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Editorial

Low-income parents deserve a school choice

What is a low-income family to do with failing schools and the inability to move to a better school system?

Too often, a stifling bureaucracy means that change won't happen soon enough for the students trapped in the system.

One alternative has been to create vouchers that allow students to take their funding to private schools.

Much controversy surrounds them for understandable reasons.

Just fix the public schools, critics say. Easier said than done and usually of no use to students who don't have many years to waste.

Now a study shows that vouchers can provide better education, especially in low-income neighborhoods.

A study from the liberal Brookings Institution and the conservative Hoover Institution has documented the benefits in New York City.

The study included groups of students from kindergarten in 1997 to college enrollment in 2011.

The researchers followed students who won a voucher lottery with a group who did not, the control group. This is the gold standard of research.

The result: An African-American student who used a voucher to attend a private school was 24 percent more likely to enroll in college than one who did not.

"We know of no other voucher study that has been as successful at tracking students over such a long period of time," wrote Mathew Chingos of the Brookings Institution and Paul Peterson of the Hoover Institution in *The Wall Street Journal*.

Vouchers can provide an escape from a failing school system as well as pressure the public schools to improve.

The largest provider of private schools in the New York study was the Catholic archdiocese, which has a history of educating low-income students without regard to race and creed.

But this is no panacea, either, since Catholic schools often are under their own pressures.

Vouchers can help point out that there are options for educating low-income students that the public schools should be emulating.

In the final analysis, there is no replacement for a good public school system. However, vouchers can help show the way and provide an outlet for families.