

The Accountability Imperative

Michael J. Petrilli

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The Accountability Imperative

1. Why accountability is an imperative—in all organizations, but especially in organizations with a public mission such as schools.
2. The importance of academic skills for individuals' and countries' futures.
3. How results-based accountability works in the United States—both overall, and for our charter schools.
4. The evidence of the effectiveness of accountability systems in driving greater student learning—in the U.S. and in Chile.
5. The promise that greater accountability for results can come with greater autonomy for educators.
6. The legitimate concerns educators have about testing and accountability, such as worries about the narrowing of the curriculum, or teaching to the test, and how smart policies can address them.

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The promise, and imperative, of
accountability in education:

*Creating excellent schools, full of
teachers and other educators with the
tools and support to be successful,
and students who make big gains in
learning every year.*

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Schools that help students *learn* more than they otherwise would help students *earn* more than they otherwise would as adults, and help them do better in other ways too.

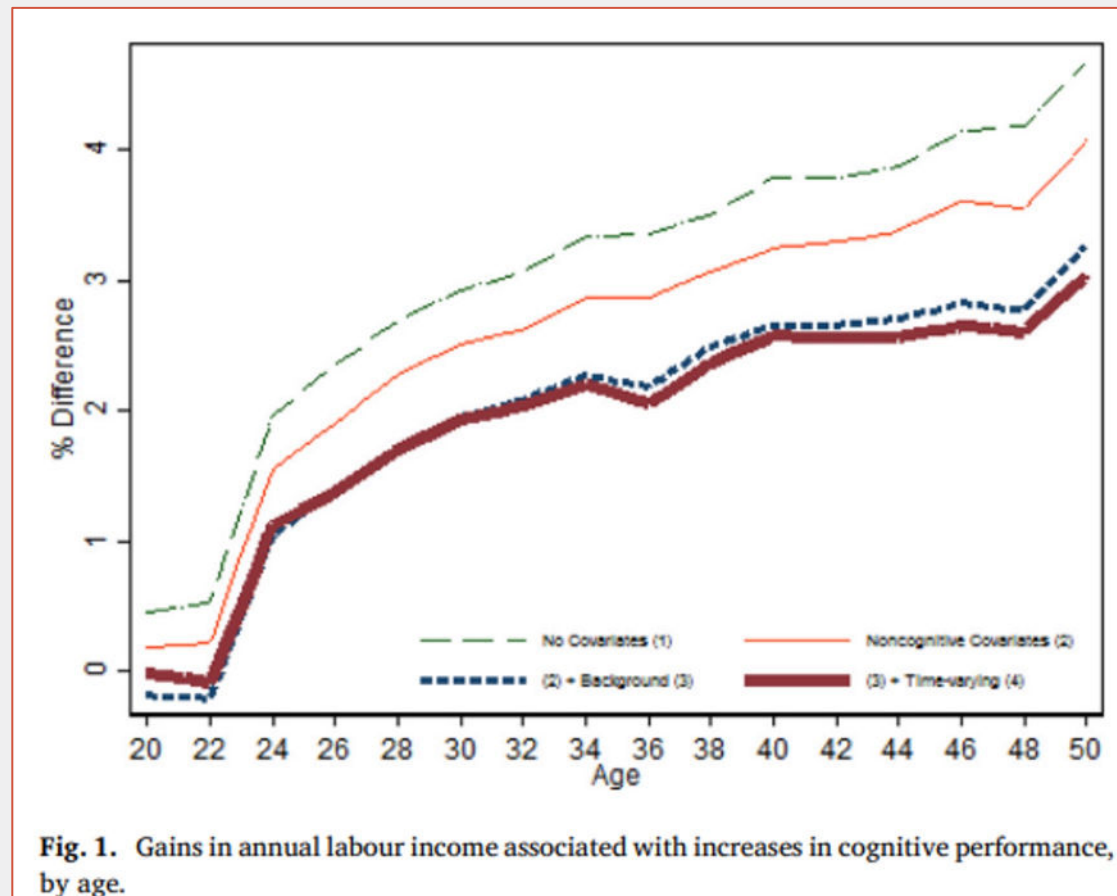
Higher test scores are significantly and positively correlated with

