

# SCHOOL CHOICE

INTERIM STUDY COMMITTEE REPORT

## HB 1897 – Parental Choice Scholarship



HB 1897 provided universal parental school choice

- ▶ Parents choose from all available community options, both public and private
- ▶ Student selection by lottery with an exception for siblings of current students
- ▶ Adequacy education dollars follow the child to parental choice school
- ▶ Phased in over a 5 year period
- ▶ HB 1897 referred to Interim Study



## The Fundamental Questions

- ▶ Does school choice improve overall student academic performance?
- ▶ What is the impact of school choice on public schools in the shared community?
- ▶ Are parents, particularly uneducated low income parents, capable of making good school choices for their children?
- ▶ How will school choice affect the cost of K-12 education in Arkansas?
- ▶ Dr. Patrick Wolf, Endowed Chair in School Choice, University of Arkansas



## Answers to the Fundamental Questions

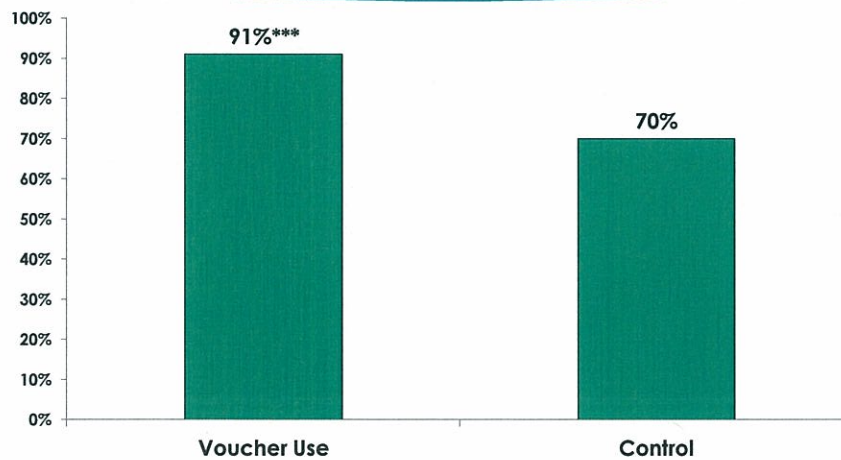
- ▶ Can school choice improve overall student academic performance?
  - ▶ Best evidence comes from rigorous “gold standard” studies
  - ▶ Two outcomes studied: student achievement & attainment (i.e. graduation)



## All Final Results from 12 Rigorous Achievement Studies



## DC Opportunity Scholarship Impact on High School Graduation (Wolf et al 2013)

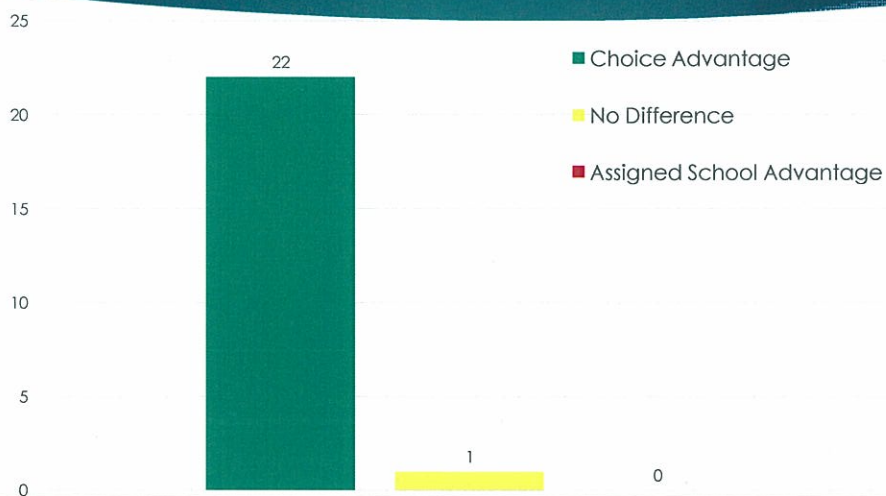


## Answers to the Fundamental Questions



- ▶ How does choice affect area public schools?
  - ▶ Rigorous studies demonstrate that public school performance improves

