

# The Anti-Aid Amendments and School Choice

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“Dumping the Know-Nothing Amendments: Church,  
State, and School Reform”

Pioneer Institute

Boston, MA

March 16, 2011





# Outline for the Talk

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1. Source and effect of the Anti-Aid Amendments
2. What is lost?
3. Who loses it?
4. What can be done?
5. Conclusions



# Origin of the Anti-Aid Amendments

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- Irish-Catholic immigration of 1840s/50s
- Protection of Protestant power structure and environment of public schools (Glenn 1987; Candal 2011)
- Call it fear or bigotry:
  - “Hostility to aid to pervasively sectarian schools has a shameful pedigree that we do not hesitate to disavow.” Justice Clarence Thomas



# Practical Effect of the Anti-Aid Amendments

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- Renders government-run private school voucher programs unconstitutional, even though:
  - U.S. Supreme Court affirms consistency with First Amendment
  - Funds directed to religious schools only through the independent decisions of parents
- “Constitutions in only two states appear to foreclose most types of private school choice: Michigan...and Massachusetts—whose anti-aid provision traces back to the anti-immigrant ‘Know Nothing’ era of the 1850s.” (Bolick 2008)



# What is Lost by Prohibiting Private School Choice?

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1. Higher levels of student attainment
2. Higher levels of student achievement
3. Higher levels of parental satisfaction
4. Stronger state fiscal health
5. Higher levels of civic values



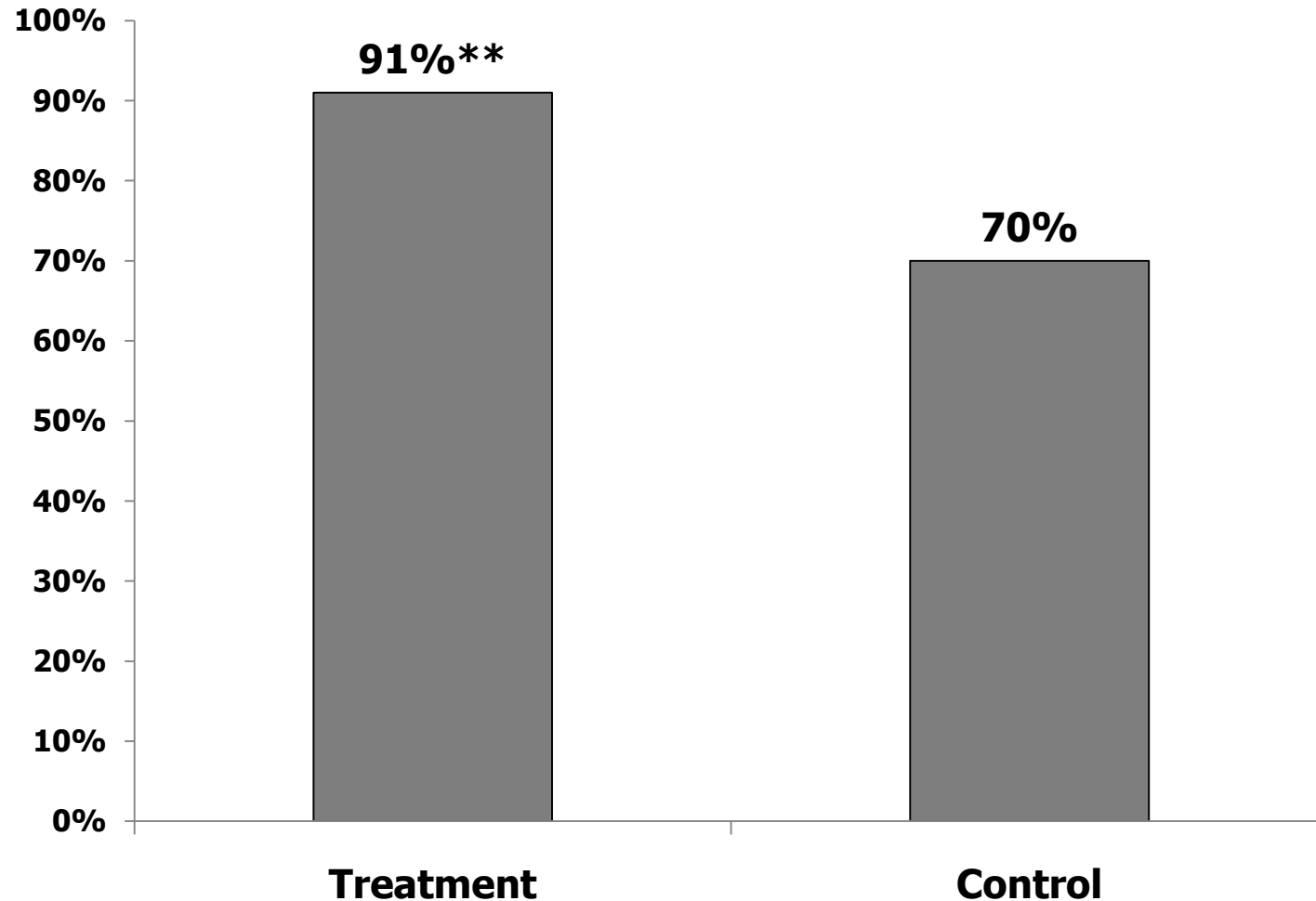
# 1. Private School Choice Boosts Educational Attainment

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- Key benchmarks: high school graduation, college enrollment, college graduation
- Previous studies find positive Catholic school effects:
  - Of 10-18 percentage points in high school grad rates
  - Of 11-17 percentage points in college enrollment rates
  - Increases highest for minority students

(Sources: Sander & Krautmann 1995; Evans & Schwab 1995; Grogger & Neal 2000)
- DC voucher use boosts high school grad rate by 21 percentage points (Wolf et al. 2010)

# Impact of DC Opportunity Scholarship Use on High School Graduation Rates (Wolf et al. 2010)



\*\*Statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence level.



