

Early Adopters: Private School Leaders Respond to the Introduction of Targeted School Vouchers



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Program Description

- Enacted in 2013, NC's Opportunity Scholarship Program was first implemented in fall 2014
- Provides state funds for eligible students in K to grade 12 to offset cost of private school tuition and fees
- Scholarships worth up to \$4,200 per student, per year
- Private schools can use nationally-normed standardized test of their choosing

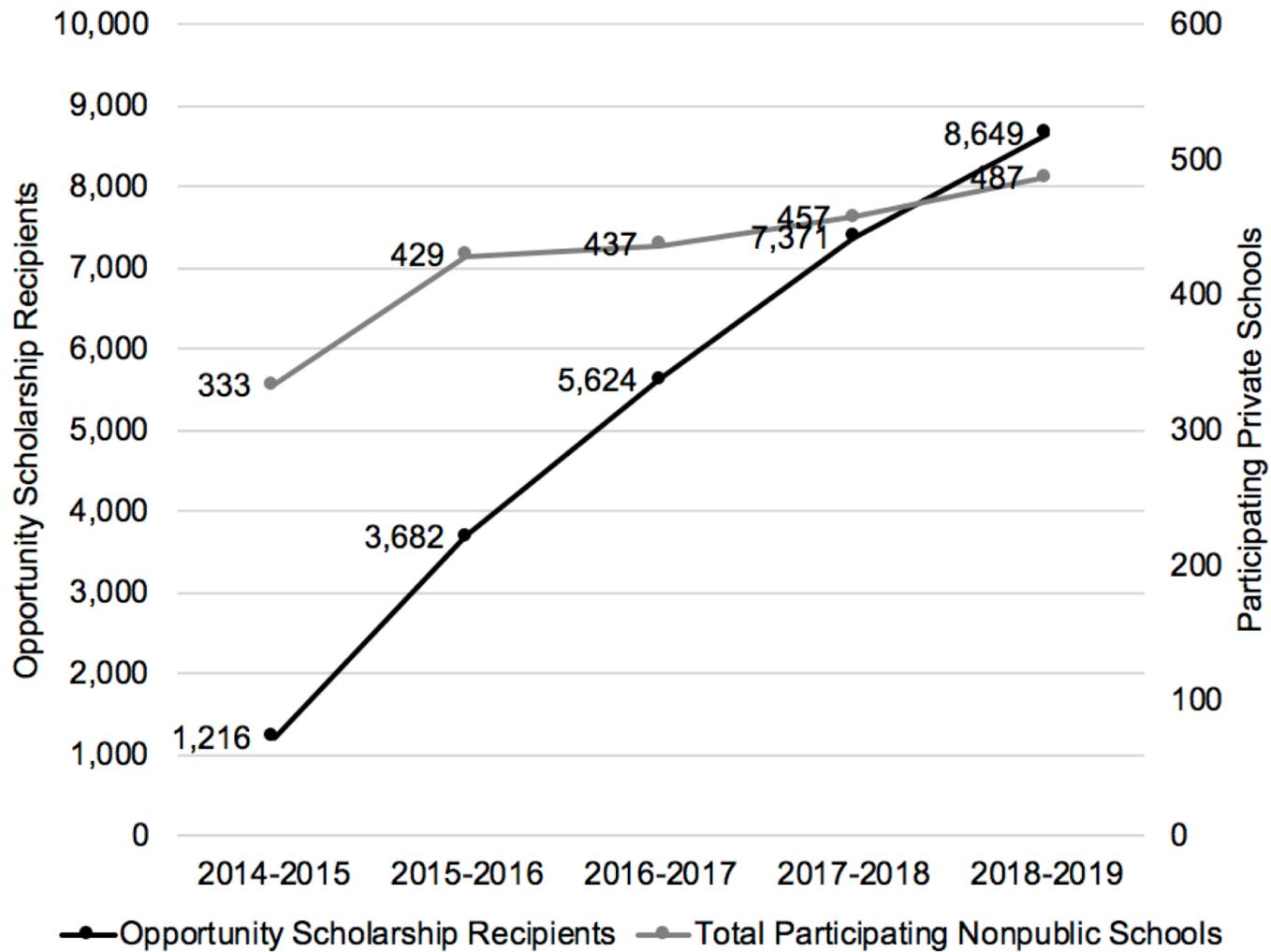


Figure 1. Participation in the North Carolina Opportunity Scholarship Program Over Time, Students and Schools. Data were obtained from the North Carolina State Education Assistance Authority. The number of participating schools reflects the number of schools that indicated they would be willing to accept students using Opportunity Scholarships, even if no students actually ended up enrolling in that school.

