

Evaluating School Choice Reforms: Lessons from Michigan and Beyond

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November 21, 2017

MERA Fall 2017 Conference

Frankenmuth, Michigan

Questions about school choice

- What?
- Why or why not?
- When?
- Where?
- How?
- So what?

What is school choice?

- Parents and students choosing schools (although some models lead to schools choosing students rather than the other way around)
- School choice always existed, at least for some
- For choice to be meaningful, there needs to be a diversity of options
- Most say they want choice, but most still do not exercise choice

Why school choice: Review of relevant theory

- Parents right.
- Market accountability on new schools
- Market theory: threat of choice
- Economic theory on sorting effect and efficiency
- Belief in innovation in private organizations
- School choice as an end in itself

School choice: Why not?

- Segregation by race/ethnicity, social class, special education status, ability, and language of instruction
- Hank Levin: framework for evaluating vouchers
 - Social cohesion, Productivity, Efficiency, Equity
- My own thinking: Splitting limited resources across dual or parallel systems.

When?

- As policy objective we can see most current school choice reforms with roots in 1980s and 1990s.
- Some school choice reforms exists for more than a century in countries like Netherlands and Belgium.
- Old choice reforms based on choice in provider but not choice based on pedagogical approaches and unique school profiles.
- Shifts in goals and purposes of public schools over time.
- “Shifting notion of publicness” Miron, 1997, 2009.

Where?

- UK 1987-88
- Sweden 1992
- USA - magnet schools in 80s, charter schools in 90s, exploration of vouchers since 50s, virtual schools in 2000s.
- New Zealand, self-governing schools (1988); school choice expanded in 1990s

How? Diverse types of school choice

- Private providers and public support for private providers (vouchers & neo vouchers)
- Intra-district choice (Magnet schools)
- Inter-district choice (Schools of choice)
- Charter schools
- Virtual schools
- Homeschooling

- Other aspects to consider:
 - Choice by location
 - Choice within schools

Figure 1.2. Estimated Trends in Growth of Voucher and Tuition Tax Credits (Neovouchers)¹⁹

