

April 23, 2015

Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW, - Room 7100  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

In 2001, the GAO released a report on, among other things, the characteristics of students participating in Cleveland and Milwaukee voucher programs compared to public school students as well as what was known about student academic achievement within the programs. Since that time, numbers of and participation both in privately and publicly funded school choice programs across the country have significantly increased, and Congress continues to consider various issues regarding federal support and oversight of choice programs.

In light of the strong federal interest in determining whether voucher programs are successful, we request that GAO review school choice initiatives and programs to ascertain “best practices” or lessons learned in this area and the extent of federal oversight. In doing so, we would find information about disciplinary actions and policies; access for disadvantaged populations; and accountability practices particularly helpful – especially over time in programs with longer operating histories. For example, Wisconsin and Ohio were among the first states to initiate choice programs.

Disciplinary actions in choice and traditional school programs

1. How do the rates and nature of disciplinary actions (i.e. suspension, expulsions) in public school choice programs (charter and magnet) compare to those of traditional schools?
2. How do the disciplinary policies of selected public and private choice programs compare to policies at selected traditional public schools?
3. What factors contribute to any differences in disciplinary actions and rates among choice and traditional schools?
4. To what extent have the Departments of Education and Justice taken action to help ensure that certain students groups are not disproportionately disciplined?

Characteristics of students and accountability mechanisms in school choice programs

1. How do the numbers and characteristics of students in public school choice programs compare to students in traditional public schools?

2. How do selected public and private choice programs reach out to students and to what extent do their admission policies and enrollment processes vary?
3. What are the reporting requirements for selected private and public choice programs and to what extent do they align with requirements to promote accountability for public funds?
4. To what extent have the Departments of Education and Justice taken action to help ensure access to choice programs?

ELL students' enrollment in choice programs

1. How does the enrollment of English Language Learners (ELLs) in choice programs compare to that in traditional public schools?
2. How do selected choice programs reach out to ELL students and what are their admission policies and enrollment processes?
3. What factors contribute to any differences in ELL enrollment levels among choice programs and traditional public school?
4. To what extent have the Departments of Education and Justice taken action to help ensure access to choice programs?

Thank you for your assistance with this request. Please direct your staff to coordinate GAO's response with Alicia Molt on Rep. Pocan's staff ([Alicia.molt@mail.house.gov](mailto:Alicia.molt@mail.house.gov), 202-225-2906).

Sincerely,

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Mark Pocan  
Member of Congress

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Marcia Fudge  
Member of Congress

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Gwen S. Moore  
Member of Congress