

The Impact of Housing Vouchers on Academic Outcomes: Evidence from New York City

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What determines academic success?

Home and family factors critical to whether and when children are “ready to learn”

- Ability to pay attention, concentrate, do homework, show up for school
- Hunger (inadequate nutrition) will hinder learning
- Unstable housing or difficult (long) commute affect absenteeism

Outside of school factors matter

- After school programs; libraries, museums
- Playgrounds, summer camp; medical care
- Safety, transportation

Schools matter

- Often linked to neighborhood through school zones
- Means housing choices linked to schooling options

Think outside the Schoolhouse

Previous decades of reform efforts have aimed at improving schools:

- Desegregation, School Finance Reform, Class Size Reduction
- Accountability and testing
- Teacher training, professional development, curriculum reform

Notable successes but inequality in academic outcomes persists

- Disparities between socioeconomic groups, racial/ethnic groups
- Across neighborhoods and within districts
- Long term effects on employment, earnings, college, health (i.e. obesity, mortality)

My work investigates the potential for leveraging outside-of-school factors

- Provides credible, rigorous evidence that housing vouchers improve kids academic performance

Why Housing Vouchers?

Vouchers may affect educational outcomes through:

- Increased housing stability
- Decreased overcrowding
- Income effects from rental subsidy
- Lowered stress among parents
- Improving the neighborhood or school context.

Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program provides subsidies to over 2.5 million children under 18

- Federal Government spends \$18 billion dollars annually

Evidence on effectiveness surprisingly limited and mixed

- Hard to isolate the effect of housing vouchers per se, from everything else affecting poor children

More Background on HCV Program

Provides assistance to eligible low- and moderate-income families

- Family income may not exceed 50% of area median income (AMI)
- Rent housing on private market
- Differs from public housing, which is place-based, government operated and has different income rules for withdrawing support

Households conduct search and select unit on the private rental market

- Receive payment that is the lesser of payment standard minus 30% of family's adjusted income or the gross rent of unit minus 30% of monthly income
- Families have a minimum of 60 days to "lease up"

Assistance is substantial

- Nationally median voucher household with children has family size of four, earns \$13,000, pays \$1,000/month rent. Voucher increases their income by \$8,000 or 60 percent.

Lessons from NYC public school children

The Nation's largest school district

- Roughly 1.1 million students; 1600+ schools; more than two thirds black or Hispanic
- More than 4 of 5 students eligible for free or reduced price lunch
- Persistently high housing costs and neighborhood segregation