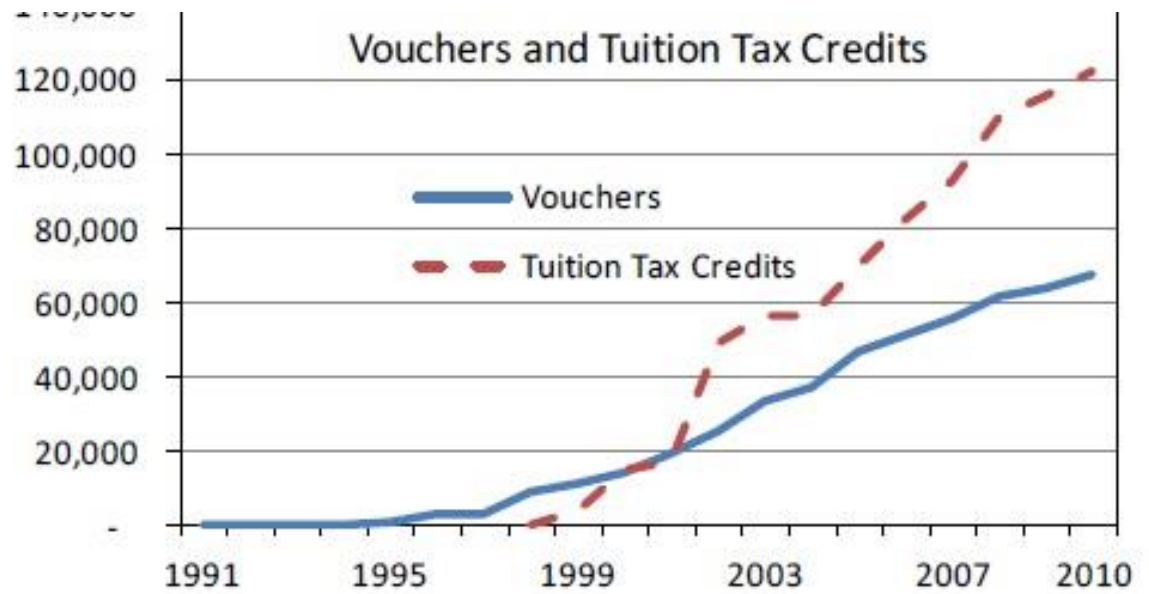


Figure 1.3. Estimated Numbers of Students Receiving Vouchers Plus Tuition Tax Credits in the United States²⁰

