

Points of interest:

- Recent center outreach includes the publication of two edited volumes of research.
- Nashville's magnet schools, designed to encourage desegregation, are not reaching that goal.
- President Bush is nominating two NCSC researchers to the National Board for Education Sciences.

Inside this issue:

School Choice:	1
What the latest research tells us	
Choice Connections:	
Partner Updates	
Ellen Goldring and Claire Smrekar:	2
Magnet Schools	
Caroline Hoxby:	2
Charter Schools	
Michael Kamil:	2
Reading Achievement	
Paul Peterson:	3
School Management	
Tom Loveless:	3
Math Achievement	
Ken Wong:	3
Urban Schools	
Choice News	
Bush to nominate NCSC scholars	4
NCLB and gifted students	4
Director heads for Notre Dame	4
New Faces	4

Choice Points with Center Director Mark Berends

Those of us who make a life in school research—pursuing answers to education's most burning questions—may be loathe to admit it, but the truth about research findings is that one study's yes may be another study's no. In other words, the most common answer to a given research question is *it depends*.

This issue of our newsletter reflects that reality, providing as it does an overview of some of the work our scholars have completed over the last year. Are charter schools working? Caroline Hoxby's study in New

York City (page 2) suggests they are. But some research in our recently published *Charter School Outcomes* and its in-press companion *Handbook of Research on School Choice* (below) suggests otherwise. It depends.

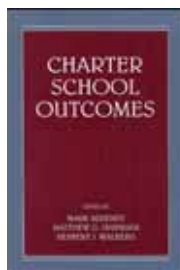
Do urban schools overseen by the mayor's office fare better than those run by the district? According to Ken Wong's work in 104 school districts across 40 states (page 3), yes. But it may not be appropriate for all districts. It depends.

As our colleague Tom Loveless (pages 3 and 4) says, "It is important to be on the lookout for oversimplifications of either education's most pressing problems or its most promising solutions. Simply marshalling good statistics is not enough."

The point is to respect the complexity of the data. This is among our continuing commitments at the NCSC.



School choice: What the latest research tells us



As perhaps the fastest-growing sector in the school choice movement, charter schools claim to offer a bigger bang

for the public education buck. The question is, is it true? According to *Charter School Outcomes* (2008), our compilation of the most recent research, yes and no.

Charter schools are public schools run by a private board under contract—a *charter*—to the local school district. So, they are free of many of the regulations traditional public schools face and therefore free, in theory anyway, to try new approaches to improving student achievement.

Currently charter school enrollments top 1 million students in over 3600 schools nationwide.

"America's public schools are under fire," said volume editor Mark Berends. "So the debate about charter schools is intensifying. What difference do they make? Do they help or hurt our regular public schools and students? *Charter School Outcomes* brings tested, factual research to the conversation." The book is the first in a series of edited volumes on choice from the NCSC.

The next volume in the series, *Handbook of Research on School Choice* (in press), broadens the discussion to include other forms of choice. With sections on magnet schools, school vouchers, private schools, and other schooling choices such as virtual and homeschools, the book offers both national and international

perspectives from an eminent group of education scholars.

Series editors are Mark Berends, professor and director of the NCSC; Matthew Springer, assistant professor and director of the National Center on Performance Incentives; Dale Ballou, associate professor and associate director of the NCSC; and Herbert J. Walberg, distinguished visiting fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

Both books are available from Lawrence Erlbaum Associates/Taylor & Francis Group.



Choice Connections: Partner Updates

Ellen Goldring and Claire Smrekar: Magnet schools in Nashville

Ellen Goldring is Vanderbilt professor of education policy and leadership. Claire Smrekar is associate professor of education policy and leadership. Much of their work centers on magnet schools.

Currently the professors are compiling an edited volume of research highlighting Nashville's unique history of school desegregation and recent trends of re-segregation. A collection of studies from across the coun-

try, the book will include research on whether Nashville's enhanced option plan and magnet schools are fostering diversity and student performance.

According to Goldring and Smrekar's findings, these designs are not.



At academic-selection magnet schools in Nashville, students are predominantly white. At non-academic-selection magnet schools, they are predomi-

school types, few Hispanic students are represented, indicating that this population has a low level of participation in school choice processes.

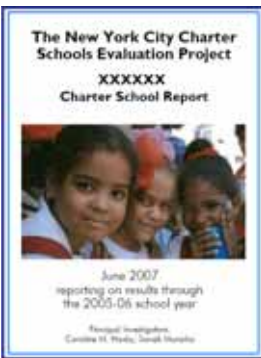
Upon publication of the book, the researchers will host a national conference on Vanderbilt University's Peabody campus.