- Employment
- Choice of occupation
- Work experience

And negatively correlated with risky behaviors including

- Teenage pregnancy
- Smoking
- Illegal activity

Relationship between Cognitive Skills and Rising Labor Market Returns

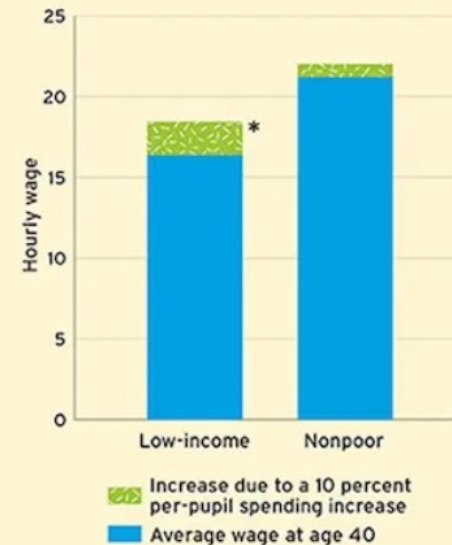


Source: Danjun Lin, Randall Lutter, and Christopher J. Ruhm, “Cognitive Performance and Labour Market Outcomes”, *Labour Economics* 51 (April 2018): 121-135, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2017.12.008>.

Effect of Court-Ordered School Finance Reform on Wages

Narrowing the Wage Gap (Figure 4)

For children from low-income families, increasing per-pupil spending by 10 percent in all 12 school-age years boosts adult hourly wages by \$2.07 in 2000 dollars, or 13 percent.



* indicates statistical significance at the 95 percent confidence level

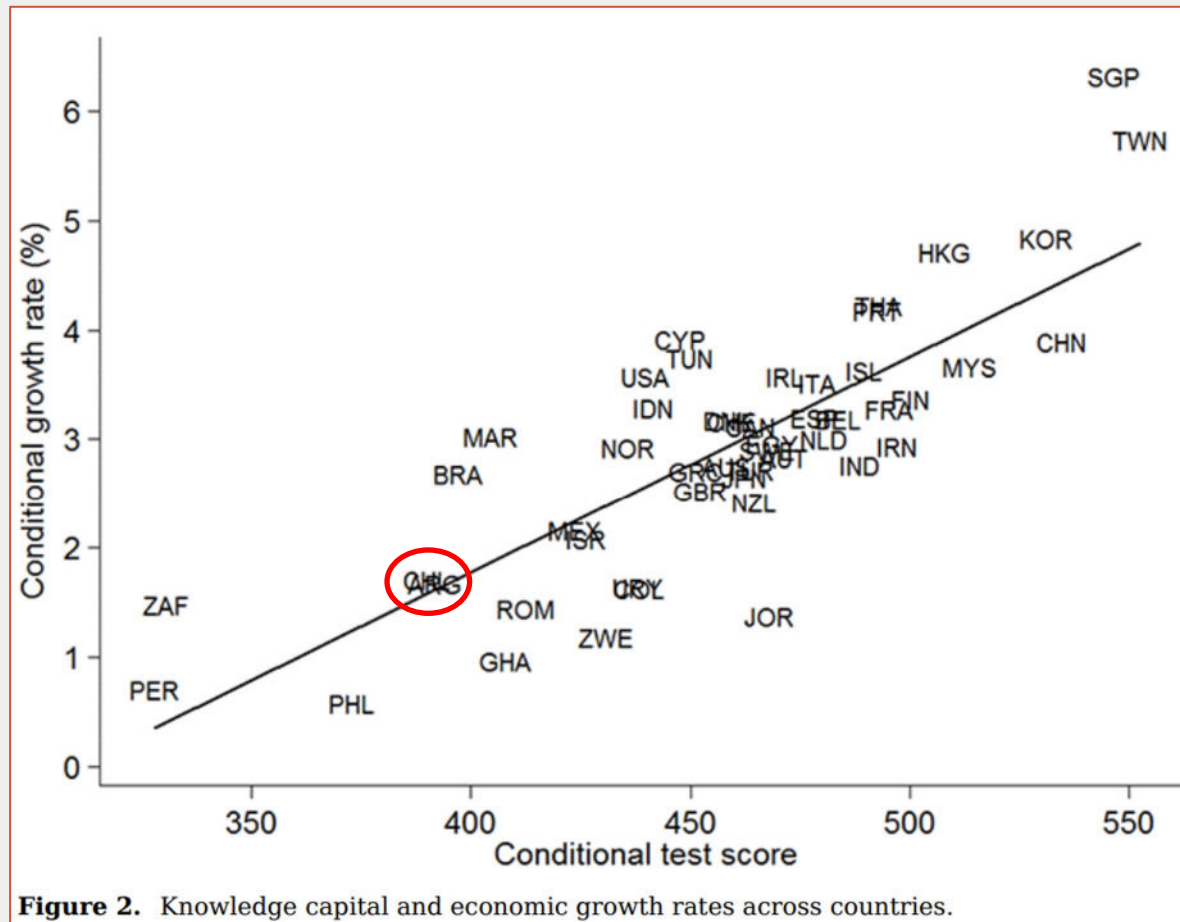
NOTE: Low-income children are those whose annual family income fell below two times the federal poverty line at any point during their childhood.