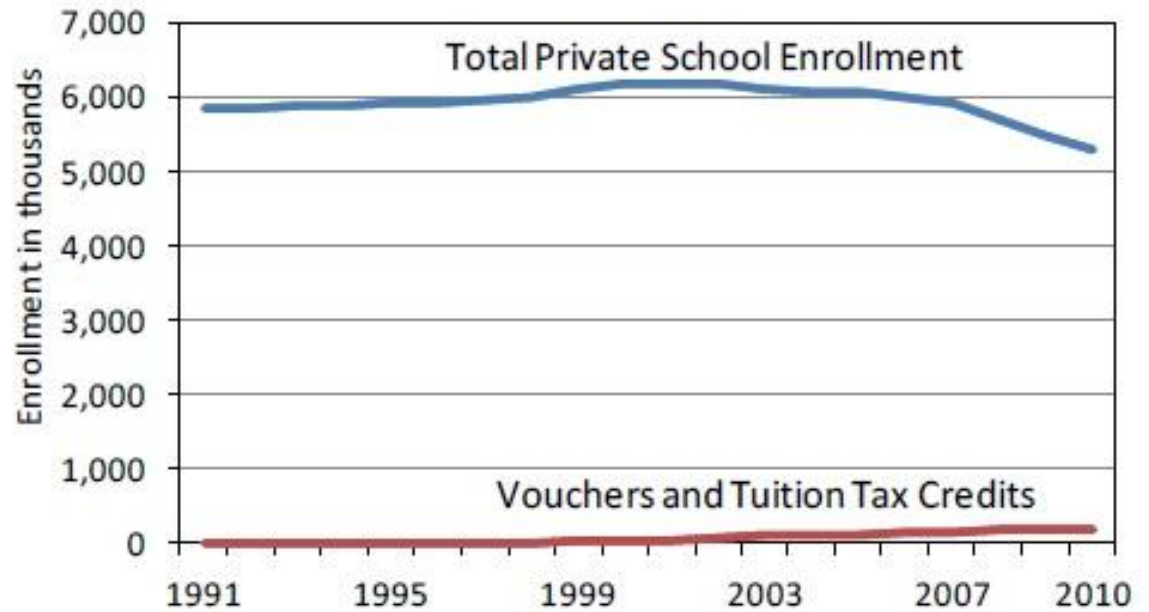


Figure 1.4. Estimated Enrollment Trends in Charter Schools²¹

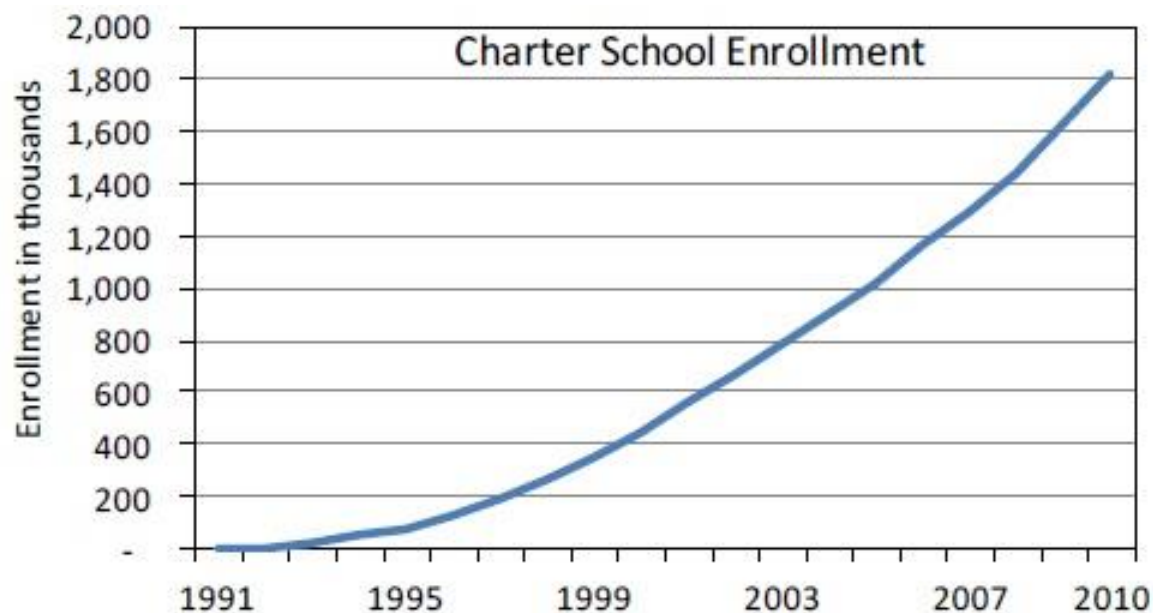


Figure 1.5. Estimated Enrollment Trends in Homeschooling²²

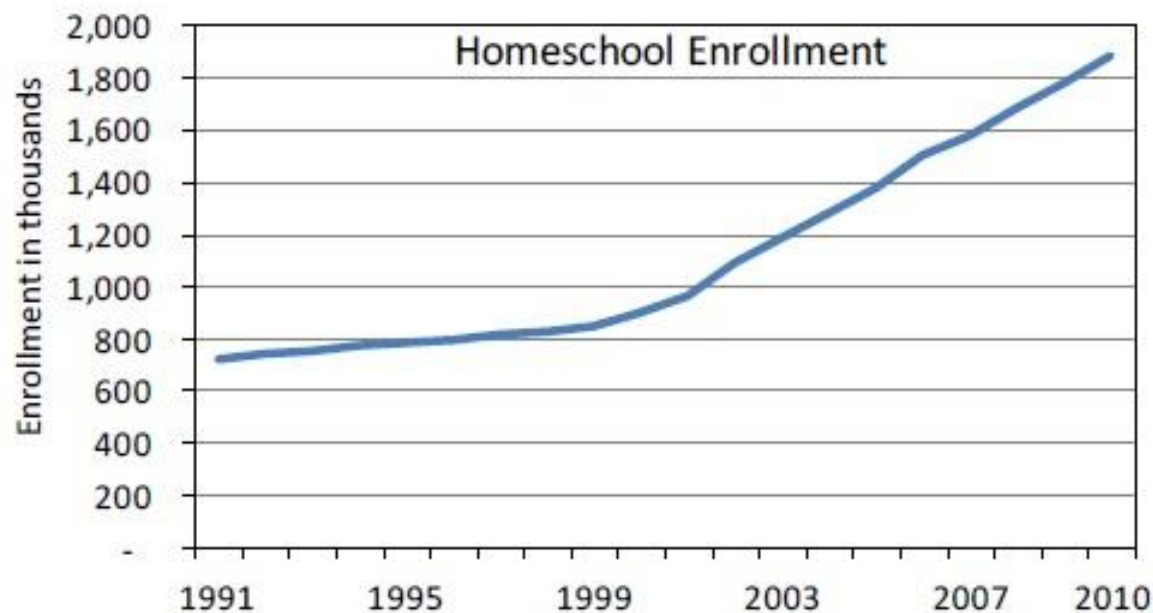


Figure 1.6. Estimated Enrollment Trends in Inter- and Intra-District Choice Programs²³