Similar Programs

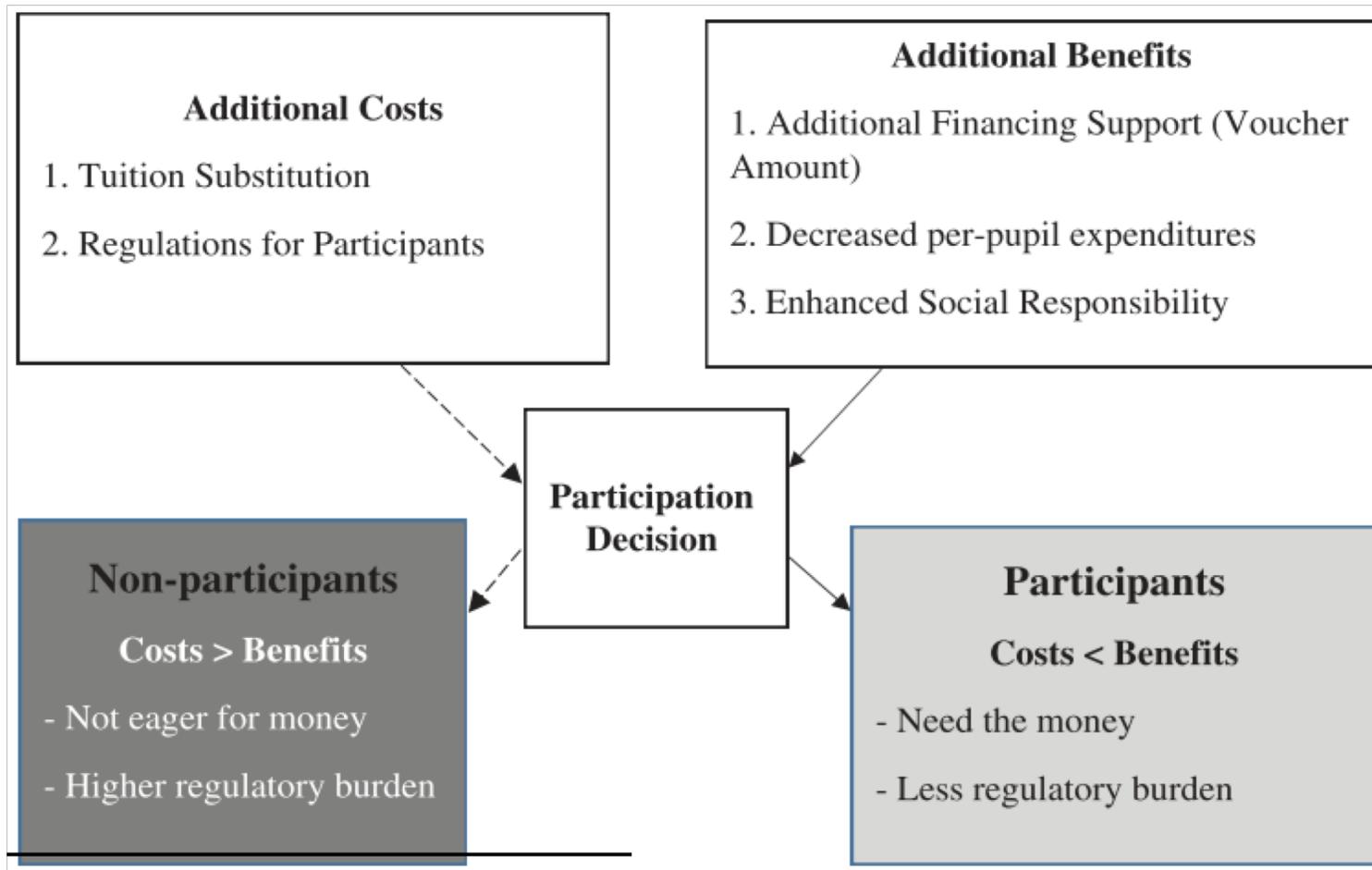
<i>Key Characteristics</i>	<i>NC</i>	<i>FL</i>	<i>IN</i>	<i>LA</i>
Program Design	Voucher	Tax Credit	Voucher	Voucher
Max Voucher Value (2016-17)	\$4,200	\$5,886	\$6,473	\$10,090
Avg Voucher Value (2015-16)	\$4,116	\$5,476	\$4,520 (1-8) \$5,496 (9-12)	\$5,856
Participating Schools Can Charge More than Voucher Value?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
School-Specific Admission Standards	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Private Students Eligible?	No	Yes	No	No
Academic Accountability	Norm-referenced test of choice	Norm-referenced test of choice	State Test	State Test
Non-Public School Participation Rate (2016-17)	~60%	~69%	~45%	~34%

