

ABSTRACT

The Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP) was approved by the state legislature in 1990 and begun in the city of Milwaukee. The WPCP was later expanded to include all of Wisconsin in 2011. Since then, the WPCP has offered educational and tuition waivers to qualifying low-income families to attend a private K-12 school of their choice. To date, more than 30,000 students have participated in the program, with marked and increasing representation from non-white students over the years. Although the academic benefits of the private school curriculum have been well-documented, the goal of this project was to investigate the impacts of attending a private school on mental health resources, nutrition, and physical activity opportunities. To assess this, we have surveyed parents of children who have transitioned from public to private school by ranking their satisfaction with each of these domains from 0-100 (0 = 'no satisfaction'; 100 = 'completely satisfied'). Our data reveals decreased satisfaction with physical activity opportunities offered at public schools when compared to private schools (41.45 to 62.26, $p=0.04$) as well as with nutrition (43.91 to 74.08, $p=0.03$). Interestingly, satisfaction with mental health resources was not significantly different between public and private schools (57.63 to 64.17, $p=0.67$).

BACKGROUND

- The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) was created in 1990 due to parents' dissatisfaction with the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) system.
- The MPCP allowed parents to send their students to an MPS school of their choosing and also created a voucher program for low-income families to access private schools without worrying about the costs of tuition.
- The MPCP also had a goal of increasing the diversity of the private school system which is predominantly comprised of White students.
- The public education system is providing low-income and minority students with less opportunities for academic success as evident by national assessments of public education especially in larger cities which are predominantly comprised of Black and Latinx populations.
- Although the educational outcome benefits of the private school curriculum have been well documented, the benefits on nutrition, physical activity, and mental health resources (especially critical during the COVID-19 pandemic) have not been fully assessed.

OBJECTIVES

- To investigate if MPCP/WPCP is increasing the diversity of Private School student demographics.
- To evaluate the extra-educational benefits of the private school curriculum on nutrition, physical activity, and mental health resources using a survey-based approach sent to parents of students who are enrolled in the WPCP.
- To evaluate how minority individuals become aware of the WPCP.

METHODS

Assessing the Influence of School Choice on race/ethnic Diversity: Enrollment information, student demographics, and learning outcomes were obtained from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction from state public schools and private schools (N=2602). Private schools have the option to report information for PC participants only or information for all of their students. Data is for the academic year 2020-2021. Student demographics (race/ethnicity) were primarily interrogated to assess the influence of Parental Choice on race/ethnic diversity across these three school types.

Evaluating extra-educational benefits of the private school curriculum: We aimed to assess the benefits of the private school curriculum on nutrition, physical activity, and mental health. A survey was created using Qualtrics to encourage anonymity. The survey was sent to key stakeholders including schools and parents in the program.

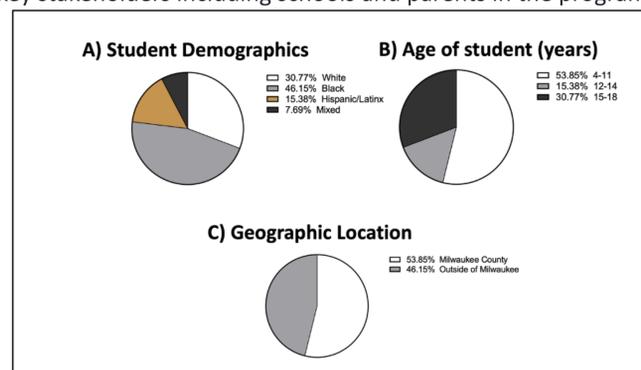


Figure 1: 17 surveys were submitted but only 13 respondents completed the full survey. **A)** Largest respondents were Black (46.15), followed by White (30.77), and Hispanic (15.38). **B)** Largest respondents were parents of children aged 4-11 years (53.85), followed by parents of children aged 15-18 (30.77), and parents of children aged 12-14 (15.38). **C)** The majority of respondents resided in Milwaukee County (53.85) compared to the rest of the state (46.15).