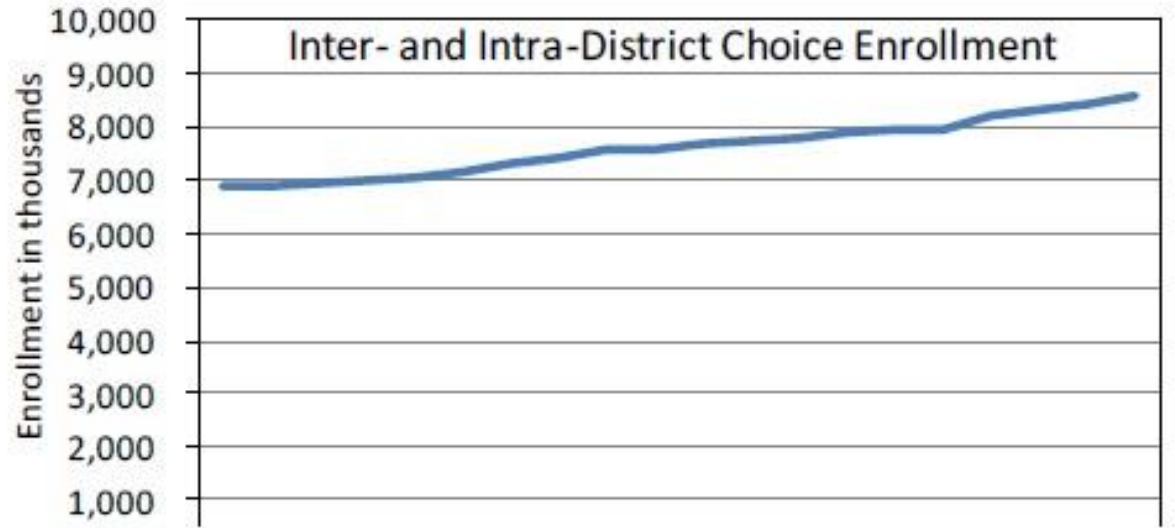
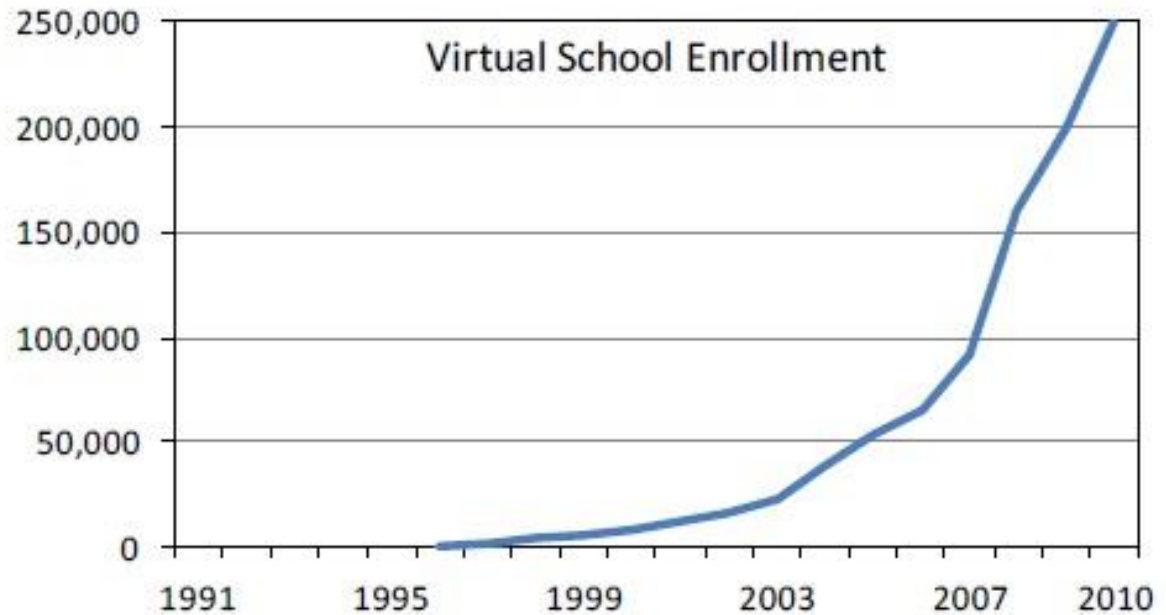
