The Anti-Aid Amendments and School Choice

Patrick J. Wolf, Ph.D.
University of Arkansas
“Dumping the Know-Nothing Amendments: Church, State, and School Reform”
Pioneer Institute
Boston, MA
March 16, 2011
Outline for the Talk

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

- 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

- 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?

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

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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

- 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?

- **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)

- 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 33rd percentile in reading and 31st in math
Policy Conundrum

- 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

- **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)

- 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

- **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

- 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
Aud, Susan. 2007. Education by the Numbers: The Fiscal Effect of School Choice Programs, 1990-2006 (Indianapolis, IN: Milton & Rose Friedman Foundation)


References (continued)

For More Information

http://www.uark.edu/ua/der/People/wolf.php

Patrick J. Wolf, Ph.D.
Professor and 21st Century Endowed Chair in School Choice
Department of Education Reform
College of Education and Health Professions
201 Graduate Education Building
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701
Phone: 479-575-2084
FAX: 479-575-3196
pwolf@uark.edu