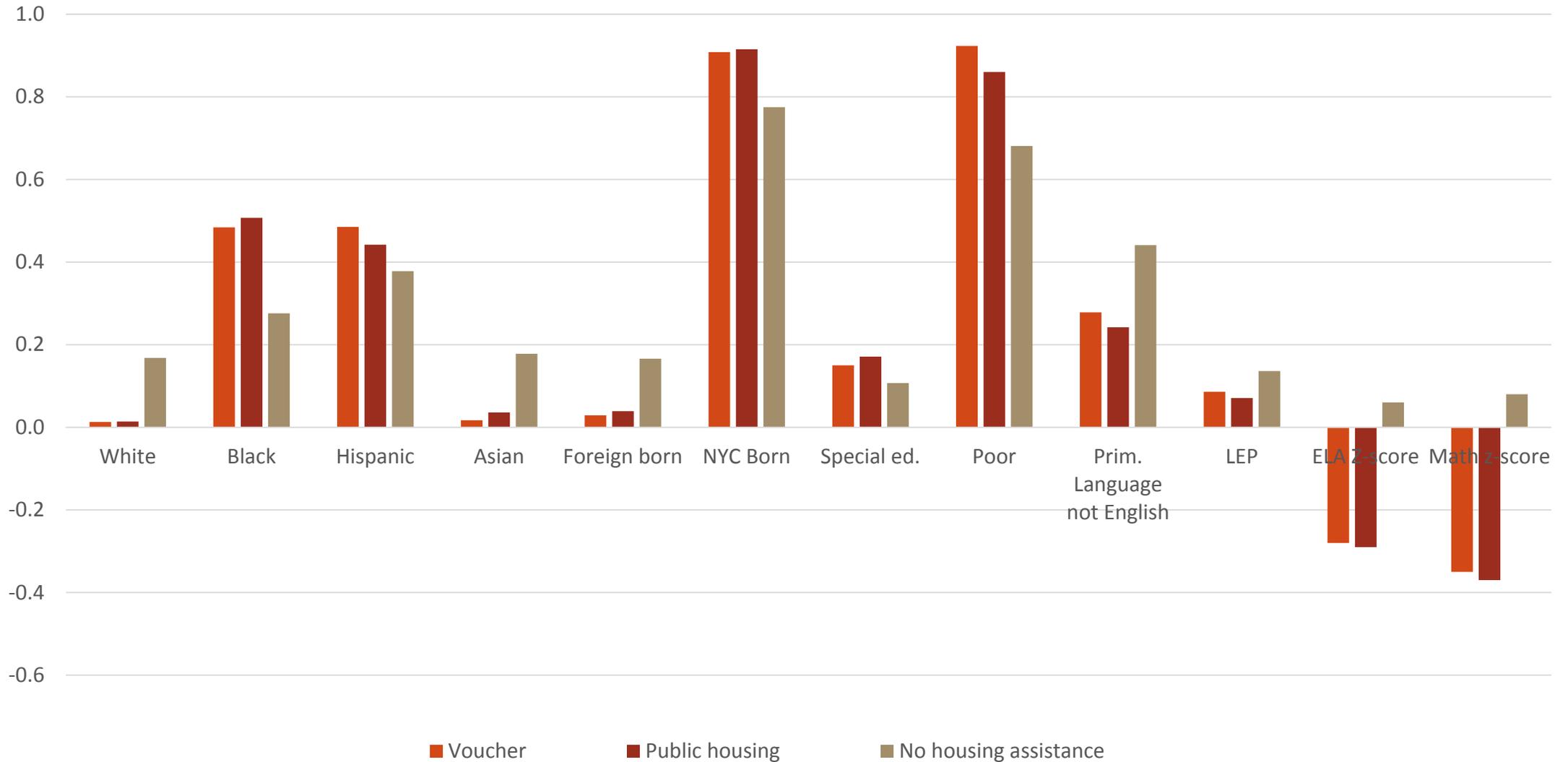
Housing Vouchers are important in NYC

- About 90,000 total households & more than 200K individuals use vouchers
- As March 2015, 121K+ families still on wait list, which was closed in March 2007

