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9801 HOUSE HEALTH EDUCATION & SOCIAL SERVICES

, columnist for *The*
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from the viewpoint of those who grab so avidly for the chance to shove their children into better schools: Should they be required to keep their children in dreadful schools in order to keep those schools from growing even worse? Should they be made to wait until we get around to improving all the public schools? . . . Surely voucher opponents cannot believe the logic of their counterargument: that if you can't save everybody—whether from a burning apartment house, a sinking ship or a dreadful school system—it's better not to save anybody at all.¹³

Jonathan Rauch, national correspondent for *The National Journal*, in *The New Republic*:

I've always found it a little odd that liberals hand the voucher idea to Republicans like [Representatives Charles H.] Taylor and [House Speaker] Newt Gingrich, rather than grabbing it for themselves. . . . For poor children, trapped in execrable schools, the case [for vouchers] is moral rather than merely educational. These kids attend schools which cannot protect their physical safety, much less teach them. To require poor people to go to dangerous, dysfunctional schools that better-off people fled years ago, and that better-off people would never tolerate for their own children—all the while intoning pieties about "saving" public education—is worse than unsound public policy. It is repugnant public policy.

Why should the poor be denied more control over their most important means

of social advancement, when soccer moms and latte-drinkers take for granted that they can buy their way out of a school (or a school district) that abuses or annoys them?

By embracing school choice—if not everywhere, then at least somewhere—liberals could at one stroke emancipate the District's schoolchildren while also emancipating liberalism from that basest sort of corruption.¹⁴

Diane Ravitch, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, and William A. Galston, Professor at the University of Maryland School of Public Affairs, in *The Washington Post*:

These [school choice] efforts should be expanded into a national demonstration program involving poor children in no fewer than 10 hard-pressed urban school districts for a period of no less than five years, with carefully designed monitoring and evaluation plans. We cannot afford to write off another generation of urban schoolchildren. . . . It is time to set ideology and politics aside and put our children first.¹⁵

Brent Staples, editorial board of *The New York Times*:

Democrats who had made careers as champions of the poor opposed the [school choice] plan, arguing that a solution that did not save every child was unacceptable. The Democrats got the worst of the exchange. They seemed more interested in preserving the public school monopoly than in saving at least some children's lives [through vouchers].¹⁶

12. "District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997," *Congressional Record*, April 30, 1998, p. H26655.

13. William Raspberry, "Not Enough Lifeboats," *The Washington Post*, March 9, 1998, p. A19.

14. Jonathan Rauch, "TRB from Washington: Choose or Lose," *The New Republic*, November 10, 1997.

15. Diane Ravitch and William Galston, "Scholarships for Inner-City School Kids," *The Washington Post*, December 17, 1996, p. A23.

Virginia Walden, D.C. parent, in *The Washington Post*:

I am a lifelong Democrat, and I am not sure when the Democrats decided that siding with the poor and the needy is no longer part of their platform. School choice empowers parents, and I don't care who is behind it, Democrats or Republicans.¹⁷

Editorial, *The Washington Post*:

A modest voucher experiment might help energize the public schools. . . . And

such a program, we believe, will not do harm to the system or by implication suggest that it is a permanent loser. . . . The point—the hope—would be that such an experiment could be one small part of the effort being undertaken with vigor and optimism by the new school team to bring the District system to a higher, more even standard of achievement, one that reflects the quality of our best schools, which are the models.¹⁸

—Nina H. Shokraii is an Education Policy Analyst at *The Heritage Foundation*.

16. Brent Staples, "Schoolyard Brawl," *The New York Times*, January 4, 1998, Section 4A, p. 35.

17. Virginia Walden, "Vouchers Deserved a Chance," *The Washington Post*, May 24, 1998, p. C8. Virginia Walden is a single mother of three children in the District of Columbia.

18. Editorial, "The Voucher Issue," *The Washington Post*, September 30, 1997, p. A20.

September 13, 1991

NINE PHONEY ASSERTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL CHOICE: ANSWERING THE CRITICS

INTRODUCTION

Free market economics works well for breakfast cereals, but not for schools in a democratic society. Market-driven school choice would create an inequitable, elitist educational system.

So said Keith Geiger, President of the National Education Association, in September 1990.¹

Similar arguments that education and consumer choice, like oil and water, simply do not mix are espoused by many other critics of educational choice. These criticisms of school choice programs have grown louder and more shrill as school choice programs proliferate. To date, some eleven states have adopted some type of plan, ranging from limited choices among public schools in several states to a program including private schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Ballot initiatives and legislative battles are pending in another fourteen states, and many of these proposals would give parents the option of sending their children to private schools.

1 Keith Geiger, "Choice That Works: Transforming Public Schools at the Local Level," Advertisement, *The Washington Post*, September 30, 1990.

With growing support for choice in education,² it is hardly surprising that the National Education Association and other opponents of reform step up their attacks on educational choice. The criticisms against choice constitute nine broad categories:

ASSERTION #1

The Undermining-America Argument: Choice will destroy the American public school tradition.

ASSERTION #2

The Creaming Argument: Choice will leave the poor behind in the worst schools.

ASSERTION #3

The Incompetent Parent Argument: Parents will not be capable of choosing the right school for their child.

ASSERTION #4

The Non-Academic Parental Neglect Argument: Parents will use the wrong criteria, such as sports facilities, in choosing schools for their children.

ASSERTION #5

The Selectivity Issue: There will be insufficient help for students with special needs.

ASSERTION #6

The Radical Schools Scare (or the Farrakhan-KKK Theory): Extremists, like Louis Farrakhan or the Ku Klux Klan, will form schools.

ASSERTION #7

The Church-State Problem: Choice is unconstitutional.

ASSERTION #8

The Public Accountability Argument: Private schools are not sufficiently regulated.

ASSERTION #9

The Choice is Expensive Argument: There are high hidden costs associated with school choice.

² See, for example, Jeanne Allen and Michael J. McLaughlin, "A Businessman's Guide to the Education Reform Debate," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 801, December 21, 1990; Clint Bolick, "A Primer on Choice in Education: Part I — How Choice Works," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 760, March 21, 1990; Clint Bolick, "Choice in Education, Part II: Legal Perils and Legal Opportunities," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 809, February 18, 1991, p. 6.

These criticisms too often go unanswered, and thus begin to gain currency in the press and among many Americans. Even some business leaders are prone to accept arguments against consumer choice and competition in education, despite lauding it as the key to efficiency in the rest of society. Fearful of backing an issue that may be controversial, and lacking precise and accurate information about educational choice, these business executives prefer to err on the side of caution and take no position in the debate.

This reluctance is costly, however, because American business pays heavily for the failures of the school system. U.S. firms, for instance, last year paid out \$40 billion to finance remedial education for their employees. The businessmen's reluctance to back choice in the debate also is misplaced because the criticisms of educational choice either are completely spurious or no longer are valid because they have been addressed in modifications of the original choice concept.

NINE PHONEY ASSERTIONS AGAINST SCHOOL CHOICE

ASSERTION #1) THE UNDERMINING-AMERICA ARGUMENT: Choice will destroy the long tradition of common schools in America by subsidizing private schools at the expense of public schools. These schools, which embody the classless and democratic principles of the United States are enshrined in the public school system.

Says Wisconsin Superintendent of Public Instruction Herbert Grover: "[T]he private school choice program is not a solution but a program that is in conflict with the intent of the common schools established for the common good of our society."

RESPONSE:

The term "public education" was first used in 1837 by Horace Mann, then chairman of the New York State Board of Education, to describe the goal of an educated citizenry, seen in part as an effective way to knit together the millions of immigrants from many lands who were coming to America. Charles Glenn, educational expert, author, and former director of equal opportunity for the state of Massachusetts writes that, "At the heart of this vision was the idea of the common school, a school in which the children of all classes and representing all levels of society would be educated together and would thus acquire the mutual respect essential to the functioning of a democracy."⁴ Indeed, opponents of choice often talk of the notion of the common school and frequently invoke the name of Horace Mann.

3 Herbert Grover, "The Milwaukee Choice Plan," *Wisconsin Choice News*, August 1990, p. 4

4 Charles L. Glenn, *The Myth of the Common School* (Amherst, MA.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988).

As University of Chicago sociologist James Coleman has discovered in his research, however, public schools rarely conform to the common school tradition.⁵ They tend, rather, to be the most exclusive and segregated schools. Ironically, private religious schools are more consistent with the common school philosophy than are public schools. Private, inner city Catholic schools in such cities as Chicago and New York bring together children of widely differing social and economic strata.

Choice, in fact, affords Americans the best chance of re-creating the common school by returning all children to a level playing field and ensuring that schools are representative of diverse communities. Parents of all colors, socio-economic levels, and classes should be able to choose among the widest range of schools possible, rather than being segregated out of a particular school because its cost may be prohibitive. Similarly, taxpayers required to subsidize their local school districts should have some say over what occurs in the schools. While choice opponents boast of "public accountability" in the schools, in reality the schools are no longer accountable for their employees, their product, or their daily operations. Choice makes schools accountable directly to consumers.

Choice would recreate Mann's notion of the common schools by restoring quality education and accountability for results. In the 19th century, the local public school epitomized the ideals, providing education which long ago ceased to respond to the needs of American children.

ASSERTION #2)THE CREAMING ARGUMENT: Choice will "leave behind" the poor and most difficult to educate, while good students will be "creamed" into the best schools.

Says California Superintendent of Public Instruction Bill Honig: "The voucher approach risks creating elite academies for the few and second rate schools for the many."⁶

RESPONSE:

The creaming argument supposes that poorer and less able children will tend to be left behind in the worst schools when parents have a choice of schools. Adherents of this view presume that most minority or lower-income parents do not know the difference between good and bad schools and that their children thus will end up in bad schools. Hence, the argument goes, choice plans are unfair because they separate the "haves" from the "have-nots."

5 James Coleman, *Public and Private Schools* (New York, New York: Basic Books, 1987).

6 Bill Honig, "School Vouchers: Dangerous Claptrap," *The New York Times*, June 29, 1990.

While the "creaming" theorists are concerned about inequality under a choice plan, they seem to ignore that today's education system is extremely unequal. The "haves" already have choice because they have the money to choose a private school for their children. The "have-nots," meanwhile, are trapped in major urban school systems in which the quality of education is appalling despite heavy spending by the school districts.

Successful Magnet Schools. Choice is a tool to reduce this inequality. The evidence shows that choice improves all schools, not just a few, and that poor parents are quite able to find the best schools. This is very clear in the case of magnet schools, which are specialized schools offering unique programs. They are designed to attract children of all races. They constitute a limited form of parental choice, in that parents opt to send their children there in place of the school to which they were assigned. They post significantly better results than other public schools. Large magnet school systems have been functioning for more than a decade in over 100 cities nationwide.

Adherents of the creaming argument contend that magnet schools nationwide can boast success simply because they attract smart children of smart and very involved parents.⁷ Yet the evidence on many long-established magnet schools suggests this is not the reason. These schools credit their success to the child's excitement at being in the school and the school's ability to tailor its lessons to the needs of individual students.⁸ Magnets do not, in fact, selectively enroll children. Indeed, since demand is high, they operate generally by lottery, to ensure that all parents have an equal opportunity at a limited number of spaces. Moreover, refuting the assertions of choice critics, parents of these children are not necessarily the most involved and better educated parents.

Evidence suggests, meanwhile, that poor and disadvantaged parents are just as capable as better-educated or higher-income parents of distinguishing between good and bad schools. The problem today is that poor parents are rarely given the opportunity to do so. When they have the opportunity and are given full information about the choices open to them, they choose well.

Harlem Turnaround. Consider the case of East Harlem in New York City. Children in East Harlem School District 4 in 1974 scored the lowest of any New York City school district in state assessments. Central office officials blamed their students' failure on the bad influence and lack of involvement of parents. Then a bold district administration instituted a plan that gives teachers authority to design and run their own schools and gives parents the right to choose among them. Teachers joined administrators in launching a comprehensive outreach program to inform parents about the diversity of options then available. By 1986, students from District 4 ranked sixteenth out of 32 in reading and math scores. When

7 Suzanne Davenport, "School Choice," *Designs for Change*, 1989.

8 U.S. Department of Education, "Choosing Better Schools: A Report on the Five Regional Meetings in Choice in Education," December 1990.

asked to choose among a variety of schools for their children, the poorest and most desolate of East Harlem parents in fact made good choices for their children, usually based on academic criteria.

The same has been true in Milwaukee. There the parental choice program gives low-income students state "scholarships" worth \$2,500 to cover tuition at the private, nonsectarian school of their choice. In its first year of operation, parents of almost 400 students exercised their choice and sent their children to institutions such as the highly respected Urban Day School, which boasts a 98 percent graduation rate. A majority of parents participating in the choice program are single parents, and many are unemployed. They are virtually identical to their public school counterparts according to most socio-economic measures.⁹

Proponents of the creaming view assume that there is a static pool of schools and that choice plans will allow good schools to drain away the better students; the bad schools will continue to educate the worst students and deteriorate. This criticism overlooks one of the most fundamental dynamics of choice: the ability of parents to choose schools forces existing public schools to change. Another dynamic is that good schools expand and new schools emerge. If bad schools cannot or will not improve, their students can go elsewhere. The assertions about "bad children being left behind" simply do not take into account the dynamics of a school choice plan.

ASSERTION #3) THE INCOMPETENT PARENT ARGUMENT: Since some parents are truly incapable of making choices, such as those who abuse drugs, some parents also are incapable of wisely exercising their choice option, thus consigning their children to sub-standard education.

Says Urban Institute scholar Isabel Sawhill: "The emphasis on choice...conflicts with the rising body of evidence that poor families are often beset with any multitude of problems, making it difficult for them to cope with the added responsibility—such as evaluating different schools or owning a home."¹⁰

RESPONSE:

The evidence actually suggests that the opportunity to make a real decision—possibly for the first time in years—can shake an individual out of a life of despair and dependency. This notion undergirds the philosophy of empowerment, and its dramatic effects can be seen in the success of tenant management of public housing and similar empowerment strategies.¹¹ According to New York University political scientist Lawrence Mead, allowing or requiring the poor to make de-

9 "Parents are happy with choice program," *The Milwaukee Journal*, August 12, 1990, p. 1.

10 Isabel V. Sawhill, Raymond J. Struyk, and Steven M. Sachs, "The New Paradigm: Choice and Empowerment as Social Policy Tools," *Policy Bites*, The Urban Institute, February 1991, p. 5

11 John Scanlon, "People Power in the Projects: How Tenant Management Can Save Public Housing," *Heritage Foundation Backgrounder* No. 758, March 8, 1990.

cisions renders them just as capable of good decisions or work habits as someone who is better off. Writes Mead, "The poor are as eager to work [and participate in decisions] as the better-off, but the strength of this desire appears to be unrelated to their work behavior...most clients in workfare programs actually respond positively to the experience of being required to work, not negatively as they would if they truly rejected work."¹²

The ability to choose leads to one of two outcomes. In very many instances, as supporters of empowerment contend, it leads to parents gaining the self confidence to exercise control over their lives. But even if this does not happen, and parents do not bother to choose a school for their children, they are still assigned a school under choice plans. The assigned school is not likely to be worse than the one now attended by the child. Indeed, it is likely to be better because of the improvements forced by increased pressure from other parents.

Deeply troubled or dysfunctional children, meanwhile, are likely to do better under a choice system because it will make available a wider range of schools, especially if private schools are included in the choice program. Explains Abigail Thernstrom, adjunct Associate Professor of Education at Boston University and author of *School Choice in Massachusetts*, "... Already many private schools meet the needs of dysfunctional children."¹³

To be sure, a ready availability of information is more important to poorer and less able students than to sophisticated parents. For this reason, choice plans such as those crafted by Brookings Institution senior fellow John Chubb and Stanford University professor Terry Moe would require parent information centers and parent liaisons to help parents who need assistance in making choices.¹⁴ But even if such source of information were not available, the worst that could happen is that children for whom no choice is made would be assigned to a school—which is no different from what occurs today.

ASSERTION #4) THE NON-ACADEMIC PARENTAL NEGLECT ARGUMENT: Parents will use such criteria as a school's location or its athletic facilities, rather than the quality of the education it provides, in deciding what school their child will attend.

