



5 Things the GAO Forgot to Ask

November 2, 2007

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Today the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report critical of the Washington D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) - not surprising given the agency's historic tendency to support the status quo. Here are five questions the GAO should have but didn't ask about this pioneering education choice program:

1. **To whom is the program accountable?** The OSP is accountable to parents (who are not forced to apply for scholarships and can put their children back in public school whenever they choose), to taxpayers (who have free will to support or not support the program and those who authorized it), and to the general public. Opponents' "lack of accountability" argument falls flat given the fact that chronically failing schools continue to be propped up by captive enrollment and funded with taxpayer dollars.
2. **How satisfied are families with the OSP program?** Highly satisfied. For every one scholarship available, four students have applied. A Georgetown University report on the OSP program showed that parents of OSP students were more involved in their children's education, that communication between parents and children significantly increased and that OSP students demonstrated an improved attitude toward learning and had greater self-confidence.
3. **If the scholarship program didn't exist, what would be the alternative for OSP students?** Without the Opportunity Scholarship Program, 83 percent of participating students would be forced to attend schools that have failed to meet academic performance standards.
4. **How does student achievement among voucher students compare to that of students in public schools?** Student achievement is roughly the same. This is good news, considering that when a child transitions from one school to another, performance typically declines. Research from other school choice programs shows that over time (as is the case with the 15 year-old Milwaukee Parental Choice Program), low-income students in the program made significant gains in math and reading after at least three years in the program. Studies have consistently found that private schools, even after adjusting for the socioeconomic backgrounds of their students, do a better job overall than public schools of educating students, particularly among disadvantaged children whom the OSP program disproportionately serves.
5. **How can the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program be improved?** First, create a program where the money actually follows the students. Currently, when a student enrolls in the OSP program, the funding for that student remains in the typically failing school for at least one year. Second, expand the program. The supply of private schools is elastic and responds to demand. The demand exists; Congress should enable supply to meet that demand.

For more information about the importance of education choice, contact The Center for Education Reform at 1-800-521-2118.

Additional Responses:

U.S. Department of Education's October 23 response to draft report, include in the [final GAO report, page 68-76](#), and [press release](#), November 2, 2007.

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