To learn more, visit www.vanderbilt.edu/vcns/.

nantly black. And in both

Caroline Hoxby: Charter schools in New York City

Caroline Hoxby is Scott and Donya Bommer professor in



economics at Stanford and director of the National Bureau of Education Statistics. Her research for the NCSC focuses on charter schools.

Professor Hoxby has released the Charter Schools Evaluation Project study in New York City. The multi-year study captures data on absolute test scores, value added performance, lottery in vs. lottery out and social demographics.

Professor Hoxby's report examines data from 42 of NYC's 60 public charter schools. Her findings show that, on average, students in these charter schools outperform their peers in the regular public schools.

Specifically, the average effect of the charter schools on student math performance is 0.09 standard deviations for every year a student spends in the charter school.

The average effect on reading is 0.04 standard deviations for every year the student spends in the charter school. This is in addition to whatever gains students would have been expected to make in the regular public schools they would otherwise have attended.

The full report is available on the NCSC website at www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice.

Michael Kamil: Reading achievement and NCLB

Michael Kamil is consulting professor of education at Stanford University. Dr. Kamil's work is concerned with the effects of technology on literacy; he also conducts research with English Language Learners.

One of his most recent studies is *Review of Research on Reading Instruction in Choice Schools compared to Non-Choice Schools* with Helen Kim Chou. The study considers a provision of No Child Left Behind, which

allows families with children in low-performing schools to transfer them to higher-performing schools where, the assumption goes, they will receive better instruction. The aim of the project is to learn whether or not that assumption holds for reading instruction.

Researchers reviewed the research literature on reading instruction in choice schools compared to that in other

schools. Their preliminary results suggest small to negligible effects of the variables for producing significant gains in general reading achievement compared to traditional schools.

To read the abstract for this study,

visit the NCSC website at www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice.



Choice Connections—Partner Updates

Paul Peterson: Education management in Philadelphia

Paul Peterson is Harvard University's Shattuck professor of government and director of Kennedy School of Government's Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG). His NCSC projects examine school vouchers, competition, policy and governance.

With research fellow Matthew M. Chingos, Professor Peterson recently released a study on the impact of for-

profit and non-profit management on student achievement.

Using test-score data supplied by the Philadelphia School District, the researchers reveal that, in 30 of Philadelphia's lowest performing schools placed under the direction of for-profit education companies, students learned more in math after three and four years than would have been expected

had schools remained under district management.

Peterson and Chingos also find gains in reading scores, but those gains are not different from expected at statistically significant levels.

Read the full report at www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice.



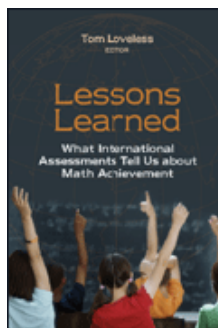
Tom Loveless: Math achievement in the U.S. and abroad

Tom Loveless is an expert on student achievement, education policy, and reform in K-12 schools. He currently serves as director of the Brown Center on Education Policy at the Brookings Institution and as a member of the Koret Task Force at Stanford University.

Dr. Loveless is editor of Brookings' *Lessons Learned: What International Assessments Tell Us about Math Achievement* (2007).

Using data from International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement assessments conducted in 12 to nearly 50 countries (depending on the testing year), each chapter of the book addresses a different question on the topic.

How well are students learning math in different countries? How do curriculums and reforms fare at home and



abroad? How do US math curriculums compare to those used overseas?

The book provides valuable insight for

those on the quest to improve American education. As chapter author and Michigan State University Professor

William Schmidt stated, "In this kind of world it would be folly for us to simply ignore what other countries do...The standards for what is a good solid education that prepares people to work [are] now being pretty much set internationally."

The book may be purchased at www.brookings.edu/events/2008/0123_math.aspx.

Ken Wong: Urban schools and mayoral control

Ken Wong is Walter and Leonore Annenberg Professor in Education Policy; he is also

director of the Urban Education Policy Program at Brown University. Professor Wong studies charter politics and law for the NCSC.

With his colleagues, he recently published *The Education Mayor: Improving America's Schools* (2007, Georgetown University Press), which takes a critical look at mayoral control of urban school districts in 40 states.

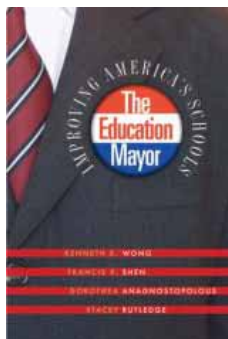
The authors seek to answer

four central questions: What does school governance look like under mayoral leadership? How does mayoral control affect school and student performance? What are the key factors for success or failure of integrated governance? And, how does mayoral control effect practical changes in schools and classrooms?