Asks American Federation of Teachers President Albert Shanker, "Do most [parents]—rich, poor or in the middle—really want rigorous standards for their children? And if they don't, would they choose rigorous schools?"

12 Lawrence Mead, "Jobs for the Welfare Poor," *Policy Review*, Winter 1988, p.65

13 Abigail Thernstrom, "Hobson's Choice," *The New Republic*, July 15, 1991, p. 13.

14 John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1990), p. 221.

RESPONSE:

Choice critics like Shanker argue that most parents would not bother to choose a school or if they did, they would do so on the basis of non-academic concerns. They point to public school choice plans in Minnesota, where only a small percentage of students actually switched schools when state-wide open enrollment was instituted last year. The most common reasons given by parents for switching schools included transportation, proximity to work and child care, and athletics.

Minnesota is not a valid example. For one thing, its choice program is limited. In most grades the choice of school is restricted entirely to the public sector. For another thing, there are few academic differences among public schools in Minnesota's mainly suburban, sprawling communities. Significant differences may emerge, of course, as schools begin to make major improvements to meet competition.

The law creating the open-enrollment plan, moreover, did not include mechanisms to make change easy in the organization of Minnesota schools. Thus superintendents function as they did before and principals and teachers have not seen their autonomy increased. As such, schools cannot respond easily to parental choices. Minnesota and other states with open-enrollment policies also have not taken sufficient steps to make information available to parents. In Iowa, for example, no money has been allotted from the annual state school budget for outreach information. The result: parents find it hard to obtain academic information on which to base decisions.

Parent frustration in Minnesota already is prompting changes in the law. The Minnesota legislature this June enacted the Charter Schools Act, making it possible for teachers to form their own school, and be free from most state oversight.¹⁵

Gauge for Achievement. Shanker's argument in any case unwittingly underscores the need for choice. The fact is that parents routinely are kept in the dark about how well public schools perform because hard performance information generally is unavailable. The need for such information has led an increasing number of choice advocates to support calls for state and national testing to give schools performance standards and to give parents a gauge by which to measure their children's achievement.

Once an accurate and dependable system of accountability is in place, parents will become smart consumers and can demand improvements—even if they choose not to change schools. Of course, even with clear performance testing and with precise information on which to make choices, some parents may, as Shanker fears, decide that a neighborhood school or a school with an emphasis on team sports is better for their child than one which excels in mathematics. But that

15 Ted Kolderic, "Minnesota's New Program of 'Charter Schools'" (Center for Policy Studies: St. Paul, MN), June, 1991.

should be their choice to make as parents. It is a choice made routinely by affluent parents. Choice plans allow poor parents the chance to make that same decision.

ASSERTION #5) THE SELECTIVITY ARGUMENT: Private schools in the choice plan will admit only easy-to-teach children, leaving difficult, less academically gifted children in the public schools. Such selectivity is the reason for the private schools' vaunted ability to outperform public schools.

Says Senator Edward M. Kennedy, the Massachusetts Democrat, choice has the potential to be "a death sentence for public schools struggling to serve disadvantaged students, draining all good students out of poor schools."

RESPONSE:

The selectivity issue argument challenges choice advocates. Few are willing to deny a private school the right to set admissions standards. But while some private schools set high admission requirements, the fact is that parochial schools—the private schools serving most children in cities with or considering choice plans—actually are less selective than public schools. Explains Reverend Vincent Breen, superintendent of education for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens, the claim that selection is normal at Catholic schools is "a completely false statement that's repeated over and over again. Catholic schools are just as open to the needs of the urban child."

According to sociologist James Coleman, Catholic schools in particular boast success in raising the academic achievement of population groups that do poorly in public schools, including blacks, Hispanics and children from poor socio-economic backgrounds. "The proximate reason for the Catholic schools' success with less-advantaged students from deficient families appears to be the greater academic demands that Catholic schools place on these students."¹⁶ Research by Brookings scholars Chubb and Moe further shows that private schools in general excel because of their organization, not because they weed out less able students through set admissions criteria. After controlling for all of the variables used to explain away the performance of private schools such as selection criteria, as well as socio-economic status, student ability, and the influence of peers, Chubb and Moe find that private schools still outperform public schools.¹⁷

To avoid the possibility of private schools rejecting students who are particularly costly to teach or accommodate, such as handicapped children or those with pronounced learning disabilities, Chubb and Moe recommend that choice plans offer more valuable scholarship certificates for such children to encourage schools to create programs suited to their needs. Many school systems in fact already contract with private centers to provide extra assistance to public school

16 James Coleman, *Public and Private Schools*, Basic Books, New York, 1987, p. 148

17 Chubb and Moe, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

children with special needs, indicating that private institutions by no means shun such children.

ASSERTION #6) THE RADICAL SCHOOLS SCARE: A choice system will lead to "fly by night" schools, which take public funds without providing adequate education. Worse still, schools espousing radical or extremist dogmas would emerge, perhaps even those run by the Ku Klux Klan or by black extremists.

According to critic Isabel Sawhill, "Diploma factories might be established in the inner cities to take advantage of the government funding, it is argued, similar to the recently exposed examples of vocational schools that exploit low income students to profit from federally sponsored student loans."¹⁸ Adds California Superintendent Bill Honig, choice "opens the door to cult schools. Public schools are the major institutions transmitting our democratic values. By prohibiting common standards, [choice proponents] enshrine the rights of parents over the needs of children and society and *encourage tribalism* [emphasis added]. Should we pay for schools that teach astrology or creationism instead of science? Should we inculcate racism?"¹⁹

RESPONSE:

Most states have imposed minimum academic standards on private as well as public schools. Most education choice proposals, moreover, require the government to play some role in enforcing federal anti-discrimination laws and ensuring contractual obligations to students. If governments fail to do this effectively, as the federal government is accused of doing for trade schools, this is a deficiency of government, not of consumer choice. As it is, a good number of public schools today would be found delinquent in complying with a government regulation requiring good value for money.

While many for-profit trade schools abuses have been documented, the vast majority of schools of higher education currently operate in a choice system and state or federal assistance follows needier children to the school that they choose. Unlike its public education system, American higher education is considered world class.

As to the claim that bizarre or extremist schools will proliferate under a choice system, nothing prevents such schools from opening and attracting customers today in the private sector. The fact is that few exist. Fewer, if any, would be established under choice programs. One reason is that schools are banned from discrimination on the basis of race under the 14th Amendment. Another reason is that a school accepting government funds under a choice program would be sub-

18 Isabel V. Sawhill, Raymond J. Struyk, and Steven M. Sachs, "The New Paradigm: Choice and Empowerment as Social Policy Tools," *Policy Bites*, The Urban Institute, February, 1991, p.5

19 Honig, *op. cit.*

ject to some additional constraints. In short, Honig's vision of "cult schools" is mere fantasy.

ASSERTION #7) THE CHURCH-STATE PROBLEM: Choice plans that include private, religious schools are unconstitutional because they violate the First Amendment's establishment clause.

Robert L. Maddox, Executive Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, claims that public funds cannot be used at religious schools without "violating the constitutional separation of church and state." He adds that "A long line of Supreme Court cases has repeatedly found that the First Amendment bars the expenditure of tax money to support religion or religious schools."²⁰

RESPONSE:

This claim, though widely believed, simply is wrong. As the *Congressional Quarterly* notes in an April article on school choice: "The federal government already provides Pell grants to students at private, religiously affiliated colleges, notes Michael W. McConnell a law professor at the University of Chicago. The GI bill even covers tuition at seminaries."²¹ The journal also points out that Harvard Law School's Lawrence Tribe, one of America's most liberal constitutional scholars, says that the current Supreme Court would not find a "reasonably well-designed" choice plan a violation of church and state. He agrees there may be policy concerns about choice, but that the constitutional concerns have been addressed in a litany of cases.

The Supreme Court generally has applied three tests in "establishment clause" cases, to determine whether legislation to support private schools is constitutional. First, the program must serve a secular purpose. Second, its "primary effect" must neither advance nor inhibit religion. And third, it must not foster an "excessive entanglement" between government and religion.²²

In practice, as long as a school choice program puts the decision of where the funds are spent in the hands of individual students or parents, and as long as the program does not discriminate in favor of religious schools, the program is likely to survive any constitutional challenge.

20 Robert L. Maddox, Letter to the Editor, *The New York Times*, May 10, 1991

21 *The Congressional Quarterly*, April 27, 1991.

22 Bolick, Part II, *op. cit.* The study provides details of key court cases on choice.

ASSERTION #8) THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY ARGUMENT: Private and parochial schools in a choice system would not be regulated by state and federal laws, and therefore would not be accountable to public authority.

Asks Boston University Professor of Education Abigail Thernstrom: "Would taxpayers have an adequate say in how their money is spent?" Claims a *New York Times* editorial, choice among both public and private schools would "undermine the accountability and morale of public schools."²³

RESPONSE:

The irony of the accountability argument is that in most cities it is the public schools, not the private schools, that are not accountable to parents or even taxpayers. The private schools, by contrast, are directly accountable to their customers. The editors of *The New York Times*, for instance, need only consider the abuses of public funds in New York City schools, which their newspaper has documented, to appreciate that limiting the use of public funds to public schools is no guarantee of accountability.

Residents of Chicago also know that government control of a school does not guarantee fairness or equity. This is why in 1989 they backed a radical overhaul of the city's schools, giving control to parents to run schools. Most private institutions constantly feel forced by competitive pressure to provide a regular accounting of expenditures and receipts, and to detail the achievements of their students.

The accountability argument is also used to advance claims that private schools, left to their own devices, will discriminate. Yet all constructive choice proposals require that schools follow legal accountability requirements and federal anti-discrimination laws.

ASSERTION #9) THE CHOICE IS EXPENSIVE ARGUMENT: There are large hidden costs associated with school choice programs. Transportation costs, for instance, would be so prohibitive as to offset benefits.

Senator Nancy Landon Kassebaum, the Kansas Republican, fears that "transportation costs alone could grow and grow, making choice programs infeasible."

RESPONSE:

Choice does not imply higher costs, even higher transportation costs for large districts. "A system of educational choice need not cost more than current educational systems, and might cost less," says Brookings' John Chubb. "If the supply of schools is allowed to respond to demand, the supply is likely to expand, with relatively small numbers of large comprehensive schools being replaced by larger numbers of small, specialized schools. This expansion could easily occur without

23 "Skimming the Cream Off Schools," *The New York Times*, July 26, 1991.

the construction or acquisition of new facilities if several schools shared a building."²⁴

Chubb's view is firmly grounded in experience. The choice program in East Harlem District 4 in New York City was created among 20 pre-existing school buildings. Today students can choose from 52 alternative schools, many of which share a building with other schools. Thus wider choice does not necessarily mean increased overhead on transportation costs. This schools-within-a-school concept would be very appropriate for rural areas where transportation costs could indeed mount if students needed to travel farther to their chosen school.

Choice plans actually may reduce transportation costs in many instances because demand might lead to new schools. And overhead administrative costs very likely would fall since, as Chubb explains, "There is every reason to believe that the administrative structure of a choice system would be less bureaucratized than today's public school systems, and look more like private educational systems, where competition compels decentralization and administrative savings."

CONCLUSION

There is ample evidence that a market-driven education system would spur improvements in the way schools operate, and thus improve education for America's children. Despite this evidence, school choice has its critics. Many are motivated by the challenge to their bureaucratic power that is posed by choice. Others, though, are motivated by misunderstandings and misplaced concerns.

Some critics worry that parents cannot, or are not equipped with the necessary information to make wise choices about their children's education. This view enormously underestimates the common sense of ordinary Americans. It also conveys the startling suggestion that today's bureaucratic schools are in the best interests of students. And to the extent that information is unavailable to parents, this has been the explicit policy of public school districts determined to cover up their failure to educate and to use money well. In New York City, for example, few parents know that of the \$6,100 allocated per child, only one-third ever reaches the classroom.

Other worries stem from the belief that some schools, particularly if private schools are included in a choice program, will cream off "profitable" students or discriminate in other ways, and may shortchange students. These worries too are baseless. Not only do schools participating in choice programs abide by non-discrimination policies, but they have a history of providing a more integrated environment and a higher caliber of education than traditional government schools.

24 John Chubb, "Educational Choice, Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Questions About Mediocrity in American Education and What Can Be Done About It." The Yankee Institute for Public Policy Studies, July 1989, p. 22

Refuting Arguments. Even though the concerns may be erroneous, they are in most instances sincerely held. Yet, when presented with the facts, most Americans can see that most of the arguments raised against school choice are spurious. Without the facts, however, Americans can be taken in by arguments like NEA President Keith Geiger's dismissive "breakfast cereal" analogy. Thus if reform based on choice is to succeed, those committed to choice, including George Bush and Education Secretary Lamar Alexander, as well as business leaders and reform organizations pressing for choice at the state and local level, must step up their efforts to explain the facts about choice. While the intellectual debate on school choice is over when it unites all ideological viewpoints, its supporters must demonstrate repeatedly that choice works and is the key to restoring a world class educational system in America.

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100 27 1998

Privatization

12th Annual Report on Privatization

98

EDUCATION

The strength of the movement toward privatization of education is reflected not only by the size and number of contracted services and choice programs in 1997, but also by the momentum of activities being carried into 1998. Court decisions, conferences, legislation, and recognition by government officials of options in education are now at the periphery of what millions of educators, parents, and children already perceive to be viable alternatives to the current educational system.

Contracting

The National Education Association (NEA), the largest teachers' union in the United States with 2.3 million members, adopted the following resolution at its recent annual conference:

The National Education Association believes that the following programs and practices are detrimental to public education and must be eliminated: privatization, performance contracting, tax credits for tuition to private and parochial schools, voucher plans (or funding formulas that have the same effect as vouchers), planned program budgeting systems (PPBS), and evaluations by private, profit-making groups.

While the NEA adopts these types of provisions and directs resources at the federal, state, and local levels to have its position implemented, school districts and institutions of higher education are turning to contracting in greater numbers, usually for noneducational services.

According to the 1997 *American School & University's* "Fifth Annual Privatization/Contract Services Survey," outsourcing is prevalent in the nation's school districts (see Table 4-3). Transportation and food service were the most likely services to be contracted out, with 40.4 percent of districts contracting out for transportation and 21.1 percent of districts contracting out for food service. According to *School Transportation News*, for the 1997-98 school year, there are 109,498 privately owned buses providing school transportation service nationwide. This makes up 31.5 percent of the combined total of district-owned and contractor-owned buses.

With tightening budgets, the increasing fiscal demands of special education and other alternative education, and growing enrollments, it is no surprise that 90 percent of school districts indicated that the primary reason to privatize services was to save money. Nearly equally important as cost savings, though, was the desire to improve operations (89 percent) (see Table 4-5).

For large, urban districts, cost savings from contracting can be especially great. A 1996 performance audit by the Ohio State Auditor suggested that the Cleveland school district should privatize its transportation system. The audit estimated that the district would save between \$9 million and \$11 million—from a \$29 million budget. Philadelphia's school district saved over \$29 million in the last two years, primarily through reducing costs in the areas of transportation, food service, and human resources through contracting and restructuring.

Looking forward, 42 percent of the school districts expected their use of contracted services to increase over the next few years. School districts that use the private sector for specialized services are finding that this option is practical and allows them to devote more time and resources to their primary responsibility of educating children.

Noneducational services are not the only services that school districts are contracting out for. Educational services continue to be an option, either in the form of specific classes or through the management of entire schools. For school districts searching for alternative ways to provide remedial education to students, particularly to those students in urban districts, contracting with education service providers is quickly becoming an accepted option, even for people traditionally opposed to these contracted arrangements.

Sylvan Learning Systems, a provider of supplemental educational services, was awarded a three-year performance-based contract to provide supplemental educational ser-

Table 4-3: Outsourcing of Noneducational Services

	None	1 to 4	5 or more
School districts	12.3%	82.5%	5.2%
Colleges	5.1%	59.8%	35.1%

Source: *American School & University*, "Fifth Annual Privatization/Contract Services Survey," 1997.

vices in eight public schools—seven elementary schools and one middle school—in the Compton (California) Unified School District. The district has contracted with Sylvan to provide math and reading instruction to 1,200 students in

two one-hour sessions per week, during and after regular school hours. The goal of the contract is to improve students' reading scores by a minimum of 3 points on a scale of 100. If the company fails to meet the goal, it must provide

additional services at no charge to the district. And if those additional services fail, the contract can be terminated. Said LaVonne Johnson, Compton's assistant superintendent of operations, "This is the first time [with any program] we have had guarantees, where, if it doesn't work, we don't pay."

