

NATIONAL CENTER ON

School Choice

Press Release

April 10, 2009

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New book on school choice examines charter schools, homeschooling, vouchers and more

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - As parents and policymakers increasingly worry about the quality of public schools, alternatives such as charter schools, magnet schools and vouchers appear more attractive. But experts wonder: What difference do schools of choice make?

A new book from the National Center on School Choice at Vanderbilt explores that question from a variety of angles. The *Handbook of Research on School Choice*, released April 10, brings together top research on major forms of school choice, including charter schools, vouchers, homeschooling, magnet schools, private schools, virtual schools, supplementary education services and tuition tax credits. The chapters explore choice from a range of perspectives - historical, political, sociological, economic, legal and psychological - at schools in this country and abroad.

"The concept of school choice can no longer be defined as just school vouchers, tax credits and charter schools. Students in consistently low-performing traditional public schools can move to higher-performing traditional public schools, or attend after-school tutoring programs free of charge. With this growth has come increased educational opportunities for many children who might not otherwise have had the chance to participate," Matthew Springer, a co-author of the book and director of the National Center on Performance Incentives at Vanderbilt University, said. "Whether students have a sufficient amount of schooling options, or if these options are enhancing students' academic outcomes, remains at the center of intense debate."

For many of education's most complex questions, several authors note that simple answers don't exist. Are schools of choice more or less effective than traditional public schools? Are conservatives or liberals most likely to favor choice? For these and many other questions, the answers depend on such variables as the kinds of schools in question (e.g., charters or vouchers, magnets or home schools), how they're governed, the political climate of their communities and so on.

Though the chapters are based on scholarly research, the editors and authors have taken care to translate the papers into prose that is accessible to a broad range of readers, making it useful for researchers, graduate students, faculty members, educators, policy-makers and anyone who wants to stay current on policy topics related to choice. A chapter about the economics of choice, for example, posits that because education benefits both individuals and broader society, it doesn't fit neatly into categories for how goods should be funded, produced and distributed. This presents challenges such as providing families with freedom of choice while also ensuring that each system is financially efficient, equitable and fosters social cohesion.

A chapter on legal issues notes that the Constitution and state laws have different effects on different kinds of school choice. Charter schools generally aren't impeded by state constitutions, for example, while voucher systems are in several states. That chapter also explores the tension between the desire schools of choice have for autonomy and the pressure legislatures feel to regulate education as a core government service.

The book was edited by National Center on School Choice Director Mark Berends, University of Notre Dame; Vanderbilt's Springer and Dale Ballou, associate professor of public policy and education; and Herbert J. Walberg, distinguished visiting fellow with the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. It is the second book in a series produced by the National Center on School Choice.

For more information on the center, visit <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/schoolchoice/>. For more information about Peabody College, ranked the No. 2 education school in the nation in 2008 by *U.S. News & World Report*, visit <http://pty.vanderbilt.edu>.