

Special points of interest:

- In this issue, we review and preview '06-'07 happenings at the NCSC. Rigorous research has been completed, and there's more to be done.
- Recent Center outreach includes the upcoming publication of two edited volumes of research and the Peabody Journal of Education.
- Center researchers' work was cited in two December cases before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Inside this issue:

Choice Connections 2

Fall conference
On charter schools

Getting the
Word Out: publi-
cations from the
NCSC

Choice Cases 3

Open
Enrollment

Meta-Analysis

Inside Schools

Choice News 4

Supreme Court
cases cite NCSC
scholars' work

Preparing for
AERA

Choice Points with Center Director Mark Berends

A year (almost) in review



Early this year, the Choice Center submitted a perform-

ance report to our primary funder, the U.S. Department of Education—eight volumes of research accomplished over the last twelve months. We are pleased by results of the work completed, and inspired to dig into the work underway and still to be done.

In this issue, you'll find an overview of some of that research and its related outreach. There is a look back at September's conference on charter schools.

There are summaries of two upcoming publications. You'll also find synopses of research we have just begun—a meta-analysis project, and a new charter school study in Indianapolis—as well as spring and summer activities we're ready to start.

Looking ahead, we know that new projects await us. The National Center on School Choice is just 2 1/2 years old, but the school choice movement is much older and still gathering steam.

Now more than ever, people want to know if choice makes a difference. They want to know

what their school options are, and what they can expect from them.

As researchers, our job is not to promote choice, but to examine it, and thereby lead policymakers, educators, and parents alike to empirical findings that shed light on choice reforms.

Let us hear your thoughts about what you read here. If you have questions or comments, email ann.primus@vanderbilt.edu.

Summer Institutes: Time out for the big picture

Finding time away from daily demands to reflect on the bigger picture of our professional lives—it's an all-too-familiar challenge for most of us. Leaders of independent and charter schools are no exception. This is one reason the NCSC and the Peabody Professional Institutes (PPI), which offer professional development experiences for educators across the nation, have designed two Summer Institutes for independent and charter school leaders.

In June, we will welcome a select group of these leaders to Peabody to guide them through a week of considering the big picture of what they do.

Under the tutelage of NCSC faculty, participants will explore the foundations and fundamentals of school development.

Independent school leaders will consider a range of issues, from learning theories to finance and communications. Charter school leaders will cover topics such as fund raising and governance, management, and strategic planning.

In other words, these leaders will develop what the Institutes

aim to provide: "knowledge grounded in theory and supported by data."

At the end of the week, participants will earn the title "Summer Fellow of Peabody College," joining the ranks of other Vanderbilt alumni who are leaders in education and human development throughout the world.

To learn more, go to peabody.vanderbilt.edu/x3332.xml.



Choice Connections



Photo courtesy of Daniel Dubois.
Conference attendees in the Wyatt Center Rotunda.

**Charter School
Outcomes
will be published
later this year.**

Fall conference: Considering charter school outcomes

Over two autumnal days in late September, more than 100 charter school experts gathered on Vanderbilt's Peabody campus for the first National Conference on Charter School Research.

The event featured a national panel of interdisciplinary scholars who spoke on teaching and learning in charter schools, governance and finance, and charter school effects on student achievement.

Dr. Mark Schneider, commis-

sioner of the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics, gave the keynote address. Conference guests included charter school leaders of every stripe, from principals and teachers to researchers and policymakers.

From all accounts, the conference was a great success. Said NCSC Director Mark Berends, "What a privilege to bring to one place so many people who care about the education of our nation's children."

The conference papers, which NCSC had available online before the conference, have been revised and compiled into an edited volume entitled *Charter School Outcomes*. The volume will be published later this year by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

For updates on this and other happenings at the NCSC, visit our website at vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice.