Sylvan Learning Systems is also one of five private educational service providers designated by the Los Angeles Unified School District as options to aid the 100 lowest-performing schools in the district. The district has allotted each of these schools \$100,000 to contract with their choice of providers for additional remedial services, or to come up with its own alternative instructional plan. Within one week after the announcement of the plan, 75 of the 100 schools chose to bring in the private tutoring companies to provide after-school instruction, and more followed.

The Edison Project released its *Annual Report on School Performance* in December 1997. Edison is one of a handful of for-profit education management organizations (EMOs) contracting with school districts to provide full operation of schools. It currently manages 25 schools in eight states.

Edison's annual report looked at the academic performance of all of its schools, but particularly focused upon Dodge-Edison Elementary School in Wichita, Kansas, one of the few Edison schools with two full years of instruction completed. It reported that students at Dodge-Edison have gained more than 25 percentile points against national norms in reading and math achievement, as measured by the Metropolitan Achievement Tests (MAT-7). Fifth-grade students scor-

Table 4-4: Percentage of School Districts Using Selected Contracted Services

Type of service	% of districts
Transportation (busing)	40.4
Food service	21.1
Computer services	19.3
HVAC maintenance	19.3
Printing	15.8
Vending	14.0
Security	10.5
Grounds maintenance	8.8
Instructional-equipment repair	7.0
Laundry	7.0
Payroll preparation	5.3
Administrative services	3.5
Custodial services	3.5
Maintenance	1.8

Source: American School & University, "Fifth Annual Privatization/Contract Services Survey," 1997.

Table 4-5: Top Five Reasons Why School Districts Do or Do Not Privatize Services

Reason for privatizing	Percent
Save money	90.1
Improve operations	89.0
They could do a better job	70.3
Save management time	67.3
Provide better accountability	59.3
Reason for not privatizing	Percent
Threatens jobs of loyal employees	35.5
Too expensive	17.0
Union contracts make it too difficult	16.3
If they can make a profit, we can do it for less	13.2
Not necessary; we can do it just as well	10.4

Source: American School & University, "Fifth Annual Privatization/Contract Services Survey," 1997.

Fast Facts

1. By fall 1997, approximately 700 charter schools were in operation in 29 states, enrolling more than 170,000 students.
2. There are 30 to 40 for-profit companies providing home-study courses.
3. An estimated 10 percent of public-school special-education dollars are contracted out to private schools and organizations; 14 percent of public-school districts contract out for special-education programs and services.
4. About 7 percent of public-school districts contract out for at-risk programs.

ing in the top quartile nationally rose from 17 to 32 percent in reading and from 15 to 47 percent in math. The percentage of students scoring in the lowest quartile fell from 49 to 8 percent in reading and from 42 to 16 percent in math.

Charter Schools

While for-profit education management organizations continue to market themselves to traditional public schools, they have found another avenue into the education market: management of charter schools. Companies that design and manage schools are either obtaining their own charters or contracting to run schools whose charters are held by parent or community groups. The Edison Project will have 25 schools in eight states by fall 1998, and Education Alternatives Inc. is working to open up to a dozen charter schools near Phoenix over the next three years. Other companies involved in the charter-school movement include:

- Sabis Educational Systems operates a K-8 charter school in Springfield, Massachusetts, opened two schools in Chicago in fall 1997, and plans to open more in Arizona in 1998.
- Alternative Public Schools operates a charter school in Chelmsford, Massachusetts and is contracting to operate a K-8 school in Wilson, North Carolina, in 1998.
- Advantage Schools of Boston has a K-5 charter school in Jersey City, New Jersey, and opened a similar school in Phoenix this fall.
- Charter School Administrative Services operates five charter schools in Michigan.

- Excel Academies operates charter schools for at-risk students in Arizona and Michigan.

Public Vouchers

In adopting Gov. Tommy Thompson's 1998 budget, the Wisconsin legislature agreed to an expansion of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. The expansion would allow as many as 15,000 low-income children in Milwaukee to attend any private school at state expense, including religiously affiliated schools. A challenge to the expansion was filed immediately and is to be heard in the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 1998. The program currently provides approximately \$4,300 per student for about 1,500 students to attend nonsectarian private schools of their choice.

All nine members of the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) board wrote a letter supporting the fundraising efforts of the private voucher program in Milwaukee, Partners Advancing Values in Education (PAVE). The board members, regardless of their individual views on school choice, endorsed the program because of its competitive effects on district reforms. They stated: "We believe PAVE's efforts to afford disadvantaged families their first choice for

Corporate Classrooms

Company	# of Charters	States
EAI	12	AZ
Edison Proj.	12	CA, CO, MA, MI, MN
Education Develop. Corp.	9	MI
Sabis Educational Systems	7	AZ, DE, IL, MA
Advantage Schools	3	AZ, NJ, NC
Alternative Public Schools	2	MA, NC

quality education is a critical initiative—not only to help thousands of poor families but also to support MPS reforms.”

In a surprise move, three of these same board members signed a friend-of-the-court brief in support of the public voucher program, including religious schools. Also signing the brief were Mayor John Norquist and former MPS superintendent Howard Fuller.

Choice proponents continue to point to two research analyses that found improved performance by students attending private schools in the Milwaukee public voucher program, countering a study done by John Witte from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. The first analysis was from a group of researchers led by Paul Peterson of Harvard University, the second by Cecilia Rouse of Princeton University.

Both Rouse and Peterson's group found that in the first few years, students in the voucher program gained little in math and reading compared to the control group, but after four years in the program, voucher students gained between 6 and 10 percentile points on math tests scores.

In another program, 2,000 students participating in the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program were allowed to continue to attend the schools of their choice this school year. Schools in the Cleveland choice program, unlike the Milwaukee program, were not limited to nonsectarian schools.

After the program's first year, a preliminary analysis by Peterson's Harvard group found that two-thirds of parents were very satisfied with the academic quality of the school, compared to less than 30 percent of those who applied for a voucher but remained in public schools. In addition, voucher parents were also more than twice as likely to be happy with the school's discipline and class size.

Academic results, as measured by tests scores at the beginning of the year and the end of the year, showed that voucher students gained 15 percentile points in math and 5 percentile points in reading, relative to national norms.

Table 4-6: At-Risk Youth in Charter Schools & Public Schools

	Public	Hudson Charter	Federal Charter
Minorities	34.0%	49.6%	48.4%
Eligible for free/reduced lunch	36.6	40.5	33.8
LEP	6.8%	13.1%	7.0%
Special Education	10.4%	12.6%	7.4%

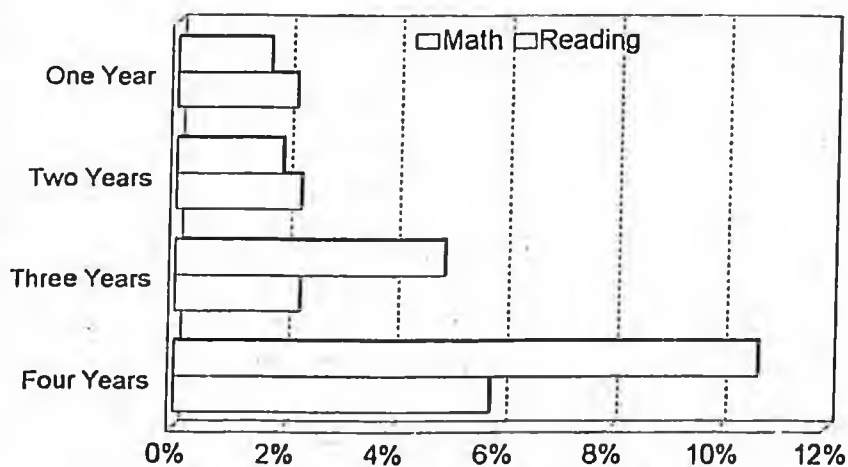
Source: Hudson Institute and U.S. Dept. of Educ.

Private Vouchers

Since 1991, at least 32 private voucher programs have sprung up around the nation to provide private-school tuition assistance for students in elementary and secondary schools, particularly inner-city students from low-income families. Approximately 14,000 students currently receive these private vouchers that enable them to attend the schools of their choice, and more than 40,000 students are on waiting lists for these same vouchers.

A recent evaluation of the PAVE private voucher program in Milwaukee found that 75 percent of PAVE graduates in the last two years went on to college or technical school.

Figure 4-2: Effect on Test Scores per Year of Attending Milwaukee's Choice Schools



Source: Program on Education Policy and Governance, Fall 1997, p. 4.

Empowering the Educational Liberty of Parents/Guardians

Good Nationwide
 Update

"*Liberty*," as protected by the Fourteenth Amendment, includes a parent's (or guardian's) Constitutional right to direct the education of their children free from unreasonable state interference. *Educational Liberty* is every parent's freedom to choose the learning community, educational philosophy and curriculum for one's children from among qualified government-run, private, or religious schools. Across our country, various legislative measures have been enacted into standing laws which currently empower such parental choice in schooling. Outlined below is a summary of those existing public policies which today honor and affirm the educational liberty of parents.

EDUCATIONAL INVESTMENT INCENTIVES

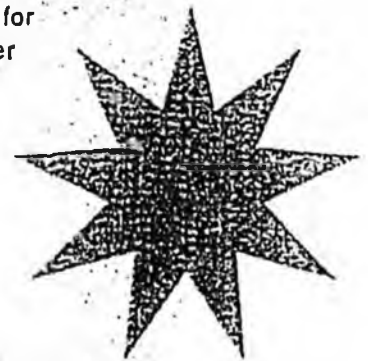
Arizona

✦ Allows taxpayers two separate state income tax credits related to K-12 schools which: (1) reduce an individual's state income taxes up to \$500 for donations made to a "school tuition organization" that, in turn, provide scholarships for students to attend private and religious schools, and (2) reduce an individual's state income taxes up to \$200 for fees paid to a public school for extracurricular activities (allows taxpayers to claim the credit against fees paid for such things as band uniforms, varsity athletic equipment and uniforms, or scientific lab materials).

✦ Donations by such charitable educational organizations to qualified nonpublic schools are to be pooled together to fund scholarships for students on a first-come, first-serve basis. The tax credit may not be used by donors who designate their contributions for the direct benefit of any of their own dependents. Contributions made by independent foundations may not limit tuition grants to students attending a specified school.

Legislative History: 1997) Arizona Legislature enacted, and Governor Symington signed, the tax credit for voluntary contributions to school tuition organization and for public school fees. Opponents tried gathering signatures to place a referendum on the ballot repealing the tax credit. Having gathered only 10,000 of the 60,000 signatures needed to place the measure on the ballot, the unions decided to file a lawsuit against the tax credit. 1998) A previous statutory exclusion was removed from the tax credit law to allow scholarships for students attending same-gender schools.

Legal Status: The tax credit was challenged in September '97 as an unconstitutional use of public funds to benefit private schools. The Arizona Supreme Court heard arguments in December '97, although no ruling has been made to date. The law took effect in January '98.



EDUCATION TAX CREDITS/DEDUCTIONS

Iowa

- Public and nonpublic school taxpayers can receive a state tuition tax credit equal to 25 percent (\$250) of the first \$1,000 spent on allowable education expenses for each dependent in accredited and approved K-12 schools.

- Allowable education expenses consist of costs tuition charges, textbooks and other instructional materials and equipment, as well as, costs related to extracurricular activities including sporting events, musical or dramatic events, speech activities, and driver's education.

Legislative History: 1987) Iowa legislature enacted a combination education tax credit/deduction law up to \$1,000, 5% of which could be applied toward tuition. The law limited beneficiaries to those with incomes of \$45,000 or less. 1996) The combination arrangement was replaced by a credit for all taxpayers (the income limitation was removed), 10% of which could be applied toward tuition. 1998) Legislation increasing and extending the tax credit was drafted and signed into law by Governor Branstad.

Legal Status: The 1987 law was challenged in Iowa Federal District Court in 1992 and upheld as not violating the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution. No legal challenges since.

Louisiana

- Provides a tax credit of \$25 against income taxes for any and all educational expenses incurred for each dependent child in kindergarten, elementary, or secondary school.

- The educational tax credit applies to all income taxpaying parent/guardians with children in elementary and secondary schools—public or private.

Legislative History: 1972) Louisiana Legislature approved tuition credit on state income tax for every child in accredited private schools only. But when the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a similar plan, the credit was never implemented. 1979) Governor Edwards proposed and signed, with the legislature's approval, the current education tax credit for both public and private school children.

Legal Status: No legal challenges.

Minnesota

- Provides tax deductions for tuition, textbooks, instructional materials, and transportation summer school and summer camps, tutoring, and personal computer hardware and educational software. The amount of the deduction is \$1,625 per child in grades K-6, and \$2,500 per child in grades 7-12.

- Provides refundable education tax credits of \$1,000 per child, capped at \$2,000 per family, for low-income families with annual incomes less than \$33,500. This refundable credit can be used for all items qualified under the deduction except tuition. Families who do not earn enough to owe taxes will get checks for the amount of credits they qualify for.

- Allows a working-family tax credit to provide households that have children, and earn \$29,000 a year or less, with an additional \$200 to \$350 credit which can be used for any purpose, including private school tuition.

Legislative History: 1955) Legislature enacted a law which allowed taxpayers to claim a \$50 deduction from gross income for certain expenses incurred in the education of their children. This law was later revised in 1976, and then again in 1978. 1982) Legislature broadened the deduction law to \$500 per child in grades K-6, and \$700 per child in grades 7-12. That deduction was later increased to \$650 per child in grades K-6, and \$1,000 per child in grades 7-12. 1997) Governor Carlson advocated and signed comprehensive education legislation which more than doubled the tax deduction and created a new refundable education tax credit for low-income families.

Legal Status: In 1983 the U.S. Supreme Court upheld as constitutional, the Minnesota statute, which provided an income tax deduction for tuition, textbooks, and transportation that benefited parents of children attending public, private, and religious schools (*Mueller v. Allen*). A legal challenge for the tax credit portion of the new law is anticipated.

OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIPS/GRANTS

Ohio

✦ Ohio's *Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program* provides reimbursement for tuition to parents/guardians who send their children to the public, private, or religious school of their choice. The program also financially helps Cleveland public school parents/guardians purchase before and after school tutoring services for their children.

✦ State awarded scholarships are limited to up to 4,000 students residing in the Cleveland City district who are enrolled in kindergarten through 4th grade. Beneficiaries are selected by lottery, with a preference for low-income children. Scholarships are worth 90% of tuition (up to \$2,500) at participating private or religious schools. No more than 50% of the children may have attended private or religious schools previously.

✦ As enacted, the *Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program* provides that each year one grade level will

be added to the eligibility rolls, up to and including 8th grade. For the first two years, the scholarship program allows Cleveland's public schools to keep 55% of state aid per pupil (approx. \$5,600) even if the student attends a private or religious school.

Legislative History: 1995) Governor Voinovich signed a two-year budget package that created the scholarship program for 2,000 K-3 students for the 1996-1997 school year. 1997) The legislature voted to expand the program through the Governor's biannual budget, to 3,000 students and to include 4th grade in its second year, and to 4,000 students and to include 5th grade in its third year.

Legal Status: July '96, Franklin County Common Pleas ruled that the legislatively approved Cleveland plan violates neither Ohio's Constitution nor the U.S. Constitution. In May '97, Ohio's Court of Appeals overturned the lower court's decision. In July '97 under appeal to Ohio's Supreme Court, the expanded Cleveland Scholarship Program was allowed to continue in operation while the appeals process proceeds.

Wisconsin

✦ Wisconsin's *Milwaukee Parental Choice Program* allows eligible students enrolled in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS)—and students attending private schools in grades K-3—to receive an equitable share of public funds to pay for the cost of education in participating elementary and secondary schools in Milwaukee including religious schools.