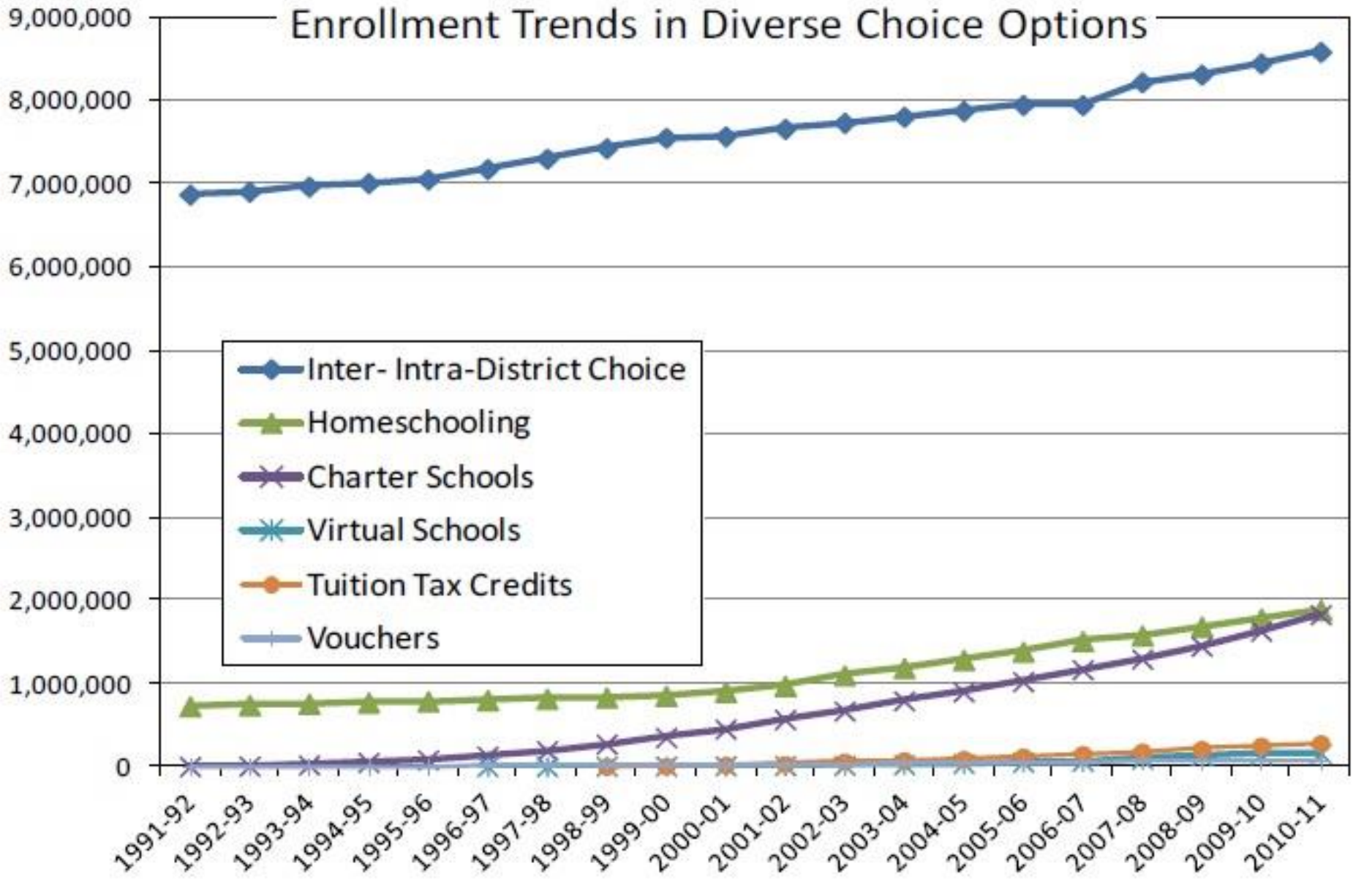


