

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE

March 22, 2013

8:04 a.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Gary Stevens, Chair
Senator Mike Dunleavy, Vice Chair
Senator Charlie Huggins
Senator Berta Gardner

MEMBERS ABSENT

Senator Bert Stedman

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

DISCUSSION No. 2 ON VOUCHER SYSTEMS

- HEARD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

MARTIN CARNOY, Professor of Education & Economics
Center for Education Policy Analysis
Stanford University
Stanford, California

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented information regarding the school voucher system.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[8:04:09 AM](#)

CHAIR GARY STEVENS called the Senate Education Standing Committee meeting to order at 8:04 a.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Gardner, Huggins, Co-Chair Dunleavy, and Chair Stevens.

Discussion No. 2 on Voucher Systems

[8:04:25 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS announced that the only order of business would be a continuation of the discussion of voucher systems.

8:04:33 AM

MARTIN CARNOY, Professor of Education & Economics, Center for Education Policy Analysis, Stanford University, presented information regarding the school voucher system. He posed the question, "Why would Alaska want a voucher plan?" He noted that after looking at educational data from Alaska, it seems like the public education system in Alaska was doing quite well. The National Assessment of Educational Progress Test shows that white students in Alaska have increased their 8th grade math scores by about one-third of the standard deviation - more than ten points over the past 15 years. That is about the same as the national average. Alaska students score better than the national average in reading.

8:07:03 AM

DR. CARNOY related that Native American students do not score as well and do not seem to be making any progress in math and in reading, which is similar to national data. Therefore, the main problem in education in Alaska relates to a specific population, not the public education system.

DR. CARNOY turned to the issue of standard arguments in favor of vouchers. He listed the two arguments: increased competition among schools would raise test scores for all students, and private schools are more effective than public schools, so students would shift to the more effective private schools in order to do better in school.

8:08:54 AM

DR. CARNOY addressed the first argument, evidence that there is a competition effect. He used Milwaukee as an example of a "complete choice" city when it comes to education. Twenty percent of all students use vouchers to go to private schools. The value of the voucher is somewhat less than the cost per student. There are also charter schools and magnet schools in Milwaukee. Only about one-fourth of students attend a neighborhood public school.

He said the other place he has studied is Chile, which has a national voucher plan.

He related that in Milwaukee, with a targeted plan of up to 1.85 of the poverty line, a limit of 24,000 vouchers can be issued.

In Chile, everyone receives a voucher; about 47 percent of children attend privately run/publically funded schools.

[8:11:36 AM](#)

DR. CARNOY addressed those two plans in terms of the competition effect. Milwaukee has had the voucher plan since 1998 when the Supreme Court ruled that any school, including religious schools, could use vouchers. In the first year, mostly students already in private schools received vouchers. The effect on public schools in the first year showed an increase in student performance. Since then, there has been no effect on student performance in public schools. In the first two years, about 5,000 students took advantage of the voucher. Since then, another 15,000 have used a voucher, and yet, there has been no additional effect on public school performance in Milwaukee.

He stressed the fact that African-American students, who make up 67 percent of students in Milwaukee and who use about 70 percent of the vouchers, had lower educational gains than African-American students nationally after 15 years of voucher plans.

[8:13:16 AM](#)

DR. CARNOY showed a graph of math test scores for African-Americans in Milwaukee, versus the national numbers. He said black student scores in Wisconsin are lower now than national scores from 1996.

He addressed Chile's plan, which they have had since 1981. There is no evidence of a competition impact from their voucher program. Test scores went up in 2005 after the government spent a great amount of money on teacher salaries and teacher training. The government also increased the value of the voucher for low income students by 50 percent.

[8:15:14 AM](#)

DR. CARNOY turned to the issue whether there is any evidence that private voucher schools do better than public schools with similar students. He noted that there have been several studies around the country that looked at that question. All of the studies have dealt with targeted voucher plans for low income students. The results show that the effects of voucher plans have been small, if at all. After a three-year study in Washington, D.C., the best that could be claimed is that students gained one-sixth of a standard deviation only in reading. It was not the lowest income students that had the gain.

He said the same author of the DC study, Patrick Wolf, did a four-year study in Milwaukee, in which they matched students in private voucher schools with public school students. The study was unable to show any significance in gain for voucher students over public school students.

[8:17:32 AM](#)

DR. CARNOY summarized that he was open to vouchers, but that there is sparse evidence that they have a positive effect and they have a high cost. In Alaska, a voucher plan would immediately cost the state about 7,000 to 7,500 private school students. A \$10,000 voucher, compared to the \$16,000 cost per student in public schools, times 7,500 students who are currently in private schools, would immediately cost the state \$75 million more. Eventually, more private schools would come into the market to take advantage of the \$10,000 voucher. It would take 4,500 more students to leave public schools to attend private schools in order for the state to break even. He cautioned that a \$10,000 voucher in Alaska may not be large enough.

[8:19:41 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS asked what kind of oversight exists in private voucher schools regarding curriculum and teacher certification.

DR. CARNOY replied that Milwaukee private voucher schools are unregulated. The legislature did not require state testing in private schools. In order to do the study, the author had to get private schools to agree to take the state test for comparison.

He noted that, in general, private schools hire from the same certified teacher pool.

He inquired how many charter schools were in Alaska.