✦ Eligibility is limited to Milwaukee families with incomes at or below 175% of the federal poverty level. Participation is limited to 15% of enrollment in the MPS, or about 15,700 students. Students are selected by the participating schools through a lottery, except that preference may be given to siblings.

✦ The state pays the lesser of either the MPS per-student aid (roughly \$4,400) or the private/religious school's operating and debt-service cost per pupil that is related to educational programming. As payment, the state issues a check, made directly payable to the parent or guardian of a participating student, and mails it to the private/religious school to be endorsed by the parent and used by the school for expenses for that student.

The program does not restrict the uses to which private religious schools can put the state aid.

✦ MPS, through a variety of programs, gives eligible parents the choice of sending their children to a neighborhood public school, a different public school outside the district, a specialized public school, a private school, or a religious school. Under an opt-out provision, if requested by parents, students cannot be required to participate in religious activity.

Legislative History: 1989) *Milwaukee Parental Choice Program* was created for nonsectarian schools. 1995) The legislature expanded the program to include religious schools.

Legal Status: Court injunctions in 1995 prevented eligible Milwaukee students from using scholarships to enroll in religious schools. Two years later a state appeals court ruled 2-1 that the inclusion of religious schools in the scholarship program violated the Wisconsin Constitution. The appeals court upheld a ruling made earlier by a state trial court judge. On appeal, the Wisconsin Supreme Court on June 10, '98 upheld the state law allowing taxpayer funds to be used for religious school tuition. Overturning lower court decisions, the state high court said expansion of Milwaukee's program to include religious schools violates neither the U.S. nor the Wisconsin Constitution.

Educational Liberty

TUITIONING

Maine

- + State aid is provided for children to attend non-religious private schools if the district in which they reside does not have a public school.
- + "Tuitioning towns" reimburse families for their children's tuition expenses in rural school districts that do not have their own public high schools.
- + Students receive tuition—up to the average amount of public per-pupil funding—to attend public high schools in adjacent school districts or private schools.

Legislative History: (1903-1983) Parents were permitted to choose a religious school for their children. (1983) Maine state law specifically prohibited towns from paying tuition to any school that is "sectarian."

Legal Status: In July '97 four families sued alleging that Maine's law, prohibiting parents from selecting a religious school for their children, violates the U.S. Constitution's guarantee of free exercise of religion and equal protection of the laws. The State Supreme Court heard oral argument on April 10, 1998, and is expected to deliver its decision later this year.



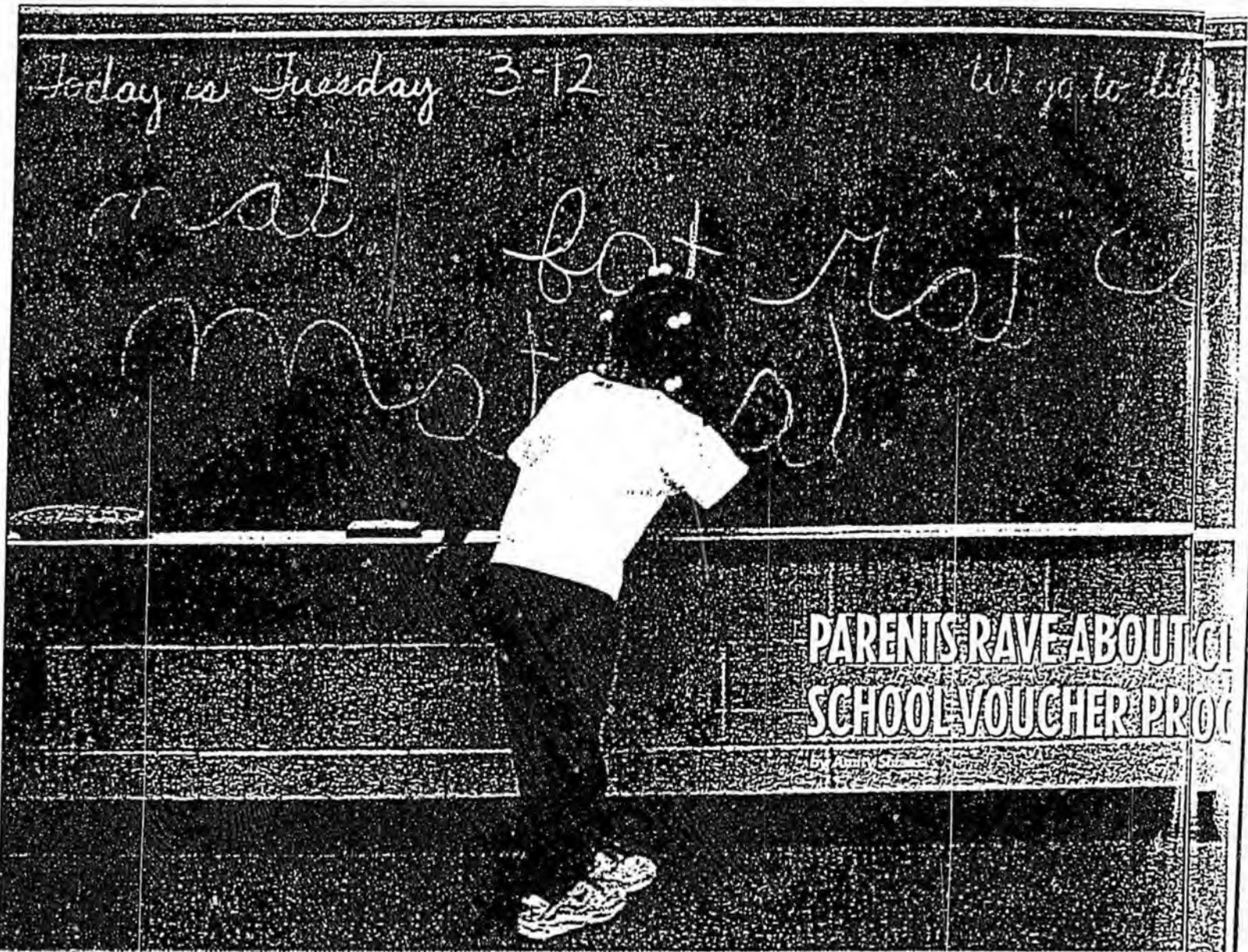
Vermont

- + Vermont, like Maine, practices "tuitioning." In order to meet the demand of families who live in towns too small to support a local public high school, the state pays the tuition expenses for children to attend any public or approved nonsectarian private school.
- + Students in these towns may attend public or approved nonsectarian secondary schools selected by their parents and located either within or outside of Vermont. Their hometown school boards pay their tuition expenses.
- + The school board of a "tuition town" must pay the full tuition charged by a public school, but private schools receive only an amount equal to the average tuition charged by the state's high school districts. If a selected private school charges more than this amount for tuition, the school district may pay the greater amount, but it is not required to do so. Parents must cover the difference, if the full tuition is not paid by the school district.

Legislative History: (1869) Vermont's tuition statute was adopted to ensure that both urban and rural school children could receive a quality secondary education and did not distinguish between religious and secular schools. (1990) The state legislature permitted school boards in small towns that do not have schools for first through sixth grades to "tuition" pupils to nonresidential, independent private schools.

Legal Status: Religious high schools were included in Vermont's tuitioning program until 1961, when the state supreme court ruled that religious schools were ineligible, under the federal Constitution. In 1994 that court unanimously reversed itself allowing a student to attend an out-of-state school. In May '96, the school board in the 200-student Chittenden school district voted to pay tuition for 15 children to attend Mount St. Joseph Catholic High School. In June '97 a superior court judge ruled that it was unconstitutional. Chittenden school board voted in July '97 to appeal the case to the Vermont Supreme Court. A decision is expected before the end of '98.

'A CHANCE TO EG



PARENTS RAVE ABOUT SCHOOL VOUCHER PROGRAM

Every morning Delvond Shakespeare buckles his two sons into the back seat of his gray Ford Taurus and drives them to a Cleveland elementary school called Our Lady of Peace.

Shakespeare loves the school. It has taught 8-year-old Landel the computer keyboard, and it is teaching 5-year-old Isaiah to read. After he drops them off, he pulls his car up beside the school so he can see his two sons joining the lines for their classes.

"That," he says, "gives me the best feeling."

Sometime in the coming weeks—

maybe by the time you read this—Ohio's state Supreme Court will decide whether it can stand to see its citizens this happy. Shakespeare's sons are among 2,962 Cleveland kids attending 56 private schools under a state voucher program that offers low-earning families up to \$2,500 a child for tuition.

America is hungry for school reform, and there are other voucher and scholarship programs operating across the country. But the two-year-old Ohio Scholarship and Tutoring Program does something daring: It allows parents to use their government vouchers at parochial schools. And two-thirds of Cleveland

voucher families, like the Shakespeares, choose to do so.

ABSOLUTELY BERSERK

One way to tell that this is a great idea is that it is driving teachers unions absolutely berserk.

They know that parochial schools have the power to lure away public schools' most precious political asset—pupils. The Ohio Education Association, the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, along with the American Civil Liberties Union, are all busy clamoring at the Ohio courts' doors, huffing about church-state

EQUIP MY CHILD'

"First thing we saw were the drug dealers. The next corner was the winos. The third corner was shooting dice. And the fourth corner, there were the young ladies"—prostitutes.

Inside the school, the children were bouncing around. The teachers paid no attention. And then there were the books.

"Hardly books at all," says Shakespeare's wife, Charlynn, recalling battered, coverless texts and photocopies. When Shakespeare went into the boys' bathroom, he met a man who tried to sell him marijuana. He remembers imagining what first grade would be like for Landel:

"He had to walk through this war zone, and once we get in the school grounds he is still in a war zone, and once inside the school he is still in a war zone. No way I was going to send him to that school."

For a year, the Shakespeares lived in an attic so they could afford to send Landel to Our Lady of Peace.

AN ANSWER TO PRAYER

The Shakespeares are fervent Baptists, and the announcement of the voucher program's first lottery came to them like the answer to a prayer. Landel got a voucher, and when Isaiah reached kindergarten, he got one too. The vouchers spared the family several thousand dollars in costs, which they saved to buy a ranch-style house with white siding—their first home.

Seated in the rec room of that home, the couple count on their fingers what the school gives their children: civility, phonics and that thing most desired by modern parents—computers. Now, says Shakespeare: "I have a chance to equip my child."

Other families recently came together to testify of their excitement at Hope Central Academy, one of two pilot nonsectarian schools created by Akron philanthropist David Brennan to give parents a place to spend their vouchers if they didn't want to use a parochial school.

"It's about time," says Christine Suma, a mother of 12. Her oldest children attend all kinds of colleges—religious, public, private—on various grants and subsidies. "So," she asks, "why can my college kids get aid and not my little kindergartner?"

The numbers bear out the parents'

enthusiasm. A study by Paul Peterson of Harvard University found that 63 percent of voucher parents were "very satisfied" with the academic quality of their schools, compared with less than 30 percent of public-school parents. Although they were often poor scorers in public school, most of the voucher children now perform at grade level or above. Next year the program is expanding to 4,000 students to meet fresh demand.

A BUREAUCRATIC MONSTER

What makes vouchers so hot here is that Cleveland schools are so rotten. The courts, the state government and even the federal government have spent four decades and many billions trying to rescue the city's schools by taking them over, rearranging them, reforming them and otherwise intervening.

Yet the work has yielded little but a swelling bureaucratic monster: Today a full 51 percent of the \$5 billion budget of Ohio schools is spent outside the classroom. Cleveland schools spend a generous \$7,000 a child, nearly double the state average, and more than twice what schools like the Hope Academies spend per child. Yet half its high schoolers drop out. Those who do graduate read, write and compute well below grade level.

Nonetheless, local voucher opponents recently circulated anti-voucher material under the ominous headline: "How a Pilot Private School Voucher Project Will Eventually Destroy Urban Education."

Voucher parents are particularly furious about the union charge that vouchers will "cream off" middle-class kids from the public school system.

"There's nobody left to cream off," snorts Fannie Lewis, a city councilwoman who marched on the state capitol to push for more school choice. Nearly every family that could leave the system did so long ago. And the voucher families are hardly prosperous—their average household income is under \$12,000.

Bert Holt, the state education official who directs the voucher program, sees vouchers as a continuation of blacks' struggle for civil rights. Years ago, she worked for the city desegregating schools. Now, for the same reasons, she works on vouchers.

Without vouchers, Holt says, Cleveland children are "locked out" of



CLEVELAND'S
PROGRAM

separation and labeling the program "unconstitutional and unfair."

To listen to the Shakespeares describe their desperate circumstances before the new program is to feel such objections melt into irrelevance. A few years ago, when Landel turned 5, Shakespeare did what many American parents with children that age do. He took a walk down to his local school, a public elementary school, to see what he was getting for his tax money.

To this day, Shakespeare gets vehement when he recalls that moment. All four corners at the intersection outside the school were occupied.

opportunity. "They suffer a terrible disenfranchisement."

Across the nation, many pastors and parishioners in black churches are beginning to agree. A recent visitors' day at Hope Central, one of the two new academies, attracted ministers and other church people from as far away as Texas and the District of Columbia. They, like many voucher parents, feel that restoring religion to schools will help many minority kids.

Listening as the pastors lovingly consider the details of their dream schools, one can't help feeling that education reform in this country has come full circle. Like Cleveland, most of the country has been busy centralizing education for 40 years. Now, many Americans are realizing they long for the days when the school mistress was hired and paid by four farmers meeting on the village green.

The nation learned a bitter lesson in the past 25 years, says Caroline Floyby, a Harvard economist who studies school finance: "If you sacrifice local control in the name of equality, you're also sacrificing quality."

PRECIOUS LOCAL CONTROL

The path by which the Cleveland program restores that precious local control is circuitous and artificial, a far cry from the simple and understandable relationship between villagers and their schoolmarm.

Voucher families like the Shakespeares pay local taxes to a public school system that their children do not use. Lawmakers in Columbus pour money into Cleveland's public schools—none of which benefits the voucher families. But Columbus also funnels an extra, special stream of money to voucher parents.



It is a Jarvik heart of school finance, but one quite precious to families like the Shakespeares. In 1996, Shakespeare met with voucher opponents.

"When I went to see them," he says, "I wanted to know why they were so against inner-city kids getting a good education." ■

This article first appeared in the Feb. 23, 1998, edition of The Wall Street Journal and is reprinted with permission. Amity Shlaes is a member of the Journal's editorial board.



A PRIVATE RESCUE MISSION

Wealthy businessmen are helping poor children out of failing public schools and into private education.

by Judith Havemann

When 12-year-old Franciscoc Blassingame completed sixth grade last year, waiting for him was a middle school in Washington, D.C., where nearly half the students lack fundamental reading skills and almost none can do basic math.

His grandmother was desperate for an alternative and eventually found one: Thanks to the largess of a Wall Street tycoon, she received \$1,200 to remove Franciscoc from the public schools entirely. He's now happily enrolled at St. Thomas More Catholic School near her home.

Franciscoc is one of 14,000 needy children across the country whose educations are being at least partly financed at any private school their parents choose.

Paying their way are wealthy individuals who have lost patience with the nation's public schools and given up on long-term incentives like offering college scholarships to those who finish high school. These philanthropists are reaching down into the nation's elementary schools and offering low-income children the opportunity to escape the public sys-

tem in the same manner that many more affluent families already do.

While Cleveland and Milwaukee are experimenting with taxpayer-financed private school vouchers and Congress is embroiled in an ongoing debate over whether to expand the idea across the country, philanthropists are moving swiftly on their own. Already, their efforts have produced private-voucher programs in 32 cities, up from just a single program at the beginning of the decade. That growth has propelled private school vouchers into a field of its own and one that has attracted \$45 million in charitable donations.

In the process, these programs have become a new lightning rod for criticism from educators and from teacher unions like the National Education Association. Such concerns, however, are not dampening the pace of growth.

SHAKING UP THE SYSTEM

In Washington, D.C., Wall Street multimillionaire Theodore J. Forstmann and John Walton, an heir to the Wal-Mart fortune, have contributed \$6 million for



1,000 scholarships for low-income children. So far, 7,573 children, or about 10 percent of students enrolled in D.C. public schools, have applied.

