

Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty: Choice and charter schools outperform public schools, new report shows

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The News: Students attending Wisconsin's private choice and charter schools outperform their peers in traditional public schools in both English Language Arts (ELA) and math, even after accounting for demographic differences, according to a new [Apples to Apples](#) report released by the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL).

Using the most recent statewide data and a rigorous statistical model that controls for income, race, disability status, English learner status, and other key factors, the report finds that school sector matters—and that choice and charter schools consistently deliver stronger academic outcomes, particularly in Milwaukee.

Key Findings on Proficiency: Our report finds that after adjusting for student demographics, private choice and charter schools outperform traditional public schools on a number of academic metrics, including:

- Private choice schools outperform traditional public schools statewide.
- ELA proficiency is 4.1 percentage points higher
- Math proficiency is 7.7 percentage points higher
- In Milwaukee, the advantage is even larger
- ELA proficiency is 5.8 percentage points higher
- Math proficiency is nearly 8 percentage points higher
- Charter schools—especially district-authorized and independent charters—also show strong performance, particularly in Milwaukee.

- Choice and charter schools post higher academic growth scores on average, indicating stronger year-to-year student progress, not just higher proficiency levels.

Notably, these results persist **despite private choice schools receiving significantly less funding**—at most **82 percent of the per-pupil funding** of traditional public schools.

Our Take: WILL Research Director, Will Flanders, stated, “When we put schools on a truly level playing field, the results are clear. Choice and charter schools are delivering stronger academic outcomes, even while serving students with greater needs and operating with fewer resources. Families are responding to that reality.”

Parents Are Voting With Their Feet: The report also documents continued growth in parental demand for alternatives to traditional public schools:

- Enrollment in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) increased by nearly 2,000 students.
- Enrollment in the Wisconsin Parental Choice Program (WPCP) increased by over 3,000 students.
- Public school open enrollment reached a new record of 75,126 students, an increase of more than 1,200 students over the prior year.

Students are disproportionately leaving lower-performing districts for higher-performing ones, suggesting that academic quality—not simply funding levels—is driving enrollment decisions.

Our Take: WILL Research Director, Will Flanders, stated, “Even as enrollment and birth rates decline across Wisconsin, choice schools are growing and families are using open enrollment at record levels. That’s a powerful signal that parents are seeking out schools that work.”

What We Mean by Apples to Apples? WILL’s annual *Apples to Apples* report is designed to fairly compare education outcomes across public, charter, and private voucher schools by adjusting for key student characteristics that strongly influence achievement.

Because Wisconsin’s private parental choice programs are means-tested, choice schools often serve higher shares of low-income students than the average school.

This report accounts for those realities through rigorous statistical modeling, avoiding misleading raw-score comparisons and providing a clearer picture of how schools are actually performing.

Why This Report Matters: Wisconsin is home to the nation's oldest school choice program, and debates over its effectiveness often hinge on incomplete or misleading comparisons. Because schools serve very different student populations, meaningful evaluation requires adjusting for income, disability status, and other factors that strongly influence outcomes.

This report provides that independent analysis at a moment when DPI has weakened proficiency standards, producing inflated scores that make it harder for parents and policymakers to identify which schools are truly succeeding and which are falling behind.

Read More:

- [Apples to Apples Report](#), February 2026

Read and share the [press release](#) online.