SOURCE: Authors' calculation

Source: C. Kirabo Jackson, Rucker C. Johnson, and Claudia Persico, "Boosting Educational Attainment and Adult Earnings: Does school spending matter after all?", *Education Next* 15, no. 4 (2015): 69-76, <https://www.educationnext.org/boosting-education-attainment-adult-earnings-school-spending>.

In Massachusetts, students who attend high schools that are good at boosting test scores earn **13 percent** more annually at age thirty compared to similar peers who attend high schools that aren't very good at boosting test scores.

Relationship between Countries' Test Scores and Economic Growth



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Every Student Succeeds Act (2015)

- Annual tests in reading and math in grades 3-8
- States must release data by subgroups
- Up to states whether they want to classify schools
- States must provide extra help to lowest performing schools, but few real consequences remain

Charter schools

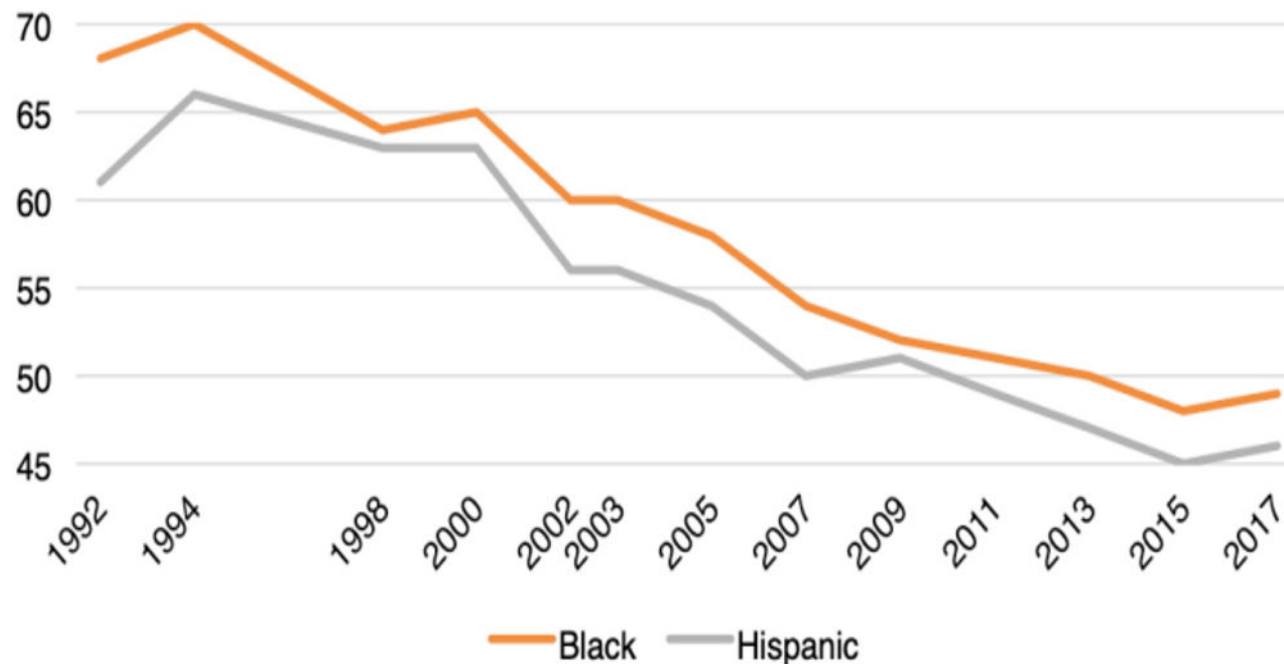
- Public schools open to all (no selective admissions)
- No tuition
- No religion
- Greater autonomy than traditional public schools
- Most are not unionized
- Greater accountability—can be closed for low performance

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The proportion of Black and Hispanic students scoring below “basic” dropped dramatically during the accountability era.