Figure 1.7. Estimated Enrollment Trends in Virtual Schools²⁴



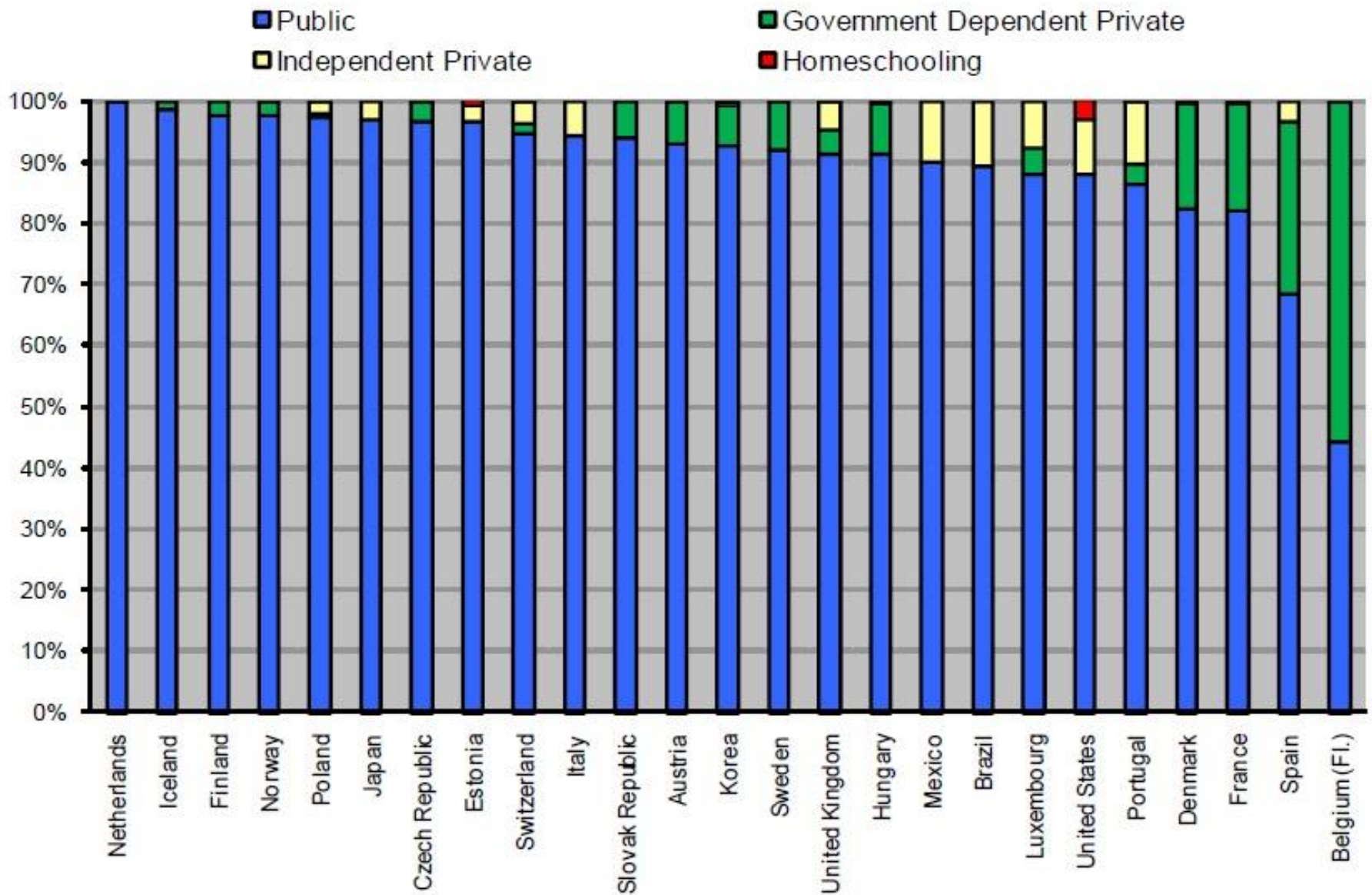
Enrollment Trends in Diverse Choice Options



