

Evaluation of the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program: Impacts After One Year

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Background

Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP): First federally funded voucher program in the U.S., operating since 2004 and reauthorized in 2011. Provides scholarships to low-income parents in DC who want their children to attend a participating private school.

Evaluation: Responds to requirements in SOAR Act to use “strongest possible research design,” to examine impacts of scholarship offer and use on achievement and attainment, satisfaction, perceptions of safety, and parent involvement in education.

- **Design:** Randomized controlled trial, where random chance (through program lotteries) determines who receives the offer of a voucher and who does not in order to ensure that, starting out, the two groups’ characteristics and motivation are equivalent.
- **Sample:** 1,771 eligible applicants who entered lotteries in Spring 2012, 2013 and 2014
 - Two-thirds (68%) entering grades K–5
 - Score in 32nd percentile nationally in math and 34th percentile in reading, pre-OSP
 - Applied from traditional public schools (40%) and charter schools (35%), with remainder in pre-K arrangements (25%)
 - 995 offered a scholarship (treatment group), 776 not offered (control group)
 - About 70% of treatment group students used their scholarships in the first year

School type	Percentage of study participants, by type of school attended a year after OSP application	
	Treatment group	Control group
Traditional public	16	48
Charter	15	42
Participating private	68	10
Nonparticipating private	1	0

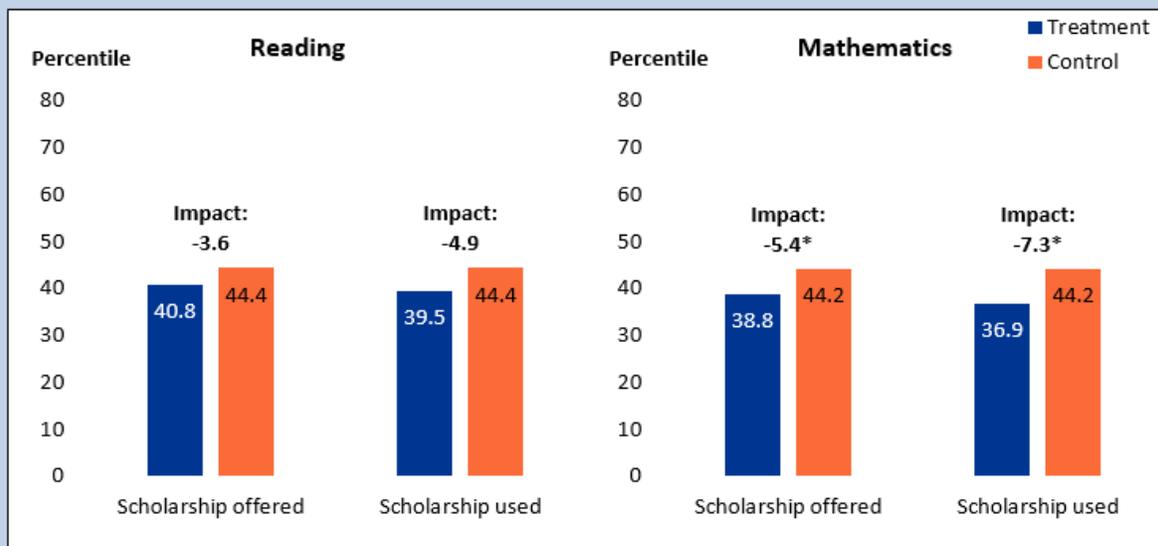
- **Data:** Annually, nationally-normed achievement tests (Terra Nova, Third Edition) administered in schools by the study team; parent, student, and principal surveys
- **Analysis:** “Impact of scholarship offer” = difference between the treatment and control group on measured outcomes, taking into account students’ pre-OSP characteristics and test scores; apply a commonly accepted statistical adjustment to calculate the “impact of scholarship use”
 - Impacts for full sample
 - Impacts for key subgroups
- **Future reports:** Impacts after Two Years (by Spring 2018), Impacts after Three Years (by Spring 2019), possible research brief on participation

Key Findings

1. The OSP had a statistically significant negative impact on mathematics achievement after one year.

- Math scores were lower for students who were offered or used OSP scholarships, compared to students that applied for but were not offered scholarships
- No statistically significant impacts on reading scores overall, or on reading or math scores for students applying from low-performing schools (priority group)
- Negative impacts on both math and reading scores for students who were not applying from low-performing schools and for students in grades K–5