Prior Literature

- Stewart, Jacob, and Jensen's 2012 site visits to private schools in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program
- Stuit and Doan's 2013 analysis of the impact of regulations on participation decisions for private schools in thirteen choice programs across the country
- Kisida, Wolf, and Rhinesmith's 2015 survey of school leaders in Indiana, Louisiana, and Florida
- Sude, DeAngelis, and Wolf's 2017 analysis of D.C., Indiana, and Louisiana's programs
- Austin's 2019 qualitative study of ten Catholic school principals in Indiana

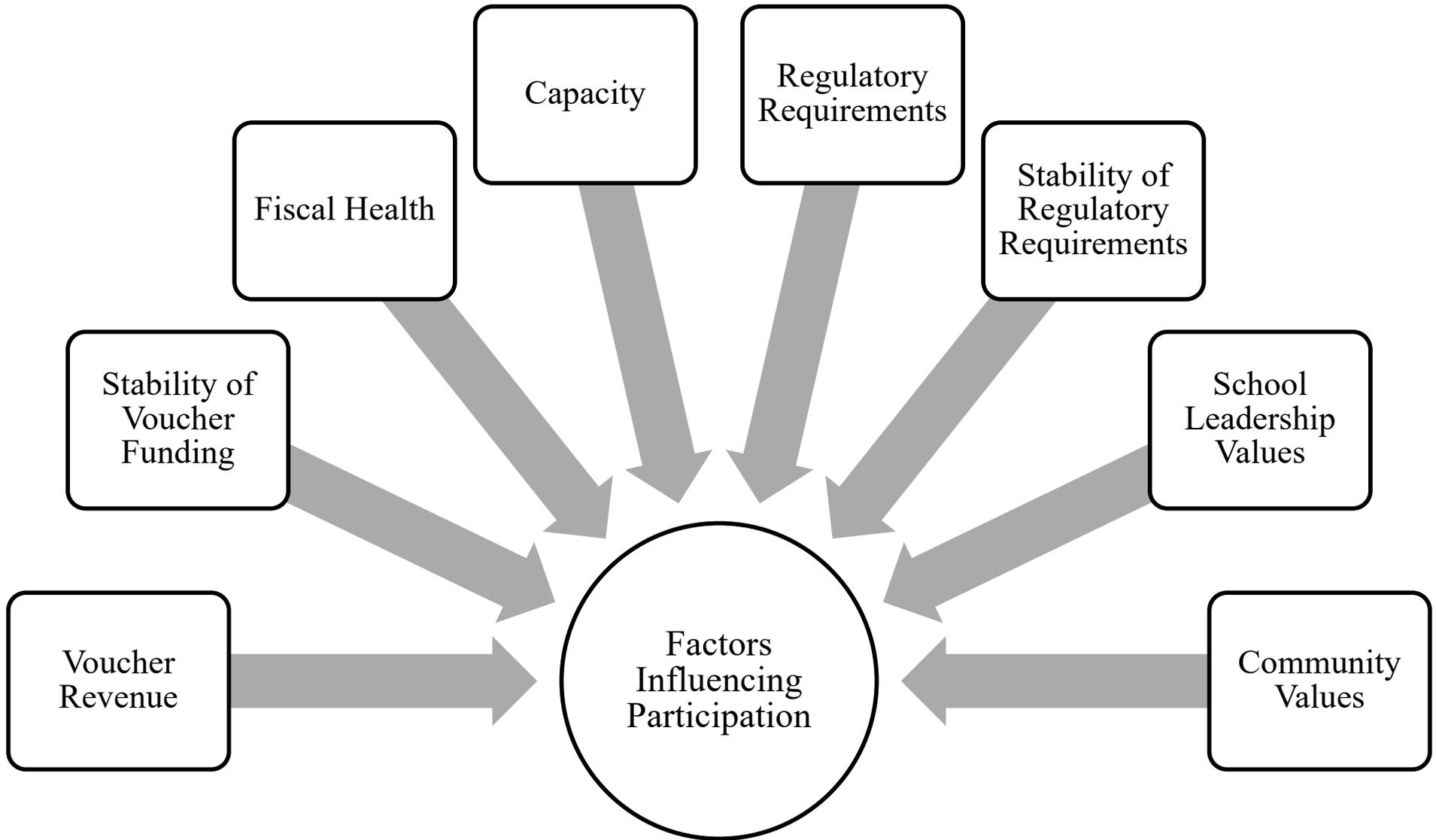
Key Themes from the Literature

- Private school principals have a variety of factors to consider when deciding whether or not to participate in a voucher program
 - Program regulation
 - Value of the voucher
 - Administrative burden
- As programs grow, these tensions become more pronounced
- How schools weigh the benefits and challenges of participating in state-funded programs of this nature in a rapidly expanding school choice context remains unknown



Cost benefit decision making model.

Source: Sude, Y., DeAngelis, C. A., & Wolf, P. J. (2018). Supplying choice: An analysis of school participation decisions in voucher programs in Washington, DC, Indiana, and Louisiana. *Journal of School Choice*, 12(1), 8-33.



Data Collection

Focus Group and Interview Data Collection Statistics

Time Period	Location	Data Collection Mode	Number of Participants	Number of Schools Represented
Summer 2014	Wilson, NC	Interview	1	1
Summer 2016	Raleigh, NC	Interview	1	1
Summer 2016	High Point, NC	Focus Group	7	6
Summer 2016	Raleigh, NC	Focus Group	9	6
Summer 2016	Charlotte, NC	Focus Group	14	11
Summer 2016	Fayetteville, NC	Focus Group	18	15
Totals	6	2, 4	50	40

Notes: All participants were guaranteed anonymity so locations have been aggregated to the city level.

Findings

- This qualitative data collection exercise reveal insights into the **cautious** ways in which North Carolina's private schools are interacting with the program
- Feedback about **program design** is positive as schools carefully navigate this new territory, finding ways to integrate a state-funded voucher program into their existing fiscal, social, administrative, and curricular structures
