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New study suggests that vouchers may contribute to improvements in Florida's public schools

Erika Hobbs, Florida Education — posted by erikahobbs on June, 3 2010 5:55 AM

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Competition in the education marketplace may have played a role in boosting the performance of Florida's public schools, a May study by Northwestern University professor David Figlio suggests.

And vouchers may have been one key.

Vouchers are the common name for the \$3,950-grants The Florida Tax Credit Scholarship Program gives to impoverished children to go to a private or parochial school instead of their assigned public school.

According to the study, the gains were modest, but clear: Schools nearest to private campuses, and those likely to lose federal funding if the enrollments of poor children fell too low made the most gains. Those groups may have felt the most pressure to make changes to increase academic performance.

The rise in scores could have resulted from a number of things, from changes in school policy to changes in classroom makeup.

Figlio and co-author Cassandra Hart looked at data from 2000 to 2007, and because they had only two years' worth of scores from before the vouchers were introduced, they said that they couldn't rule out that the schools already were on a path to greater gains.

Nevertheless, they conclude in their report: "We find evidence that public schools subject to more competitive pressure from private schools raised their test scores."

This study is among many looking at school-choice issues, and is sure to bolster support for the state's ever-expanding voucher program.

It was funded by Florida's Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Education. Figlio is a former University of Florida professor.

You can read his study [here](#).

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