Getting the word out: Birth of a handbook

Phase I—lining up authors—of the upcoming *Handbook of Research on School Choice* is complete. The *Handbook* will be the second in the Center's planned series of volumes on school choice research. As of February, all authors were on board to submit manuscripts by the end of this year.

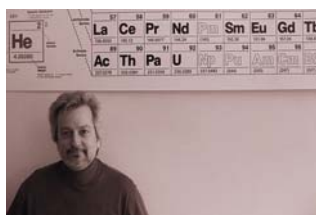
The time is ripe for such a book. Over the last fifteen

years, the number of school-based options to parents has increased. More systems are open to children attending low performing schools, especially in response to No Child Left Behind.

In this context, the *Handbook's* purpose is to compile the most rigorous and policy-relevant research available on all forms of K-12 school choice—from

magnets and charters to private and home schools. Its aim is to define the current state of this evolving field of research, policy, and practice.

Handbook editors are Mark Berends, Matthew G. Springer, and Dale Ballou, all of Vanderbilt's Peabody College, and Herbert J. Walberg, of Stanford University.



Getting the word out: Peabody Journal of Education

This summer a special edition of the *Peabody Journal of Education* will be published in coordination with the National Center on School Choice.

The journal, whose guest editors are Mark Berends, Matthew G. Springer, and Warren Langevin, highlights current research on the effects of school choice and competition in public and private education both here and abroad. Specifically, it presents new empirical and

theoretical studies on the policy environment for school choice. Contributing authors include political scientists, economists, policy analysts and legal scholars.

Articles cover a range of topics, such as the politics of school choice in charter schools and interest-groups; homeschooling; a DC scholarship program; teacher mobility; district competition in Wisconsin and across the U.S.; and international perspectives on school choice.

According to the editors, "We believe this special issue provides helpful information with practical relevance to policy leaders and practitioners interested in school choice."

To learn more about selections from this journal, visit vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/pje-special2007.html.

Choice Connections

Open enrollment: Discerning the benefits

How does open enrollment—the ability to send children to any public school in their district—impact students' socioeconomic and achievement status in magnet or neighborhood schools? This is the question researchers Michael Flicek (Wyoming public schools) and Ron Houser (Northwest Evaluations Association) set out to answer in their recent study.

Their investigation took place in one school system of about 11,500 students. Of these,

they divided about 5,000 into two groups based on where they lived. "Near attenders" were attending one of the two schools closest to their homes. Far attenders were not. Here is what the research found.

At magnet schools, open enrollment was associated with higher socioeconomic and achievement status. At neighborhood schools, the opposite was true.

However, students in magnet schools—as opposed to those in neighborhood schools—showed low achievement growth in reading and math.

In the study summary, authors wrote, "Overall attender status did not predict reading or math initial status or growth. Within several school types by socioeconomic status subgroups, however, far attenders had lower achievement growth than near attenders."



Meta-Analysis: Seeking apples-to-apples

It's no secret that charter school research findings on student achievement are as varied as the schools themselves.

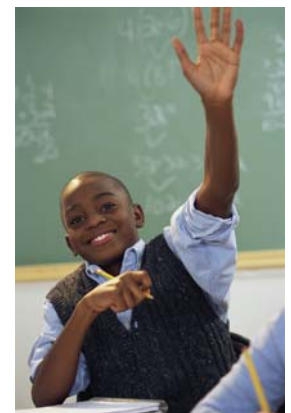
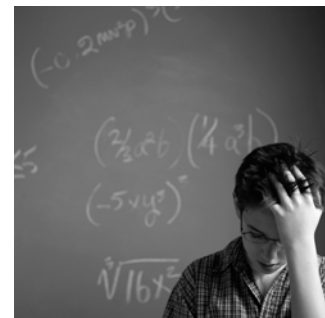
The reasons for this are connected to the variety of the schools and the methods used to study them. So the NCSC is devoting one project to "meta-analysis": examining not a school or group of

schools, but the *research* on the schools' effects on student achievement.

