

Public Schools as Good as Private Ones

On Student Achievement: Study

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Students in public schools learn as much or more mathematics between kindergarten and fifth grade as similar students learn in private schools, according to a new University of Illinois study of multiyear, longitudinal data on nearly 10,000 students.

The results of the study appeared in the May issue of a major education journal, *Phi Delta Kappan*.

“These data provide strong, longitudinal evidence that public schools are at least as effective as private schools in boosting student achievement,” according to the authors, education professor Christopher Lubienski, doctoral student Corinna Crane and education professor Sarah Theule Lubienski.

The new report is the first published study to show that public schools are at least as effective as private schools at promoting student learning over time, the authors say.

Combined with other, yet-unpublished studies of the same data, which produced similar findings, “We think this effectively ends the debate about whether private schools are more effective than publics,” said Christopher Lubienski, whose research has dealt with all aspects of alternative education.

This is important, he said, because many current reforms, such as No Child Left Behind, charter schools and vouchers for private schools, are at least partially based on that assumption.

The debate essentially began three years ago with the publication in *Phi Delta Kappan* of a previous study by the Lubienskis, which challenged the then-common wisdom - supported by well-regarded but dated research - that private schools were superior to public schools.

In that 2005 study, the Lubienskis found that public school students tested higher in math than their private school peers from similar social and economic backgrounds. In another, more-extensive study in early 2006, they built on those findings, and also raised similar questions about charter schools. Both studies were based on fourth- and eighth-grade test data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

The conclusions were supported later in 2006 with similar findings from U.S. Department of Education studies comparing public schools with private schools, and with charters. The federal studies looked mainly at NAEP test data on both math and reading.

Critics of the previous studies, however, cited the lack of longitudinal data showing the possible effect over time of different kinds of schooling. The new study was designed, in part, to address that issue, the authors say in their *PDK* article.

The *PDK* article is available online for a fee of \$7.00 at <http://tinyurl.com/Lubienski>.

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