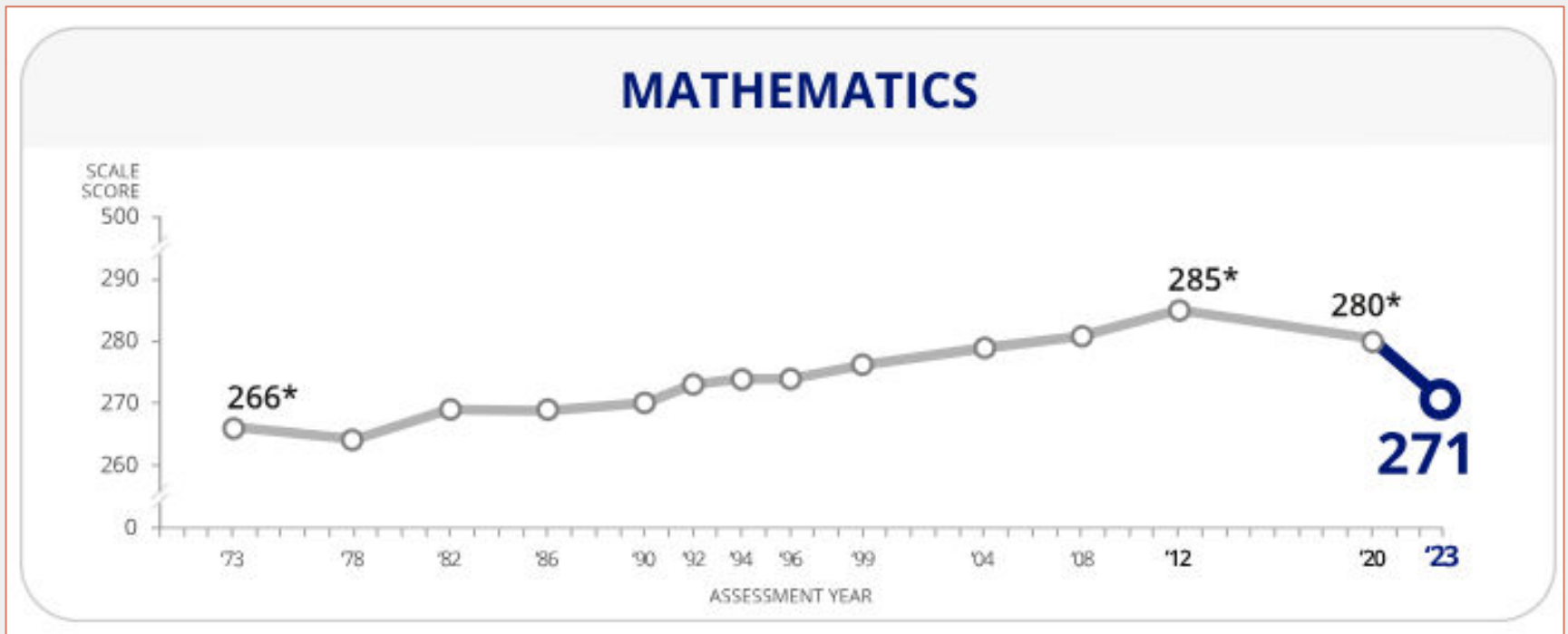
Figure 1. Percentage of fourth graders scoring below basic in reading on NAEP



Source: Michael J. Petrilli, “Fewer Children Left Behind: Lessons From the Dramatic Achievement Gains of the 1990s and 2000s,” Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2019), <https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/research/fewer-children-left-behind>.

NAEP trends, 1971-2023

13-year-olds



Sources: National Center for Education Statistics, “Reading and mathematics scores decline during COVID-19 pandemic,” NAEP Long-Term Trend Assessment Results, The Nation’s Report Card (2022), <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/ltr/2022/>; National Center for Education Statistics, “Scores decline again for 13-year-old students in reading and mathematics,” NAEP Long-Term Trend Assessment Results, The Nation’s Report Card (2023), <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/ltr/2023/>.