OECD Findings

- Data collected in 2010, 25 countries, later supplemented by other PISA countries so total of 64 countries.
- Factors that hinder or facilitate choice
 - Funding (vouchers, tax credits, money following student)
 - Transportation
 - Information

Chart D5.1. Distribution of students across diverse forms of school Institutions



Accountability: Past and present

- Regulatory accountability
- Performance accountability
- Market accountability
- Professional accountability

My research & evaluation work related to school choice reforms

- Evaluation of implementation & initial impact of Swedish national voucher reform 1992-93.
- Studies of school restructuring in 4 European countries (1990s)
- Evaluations of state charter school reforms (Michigan, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois)
- Preschool voucher studies
- Technical assistance for charters in five states.
- Federal study on correlates of success in charter schools
- 2 books and scores of reports and policy papers on charters, choice, private EMOs, virtual schools

Original goals for charter schools

- Empower local actors and communities
- Enhance opportunities for parent involvement
- Create new opportunities for school choice with open access for all
- Develop innovations in curriculum and instruction
- Enhance professional autonomy and opportunities for professional development for teachers
- Create high performing schools where children would learn more
- Create highly accountable schools

Common methods to evaluate school choice

- Analysis of existing data sets (e.g., school demographics, district finance,
- Accomplishment of mission
- Surveys of parents, students & teachers
- Secondary analysis of documentation
- Interviews
- Analysis of student achievement

Evaluating student achievement

- Case studies
- Difference-in-difference analysis
- Residual gains analysis
- Matched student designs
- Simulated random assignment