In Albany, N.Y., philanthropist Virginia Gilder offered a \$2,000 scholarship to every child in the city's lowest-performing school. More than 100 children, one-sixth of the student body, left.

Gilder, who over the years has used her millions to promote conservative causes, wanted to do more than simply offer a scholarship. She wanted to shake up the system so that public school educators would be forced to take notice. It worked: The school board ousted the principal, brought in nine new teachers, added two assistant principals and invested in books, equipment and teacher training after years of neglect.

In Milwaukee, a private foundation raised \$1.8 million for scholarships in the week after the courts there blocked a public voucher system from including religious schools three years ago. This year, the organization gave out 4,300 scholarships, the largest number in the country, to help get low-income children into 110 Catholic and other private schools.

Although the private vouchers are financed entirely with charitable donations, the chief complaint of those who have criticized the effort is that the donations represent a dangerous force that could hurt public schools by taking away the best students, the most motivated

parents. Some opponents also believe that private vouchers represent a thinly veiled attempt to further discredit public schools and open the door to a giveaway of taxpayer funds to parochial education.

"If these scholarships cream off the kids with the most motivated parents, how does that help education?" asked Deanna Duby, director of education policy for the People for the American Way Foundation.

Forstmann responds that his aim is to help children get a good education.

"These kids are sentenced to die," he said, "and this is only a bit of an overstatement, because without education there is no hope for them."

Forstmann argues that public schools are graduating only a small fraction of their students when a Catholic school across the street, spending only half as much money per pupil, sends 80 percent of its graduates to college. "What is going on here?" he thunders.

THE MISSING LINK

Forstmann's effort is being described within Washington, D.C., as the critical missing link for the poor.

"We need to be helping not only the children in 12th grade who have made it, but the kids in second grade who are not learning to read and will never be candidates for college," said Douglas D. Dewey, who oversees the local effort.

Called the Washington Scholarship Fund, Forstmann's project has touched a nerve ever since its details became public through a \$100,000 advertising campaign last fall. Within three months, it had attracted thousands of applicants—although not all are actually eligible because many hopeful candidates are not poor at all, and others don't realize that

they will have to pay a share of the tuition out of their own pockets.

District resident Bernice Gates said she called the Washington Scholarship fund every day for almost three years trying to get a scholarship for her 11-year-old son to go to Calvary Christian Academy in Northeast D.C.

"My 9-year-old son who was going to Calvary was so much more advanced than his older brother" in public school, she said.

Gates, herself a student at the University of the District of Columbia, said the public schools did not push her son to learn.

"If he turned his papers in, did his homework, the other kids made fun of him, ridiculed him, let him know it wasn't cool," she said.

Phyllis Hickey is another applicant. Her two children already attend St. Michael's Catholic School in Silver Spring, but at considerable personal sacrifice for the single mother with a secretary's income.

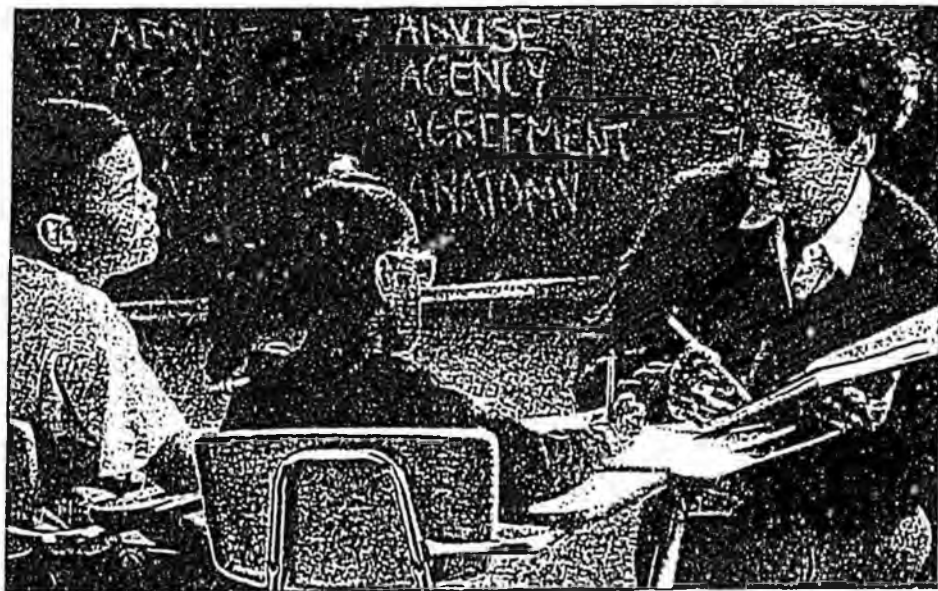
"Discipline-wise, I prefer private school," Hickey said. Her daughter had "three or four" different teachers in first grade before she removed her from the District public school system, she said.

"I am from Jamaica, and I am not used to public school," she said. "I don't like the noise, kids running up and down the hall."

Right now, Hickey is struggling to pay the tuition herself.

"If we don't win the scholarship, I will make the sacrifice, but it would help." ■

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Free at Last
Black America
Signs up for
School Choice

By Nina Shokrati

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Free at Last

Black America Signs up for School Choice

A powerful grass-roots movement is slowly gathering force that may transform the politics of American education. Its human face is not white but black; its resources few but its determination strong. And its goal is freedom. Although most black political leaders still actively oppose vouchers and charter schools, their constituents are growing increasingly angry at the public schools' disastrous record of teaching black children. As a result, black parents, pastors, local officials, and civil-rights leaders are beginning to embrace school vouchers, charter schools, and other reforms that offer alternatives to dismal public schools.

These African Americans believe that academic achievement is the key to their economic independence. They want schools that involve them in their children's education while imposing high standards and strict discipline, and they reject the notion that poverty somehow renders parents less interested in their children's academic well-being. As their numbers swell, teachers unions will find it increasingly difficult to hold back reforms that offer black children a better chance.

This new movement is already spreading throughout the country. In Cleveland, African Americans like councilwoman Fannie Lewis, school principals Lydia Harris and Sister Hasina Renee, and school-board member Genevieve

By Nina Shokraii

Mitchell led the fight for a new state law that provides vouchers this fall for 2,000 low-income children. Lewis, Harris, Renee, and Mitchell vigorously supported Republican governor George Voinovich as he moved his voucher proposal through the state legislature. Lewis recruited 300 citizens in her neighborhood of Hough, the site of race riots in 1968, to travel to Columbus to lobby for the scholarship program. Last fall, when the governor's staff organized a press conference to announce the signing of the bill, jubilant black students and their parents packed the hallways and aisles.

In fact, support for vouchers in Cleveland was so strong that nearly 6,300 students, almost all of them black, applied for only 2,000 slots, which were filled by lottery. By mid-September of this year, 1,410 of the students had enrolled in a religious school. Councilwoman Lewis, a mother and 46-year Cleveland resident, attributes this flight to public schools' dismal educational record and indifference to parents. "The quality of public schools in Hough is poor," she says. "The roofs leak and the schools sometimes lack books, chairs, and other materials. Of the more than \$7,000 spent on each child in the Cleveland public schools, only a fraction goes to classroom education." Thanks to vouchers, this fall Lewis was



able to open her own community school, the Hough-Brooks Academy for Higher Learning—a nonsectarian school run by a community board with a curriculum emphasizing the arts and cultural awareness. Lewis hopes this will “force school officials to pay more attention to parents’ concerns and to provide safer and better schools.”

In Milwaukee, as Dan McGroarty has shown in his new book, *Break These Chains*, blacks have been the principal supporters of two Wisconsin voucher programs. “The battle for Parental Choice,” McGroarty writes, “began in the church basements and meeting halls of Milwaukee’s Near North Side,” a poor neighborhood where only 48 percent of adults hold a job. “From the start, the Milwaukee proponents’ language was appropriated from the civil-rights movement. Their rhetoric was more redolent of Martin Luther King Jr. than the free-market pronouncements favored by conservative voucher proponents.”

The engineer of Milwaukee’s first voucher plan, which was limited to nonsectarian schools, was Annette “Polly” Williams, a black Democratic state representative from the Near North Side. Having fought the school system a dozen years earlier for busing her daughter to a bad public school, Williams was familiar with the Milwaukee education establishment’s indifference to the needs of low-income black families. “The system is the system. It doesn’t care. It doesn’t feel,” Williams told McGroarty. “The way I saw it, [it] is

preparing our children for slavery. Look at the situation: Drop out by 10th grade, get into the street life. When you should be walking across the stage getting a diploma, you’re standing in front of a judge wearing chains.”

Committed to breaking up the system for the sake of the young black children in her community, Williams gradually mobilized her army of mothers and grandmothers, most of whom were on welfare, and all of whom were determined to “do right by their children.” Aware of her army’s powerful impact on lawmakers, she convinced the chairman of the state assembly’s urban-education committee to hold a public hearing on her school-choice plan on the morning of February 23, 1990. The three-hour-long hearing, which attracted 200 low-income minority parents and children, prompted the committee to approve her proposal. Soon thereafter, it passed the assembly and the senate and was signed into law by Republican governor Tommy Thompson.

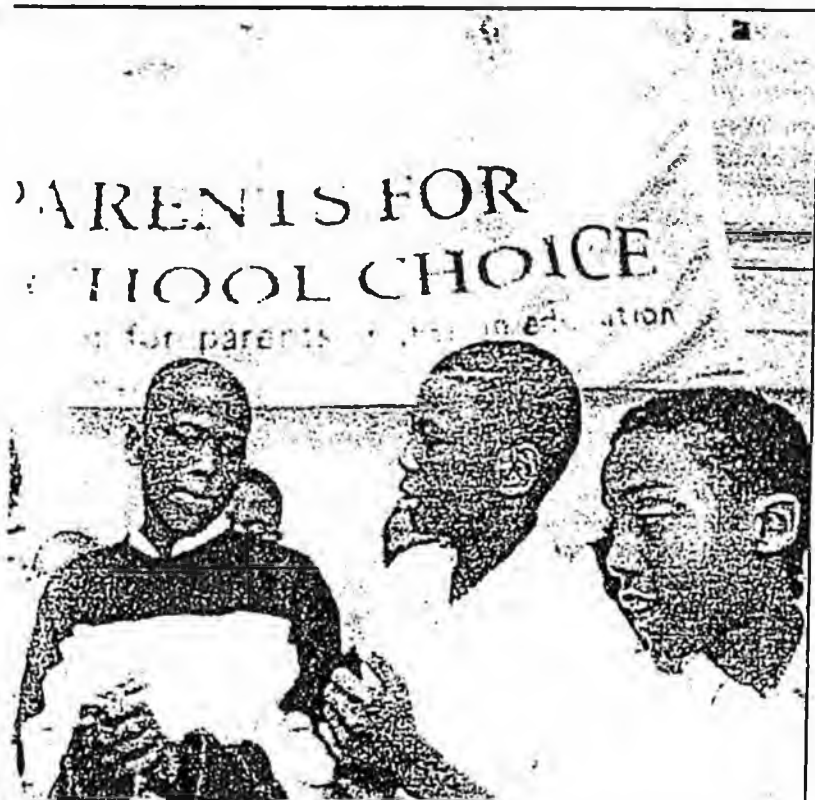
Throughout the endeavor, only one local newspaper captured Williams’s crusade in a concise and accurate way: *Community Journal*, whose editor, Mikel Holt, is yet another fan of school choice. As for Milwaukee’s mainstream dailies, McGroarty notes, “they attacked Williams repeatedly. One went as far as portraying her in a cartoon as a stick-up artist pointing a pistol at a public-school teacher.”

Having survived a grueling round of constitutional scrutiny, the program generated so much support that in September 1994, 750 mostly low-income blacks rallied for its expansion. This time, a new generation of African-American educators joined Williams in the battle. They included Zakiya Courtney, then principal of the Urban Day School and now the director of a grass-roots group called Parents for School Choice; Brother Bob Smith, the principal of the outstanding inner-city school Messmer High; and Howard Fuller, then superintendent of Milwaukee public schools. Last year, the school board and the teachers unions mailed 3,000 videotapes attacking Fuller’s stance on choice, calling it an attempt to scale back or completely cut educational programs. The unions succeeded in establishing an anti-reform majority on the board of education, which prompted Fuller’s resignation.

But according to a February 1995 report by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, 95 percent of African Americans polled in Milwaukee support school choice, and 70 percent believe that students in private and religious schools get a better education than students in the Milwaukee public schools. Finally ceding to their constituents’ demands, the Wisconsin legislature last year expanded the program to include religious schools, increased the number of vouchers

Photo by Andy Meris

They have a dream: Milwaukee children and parents rally for school choice while the Wisconsin Supreme Court hears a challenge to vouchers.



from 1,500 to 15,000, and eliminated restrictions on the number of choice students in participating schools. In response, voucher opponents immediately and successfully sought an injunction from the courts and have, so far, blocked the plan's implementation.

The parents, however, are equally determined. In February 1996, for instance, Courtney filled nine buses with 500 mostly black parents and children to attend a rally at the capitol, in Madison. There they voiced their enthusiasm for the newly enacted plan, which was being challenged in the Wisconsin Supreme Court. After a tie vote, the court sent the case back to trial court, where Dane County Circuit Judge Paul Higginbotham refused to lift the injunction blocking religious schools' participation in the program. "The state cannot do indirectly what it can't do directly," he said.

Higginbotham did allow the state to issue up to 15,000 vouchers for private nonreligious schools. But Courtney and Milwaukee's parents eagerly await the day the court will grant them complete authority over the upbringing of their children—including the freedom to send them to a religious school. Meanwhile, 4,500 low-income Milwaukee students are going to religious schools this year with privately financed vouchers—thanks to the generosity of the Bradley Foundation and 1,040 private donors who gave more than \$4 million to help the students hurt by Higginbotham's decision.

In Florida, T. Willard Fair, the president and chief executive officer of the liberal Urban League of Miami, and the Reverend R.B. Holmes, a black Baptist pastor from Tallahassee, are the principal supporters of a new charter school law enacted in April. The Florida plan allows any creative educator to open a school, free of the red tape that binds most public schools (such as teacher certification and state-imposed standards). Fair formed a partnership with Jeb Bush, the conservative Republican candidate for governor in 1994, to advance the legislation. Fair described public schools as "too regulated, entrenched in bureaucracy, with overcrowded classrooms, out-of-control children, and teachers who are not held accountable due to too much union interference." And so he created Florida's first charter school, whose student body is almost entirely low-income and African-American.

Similarly, Holmes opened the C.K. Steele-Leroy Collins charter middle school, with a student body that is 75 percent black. His school is modeled after a Christian academy he created five years ago, which he describes as a school that "all people, [whether] black, white, rich, or poor want to send their kids to." To Holmes, charter schools mean "freedom to teach reading, writing, arith-

metic, respect, responsibility, and entrepreneurship all in one—without the bureaucratic strings attached." A 1995 survey by the Foundation for Florida's Future found that Florida's black citizens supported school choice and charter schools by 68 percent and 63 percent, respectively.

In California, voucher supporters include Anyam Palmer, the principal of the Afrocentric Marcus Garvey School in South Central Los Angeles, who views "the present school system [as] the vehicle that puts us on welfare, in prison, and leaves us illiterate. . . . School choice is the only way out of this vicious cycle." "Public education is not working for most minority citizens in the inner city," says Bishop George D. McKinney Jr. of San Diego, who has set up a school at St. Stephen's Church of God in Christ. Testifying for vouchers last year before the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth, and Families, McKinney faulted public schools for "low expectations . . . of minority students" and "the systematic tracking of minority students toward nonacademic programs." A recent survey of South Central's residents by the Center for the Study of Popular Culture found that 77 percent of minorities supported vouchers.

Californians may not win the right to vouchers in the near future, but an innovative charter-school law, passed in 1992, offers blacks a close alternative. According to the Hudson Institute, the California plan gives "charter petitioners the right to seek significant autonomy from local board control [and provides] a blanket waiver from most state laws and regulations." Jonathan Williams, the black principal of the Accelerated School, in South Central Los Angeles, says that a charter-school system offers "more freedom, choice, and responsibility." Accelerated's student body comprises 50 percent blacks and 50 percent Hispanics; a majority of students belong to low or low-moderate income groups.