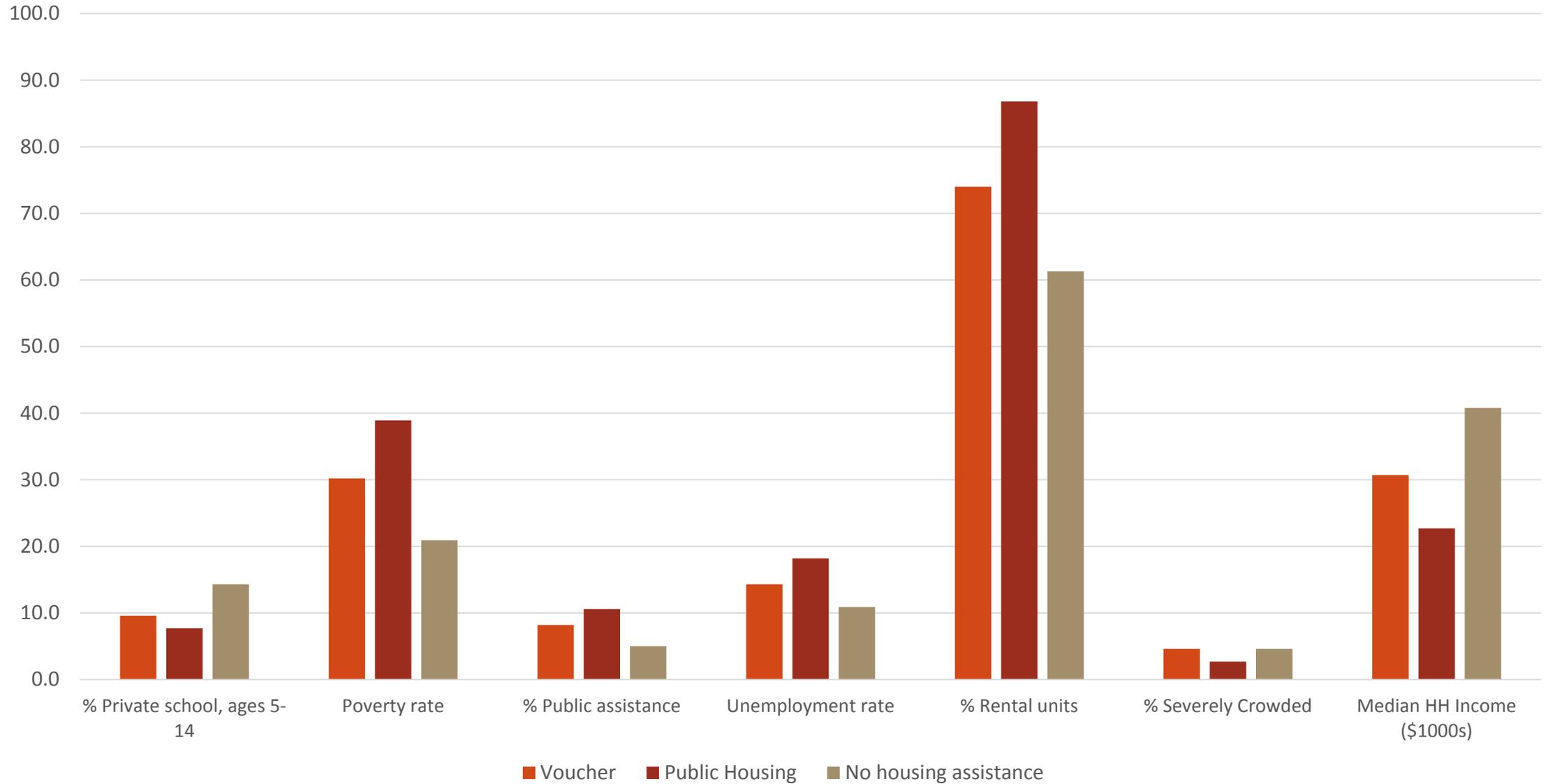
We estimate the impacts of Housing Vouchers on academic outcomes for 3-8 graders using

- detailed longitudinal data on standardized tests, attendance, student characteristics, etc.
- Residential locations and schools attended
- The random timing of voucher receipt

Student Characteristics by Type of Housing Assistance, Grades 3-8, AY 2009



Neighborhood (census tract) characteristics by Type of Housing Assistance, 2009



Vouchers Work

Students in voucher households earn higher test scores after voucher receipt

- Impact on English Language Arts (ELA) scores is .06 standard deviations
- Impact on Mathematics scores is .05 standard deviations.

These effects are substantively important as well as statistically significant.

Largest effects for those who move in the first year (0.08, 0.06)

- Compared to those who move later or lease in place (0.051, 0.04)

Further, those first-year mover access slightly better neighborhoods

- Higher median incomes
- Slightly lower poverty rates

Effects Related to School Mobility

Students who remained in the same school saw scores rise the most (0.07, 0.08)

- Compared to those moving schools in the years after receiving a voucher.

At the same time, voucher recipients attend slightly better schools after voucher receipt

- Lower poverty rates
- Higher proficiency rates
- Higher attendance rates

Underlying Mechanisms

- Increased housing stability
- Decrease overcrowding
- Lower levels of stress among parents
- Income effects from rental subsidy
- **Provide access to better neighborhoods and schools**

What can we say about how neighborhood matters?

One way is through the effect of community violence and academic outcomes

Reveal significant test score declines following exposure to violent crime

- Approximately -0.03 in both ELA and math

Effects driven by students with repeated exposure

- Students experiencing neighborhood violence on a regular basis.
- Larger still for black students (-0.08); approximately 16% of the black-white test score gap in this group

Discussion and implications for policy

Housing vouchers increase student performance

- Credible, rigorous evidence the effects are causal
- Both English Language Arts and mathematics

Substantively important

- Benefits may extend to all students in a family receiving a voucher
- Driven, in part, by ability to access better neighborhoods

Our research also shows that exposure to neighborhood violence reduces performance

- Repeated exposure particularly damaging

Demonstrates how housing subsidies can improve student performance

- And how neighborhood matters

Thank you!

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