Their results indicate that mayoral control of schools may not be appropriate for

every district; Detroit, for instance, tried but was unable to fully implement it. However, in other cities it can successfully emphasize accountability across the education system, ultimately improving student performance.

To learn more, go to www.brown.edu/Departments/Education/Education_Mayor.



Suite 400 LSI Wyatt Center
Suite 060 Wyatt Center
Box 152 GPC
1930 South Dr.
Nashville, TN 37203-57214
Phone: 322-8107
Fax 4th Floor: 615-322-4488
Fax 1st Floor: 615-322-8828

[www.vanderbilt.edu/
schoolchoice](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice)

Director

Mark Berends: 615-322-8045
mark.berends@vanderbilt.edu

Associate Directors

Dale Ballou: 615-322-8039
dale.ballou@vanderbilt.edu

Marisa Cannata: 615-322-1746
marisa.a.cannata@vanderbilt.edu

Executive Assistant

Janet Roberts: 615-322-8107
janet.w.roberts@vanderbilt.edu

Research Associates

Roberto Penalosa
roberto.v.penalosa@vanderbilt.edu

Ann Primus: 615-936-8885
ann.primus@vanderbilt.edu

Jenny Zottola: 615-936-7867
genevieve.c.zottola@vanderbilt.edu

NATIONAL CENTER ON
School Choice

VANDERBILT  Peabody College

Conducting innovative, independent research on school choice in all its forms.

The aim of the National Center on School Choice is not to advocate but illuminate school choice in all its forms—from charter schools and vouchers to school governance and public policy. Our program of research engages distinguished scholars across major social science disciplines from national doctoral universities and research organizations.

The National Center on School Choice is funded by a grant from the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. The federal grant provides \$13.3 million dollars in research support over five years. According to a cooperative agreement, the lead institution is Vanderbilt University. Partners are the Brookings Institution, Brown University, Harvard University, Indiana University, the National Bureau of Economic Research, the Northwest Evaluation Association, and Stanford University.

Choice News

Bush will nominate NCSC researchers

President George W. Bush announced his intention last month to nominate NCSC scholars Caroline Hoxby and Paul E. Peterson to be members of the Board of Directors of the National Board for Education Sciences.

Two of eight nominees, the professors are from Stanford University and Harvard University, respectively. Professor Hoxby's term is due to expire in 2112, while Professor Peterson's term will end in 2111.

NCLB: Leaving gifted students behind?

With our nation's current fixation on academic proficiency (read: No Child Left Behind) comes growing concern that, in the effort to catch up low-achieving students, high-achieving students are ignored.

Brookings scholar Tom Loveless sought to learn whether such a concern is well founded. His literature review of three studies on the topic (including one by fellow NCSC researcher Matthew Springer), reveals as many answers—yes, no, and maybe.

Dr. Loveless' additional analysis of data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) finds that, compared to the nation's lowest-achieving

students, the performance of high achieving students has been sluggish. Read the full report at www.edexcellence.net/doc/20080618_high_achievers.pdf

NCSC director heads for Notre Dame

Beginning in January, NCSC Director and Vanderbilt Professor Mark Berends will move to the University of Notre Dame.

Continuing in his role as director of the center, he will take up his new position as professor of sociology and director of the Center of Research on Educational Opportunity (CREO). At Vanderbilt, Ellen Goldring will become the principal investigator of record, and Marisa Cannata will take on responsibilities as associate director alongside Dale Ballou.

New Faces

The choice center welcomes three new researchers to its staff.



Marisa Cannata joined us from Michigan State University, where she earned her doctorate in education policy.

Her research interests focus on policies surrounding teacher quality, including teachers' career decisions, work experiences, and hiring.

This spring Dr. Cannata won the 2008 AERA Division L Outstanding Dissertation of the Year Award. Her work, entitled "Where to Teach? Developing a More Comprehensive Framework to Understand Teacher Career Decision," was applauded as "highly original in its use of theory...and in its creative use and analyses of mixed methods data."



Jie-Eun Grace Lee, originally from Seoul, Korea, came to us from UCLA, where she earned her masters in comparative/international education.

A former kindergarten teacher, Jie-Eun is interested in the research areas of refugee student engagement in U.S. and international child rights.

Furman graduate Madeline (Maddy) Mavrogordato served with Teach for America as a third and fourth grade bi-lingual teacher before beginning her doctoral work at Vanderbilt this fall.



With a background in political science and Spanish, Maddy's research interests include school choice, English language acquisition, and the use of experimental designs in educational research.