Williams believes charter schools are the solution to the educational crisis. "With charters you can keep the system public and free, while instilling stronger accountability," he contends. Without union pressure and

School Choice Leaders

Class of 1996



State Legislator
Polly Williams

handouts, "I feel like a professional instead of a wage earner." Williams's school sits in a gang-infested neighborhood. "It is not unusual for us to hear gun fights, and notice the residues of drug abuse around the school grounds," he says. But with a low student-to-teacher ratio, lots of parental involvement, and zero tolerance toward violence and drugs, Williams avoids the problems that incapacitate many public schools every year.

In Michigan, the TEACH Michigan Education Fund reports that black educators have launched one out of every three Michigan charter schools. According to Bryan Taylor, the fund's executive director, "5,000 applicants applied for 330 spots when the first charter school came to Detroit; African-American educators led most of them." In Michigan, where charter schools are called "public-school academies," the law allows any individual or group to develop a charter and to seek sponsorship from a variety of entities such as the board of a state public university. The program's key supporters include black leaders like the Reverend Ned Adams Jr., an official of the Council of Baptist Pastors, which assists member churches in Detroit interested in starting charter schools; and Larry Patrick, the former president of the Detroit Board of Education and an avid advocate "for parents having as many choices as possible for the education of their children."

Another black charter-school fan is Freya Rivers. The frustrated former Lansing public-school teacher now serves as district superintendent, full-time language-arts teacher, and part-time janitor and nurse. Her school, the Sanfoka Shule charter school in Lansing, targets at-risk elementary school students. In an article for the *Wall Street Journal* earlier this year, she wrote, "I have two students who were [in special education in traditional Lansing public schools]. They couldn't even write their names or recognize any words...."

I use the same methods to teach them that I use with the other students. Now both of them are writing sentences." In fact, 85 percent of the first- and second-graders Sanfoka received from Lansing public schools were illiterate; now all are able to read.

In Texas, ardent African-American voucher promoters include Democratic state representative Glenn Lewis, the former general counsel for the Tarrant County chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and his liberal legislative colleague Ron Wilson. Fueled by support from a growing number of black churches, including the Reverend Raymond Bryant's Union Center African Methodist Episcopal Church, in Conroe, the leaders foresee a strong chance to enact school choice in their state next year. A 1995 Texas Poll showed black support for vouchers at 59 percent, and a growing number of church groups, ministers, and community groups also believe vouchers are the next step. Says Michael Williams, a black conservative and former assistant education secretary in the Bush administration, "The [African-American] community looks to choice as the vehicle to reclaim control over the learning of the next generation of African-American scholars and leaders." Allan Parker, the president of the Texas Justice Foundation, whose group has convened a citizens' task force to investigate why Texas minority students fare worse than whites on the state's achievement tests, works closely with these leaders in promoting school choice.

All of these low-income parents and community leaders seek the same opportunities for their children that middle- and upper-income black parents enjoy. "I don't think African-American parents are any different than other parents," says Michigan's Larry Patrick. "All they want is quality education for their children. Wealthy parents, like the president, can make this choice; poor ones cannot. . . . Most African-American leaders [seem to] practice choice in their own lives and support [it] on a personal level." Denis Doyle, a senior fellow with The Heritage Foundation, notes that black teachers are twice as likely as other black parents to send their children to a private school, and 30 percent of Congressional Black Caucus members with children send their children to private schools. Meanwhile, only 4 percent of blacks possess the means to exercise this option.

Perhaps this is why a poll by the left-leaning Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies in April 1996 reveals that African Americans favor school choice more strongly than the general population. Support registers highest among women (51 percent), parents (61 per-



School Principal
Brother Bob Smith



Community Activist
Zakiya Courtney



City Councilwoman
Fannie Lewis



At Milwaukee's Holy Redeemer Academy, low-income black parents and community leaders seek the same opportunities that middle- and upper-income black parents enjoy.

cent), and younger African Americans (64 percent among 18- to 25-year-olds, 61 percent among 26- to 35-year-olds). These numbers are particularly telling when you consider that only 18 percent of blacks support the devolving of power from the federal government to the state and local levels. Says Brian Jones, the president of the Center for New Black Leadership, they reflect "a stalwart trend towards reclaiming the power of parents."

With respect to charter schools, the Hudson Institute's Educational Excellence Network recently reported similar positive conclusions. The report finds a high level of satisfaction with charter schools among most students, and cites the schools' clear academic expectations, safety, individualized instruction, committed teachers, and familial atmosphere. Hudson found that 63 percent of the students attending charter schools nationwide belong to a racial minority—including 19 percent who are African-American—and that 55 percent are poor.

What drives African Americans toward choice and charter schools? Standards, discipline, and parental involvement are the three core reasons.

Joyce Watkins, a resident of Chicago's West Side and a mother of seven, wants higher academic standards and eagerly hopes her city will adopt some form of school choice soon. "Where I'm from," she says, "public education offers leftovers. It means getting lost in the cracks." What frustrates Watkins the most is public-school teachers' lack of interest in her children's academic achievement. "They come home without homework sometimes," she laments. "The quality of education is really low. . . . I often wonder if teachers and school counselors even know my

children's names, since they are too busy disciplining unruly students." Watkins would prefer sending her children to Providence St. Mel, a Catholic school in her neighborhood, even though she belongs to a different Christian denomination. "If they gave us more choices, more kids would go to school, stay in school, and graduate to college. . . . You would also see the crime rate go down because the kids would be in class, not on the streets. . . . That's where the opportunity lies."

Gloria Grayson, a mother in Milwaukee whose two daughters now attend a private school, abhors the absence of strict disciplinary guidelines in public schools. "They were not learning. Classes were large and pupil-to-teacher ratios were high," she says. "The children were afraid and could not concentrate because they had to deal with their undisciplined peers rather than listen and learn in class. Teachers were not able or did not try to maintain adequate control over their classes. As a result, classes progressed slowly. Teachers and administrators had nothing but excuses for the poor education my children were receiving. The . . . schools are filled with drugs and violence. They graduate drug dealers. At best, children leave those schools not with a diploma, but with battle scars."

Grayson and Watkins join other parents and educators in blaming the education system's lack of interest in their concerns. After all, as Cleveland councilwoman Fannie Lewis notes, "parents have little influence over education policy. The school board often will go into executive session to shut out community attendance at its meetings." Texas legislator Glenn Lewis, whose constituents show their anger by picketing out-

Photo by Mark Hoffman

side school-board meetings, concurs. He considers choice a means to provide parents with more leverage over the school boards and "an opportunity to improve public schools . . . because so long as they are guaranteed our parents' dollars, they have no incentives to listen." According to a poll by the Center for Education Reform, 61 percent of blacks say "the quality of their public school could be improved a great deal," compared with 44 percent of the general population.

To find those key ingredients of a good education, black parents often gravitate towards religious education. As Fannie Lewis observes, "in most instances [the parents'] decisions have nothing to do with religion. They want their children in a safe environment with strong disciplinary standards where they can get a good education." Sectarian schools constitute 85 percent of all private schools; of that share, more than half are Catholic. Others include religious schools run by Baptists, Lutherans, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Muslims. These schools, especially in urban areas, enroll growing numbers of ethnic minority students, according to the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). NCEA also reports that in the last 20 years, the minority percentages have more than doubled in all Catholic schools, from 10.8 percent in 1970-71 to 23.5 percent in 1992-93.

Bob Smith, the veteran superintendent of Milwaukee's Messmer High School, a Catholic school, attests to these facts. "Catholic schools have been known for high-quality education since the black migration from the South. For many years, next to public schools, they were the only safe haven for blacks in the segregation era." He proudly cites the St. Benedict the Moor School, known today as the Urban Day School, as an example. The black all-male boarding school boasts a number of high-profile alumni, including Dizzy Gillespie, the jazz musician; Harold Washington, the first black mayor of Chicago; and Redd Foxx, the comedian and television star. Catholic schools are popular with parents, Smith says, because they are "safe havens against drugs, violence, and uncaring teachers."

A forthcoming study in the *Journal of Labor Economics* supports the believers in religious schooling by revealing that those most likely to benefit from a Catholic-school education are minorities, many of whom are not Catholic, who attend big-city schools. The paper's author, University of Chicago economist Derek Neal, observes that "in the urban minority sample, Catholic schooling dramatically increases the probability of high school graduation . . . [and increases] college graduation rates." According to Neal, that translates into future wage gains. Among the study's sample of urban blacks and

Hispanics, the probability of graduating from high school rises from 62 percent to at least 88 percent when the public-school students are placed in a Catholic secondary school. "For urban whites," he continues, "the effects are . . . always smaller in magnitude. In fact, [their] estimated wage gain from Catholic schooling is not statistically different." Neal concludes that "urban minority students benefit most from access to Catholic schools because their local public-school alternatives are poor."

Perhaps this explains why New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani recently urged educators to use the city's Catholic schools as a "guide" to reforms. He noted in a *Wall Street Journal* article in 1995 that the city's Catholic and public schools enroll about the same proportion of students with multiple risk factors, but that Catholic schools have a dropout rate of 0.1 percent, compared with 18 percent in the public schools. Giuliani also observed that, despite popular belief, Catholic schools have expulsion rates of only 2 percent. The mayor has recently proposed a measure allowing students performing in the bottom 5 percent to attend religious schools.

Furthermore, a recent report by Jay Greene of the University of Houston and Paul Peterson of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government fortifies the supporters of choice. This study demonstrates, for the first time, that students participating in the Milwaukee choice experiment, 70 percent of whom are African American, made major academic improvements compared with a control group in public schools. In fact, after three years, the gap be-



standards, discipline, and parental involvement are pulling black parents toward school choice.

tween the test scores of whites and minorities narrowed by 33 to 50 percent.

Despite the growing black support for vouchers, the civil-rights establishment and most black leaders in Congress and state legislatures remain steadfastly opposed. Their explanations range from fears of losing their best students to private schools (so-called creaming) and segregation to concerns that private schools will soak up public funds. Jessica Butler, a spokesperson for the Greater Harrisburg branch of the NAACP, exclaims "tuition vouchers are just the latest scheme for abandoning our public schools." Michael Myers, the president and executive director of the New York Civil Rights Coalition, says, "School choice is a gimmick. There is no such

thing as school choice for children who don't have a choice," since private schools get to select the types of students they like.

Militant opposition to choice may also stem from the influence of large, monied teachers unions, which see any choice outside the public schools as a threat to their monopoly. Teachers unions adamantly opposed a small school-choice plan tagged to Congress's District of Columbia appropriations bill last fall. After it passed overwhelmingly in the House of Representatives, the plan died in the Senate, despite the support of local leaders like Franklin Smith, the city's schools superintendent, and Mayor Marion Barry. Throughout the proceedings, District of Columbia delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton and the Congressional Black Caucus sided with the unions and refused to endorse school choice for the city's neediest children. Explaining her reasons for opposing the modest school choice proposal, Norton told the *Washington Post* on November 3, 1995, "It's not about money; it's about the strong feeling in the District that District schools are where most of the children are going to be, so we need to spend money fixing up our schools."

"School choice creams the public schools of their best students, and robs them of their much needed funds for educating the needy kids left behind," explains Daniel E. Katz, legal counsel for the Washington office of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). "Choice also raises the specter of segregation." But as Cleveland's Lydia Harris, principal of one of the nation's best private schools, can attest, this description is inaccurate. In a recent article in *World* magazine, she writes, "There's no cream on my crop until we put it there. It's a myth that we take discipline problems and throw them out of school. It's the other way around. I get the kids the public schools can't handle." And she does all this at a per-pupil cost one-seventh that of Cleveland public schools.

"Choice is just a subterfuge for segregation, like it was in the South," says Felmers Chaney, the head of the Milwaukee NAACP, which joined the lawsuit against the initial Milwaukee school-choice plan as lead plaintiff. "Taken as a whole, expanded [school choice] will deny African Americans equal educational opportunity," asserted Chaney in a recent brief against the expanded Milwaukee school-choice plan. To many of its black critics, the NAACP seems more concerned with integration than with quality education for black children. Even so, opponents of vouchers need only examine the work of the late James Coleman, of the University of Chicago, which shows not only that poor black youngsters fare better in religious schools than

in public schools, but also that a child is more likely to attend school with a child of another race in the private sector than in the public sector. As for the Milwaukee plan, the NAACP ought to take a look at the high level of integration in Milwaukee private schools in comparison to its public schools.

Some critics argue that the education establishment opposes school choice for a very basic reason: self-preservation. "Perhaps one of the strongest reasons why the civil-rights establishment opposes choice is economic," says Brian Jones. "They strongly feel that competition and privatization will leave them out in the cold." Public schools employ a large portion of the African-American professional community; some of them may view school choice and charter schools as programs designed to rob them of tenured jobs. To convince public-school employees that market forces will provide jobs for the best teachers and administrators from these public schools is next to impossible. Of course, as

School choice and charter schools are becoming the civil-rights movement of the 1990s.

Milwaukee's Zakiya Courtney points, the number of kids in the school system won't shrink. "This won't impact the teachers," she says. "It will only affect the pencil pushers."

Will saving jobs justify depriving innocent children of a quality education? To answer this question, these leaders ought to talk to students and their parents, visit the neighborhood private schools these children could go to, and perform a cost-benefit analysis of the savings associated with sending children to these schools. "Once you do this, you can't help but become a believer in school choice," says Messmer's Smith.

School choice is the civil-rights movement of the 1990s. Says Milwaukee's Polly Williams, "I am one of those people who is supposed to be very stupid because I am black, I live in the inner city, I am poor, and I raised my children in a single parent home. Well, those are lies. The only thing different about us is that we have been deprived of resources and access. When you empower parents like me, there is a major difference. We become responsible for our own lives. . . . We want to be empowered, and that is what the choice program has done."

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POLICY REVIEW

THE JOURNAL OF AMERICAN CITIZENSHIP

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Three Cheers
for
Three Strikes
by Dan Lungren



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What GOP Freshmen Have Learned

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Wall St Journal **Choice Goes Mainstream**

9/29/98
PAZZ

The effort to bring choice to American education hit a milestone yesterday. A group of 35 business and political leaders announced in Washington a plan to distribute \$172 million in scholarships to enable more than 35,000 children to attend schools of their choice. Rather than merely wait for public schools to improve, these civic leaders have decided the time has come to shake up the education system by encouraging competitive forces.

The Children's Scholarship Fund (reachable at 800-805-KIDS) is the brainchild of Ted Forstmann, the chairman of Gulfstream Aerospace, and John Walton, a director of Wal-Mart Stores. Three months ago, the two men committed \$100 million to set up scholarship programs in 38 cities. Since then, they have raised an additional \$72 million from like-minded reformers. They have also recruited a stellar and diverse Board of Directors.

It includes civil-rights leaders such as Martin Luther King III and the Rev. Floyd Flake. Former Democratic Cabinet officials Henry Cisneros and Joe Califano have signed on, as has Miami Heat coach Pat Riley and Roger Staubach. It also has Democratic Senators Daniel Patrick Moynihan, John Breaux and former Senator Sam Nunn. Business leaders such as Dick DeVos of Amway, James Kimsley of America Online, Peter Lynch of Fidelity, Julian Robertson and Stedman Graham are on board. The board also includes such universally respected figures as Barbara Bush and Colin Powell.

Mr. Forstmann says this breadth of support demonstrates "the agreement many people have that we need equal opportunity and a competitive envi-

ronment in education." The need for competition was brought home to him during his involvement with the Big Brother program. He found that while only 30% of students in public schools went to college, more than 90% of those from parochial schools did. Nor were the two groups of students radically different. Nearly nine out of 10 New York City parochial school students were minorities and more than 60% came from single-parent households.

Mr. Forstmann believes public education can be strengthened in much the same way that competition has improved consumer products. He notes that any system that can enforce a 90% market share has overly monopolistic characteristics. "We have thousands of bureaucrats worrying about the harm private monopolies do," he says. "But how many people worry about the harmful effects that a public school monopoly can have?"

The answer could be found in last week's record attendance at the annual Washington meeting of CEO America, the umbrella group that sponsors scholarship programs supported by private donations in more than 40 cities. Organizers clearly feel that the political zeitgeist has shifted toward choice, a move symbolized by the fact that a National Education Association vice president monitored the conference.

