
Do Vouchers Help Make Private Schools More Diverse?



As Congress [passed](#) the first major federal program to fund private school tuition, a new [study](#) provides insight into the potential impact of this type of reform on racial segregation. It suggests that private schools are acting pretty much as one might expect: Private schools serving White students seem disinclined to welcome non-White voucher students.

Like students, private schools choose whether or not they will participate in voucher programs. The new article examines this supply side of the choice equation. Specifically, it explores Alabama's Educational Scholarship Program and the racial demographics of the schools—and students—with regard to that program. It's published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, and authored by [Annah Rogers](#) of the University of West Alabama and NEPC Fellow [Bryan Mann](#) of the University of Kansas.

Created in 2013, the Educational Scholarship Program limits eligibility to students from families with incomes no higher than 185% of the Federal Poverty Level, meaning that a private school opting to participate is choosing to enroll these lower-wealth students. Rogers and Mann determine that most of these participants have been Black. Most of the state's private schools, by contrast, are majority White.

The researchers found that schools with the highest percentages of White students were significantly less likely to choose to participate in the voucher program. They also found that

the schools with the highest percentage of White students were less likely to participate in the program when the school is located in public school districts where more than 72 percent of the students were Black. One implication of such findings is that participation in the voucher program is unlikely to lead to increases in private-school diversity.

“[P]erhaps,” the researchers conclude, “the most feasible option for fostering diverse enrollments and educational equity is found outside the private sector.”

NEPC Resources on Vouchers

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