# The Difference Educational Attainment Makes

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- How far you go matters more than how much you know
- Adults with more education live longer (Meara et al. 2008), gaining 1.7 more years per extra year of ed (Lleras-Muney 2005)
- High school graduation increases earnings by \$8,500/year, decreases unemployment by 1/3 (ETS 2010)
- Each graduate reduces the cost of crime by \$112,000 (Belfield and Levin 2009)
- Each additional graduate saves the nation \$260,000 (Rouse 2005)





## 2. Vouchers Tend to Increase Student Test Scores

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- Confirmed in 9 of 10 “gold standard” studies of 6 cities by 7 different research teams (Wolf 2008)
- Equal to about an extra month of learning per year (Wolf et al. 2009)
- Exact pattern of positive results varies but no negative effects found
- Supports “Catholic schooling” effect (Coleman et al. 1982; Bryk et al. 1993)



## 3. Voucher Programs Increase Parental Satisfaction with Schools

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- Especially regarding curriculum, safety, parent-teacher relations, academics, and religion
- Confirmed by all five “gold standard” studies that asked the question (e.g. Wolf et al. 2010; Howell & Peterson 2006; Greene 2001)
- Impacts are large but decrease slightly over time



## 4. Choice *Can* Improve the Fiscal Health of States & Localities

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- Voucher values approximate Catholic school tuition of \$3,500-\$6,000
- They cost states 30-50% of public school per-pupil funding, with no capital costs
- Detailed studies show that school choice saves money when the funds follow the child (Costrell 2010; Aud 2007) -- Milwaukee voucher program saved the state \$52 million this year



## 5. Choice Programs Often Advance the Public Purposes of Education

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- 21 empirical studies reveal private or charter school advantage in promoting civic values (Wolf 2007)
- Evidence strong for political tolerance, voluntarism, political knowledge
- Catholic schools deliver comparatively the most civic benefits (Campbell 2001; Wolf 2005)
- Even non-Catholic religious schools tend to outperform public schools regarding student civic values



# Who Receives the Benefits of Voucher Programs?

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- Disadvantaged students
- Of the 11 government-run voucher programs:
  - 6 only for students with disabilities (FL, GA, LA, OH, OK, UT)
  - 4 means-tested (Cleveland, DC, Milwaukee, New Orleans)
  - 2 limited to students from “needs improvement” schools (New Orleans, OH)
  - Note -- New Orleans targeted by income and failing school
- At least 38% of students in voucher programs have disabilities compared to 12% in public schools (NCES 2010)



# Profile of DC Opportunity Scholarship Program Recipients (Wolf et al. 2007)

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- 90% African American
- 9% Hispanic
- Average family income of \$17,356
- 6% of mothers with college degrees
- 44% from schools designated in need of improvement
- 17% with diagnosed disability
- Average student at 33<sup>rd</sup> percentile in reading and 31<sup>st</sup> in math



# Policy Conundrum

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- Private school choice benefits students, especially those most in need
- The Anti-Aid Amendments to the Massachusetts Constitution prevent low-income students from practicing private school choice
- What can be done?



# Option 1: Convert Catholic Schools to Secular Charters

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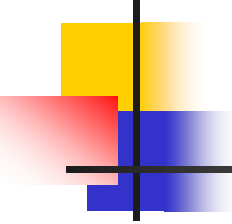
- Pros:

1. Logistically easy to do
2. Entitles schools to state per-pupil amount
3. Enables schools to continue to deliver benefits

- Cons:

1. Evidence is stronger regarding effectiveness of vouchers than charters
2. Sacrifices religious identity thus undermining Catholic school “brand”





# School Choice and the Catholic School “Brand” (Trivitt & Wolf 2011)

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- Catholic brand is:
  1. Academic quality
  2. Safe environment
  3. Parent involvement
  4. Neighborhood dispersion
  5. Large class sizes
  6. Religion
- Preferred even by non-Catholics
- Because of brand content
- Brand disappointment leads to student exit



# Option 2: Personal or Corporate Tax Credits

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- Pros:

1. Constitutional in theory, since government never touches the money
2. Logical, to avoid “paying twice” for schooling
3. Rewards beneficial actions
4. Would help maintain Catholic enrollments

- Cons:

1. Personal tax credits help disadvantaged students little, even if refundable
2. Likely unconstitutional in practice given Massachusetts court rulings (Komer 2009)



# Option 3: The Best Option

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- Repeal the Anti-Aid Amendments
- We now “know some things” about them
- Conceived in bigotry, they merely serve to separate disadvantaged families from superior and desirable educational options



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# For More Information

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