According to researcher Bettie Teasley, "this is a time when the lack of apples-to-apples comparisons is a common refrain" in charter school research.

To address it, she and fellow researchers Anna Nicotera,

Caroline Watral, Jenny Zottola, and Professor Mark Berends are systematically synthesizing the effects of many research studies to understand why they are mixed, to create a framework for standardizing charter school analysis, and to shed a brighter light on the impacts of charter schools on student achievement.



Inside schools: Opening the black box

The idea behind charter schools is that when schools are free to operate and instruct the way they want, they will provide a quality education for America's students. The question is, is it true?

So far, research has been mixed. Thus, Vanderbilt professors Mark Berends, Ellen Goldring, and Claire Smrekar, with project manager Jenny Zottola, University of Indianapolis researchers Ruth Green and Zora Ziazi, and John Smithson from the Uni-

versity of Wisconsin-Madison are taking the question to Indianapolis charter and regular public schools.

Few studies have looked at what is going on *inside* schools that affects student outcomes. So in Indianapolis, our researchers are comparing the achievement gains of students in charter schools with those in regular public schools.

They are also looking at how these schools are organized; at how they align curriculum and teaching with content

standards and assessments; and how that seems to affect student achievement.

Finally, they are providing schools with reports that link what the schools are doing with student outcomes. This way, they can gauge the impact of their practices on student achievement and effectively direct school improvement efforts.

Principal, teacher, parent, and student surveys are underway for this study.



National Center on School Choice

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 Director

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

Administrative Associate

Susie Jackson: 615-322-8107
susanne.jackson@vanderbilt.edu

Research Associates

Roberto Penaloza: 615-322-2878
roberto.v.penaloz@vanderbilt.edu

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

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

We'd love to hear your feedback.
Send comments to
ann.primus@vanderbilt.edu

National Center on School Choice

The National Center on School Choice conducts scientific, comprehensive, and timely studies on school choice to inform policy and practice. The Center is a national leader in coordinating the diverse efforts of multiple disciplines, methodologies, and substantive issues associated with the design, implementation, and effects of school choice. 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 partly funded by a grant from the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. The federal grant provides over ten 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, the National Bureau of Economic Research, the Northwest Evaluation Association, Stanford University, and the University of Indianapolis.

Choice News

NCSC researchers' work cited in Supreme Court cases

In a rare legal move, the U.S. Supreme court cited social science research for recent cases on school integration—research that included the work of NCSC faculty Mark Berends, Ellen Goldring, Claire Smrekar, and James Guthrie. It also included the work of Vanderbilt professor Pearl Sims and former graduate student Debra Owens.

According to Smrekar, "We are pleased that Peabody research

on magnet schools, student achievement and Department of Defense-sponsored schools will contribute to the court's deliberations in what could be two of the most significant racial integration cases since *Brown v. Board of Education*."

To read the amicus brief, which was filed by the American Educational Research Association, go to aera.net/default.aspx?id=1456.



Center scholars prepare for AERA

Next month a number of researchers affiliated with the NCSC will head to the annual conference of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in Chicago, Illinois.

The theme of this year's meeting is *The World of Educational Quality*. AERA President Eva L. Baker has written that this theme "points to both an expanded range of inquiry and an intensified focus on the meaning of quality in education research and practice."

Americans are not the only ones calling for educational reform; it's a cry heard around the

world. And educational reform is not the only change being championed. So, too, are the causes of equal access to and opportunity in schools; and of improved learning within schools.

All of which raise questions this spring's AERA meeting intends to address—namely, what reform efforts are taking place in other countries? What factors define quality in education? What research contributions are coming in from disciplines outside education research? And what criteria

characterize quality in research?

As panel chairs, presenters, or discussants, NCSC researchers will cover topics including the instructional and policy contexts of charter schools, and the intended and unintended consequences of NCLB on student achievement.

For more information, go to www.aera.net.