Only a few years ago, school choice was considered a radical concept embraced by politicians at their peril. That's changing, but it's a sign of the times that a group of mostly private citizens such as Mr. Forstmann and Mr. Walton have assembled are so far ahead of the curve than either the politicians or the education establishment.

STRONG SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL CHOICE

A telephone survey commissioned by the Center for Education Reform asked: "How much in favor are you of allowing poor parents to be given the tax dollars allotted for their child's education and permitting them to use those dollars in the form of a scholarship to attend a private, public or parochial school of their choosing?"

	All	Black	White	Other	Dem.	Rep.	Ind.	No children	Children in school	Children not in school
Strongly or somewhat in favor	73%	90%	71%	78%	77%	67%	77%	68%	84%	82%
Somewhat or strongly against	23%	7%	26%	14%	21%	28%	21%	28%	14%	16%

Source: Center for Education Reform/International Communications Research

The Washington Times

New poll finds public support for education vouchers for poor

By Carol Innerst
 THE WASHINGTON TIMES

A new national poll conducted for the Center for Education Reform finds strong public support for tax-funded vouchers to allow the poor to send their children to the private, public or parochial school of their choice.

The results, released yesterday, "are dramatic and challenge recent surveys which have purported to show public opposition to reform," said CER President Jeanne Allen. "The questions were clear and unambiguous. No negative buzzwords, no skewed phrasing, no leading inferences, just straight-up questions that brought straight-up answers."

Among the most notable findings of the Survey of Americans' Attitudes Toward Education and School Reform:

- Seventy percent of the public supports policies to help children in failing schools attend a public, private or parochial school of their parents' choosing.

- Seventy percent of the public supports giving poor parents tax dollars to send their children to a private, public or parochial school.

The CER telephone survey of 1,017 individuals, conducted by International Communications Research of Media, Pa., confirms data released earlier this year by the Public Agenda Foundation.

The findings challenge the results of recent National Education Association and Phi Delta Kappa-Gallup polls that showed a majority of the public still opposes government-funded vouchers for private schools.

Parents with children in public schools split evenly, 49 percent to 49 percent, on the government-funded voucher question in the PDK-Gallup poll.

On the CER poll, 82 percent of parents with school-age children favor vouchers funded by the government. The CER poll did not ask whether the children were in public or private schools.

Support for government-funded vouchers was strongest among

blacks (90 percent), Democrats and Independents (77 percent each) and parents with children not in school (84 percent).

The NEA and Phi Delta Kappa-Gallup polls also showed support for a federal role in education.

Other poll highlights:

- Sixty-one percent of respondents favor creating charter schools. Charter schools are public schools started by teachers, parents or community groups. They are freed from some governmental regulations other than those affecting health, safety and discrimination.

- Forty-eight percent perceive teachers unions to be supportive of educational excellence and 35 percent see them as an obstacle to reform.

- Ninety-three percent say the quality of their public school could be "a great deal" or "somewhat" improved.

- Sixty-one percent believe that teachers should be judged and compensated on student performance.

Choice Is a Panacea

John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe

For America's public schools, the last decade has been the worst of times and the best of times. Never before have the public schools been subjected to such savage criticism for failing to meet the nation's educational needs — yet never before have governments been so aggressively dedicated to studying the schools' problems and finding the resources for solving them.

The signs of poor performance were there for all to see during the 1970s. Test scores headed downward year after year. Large numbers of teenagers continued to drop out of school. Drugs and violence poisoned the learning environment. In math and science, two areas crucial to the nation's success in the world economy, American students fell far behind their counterparts in virtually every other industrialized country. Something was clearly wrong.

During the 1980s a growing sense of crisis fueled a powerful movement for educational change, and the nation's political institutions responded with aggressive reforms. State after state increased spending on schools, imposed tougher requirements, introduced more rigorous testing, and strengthened teacher certification and training. And, as the decade came to an end, creative experiments of various forms — from school-based management to magnet schools — were being launched around the nation.

*John E. Chubb, a senior fellow in the Brookings Governmental Studies program, and Terry M. Moe, professor of political science at Stanford University and a former Brookings senior fellow, are the authors of *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, an analysis of 500 public and private high schools based on information gathered from more than 20,000 students, teachers, and principals, the most comprehensive data set on high schools ever assembled. This article is excerpted from the conclusion to that book.*

We think these reforms are destined to fail. They simply do not get to the root of the problem. The fundamental causes of poor academic performance are not to be found in the schools, but rather in the institutions by which the schools have traditionally been governed. Reformers fail by automatically relying on these institutions to solve the problem — when the institutions are the problem.

The key to better schools, therefore, is institutional reform. What we propose is a new system of public education that eliminates most political and bureaucratic control over the schools and relies instead on indirect control through markets and parental choice. These new institutions naturally function to promote and nurture the kinds of effective schools that reformers have wanted all along.

Schools and Institutions

Three basic questions lie at the heart of our analysis. What is the relationship between school organization and student achievement? What are the conditions that promote or inhibit desirable forms of organization? And how are these conditions affected by their institutional settings?

Our perspective on school organization and student achievement is in agreement with the most basic claims and findings of the "effective schools" literature, which served as the analytical base of the education reform movement throughout the 1980s. We believe, as most others do, that how much students learn is not determined simply by their aptitude or family background — although, as we show, these are certainly influential — but also by how effectively schools are organized. By our estimates, the typical high school student tends to learn considerably more, comparable to at least an extra year's worth of study, when he or she attends a high school that is effectively organized rather than one that is not.

Generally speaking, effective schools — be they public or private — have the kinds of organizational characteristics that the mainstream literature would lead one to expect: strong leadership, clear and ambitious goals, strong academic programs, teacher professionalism, shared influence, and staff harmony, among other things. These are best understood as integral parts of a coherent syndrome of organization. When this syndrome is viewed as a functioning whole, moreover, it seems to capture the essential features of what people normally mean by a team — principals and teachers working together, cooperatively and informally, in pursuit of a common mission.

How do these kinds of schools develop and take root? Here again, our own perspective dovetails with a central theme of educational analysis and criticism: the dysfunctions of bureaucracy, the value of autonomy, and the inherent tension between the two in American public education. Bureaucracy vitiates the most basic requirements of effective organization. It imposes goals, structures, and requirements that tell principals and teachers what to do and how to do it — denying them not only the discretion they need to exercise their expertise and professional judgment but also the flexibility they need to develop and operate as teams. The key to effective education rests with unleashing the productive potential already present in

the schools and their personnel. It rests with granting them the autonomy to do what they do best. As our study of American high schools documents, the freer schools are from external control the more likely they are to have effective organizations.

Only at this late stage of the game do we begin to part company with the mainstream. While most observers can agree that the public schools have become too bureaucratic and would benefit from substantial grants of autonomy, it is also the standard view that this transformation can be achieved within the prevailing framework of democratic control. The implicit assumption is that, although political institutions have acted in the past to bureaucratize, they can now be counted upon to reverse course,

grant the schools autonomy, and support and nurture this new population of autonomous schools. Such an assumption, however, is not based on a systematic understanding of how these institutions operate and what their consequences are for schools.

Political Institutions

Democratic governance of the schools is built around the imposition of higher-order values through public authority. As long as that authority exists and is available for use, public officials will come under intense pressure from social groups of all political stripes to use it. And when they do use it, they cannot blithely assume that their favored policies will be faithfully implemented by the heterogeneous population of principals and teachers below — whose own values and professional views may be quite different from those being imposed. Public officials have little choice but to rely on formal rules and regulations that tell these people what to do and hold them accountable for doing it.



The key to better schools, therefore, is institutional reform.

These pressures for bureaucracy are so substantial in themselves that real school autonomy has little chance to take root throughout the system. But they are not the only pressures for bureaucracy. They are compounded by the political uncertainty inherent in all democratic politics: those who exercise public authority know that other actors with different interests may gain authority in the future and subvert the policies they worked so hard to put in place. This knowledge gives them additional incentive to embed their policies in protective bureaucratic arrangements — arrangements that reduce the discretion of schools and formally insulate them from the dangers of politics.

These pressures, arising from the basic properties of democratic control, are compounded yet again by another special feature of the public sector. Its institutions provide a regulated, politically sensitive setting conducive to the power of unions, and unions protect the interests of their members through formal constraints on the governance and operation of schools — constraints that strike directly at the schools' capacity to build well-functioning teams based on informal cooperation.

The major participants in democratic governance — including the unions — complain that the schools are too bureaucratic. And they mean what they say. But they are the ones who bureaucratized the schools in the past, and they will continue to do so, even as they tout the great advantages of autonomy and professionalism. The incentives to bureaucratize the schools are built into the system.

Market Institutions

This kind of behavior is not something that Americans simply have to accept, like death and taxes. People who make decisions about education would behave differently if their institutions were different. The most relevant and telling comparison is to markets, since it is through democratic control and markets that American society makes most of its choices on matters of public importance, including education. Public schools are subject to direct control through politics. But not all schools are controlled in this way. Private schools — representing about a fourth of all schools — are subject to indirect control through markets.

What difference does it make? Our analysis suggests that the difference is considerable and that it arises from the most fundamental properties that distinguish the two systems. A market system is not

built to enable the imposition of higher-order values on the school, nor is it driven by a democratic struggle to exercise public authority. Instead, the authority to make educational choices is radically decentralized to those most immediately involved. Schools compete for the support of parents and students, and parents and students are free to choose among schools. The system is built on decentralization, competition, and choice.

Although schools operating under a market system are free to organize any way they want, bureaucratization tends to be an unattractive way to go. Part of the reason is that virtually everything about good education — from the knowledge and talents necessary to produce it, to what it looks like when it is produced — defies formal measurement through the standardized categories of bureaucracy.

The more basic point, however, is that bureaucratic control and its clumsy efforts to measure the unmeasurable are simply unnecessary for schools whose primary concern is to please their clients. To do this, they need to perform as effectively as possible, which leads them, given the bottom-heavy technology of education, to favor decentralized forms of organization that take full advantage of strong leadership, teacher professionalism, discretionary judgment, informal cooperation, and teams. They also need to ensure that they provide the kinds of services parents and students want and that they have the capacity to cater and adjust to their clients' specialized needs

and interests, which this same syndrome of effective organization allows them to do exceedingly well.

Schools that operate in an environment of competition and choice thus have strong incentives to move toward the kinds of "effective-school" organizations that academics and reformers would like to impose on the public schools. Of course, not all schools in the market will respond equally well to these incentives. But those that falter will find it more difficult to attract support, and they will tend to be weeded out in favor of schools that are better organized. This process of natural selection complements the incentives of the marketplace in propelling and supporting a population of autonomous, effectively organized schools.

Institutional Consequences

No institutional system can be expected to work perfectly under real-world conditions. Just as democratic institutions cannot offer perfect representation or per-

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fect implementation of public policy, so markets cannot offer perfect competition or perfect choice. But these imperfections, which are invariably the favorite targets of each system's critics, tend to divert attention from what is most crucial to an understanding of schools: as institutional systems, democratic control and market control are strikingly different in their fundamental properties. As a result, each system structures individual and social choices about education very differently, and each has very different consequences for the organization and performance of schools. Each system puts its own indelible stamp on the schools that emerge and operate within it.

What the analysis in our book suggests, in the most practical terms, is that American society offers two basic paths to the emergence of effective schools. The first is through markets, which scarcely operate in the public sector, but which act on private schools to discourage bureaucracy and promote desirable forms of organization through the natural dynamics of competition and choice.

The second path is through "special circumstances," — homogeneous environments free of problems — which, in minimizing the three types of political pressures just discussed, prompt democratic governing institutions to impose less bureaucracy than they otherwise would. Private schools therefore tend to be effectively organized because of the way their system naturally works. When public schools happen to be effectively organized, it is in spite of their system — they are the lucky ones with peculiarly nice environments.

As we show in our book, the power of these institutional forces is graphically reflected in our sample of American high schools. Having cast our net widely to allow for a full range of noninstitutional factors that might reasonably be suspected of influencing school autonomy, we found that virtually all of them fall by the wayside. The extent to which a school is granted the autonomy it needs to develop a more effective organization is overwhelmingly determined by its sectoral location and the niceness of its institutional environment.

Viewed as a whole, then, our effort to take institutions into account builds systematically on mainstream ideas and findings but, in the end, puts a very different slant on things. We agree that effective organization is a major determinant of student achievement. We also agree that schools perform better the more autonomous they are and the less encumbered they are by bureaucracy. But we do not agree that this

knowledge about the proximate causes of effective performance can be used to engineer better schools through democratic control. Reformers are right about where they want to go, but their institutions cannot get them there.

The way to get schools with effective organizations is not to insist that democratic institutions should do what they are incapable of doing. Nor is it to assume that the better public schools, the lucky ones with nice environments, can serve as organizational models for the rest. Their luck is not transferable. The way to get effective schools is to recognize that the problem of ineffective performance is really a deep-seated institutional problem that arises from the most fundamental properties of democratic control.

The most sensible approach to genuine education reform is therefore to move toward a true institutional solution — a different set of institutional arrangements that actively promotes and nurtures the kinds of schools people want. The market alternative then becomes particularly attractive, for it provides a setting in which these organizations take root and flourish. That is where "choice" comes in.

Educational Choice

It is fashionable these days to say that choice is "not a panacea." Taken literally, that is obviously true. There are no panaceas in social policy. But the message this aphorism really means to get across is that choice is

just one of many reforms with something to contribute. School-based management is another. So are teacher empowerment and professionalism, better training programs, stricter accountability, and bigger budgets. These and other types of reforms all bolster school effectiveness in their own distinctive ways — so the reasoning goes — and the best, most aggressive, most comprehensive approach to transforming the public school system is therefore one that wisely combines them into a multifaceted reformist package.

Without being too literal about it, we think reformers would do well to entertain the notion that choice is a panacea. Of all the sundry education reforms that attract attention, only choice has the capacity to address the basic institutional problem plaguing America's schools. The other reforms are all system-preserving. The schools remain subordinates in the structure of public authority — and they remain bureaucratic.

In principle, choice offers a clear, sharp break from

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the institutional past. In practice, however, it has been forced into the same mold with all the other reforms. It has been embraced half-heartedly and in bits and pieces — for example, through magnet schools and limited open enrollment plans. It has served as a means of granting parents and students a few additional options or of giving schools modest incentives to compete. These are popular moves that can be accomplished without changing the existing system in any fundamental way. But by treating choice like other system-preserving reforms that presumably make democratic control work better, reformers completely miss what choice is all about.

Choice is not like the other reforms and should not be combined with them. Choice is a self-contained reform with its own rationale and justification. It has the capacity *all by itself* to bring about the kind of transformation that reformers have been seeking to engineer for years in myriad other ways. Indeed, if choice is to work to greatest advantage, it must be adopted *without* these other reforms, since they are predicated on democratic control and are implemented by bureaucratic means. The whole point of a thoroughgoing system of choice is to free the schools from these disabling constraints by sweeping away the old institutions and replacing them with new ones. Taken seriously, choice is not a system-preserving reform. It is a revolutionary reform that introduces a new system of public education.

A Proposal for Real Reform

The following outline describes a choice system that we think is equipped to do the job. Offering our own proposal allows us to illustrate in some detail what a full-blown choice system might look like, as well as to note some of the policy decisions that must be made in building one. More important, it allows us to suggest what our institutional theory of schools actually entails for educational reform.

Our guiding principle in the design of a choice system is this: public authority must be put to use in creating a system that is almost entirely beyond the reach of public authority. Because states have primary responsibility for American public education, we think the best way to achieve significant, enduring reform is for states to take the initiative in withdrawing authority from existing institutions and vesting it directly in the schools, parents, and students. This restructuring cannot be construed as an exercise in delegation. As long as authority remains "available" at higher levels

within state government, it will eventually be used to control the schools. As far as possible, all higher-level authority must be eliminated.

What we propose, more specifically, is that state leaders create a new system of public education with the following properties.

The Supply of Schools

The state will be responsible for setting criteria that define what constitutes a "public school" under the new system. These criteria should be minimal, roughly corresponding to the criteria many states now use in accrediting private schools — graduation requirements, health and safety requirements, and teacher certification requirements. Any educational group or organization that applies to the state and meets these minimal criteria must then be chartered as a public school and granted the right to accept students and receive public money.