Impact of Accountability on Math Achievement

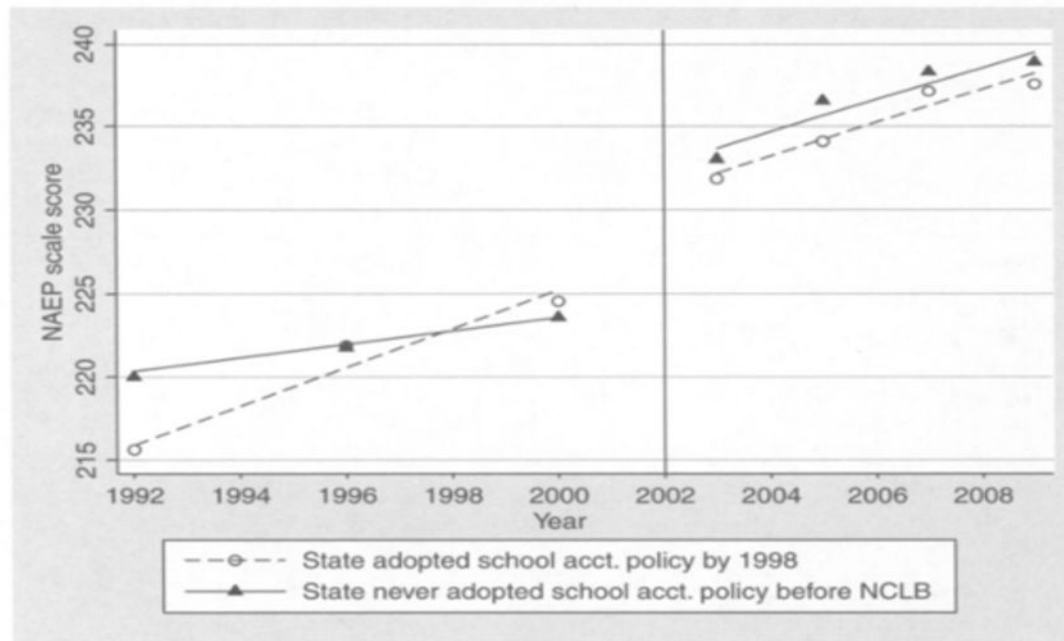
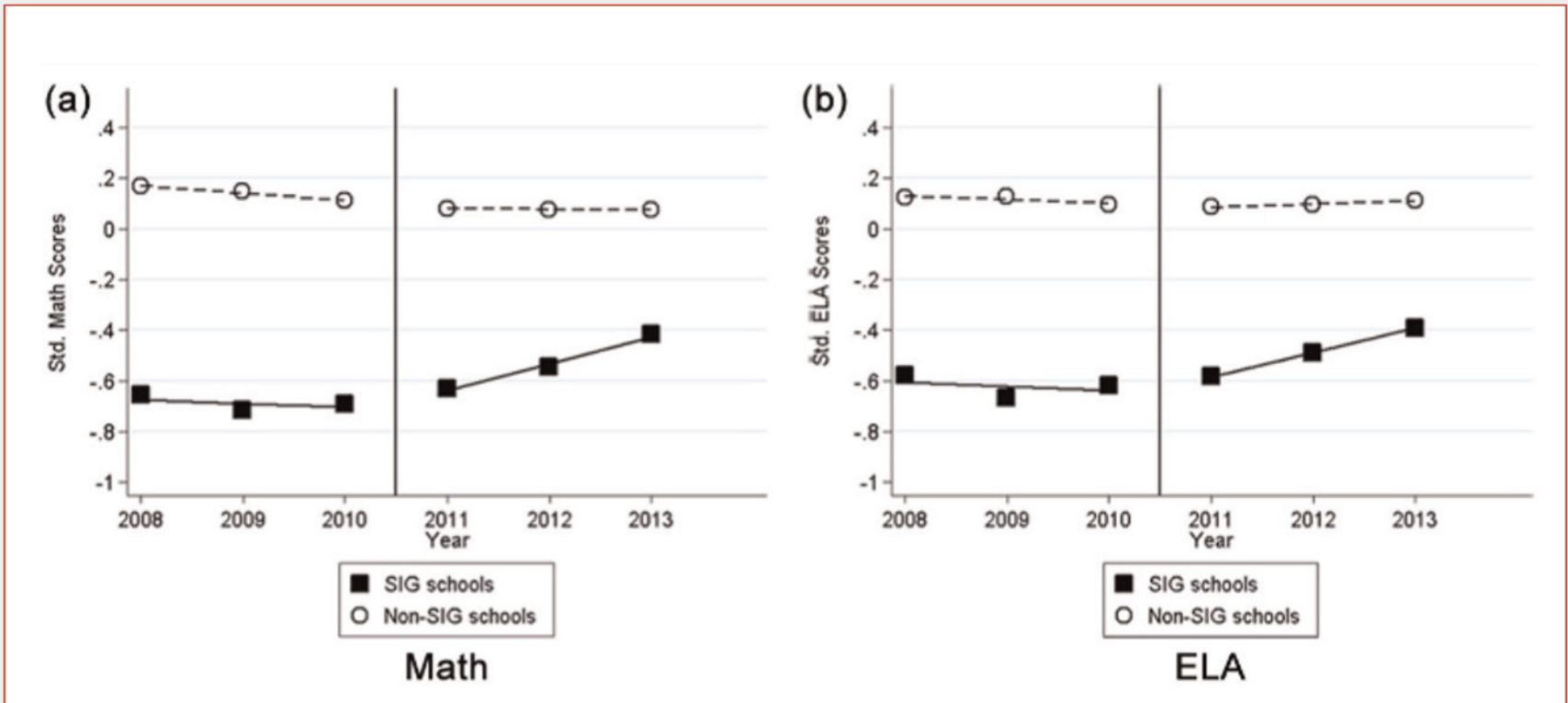


