

Raising Scores For Students Across The Board

(NAPSA)—A better education for more children. A stronger economy. Revived communities. These may be the results of a program that offers families more of a choice among schools, say education experts.

Many low-income parents don't have much of a choice when it comes to finding the best school for their children. Because these parents cannot afford to move from the neighborhood in which they live and in which their children often attend chronically failing public schools, their educational options are limited, even if their children have special needs.

Nor can low-income families afford private schools.

Organizations such as The Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) work to expand the options available to low-income African-American and other families. Some of the options being explored are charter schools, publicly financed scholarships (vouchers) and private scholarship programs. Thirty-eight states now have charter school laws, more than 80 cities have privately funded scholarship programs for low income children, and five states have taxpayer-supported voucher programs.

Several studies have documented statistically significant gains in the test scores of voucher students.

Critics of these alternatives say that they weaken the public school system by taking away needed funds, but statistics have not shown this to be true. The BAEO rejects such arguments pointing out that the current system traps low-income children in failing schools.

"It's immoral to put the needs of a system ahead of the needs of



Where voucher programs exist, achievement scores rise for all students, including those who remain in public schools.

our children," said BAEO president Kaleem Caire.

When parents have choices, schools respond and work to become competitive.

Voucher programs not only benefit the children who leave to attend private schools, they benefit the children who remain in the then improved public schools.

For example, between 1997-98 and 1999-2000, when the choice program grew rapidly, the scores of Milwaukee Public School students rose substantially.

In 1997-98, fewer than half of fourth graders were proficient in reading math, science and social studies. By last year, a majority of the fourth graders achieved proficiency in all four categories.

For more information, visit www.BAEO.org or call toll-free 1-866-865-BAEO.