Figure E-1. Impacts on reading and mathematics achievement (percentile scores) for scholarship offer and use, in first year



*Difference between the treatment group and the control group is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

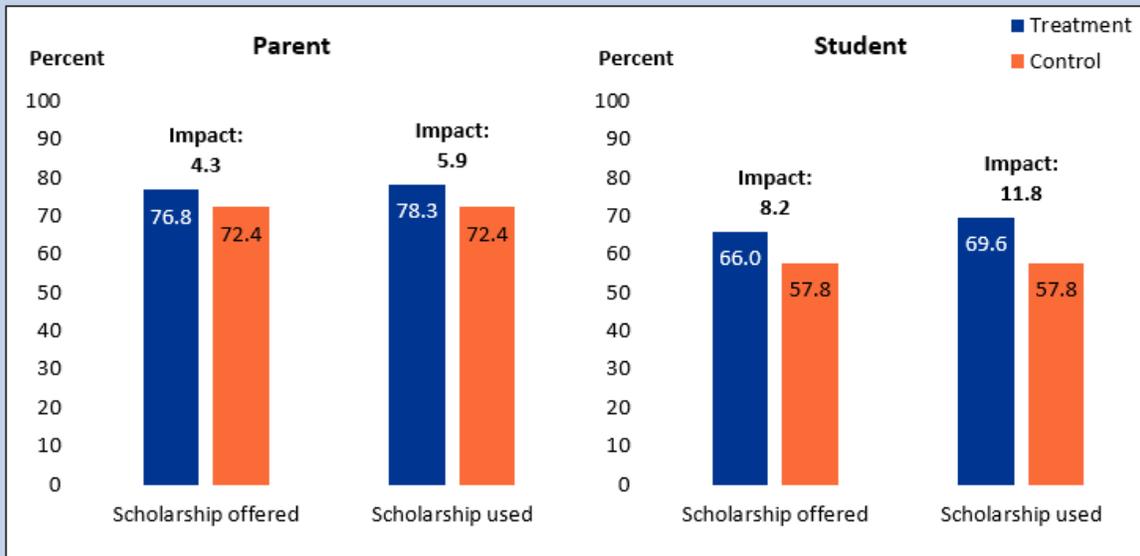
NOTE: Sample size is 636 treatment group students and 441 control group students for reading and 634 treatment group students and 440 control group students for mathematics.

SOURCE: Estimated means and impacts were generated from the study's regression models, as described in chapter 2. Percentiles were calculated using grade-level norms and scale scores. The study administered the *TerraNova Third Edition* reading and mathematics tests to DC students participating in the OSP evaluation, one year after application.

2. The program did not have a statistically significant impact on parents' or students' general satisfaction with the school the child attended in that first year.

- Parents of students who were offered or used the OSP scholarships were more likely to give their child's school a grade of A or B compared with the parents of students not selected for the scholarship offer, but differences were not statistically significant.
- Results were similar for student satisfaction (no statistically significant differences).

Figure E-2. Impacts on parent and student satisfaction (percent giving school an A or B grade) for scholarship offer and use, in first year



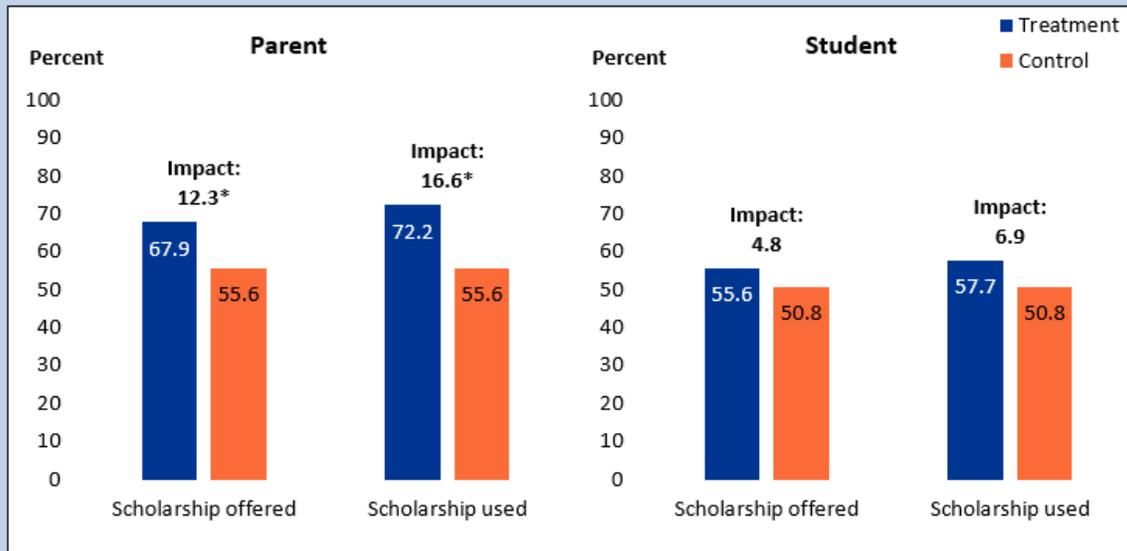
NOTE: Sample size is 616 treatment group parents and 444 control group parents. The sample size is 270 treatment group students and 154 control group students.