Figure 2. Trends in grade 4 mathematics achievement in the main NAEP by timing of accountability policy.

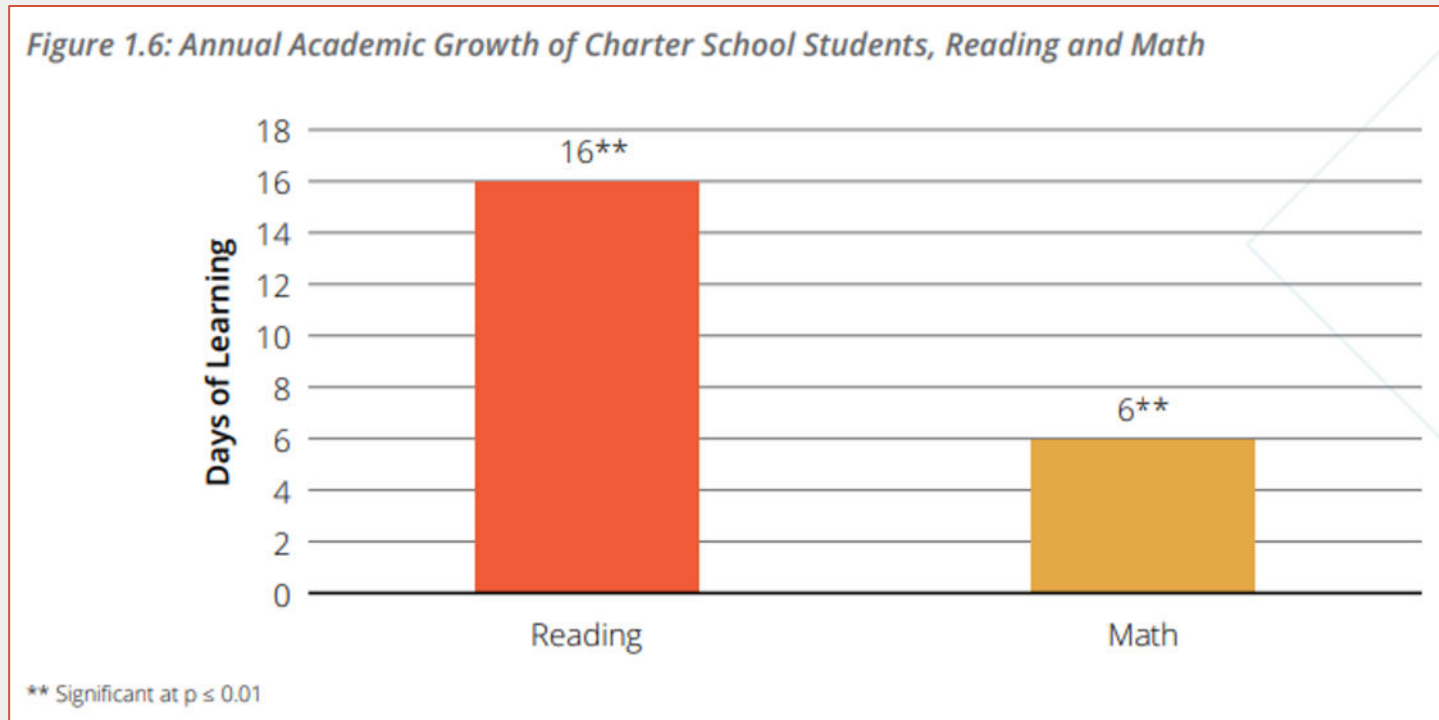
Source: Thomas S. Dee and Brian Jacob, “The impact of No Child Left Behind on student achievement,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 30, no. 3 (2011), 418–446, www.jstor.org/stable/23018959.

Positive Effects of SIG Initiative in California



Source: Min Sun, Emily K. Penner, and Susanna Loeb, “Resource- and approach-driven multidimensional change: Three-year effects of School Improvement Grants,” *American Educational Research Journal* 54, no. 4 (2017): 607–643, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831217695790>.