[8:21:55 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said there was only one in his district.

SENATOR GARDNER thought there were 30 private schools.

SENATOR HUGGINS said there were about 26. He noted that charter schools in Alaska are public schools.

CHAIR STEVENS agreed.

DR. CARNOY spoke of religious schools not wanting to be regulated in Milwaukee. He said the more regulations attached to the program, the more costly the voucher will have to be.

He did not know why Alaska needed vouchers if they already have charter schools.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY replied that charter schools in Alaska are mission schools.

DR. CARNOY asked what "mission" means.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY explained that it is a focus of the school, such as reading.

DR. CARNOY said states with highly de-regulated charter schools don't do very well. The more screening and regulation that takes place before the school begins, the better the school does. California has the largest number of charter schools - 7 percent of the school population. Districts schools must be approved by the district or county and they have about the same performance as the public schools.

[8:25:54 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked about Dr. Carnoy's thoughts on religious schools.

DR. CARNOY said in Wisconsin the State Supreme Court interpreted the state constitution to say that the state could give money to religious schools. The U.S. Supreme Court also ruled in the Cleveland Case that public money could go to religious schools if religious education was not mandatory for students. Some of the schools in Milwaukee are old, established Catholic schools and they accepted a limited number of voucher students because they needed the money. They were very successful with the voucher students because they were put into a high educational standards context.

He noted there is a lot of movement of students in and out of schools. He said new voucher schools did not have the same success rates.

[8:28:51 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS referred to an Alaskan survey that says a significant number of students who go to college require remedial training. He also stated that schools are failing students who live in metropolitan areas. He opined that the

question is how to expend public money. He concluded that American's schools are trending in the wrong direction.

[8:30:56 AM](#)

DR. CARNOY stated that the trend in educational results is headed upwards on national tests. The trend is also up on international tests. He thought that Senator Huggins was concerned about the level of quality schooling. Alaska is at the national average regarding testing. There is a tremendous variation from state to state around that average; Alaska is about in the middle. California does worse than Alaska.

He suggested improving Alaska's school system by looking at states that are doing better in the public schools system, such as Minnesota and Massachusetts. He maintained that the successes there were not due to social class.

[8:34:51 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS suggested that there are other parameters of competition other than the two Dr. Carnoy mentioned. He gave an example from the Mat-Su School District of an online program called IDEA, which is the largest correspondence program in the district. It allowed more students to enroll in the Mat-Su District. He also said that charter schools are more acceptable now.

DR. CARNOY responded that the issue is where a district wishes to put its efforts. There is no evidence that there is a competition effect from charter school vouchers. Some states are taking actions that have a positive effect on their schools.

[8:39:00 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS asked if Dr. Carnoy was the education commissioner in California, what top three things he would do to effect education positively.

DR. CARNOY described California's financial constraints. He suggested adopting common core standards, having schools implement them, changing state testing to reflect the standards, and providing assistance to teachers to conform to the standards. The most difficult hurdle is to get teachers to teach to the standards.

[8:41:40 AM](#)

SENATOR HUGGINS noted Dr. Carnoy's educational background in Chicago and wondered if he had any insight into the closing of over fifty Chicago schools.

DR. CARNOY responded that he was not an expert on Chicago schools. He said the problem seems to be that the schools are so under-performing that they warrant closing. He opined that the main problem in Chicago is that it is hard to get things done there due to the history of corruption. He did say that there are very good charter schools in Chicago, as well. He noted that 10 schools closed in Milwaukee and concluded that urban school systems have difficult issues.

[8:43:43 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY asked how to define a general voucher.

DR. CARNOY responded that a general voucher is a voucher that any student is eligible for. A targeted voucher has conditions, usually based on income.

SENATOR DUNLEAVY he related that Alaska's public school system was made up of neighborhood schools until about 15 years ago. Then there was a home school correspondence movement and a law changed that allowed parents to home school their children. Soon after, public home school programs were set up to try and capture some of the home-schooled students. Students were given allotments to support their individual learning plans, implemented by parents, by buying courses.

He said there is very little discussion about a statewide voucher system, but more interest in changing the constitution to allow public money for religious schools and lessening the chance of a lawsuit.

[8:48:40 AM](#)

DR. CARNOY replied that, nationwide, before the charter school spread, there were about 2 million students in home schools. Many home schools turned to charter schools because charter schools receive more funding than home schools. He described a couple of charter schools in California.

He asked how Alaska home school students do on state tests, compared to public school students.

[8:50:26 AM](#)

SENATOR DUNLEAVY responded that he did not have that data on hand, but guessed it would be very similar to the general population within urban areas.

DR. CARNOY replied that in Alaska state testing is monitored by the school or a teacher in the home school, whereas in California, this is not done. He agreed that parents like having a choice of schools. He stressed the importance of regulating charter schools.

[8:54:08 AM](#)

CHAIR STEVENS said he would try to find the information about how home school students do on state tests.

DR. CARNOY said he hoped Alaska would send a delegation to visit states that score high on state tests.

CHAIR STEVENS agreed to follow up on that issue. He thanked Dr. Carnoy for his time.

DR. CARNOY concluded that Alaska is making gains in education, but could do even better.

[8:55:41 AM](#)

There being no further business to come before the Senate Education Standing Committee, Chair Stevens adjourned the meeting at 8:55 a.m.