SOURCE: Estimated means and impacts were generated from study's regression models, as described in chapter 2. Parent and student surveys for OSP evaluation, 2013–2015.

3. The program had a statistically significant positive impact on parents' perceptions of safety at the school their child attended in that first year.

- Parents of students who were offered or used OSP scholarships were more likely to report their child's school was "very safe," compared with the parents of students not offered one.
- Student perceptions of school safety were not significantly different between the groups.

Figure E-3. Impacts on parent and student perceptions of school safety (percent rating school as very safe) for scholarship offer and use, in first year



*Difference between the treatment group and the control group is statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

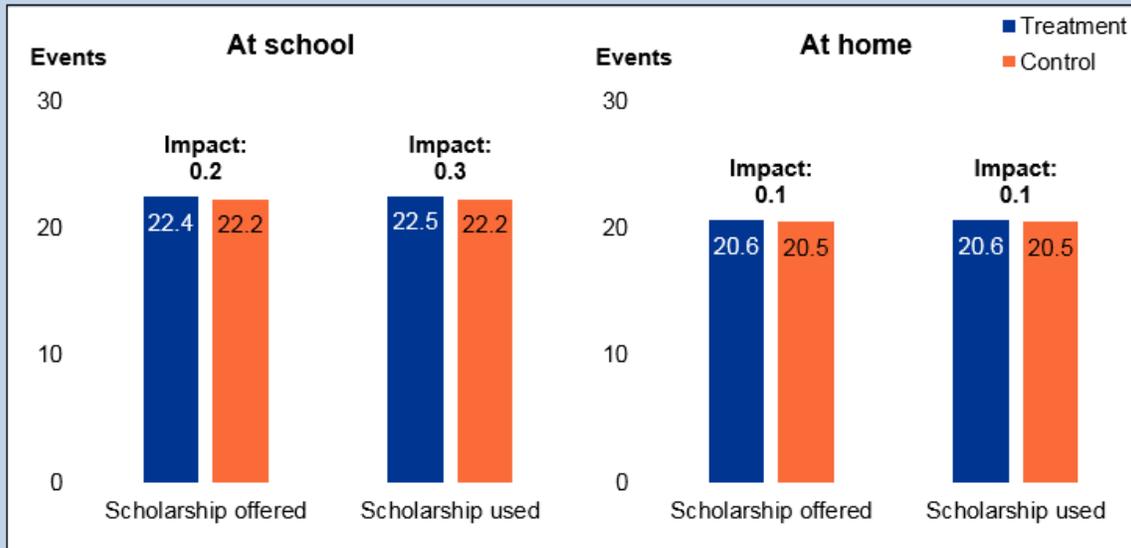
NOTE: Sample size is 616 treatment group parents and 439 control group parents. The sample size is 266 treatment group students and 155 control group students.

SOURCE: Estimated means and impacts were generated from study's regression models, as described in chapter 2. Parent and student surveys for OSP evaluation, 2013–2015.

4. Overall, the OSP did not have a statistically significant impact on parent involvement in education.

- However, for parents of students in grades 6–12, the program had statistically significant positive impacts on involvement in education-related activities and events at home after one year.

Figure E-4. Impacts on parent involvement in education at school and at home (number of events reported) for scholarship offer and use, in first year



NOTE: Sample size for school involvement is 589 treatment group parents and 416 control group parents. The sample size for home involvement is 612 treatment group parents and 440 control group parents.

SOURCE: Estimated means and impacts were generated from study's regression models, as described in chapter 2. Parent surveys for OSP evaluation, 2013–2015.