Charter School Students Outpace Their Traditional Public School Peers

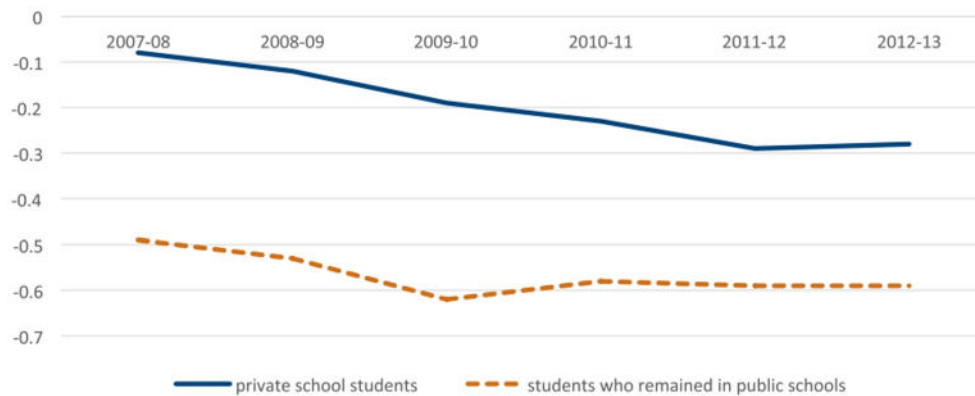


Source: Margaret E. Raymond, James L. Woodworth, Won Fy Lee, and Sally Bachofer, “As a Matter of Fact: The National Charter School Study III 2023,” Center for Research on Education Outcomes, Stanford University (2023), <https://ncss3.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Credo-NCSS3-Report.pdf>.

Voucher Recipients Trail Public School Peers on Test Score Growth

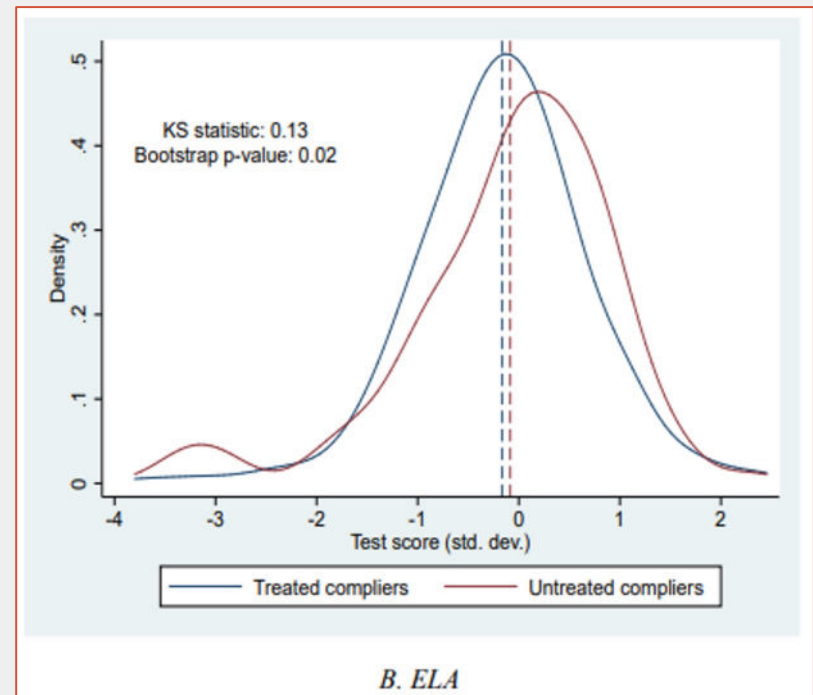
Ohio

Figure 2: Prior year standardized reading test score: EdChoice participants versus eligible nonparticipants, first year of program participation



Louisiana

Figure 3. Test Score Distributions for Voucher Compliers



Sources: David Figlio and Krzysztof Karbownik, "Evaluation of Ohio's EdChoice Scholarship Program: Selection, Competition, and Performance Effects," The Thomas B. Fordham Institute (July 2016), <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED575666>; Atila Abdulkdiroglu, Parag A. Pathak, and Christopher R. Walters, "School Vouchers and Student Achievement: Evidence from the Louisiana Scholarship Program," *National Bureau of Economic Research Working Papers*, no. 21839 (December 2015), https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w21839/visions/w21839.rev1.pdf.

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Trying to free up schools is a worthy effort—in Chile as in the U.S.