- The early adopters profiled here are **optimistic** and enthusiastic, yet wary of leaving themselves exposed if future regulations change how the program is administered

Findings

1. Ease of Market Entry

- A seamless registration process
- State agency overseeing the program is helpful and responsive

2. Integrating New Students and their Families

- Academic preparedness a concern
- Finding the balance between serving more disadvantaged students and maintaining the school's identity, culture, and standards for student behavior
- Ensuring acceptance by the existing school community

3. Regulatory Concerns

- School leaders are satisfied with the current state of regulatory oversight, but worried about the future

Limitations

- While we made every effort to recruit a representative sample, one of the primary limitations is that it cannot be used to draw inferences about **all** North Carolina private school leaders who were participating in the Opportunity Scholarship program at that time
- Our sample did not include any representatives from schools in their **first year** of operation

Policy Considerations

- Create mechanisms to **entice new schools** to enter the marketplace or support the efforts of existing, effective schools to scale up
- A delicate balance must be achieved in terms of **program regulation**
- Consider linking the overall **value of the voucher** to inflation or to per-pupil allocations in the public school sector to ensure growth over time
- Consider **differentiating** the value of the voucher for different types of students (e.g., sp.ed or those from the lowest-income families)

Looking Forward

- Important to investigate characteristics of participating schools as program grows to measure **variation** in school characteristics, mission, character, independence, religious affiliation, learning paradigms and philosophies, technological expertise, innovative programs, etc.
- Important to monitor whether or not schools are systematically **screening out** hard-to-educate students (implications for equity and inclusion)
- Will the fixed and relatively modest **voucher value** become more concerning over time?

Contact Information

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