who applied for private school vouchers started behind compared to the rest of the state. Some students were not matched with a private school. Their English scores, shown here, increased slightly over the next two years. Students who entered the voucher program, which promised better academics, did worse in the first year, and researchers think but were not certain they did not rebound in

the second.

Appendix III: New Orleans, Louisiana Economy Overview

Courtesy of Sperling's Best Places http://www.bestplaces.net/economy/city/louisiana/new_orleans.

ECONOMY OVERVIEW

The unemployment rate in New Orleans, Louisiana, is 5.10%, with job growth of 2.03%. Future job growth over the next ten years is predicted to be 39.00%.

New Orleans, Louisiana Taxes: New Orleans, Louisiana, sales tax rate is 9.00%. Income tax is 4.00%.

New Orleans, Louisiana Income and Salaries: The income per capita is \$26,131, which includes all adults and children. The median household income is \$36,681.

ECONOMY	New Orleans, Louisiana	United States
Unemployment Rate	5.10%	6.30%
Recent Job Growth	2.03%	1.18%
Future Job Growth	39.00%	36.10%
Sales Taxes	9.00%	6.00%
Income Taxes	4.00%	4.72%
Income per Cap.	\$26,131	\$28,051
Household Income	\$36,681	\$53,046
Family Median Income	\$46,298	\$64,585

ESTIMATED HOUSEHOLDS BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Income Less Than 15K	23.23%	12.61%
Income between 15K and 20K	7.58%	5.33%
Income between 20K and 30K	12.31%	10.57%
Income between 30K and 40K	9.57%	9.90%
Income between 40K and 50K	8.62%	8.95%
Income between 50K and 60K	6.75%	8.08%
Income between 60K and 75K	7.68%	10.09%
Income between 75K and 100K	8.63%	12.25%
Income between 100K and 150K	8.38%	12.82%
Income between 150K and 200K	3.12%	4.78%
Income greater than 200K	4.14%	4.64%

POPULATION BY OCCUPATION

Management, business, finance	12.89%	14.36%
Engineering, computers, science	4.44%	5.24%
Community, social services	2.03%	1.66%
Legal	2.96%	1.17%
Education, library	8.00%	6.10%
Arts, design, media, sports, entertainment	3.01%	1.88%
Healthcare practitioners and technology	6.27%	5.49%
Healthcare support	2.52%	2.47%
Firefighters, law enforcement	3.09%	2.24%
Food preparation, serving	9.21%	5.61%

Building maintenance	4.49%	3.97%
Personal care	3.72%	3.54%
Sales, office, administrative support	20.99%	24.89%
Farming, fishing, forestry	0.24%	0.73%
Construction, extraction, maintenance/repair	7.52%	8.56%
Production, transportation, material moving	8.61%	12.10%