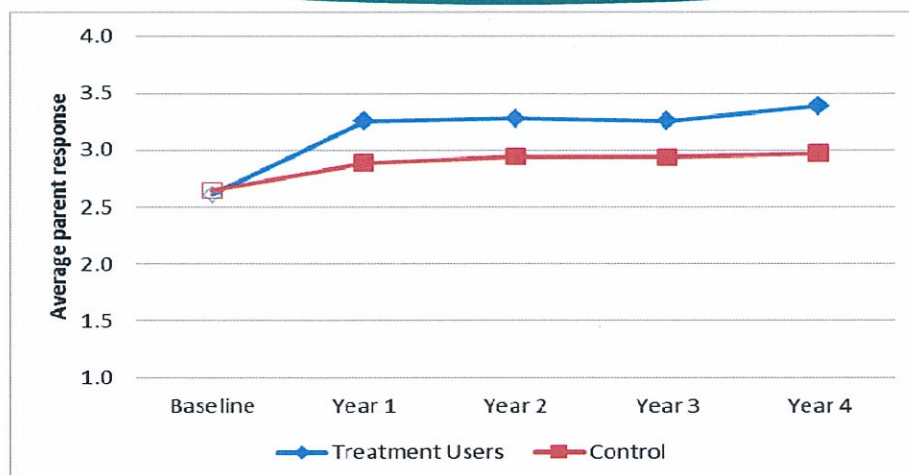
## Results from 23 Rigorous Studies



## Answers to the Fundamental Questions

- ▶ Parents: Can they choose? Are they satisfied?
  - ▶ Parents have reasonable education preferences for safety, academic quality, and moral values (Stewart & Wolf 2014)
  - ▶ Parents tend to get what they choose for (Schneider et al 2000; Hastings and Weinstein 2008)
  - ▶ School Choice increases parent satisfaction with schools

## Parent Satisfaction Scale in DC Choice Study (Wolf & Kisida 2014)







## Answers to the Fundamental Questions

- ▶ How does choice impact the cost of K-12 education?
  - ▶ Milwaukee Parental Choice Program saves Wisconsin over \$50 mil/year (Costrell 2011)
  - ▶ Ten school voucher programs studied have saved a total of \$1.7 billion (Spalding 2014)



## ACT 1227- The School Choice Act of 2013 Findings

“The students in Arkansas’s public schools and their parents will become more informed about and involved in the public educational system if students and their parents are provided greater freedom to determine the most effective school for meeting their individual educational needs. There is no right school for every student, and permitting students to choose from among different schools with differing assets will increase the likelihood that some at-risk students will find their full academic potential”.

## ACT 1227- The School Choice Act of 2013 Findings



“Giving more options to parents and students with respect to where students attend public schools will increase the responsiveness and effectiveness of the state’s schools because teachers, administrators and school board members will have added incentive to satisfy the educational needs of the students who reside in the district”.

## ACT 1227- The School Choice Act of 2013 Findings



“These benefits of enhanced quality and effectiveness in our public schools justify permitting a student to apply for admission to a school in any school district beyond the school district in which the student resides, provided that the transfer of the student does not conflict with an enforceable judicial decree or court order remedying the effects of past racial segregation in the school district”.





## School Choice Act of 2013 – Basic Criteria

- ▶ For schools in academic or facility distress, 100% of the students are eligible to transfer to another public school
- ▶ For schools not in distress there is a 3% cap on transfers
- ▶ Act 1227 does not require districts to add teachers, staff or classrooms in order to meet demand
- ▶ School superintendents are charged with insuring public awareness of the school choice program



## School Choice Act of 2013 – Basic Criteria

- ▶ The district school board is directed to adopt specific standards for acceptance or rejection of student applicants
  - ▶ Standards may include capacity of a program, class, grade level, or school building
  - ▶ Must give priority to siblings
  - ▶ Must accept credits toward graduation awarded by another district





