



Indiana University
School of Education

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Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program 1998-2002

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

December, 2003

This is the third and final annual report produced from the longitudinal study of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program (CSTP). The study began in autumn, 1998 following a cohort of children who were in first grade and enrolled in public schools or who were using a scholarship to attend private schools throughout Cleveland. Since that time, data have been collected each year on the demographic characteristics, classroom and teacher experiences, and academic achievement of these students. The current report presents the accumulated findings from the period beginning autumn, 1998 through spring, 2002 when the cohort of over 6,000 students were at the end of their fourth grade year.

In addition to these data, the most recent year of the project included an extensive telephone survey, which was conducted of randomly selected families of school-age children throughout Cleveland. The primary purpose of this portion of the study was to help understand how and why families make choices about their children's schooling. Using stratified random sampling procedures, 1,329 families whose children were in second, fourth or eighth grade in public schools, private schools using a scholarship, or community schools were interviewed.

The results of these two, distinct evaluation activities are reported in detail in separate documents. What follows are major findings from the evaluation through spring, 2002.

- Students who participate in the CSTP are more likely to be Caucasian, Hispanic, or Multiracial, whereas public school students are more likely to be African-American. Further, scholarship students tend to come from families that are somewhat less likely to be eligible for free or reduced price lunch than public school students.
- Students who enter the CSTP as a result of the initial random lottery are more likely to have attended public schools and are demographically similar to their public school peers. Students who enter the CSTP by accepting the scholarships that had remained unused late in the summer or after the beginning of the academic year are of higher income, more likely to be Caucasian, and are likely to have been enrolled in private schools in the prior year.

- Students in both public and private schools work in classrooms that include approximately 22 students, and they work with moderately experienced teachers (12 years) who have spent about half of their careers in their current schools. However, public school teachers are more likely to have completed graduate coursework and a slightly greater proportion are certified than are teachers in private schools.
- Students who have experienced larger class sizes from first to fourth grade have higher achievement than those in smaller classes. Public school students who have worked with teachers who possess more education also have higher fourth grade achievement; although the opposite is true for private school students.
- After adjusting for students' minority status and family income, there is no consistent pattern either of enhanced or diminished academic achievement for students who have used a scholarship to attend public schools from kindergarten through fourth grade. Further, students who exit the program to return to public schools often experience a comparative drop in achievement during their first or second year after leaving the program, but return over time to levels of adjusted achievement that is comparable to other students.
- Safety, order, and academic quality are consistently the most important school attributes for all families. This is true despite their selection of differing educational options (i.e., public, private, or community schools). Class size is of only slight importance to families, and the diversity of the school and extracurricular activities of even less importance.
- There are identifiable groups of families who desire and seek educational settings that meet their children's needs, but who have been unable to locate these. These families often have enrolled their children in public schools, community schools, and private schools using a scholarship, and then have returned to public schools. They tend to be less satisfied with each of the settings, including their current school, than any other families.
- Awareness of both the CSTP and community school program appears to have been enhanced by attention resulting from the U.S. Supreme Court hearing. Relatedly, the legal uncertainty of the program (prior to the Court's ruling) prompted many families to leave the program or not to apply at all.
- The cost to families and the limited number and range of participating private schools discourages many families from pursuing a scholarship. Even the 10% of tuition that families must cover is prohibitive to many very low-income families. This, coupled with difficulty finding openings in schools that are either geographically near or that provide the services their children need forces many interested scholarship families to remain in public schools.

It is important to highlight the unique opportunity that the longitudinal research in Cleveland provides. Many of the findings, as well as the issues or questions that continue to emerge from this project would not have existed if it were not for the nature, structure, and length of the present study. The ability to identify and track multiple and evolving groups of students and families is among these issues that significantly contributed to the study. Similarly, the current findings associated with academic achievement would not have been identified, nor can their persistence be confirmed without a longitudinal study. In an era of increasingly high standards for rigor in educational research, such a design may prove invaluable for future research.