But it shouldn't come the expense of providing help and expertise, especially around curriculum and instruction.

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U.S. Schools Modestly Narrowed the Curriculum under No Child Left Behind

TABLE 2. Instructional Time as a Percentage of Time Spent on Instruction in Core Academic Subjects, First through Sixth Grades, 1987–2004

	1987–88 (percent)	1989–90 (percent)	1993–94 (percent)	1999–2000 (percent)	2003–04 (percent)	Change, 1988–2004 (percent)
Reading/English Language Arts	50.2	48.8	47.8	48.3	51.9	+1.7
Mathematics	23.0	23.4	23.6	25.7	24.7	+1.7
Science	13.0	13.3	14.1	12.5	11.3	-1.6
History/Social Studies	14.0	14.5	14.4	13.6	12.1	-2.0

Source: Martin West, "Testing, Learning, and Teaching: The Effects of Test-based Accountability on Student Achievement and Instructional Time in Core Academic Subjects," in Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Diane Ravitch (Eds.), *Beyond the basics: Are math, reading, and science sufficient for a 21st century education?* (Washington, D. C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2007): 45-62.
http://edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2007/200707_beyondthebasics/Beyond_The_Basics_West.pdf.

NCLB Encouraged Schools to Focus on “Bubble Schools”

All schools or those moderately below/above particular ratings?	All	Acceptable rating	Recognized rating	Exemplary rating
<i>Reading incentives and reading achievement gains</i>				
30–45 (Lowest achieving)	.007 (.009)	.005 (.010)	–.005 (.041)	.045 (.073)
46–55 (Very low achieving)	–.012 (.006)	.001 (.007)	–.031 (.022)	.077 (.042)
56–64 (Low achieving)	–.002 (.004)	.010 (.005)	–.001 (.014)	.020 (.025)
65–74 (Marginal achieving)	.009 (.003)	.025 (.004)	.043 (.009)	.062 (.018)
75–84 (Higher achieving)	–.001 (.003)	–.002 (.004)	.058 (.007)	.058 (.015)

Source: Randall Reback, “Teaching to the rating: School accountability and the distribution of student achievement,” *Journal of Public Economics* 92, no. 5 (2008): 1394–1415, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2007.05.003>.

In Ohio, achievement ratings are strongly correlated with students' poverty levels, whereas the progress ratings show virtually no relationship at all.

Figure 2: PI scores versus economically disadvantaged students

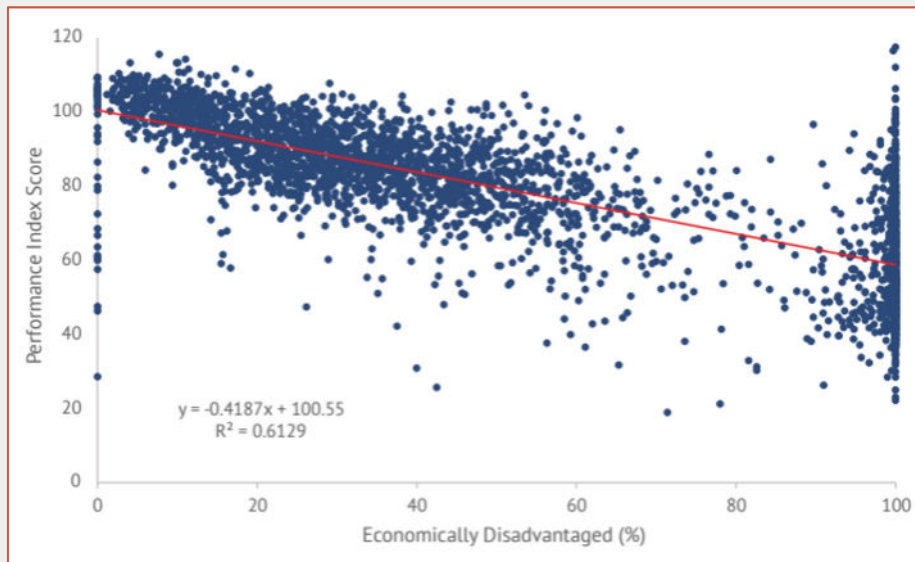


Figure 4: Value-added index scores versus economically disadvantaged



Source: Aaron Churchill, *Fine-tuning Ohio's school report card: An analysis of the state's revamped report card in its first year of implementation, 2021–22*, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, January 10, 2023, <https://fordhaminstitute.org/ohio/research/fine-tuning-ohios-school-report-card-analysis-states-revamped-report-card-its-first>.

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