## School Choice Act of 2013 – Basic Criteria

- ▶ The district standards may not include an applicant's:
  - ▶ Academic achievement
  - ▶ Athletic or other extracurricular ability
  - ▶ English proficiency level
  - ▶ Previous disciplinary proceedings with the exception of expulsion from another district



## School Choice Act of 2013 – Basic Criteria

- ▶ ADE will collect data from districts on the number of applications and the effects of school choice transfers on both resident and non-resident districts for up to 2 years to determine if a racially segregative impact has occurred
- ▶ ACT 1227 - The School Choice Act of 2013 will expire on July 1, 2015



## School Choice Act of 2013 – Tracking Data

### ▶ Public School Choice Data Tracking Survey

- ▶ Total Applications Received      4,758
- ▶ Applications Accepted            4,584
- ▶ Applications Denied                174



## School Choice Act of 2013 – Tracking Data

### ▶ Breakdown of Application Denials by Category

- |  |              |              |
|--|--------------|--------------|
| ▶ Lack of Capacity in Requested School | 12 Districts | 66 Students  |
| ▶ Desegregation Order Exemption        | 12 Districts | 39 Students  |
| ▶ 3% Cap Achieved                      | 3 Districts  | 16 Students  |
| ▶ Other Reasons                        | 7 Districts  | 53 Students  |
| Total of All Denials                   | 34 Districts | 174 Students |





## School Choice Act of 2013 – Impact to Date?

An article published July 17<sup>th</sup> in NWA Online, *Student transfers out of “distressed” schools have limits*, reports there are few seats available in quality schools

- ▶ ABE designated 26 schools in 15 districts as academically distressed
  - ▶ In Little Rock these include Hall, McClellan and J.A. Fair High Schools; Cloverdale and Henderson Middle Schools, and Baseline Elementary
- ▶ Most desired public schools are already full, particularly at the high school level



## School Choice Act of 2013 – Impact to Date?

- ▶ This shortage of available space includes Little Rock area public charter schools
  - ▶ eStem Public Charter school is full and has a waiting list
  - ▶ Lisa Academy is full and has a waiting list
  - ▶ Academics Plus charter school is full with 273 students on a waiting list
- ▶ “In several cases statewide, the school designated as academically distressed is the only high school, middle school, or elementary school in the district. Any student transfers would have to be to other districts.”

## School Choice in Arkansas

### Recommendations for Next Steps – ACT 1227



- ▶ Maintain the 3% transfer cap for schools not in academic or facility distress with one exception
  - ▶ Allow any student with an IEP to transfer without counting these students against the 3% cap
    - ▶ In several communities there are private schools that cater specifically to children with disabilities

## School Choice in Arkansas

### Recommendations for Next Steps



- ▶ Add private schools as an option for students and parents in order to better meet the current demand for transfers and to expand diversity of options
  - ▶ Private schools must continue to comply with all current statute governing private schools in Arkansas
  - ▶ Protect the rights and unique qualities of private schools which make these choices attractive to some students and parents
  - ▶ The parent is responsible for evaluation of the relative benefits of choice schools for their child and for oversight of their choice school
  - ▶ Maximum voucher for private school transfers = 76% of adequacy funding (\$6,584), or \$5,000 for FY 2016





## Related Questions

- ▶ How can the state address the fact that some geographic areas will still not have meaningful choice?
- ▶ How would the addition of private schools as a choice impact those students who are already enrolled in Private Schools?
- ▶ Other Questions from the committee?



## School Choice in Arkansas Summary of the Findings?

Findings indicate that providing school choice will have several benefits

- ▶ Greater parent and student involvement in the education system
- ▶ Parents free to determine the best school for meeting their students needs
- ▶ Increase the likelihood at risk students will stay in school
- ▶ Increase student motivation to find their full academic potential
- ▶ Increase the responsiveness and effectiveness of public schools because teachers, administrators and school board members are incentivized

## The Bottom Line



Will these proposed changes to ACT 1227 enhance or inhibit Arkansas's ability to realize the full benefits of school choice as articulated in the ACT?

Questions?