RESULTS

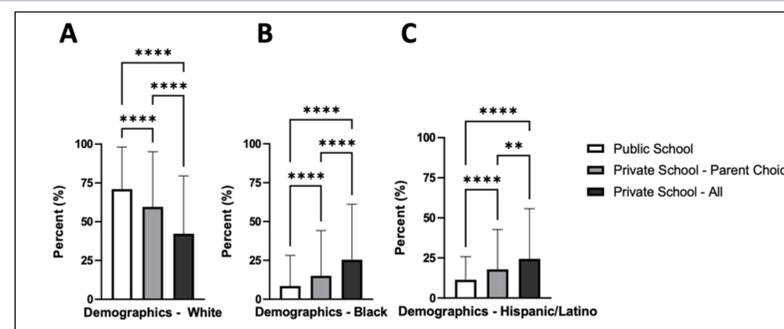


Figure 2: Student Demographics by School System
Results show that private schools have increased diverse populations than public schools, largely due to the PC voucher program. One-way ANOVA statistical analysis with multiple comparisons was performed. Public schools have increased populations of White students compared to private school with voucher participants (71.06 to 59.60; $p<0.0001$). Conversely, public schools have decreased populations of Black and Hispanic

RESULTS

compared to private school voucher participants (08.48 to 15.03; $p<0.0001$, and 11.38 to 17.90; $p<0.0001$). Without the PC voucher program, we hypothesize that these individuals would be attending MPS institutions instead of private schools. In turn, we believe this is a large contributor to the increased minority student demographics of all private schools.

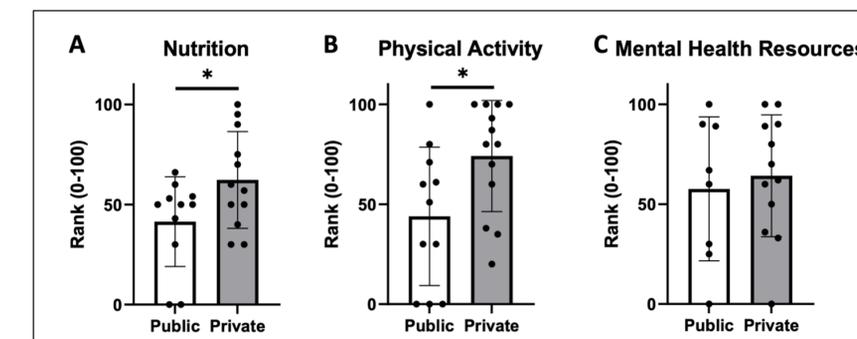


Figure 3: Comparing extra-educational resources between public and private schools.

We surveyed parents of children who have transitioned from public to private school by ranking their satisfaction with each of these domains from 0-100 (0 = 'no satisfaction'; 100 = 'completely satisfied'). Our data reveals decreased satisfaction with physical activity opportunities offered at public schools when compared to private schools (41.45 to 62.26, $p=0.04$) as well as with nutrition (43.91 to 74.08, $p=0.03$). Interestingly, satisfaction with mental health resources was not significantly different between public and private schools (57.63 to 64.17, $p=0.67$).

Self-Research
Neighbor/Word of Mouth
Counselor/Educational Institution
Flyer

Figure 4: How did you hear about the Parental Choice Program?

Surveys from parents of students of minority descent were included to create this word cloud. Findings show that most individuals of minority descent find the PC program through word of mouth.

CONCLUSIONS

- The Parental Choice Program increases the racial/ethnic diversity of students enrolled in private schools in Wisconsin.
- Parents feel more satisfied with the nutrition and physical activity resources at private school compared to public schools.
- No statistically significant differences were found in mental health resources between public and private schools.
- Minority parents report that they learned about the PC program through a neighbor or word of mouth; therefore, community outreach events are critical to continue to increase the diversity of private school student demographics.