Summary of key studies of student achievement in charter schools

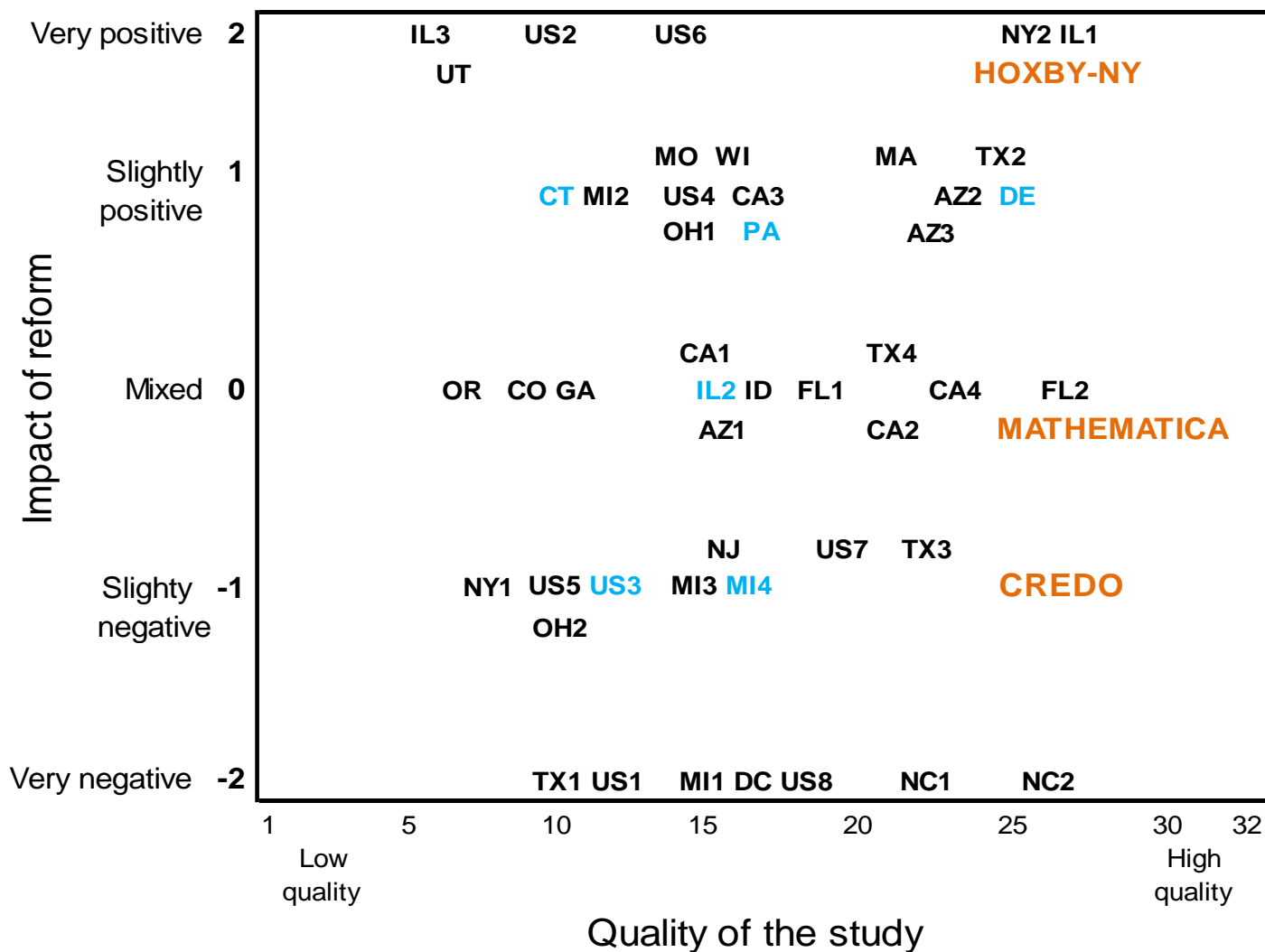


Figure 4-1 Quality and impact ratings for studies of student achievement in charter schools

Source: Gary Miron, S. Evergreen, and J Urschel, (2008). "The Impact of School Choice Reforms on Student Achievement," National Education Policy Center.

<http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/the-impact-school-choice-reforms-student-achievement>

So what? What have we learned?

- Parent satisfaction
- Segregation based on race/ethnicity, social class, ability, language of instruction
- Innovation/lack of diversity of options
- Empowering teachers?
- Impact on student performance on standardized assessments
- Effects of competition
- Unanticipated outcomes

School choice reforms

- School choice is a reform idea that is widely debated and contested (school choice means different things to different people)
- The debate often overlooks the diverse forms of school choice and the differences in how these reforms can be designed
- School choice can be designed to pursue a range of outcomes
- Choice rules can be written to reduce isolation by race, class, or special needs status. Or, they can be used as a vehicle for accelerating resegregation of our public school systems.

School choice as policy tool

- School choice is being used as a policy in itself. Instead school choice should be seen as a policy tool.
- For some, school choice is the end not a means to pursue specific goals within the education system

New and pressing topics to study

- Mobility, churn, backfilling, and its impact on sending schools
- Full picture of school finance
- No excuses charter schools
- Blended learning schools
- School choice in growing or shrinking settings
- The perfect storm

Evaluating school reforms:

Torsten Husén

Salient points include: top & grassroots support, sufficient funding & time to pilot, and consider context.

Evaluating research and policy reports

- Look for technical report with methods, limitations, etc.
- NEPC- Think Tank Reviews