Existing private schools will be among those eligible to participate. Their participation should be encouraged, because they constitute a supply of already effective schools. Our own preference would be to include religious schools too, as long as their sectarian functions can be kept clearly separate from their educational functions. Private schools that do participate will thereby become public schools, as such schools are defined under the new choice system.

School districts can continue running their present schools, assuming those schools meet state criteria. But districts will have authority over only their own schools and not over any of the others that may be chartered by the state.

Funding

The state will set up a Choice Office in each district, which, among other things, will maintain a record of all school-age children and the level of funding — the "scholarship" amounts — associated with each child. This office will directly compensate schools based on the specific children they enroll. Public money will flow from funding sources (federal, state, and district governments) to the Choice Office and then to schools. At no point will it go to parents or students.

The state must pay to support its own Choice Office in each district. Districts may retain as much of their current governing apparatus as they wish — superintendents, school boards, central offices, and all their

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staff. But they have to pay for them entirely out of the revenue they derive from the scholarships of those children who voluntarily choose to attend district-run schools. Aside from the governance of these schools, which no one need attend, districts will be little more than taxing jurisdictions that allow citizens to make a collective determination about how large their children's scholarships will be.

As it does now, the state will have the right to specify how much, or by what formula, each district must contribute for each child. Our preference is for an equalization approach that requires wealthier districts to contribute more per child than poor districts do and that guarantees an adequate financial foundation to students in all districts. The state's contribution can then be calibrated to bring total spending per child up to whatever dollar amount seems desirable; under an equalization scheme, that would mean a larger state contribution in poor districts than in wealthy ones.

While parents and students should be given as much flexibility as possible, we think it is unwise to allow them to supplement their scholarship amounts with personal funds. Such "add-ons" threaten to pro-

duce too many disparities and inequalities within the public system, and many citizens would regard them as unfair and burdensome.

Complete equalization, on the other hand, strikes us as too stifling and restrictive. A reasonable trade-off is to allow collective add-ons, much as the current system does. The citizens of each district can be given the freedom to decide whether they want to spend more per child than the state requires them to spend. They can then determine how important education is to them and how much they are willing to tax themselves for it. As a result, children from different districts may have different-sized scholarships.

Scholarships may also vary within any given district, and we strongly think that they should. Some students have very special educational needs — arising from economic deprivation, physical handicaps, language difficulties, emotional problems, and other disadvantages — that can be met effectively only through costly specialized programs. State and federal programs already appropriate public money to address these problems. Our suggestion is that these funds should take the form of add-ons to student scholarships. At-risk students would then be empow-

ered with bigger scholarships than the others, making them attractive clients to all schools — and stimulating the emergence of new specialty schools.

Choice Among Schools

Each student will be free to attend any public school in the state, regardless of district, with the student's scholarship — consisting of federal, state, and local contributions — flowing to the school of choice. In practice most students will probably choose schools in reasonable proximity to their homes. But districts will have no claim on their own residents.

To the extent that tax revenues allow, every effort will be made to provide transportation for students who need it. This provision is important to help open up as many alternatives as possible to all students, especially the poor and those in rural areas.

To assist parents and students in choosing among schools, the state will provide a Parent Information Center within its local Choice Office. This center will collect comprehensive information on each school in the district, and its parent liaisons will meet personally with parents in helping them judge which schools best meet their children's needs. The emphasis here will be on personal contact and involvement. Parents will be required to visit the center at least once, and encouraged to do so often. Meetings will be arranged at all schools so that parents can see firsthand what their choices are.

The Parent Information Center will handle the applications process in a simple fashion. Once parents and students decide which schools they prefer, they will fill out applications to each, with parent liaisons available to give advice and assistance and to fill out the applications themselves (if necessary). All applications will be submitted to the Center, which in turn will send them out to the schools.

Schools will make their own admissions decisions, subject only to nondiscrimination requirements. This step is absolutely crucial. Schools must be able to define their own missions and build their own programs in their own ways, and they cannot do that if their student population is thrust on them by outsiders.

Schools must be free to admit as many or as few students as they want, based on whatever criteria they think relevant — intelligence, interest, motivation, special needs — and they must be free to exercise their

own, informal judgments about individual applicants.

Schools will set their own "tuitions." They may choose to do so explicitly, say, by publicly announcing the minimum scholarship they are willing to accept. They may also do it implicitly by allowing anyone to apply for admission and simply making selection knowing in advance what each applicant's scholarship amount is. In either case, schools are free to admit students with different-sized scholarships, and they are free to keep the entire scholarship that accompanies each student they have admitted. This gives all schools incentives to attract students with special needs, since these children will have the largest scholarships. It also gives schools incentives

to attract students from districts with high base-level scholarships. But a school need restrict itself to students with special needs, nor to students from a single district.

The application process must take place within a framework that guarantees each student a school, as well as a fair shot at getting into the school he or she most wants. This framework, however, should impose only the most minimal restrictions on the schools.

We suggest something like the following. The Parent Information Center will be responsible for seeing that parents and students are informed that they have visited the schools that interest them, and that all applications are submitted by a given date. Schools will then be required to make their admissions decisions within a set time, and students who

are accepted into more than one school will be required to select one as their final choice. Students who are not accepted anywhere, as well as schools that have yet to attract as many students as they want, will participate in a second round of applications, which will work the same way.

After this second round, some students may remain without schools. At this point, parent liaisons will take informal action to try to match up these students with appropriate schools. If any students still remain unsigned, a special safety-net procedure — a lottery, for example — will be invoked to ensure that each is assigned to a specific school.

As long as they are not "arbitrary and capricious" schools must also be free to expel students or deny them readmission when, based on their own experience and standards, they believe the situation warrants it. This authority is essential if schools are to define and control their own organizations, and to give students a strong incentive to live up to their side of the educational "contract."

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getting into the
school he or she
most wants.*

Governance and Organization

Each school must be granted sole authority to determine its own governing structure. A school may be run entirely by teachers or even a union. It may vest all power in a principal. It may be built around committees that guarantee representation to the principal, teachers, parents, students, and members of the community. Or it may do something completely different.

The state must refrain from imposing any structures or requirements that specify how authority is to be exercised within individual schools. This includes the district-run schools: the state must not impose any governing apparatus on them either. These schools, however, are subordinate units within district government — they are already embedded in a larger organization — and it is the district authorities, not the schools, that have the legal right to determine how they will be governed

More generally, the state will do nothing to tell the schools how they must be internally organized to do their work. The state will not set requirements for career ladders, advisory committees, textbook selection, in-service training, preparation time, homework, or anything else. Each school will be organized and operated as it sees fit.

Statewide tenure laws will be eliminated, allowing each school to decide for itself whether or not to adopt a tenure policy and what the specifics of that policy will be. This change is essential if schools are to have the flexibility they need to build well-functioning teams. Some schools may not offer tenure at all, relying on pay and working conditions to attract the kinds of teachers they want, while others may offer tenure as a supplementary means of compensating and retaining their best teachers.

Teachers, meantime, may demand tenure in their negotiations (individual or collective) with schools. And, as in private colleges and universities, the best teachers are well positioned to get it, since their services will be valued by any number of other schools. School districts may continue to offer districtwide tenure, along with transfer rights, seniority preference, and whatever other personnel policies they have offered in the past. But these policies apply only to district-run schools and the teachers who work in them.

Teachers will continue to have a right to join unions and engage in collective bargaining, but the legally prescribed bargaining unit will be the individual

school or, as in the case of the district government, the larger organization that runs the school. If teachers in a given school want to join a union or, having done so, want to exact financial or structural concessions, that is up to them. But they cannot commit teachers in other schools, unless they are in other district-run schools, to the same things, and they must suffer the consequences if their victories put them at a competitive disadvantage in supplying quality education.

The state will continue to certify teachers, but requirements will be minimal, corresponding to those that many states have historically applied to private schools. In our view, individuals should be certified to teach if they have a bachelor's degree and if their personal history reveals no obvious problems. Whether they are truly good teachers will be determined in practice, as schools decide whom to hire, observe their own teachers in action over an extended period of time, and make decisions regarding merit, promotion, and dismissal.

The schools may, as a matter of strategy, choose to pay attention to certain formal indicators of past or future performance, among them: a master's degree, completion of a voluntary teacher certification program at an education school, or voluntary certification by a national board. Some schools may choose to require one or more of these, or perhaps to reward them in various ways. But that is up to the schools, which will be able to look anywhere for good

teachers in a now much larger and more dynamic market.

The state will hold the schools accountable for meeting certain procedural requirements. It will ensure that schools continue to meet the criteria set out in their charters, that they adhere to nondiscrimination laws in admissions and other matters, and that they collect and make available to the public, through the Parent Information Center, information on their mission, their staff and course offerings, standardized test scores (which we would make optional), parent and student satisfaction, staff opinions, and anything else that would promote informed choice among parents and students.

The state will not hold the schools accountable for student achievement or other dimensions that call for assessments of the quality of school performance. When it comes to performance, schools will be held accountable from below, by parents and students who directly experience their services and are free to choose. The state will play a crucial supporting role

The state must refrain from imposing any structures or rules that specify how authority is to be exercised within individual schools.

here in monitoring the full and honest disclosure of information by the schools — but it will be only a supporting role.

Choice as a Public System

This proposal calls for fundamental changes in the structure of American public education. Stereotypes aside, however, these changes have nothing to do with “privatizing” the nation’s schools. The choice system we outline would be a truly public system — and a democratic one.

We are proposing that the state put its democratic authority to use in creating a new institutional framework. The design and legitimation of this framework would be a democratic act of the most basic sort. It would be a social decision, made through the usual processes of democratic governance, by which the people and their representatives specify the structure of a new system of public education.

This framework, as we set it out, is quite flexible and admits of substantial variation on important issues, all of them matters of public policy to be decided by representative government. Public officials and their constituents would be free to take their own approaches to taxation, equalization, treatment of religious schools, additional funding for disadvantaged students, parent add-ons, and other controversial issues of public concern, thus designing choice systems to reflect the unique conditions, preferences, and political forces of their own states.

Once this structural framework is democratically determined, moreover, governments would continue to play important roles within it. State officials and agencies would remain pivotal to the success of public education and to its ongoing operation. They would provide funding, approve applications for new schools, orchestrate and oversee the choice process, elicit full information about schools, provide transportation to students, monitor schools for adherence to the law, and (if they want) design and administer tests of student performance. School districts, meantime, would continue as local taxing jurisdictions, and they would have the option of continuing to operate their own system of schools.

The crucial difference is that direct democratic control of the schools — the very *capacity* for control, not simply its exercise — would essentially be eliminated. Most of those who previously held authority over the schools would have their authority permanently with-

drawn, and that authority would be vested in schools, parents, and students. Schools would be legally autonomous: free to govern themselves as they wish, to specify their own goals and programs and methods, to design their own organizations, select their own student bodies, and make their own personnel decisions. Parents and students would be legally empowered to choose among alternative schools, aided by institutions designed to promote active involvement, well-informed decisions, and fair treatment.

Democracy and Educational Progress

We do not expect everyone to accept the argument we have made here. In fact, we expect most of those who speak with authority on educational matters — school leaders and academics within the educational community, to reject it. But we will regard our effort a success if it directs attention to the need for democratic control and provokes serious debate about their consequences for the nation’s public schools. Whether or not our own conclusions are right, the fact is that these issues are truly basic to an understanding of public schools, and they have so far played no part in the national debate. If educational reform is to have a chance at all of succeeding, that is the first thing to change.

In the meantime, we can only believe that the current “revolution” in public education will prove a disappointment. It might have succeeded

had it actually been a revolution, but it was not a revolution. It was never intended to be, despite the lofty rhetoric. The 1980s reform movement never seriously thought about the old institutions and certainly never considered them part of the problem. They were, as they have always been, part of the solution — and, for that matter, part of the definition of what democracy and public education are all about.

This identification has never been valid. Nothing about the concept of democracy requires that schools be subject to direct control by school boards, superintendents, central offices, departments of education, or other arms of government. Nor does anything in the concept of public education require that schools be governed in this way. There are many paths to democracy and public education. The path America has been trodding for the past half-century is exacting a heavy price — one the nation and its children can ill afford to bear, and need not. It is time, we think, to get to the root of the problem. □

When it comes to performance, schools will be held accountable from below, by parents and students who are free to choose.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW
1998

PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST



Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation



PUTTING CHILDREN FIRST
Bentonville, Arkansas

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

December 1998

Dear Friends and Supporters of CEO AMERICA:

This past year has been an exciting time for the school choice movement and CEO America. I want to briefly report on some of the areas in which we are involved and give you an update, as well as my views on a number of subjects. Once you read the information I've enclosed for you, I am confident that you will agree that we are breaking new ground in effectively communicating the benefits of school choice beyond the media and public policy community to low-income parents themselves.

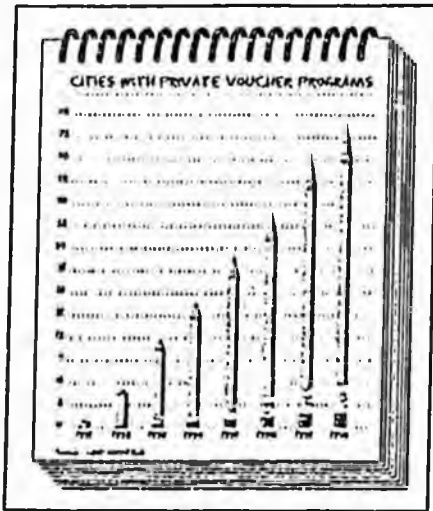
As you know, CEO AMERICA was founded in 1992 and is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit foundation dedicated to helping every child in America gain access to a quality education through parental choice programs. In order to provide immediate relief from poorly-performing, unsafe schools, the Foundation was originally established to support and develop privately-funded voucher programs. Today, with more than 40 affiliates across the country, CEO AMERICA faces a new challenge - how to increase public support for taxpayer-funded school vouchers. For this reason, we have refined our mission to focus primarily on educating and mobilizing the parents of voucher students, waiting list applicants, and families in low-income neighborhoods while, at the same time, continuing to help start more private programs.



Even though public support for school vouchers is strong and growing, especially in the inner-cities among young black and Hispanic parents, the school choice movement still faces considerable obstacles in the well-organized and heavily-funded teachers' unions. It's going to take the concentrated moral force of thousands of parents who want a better life for their children to counter the opponents of publicly funded school choice on the legislative front. Until we launched our Campaign to Educate America this year, however, there was no way to reach these concerned citizens.

Priming the Pump: How Privately-Funded Vouchers Stimulate the Grassroots

Drawing on my experience from Wal-Mart Stores in the early 1980's, I refer to our expanded mission as "retail school choice". The role of the privately funded program has proven to be a valuable tool in demonstrating that, when given the opportunity, parents, especially those of color and low income, want to have a choice. However, it has only touched the surface in giving a few parents this choice. For this reason, we will continue our work in encouraging the privately-funded voucher movement and were successful in reaching our goal this year of adding at least ten new privately-funded voucher programs, bringing to 41 the total number of programs currently operating around the country.



In June 1998, the privately funded voucher movement received a tremendous boost when John Walton and Ted Forstmann announced the creation of the Children's Scholarship Fund (CSF). Together, they committed \$100 million in challenge grants for voucher programs, which would be matched by local partner cities around the country. This came at a good time when CEO AMERICA's matching grant program was coming to an end, completing the fulfillment of the Walton Family Foundation's \$2 million gift in 1994.

By September, the Children's Scholarship Fund announced their partner cities at a news conference in Washington, DC. To date, partnerships have been established in nearly 40 cities with a total of approximately \$70 million pledged that would be matched by the Walton/Fortsmann funds. Of the 40 partnership programs, 25 were

existing CEO affiliate programs. Another six were CEO initiated by groups who were considering starting programs. These partnerships would not have been possible without a strategic alliance of Children's Scholarship Fund with CEO AMERICA.

In the coming years, we will continue to work closely together to exchange information and pool resources so that we can effectively use the private vouchers to stimulate competition in education and the taxpayer-funded school choice movement. Our greatest asset in these private voucher programs will be those who sign up for the lottery but don't receive a voucher. They are the ones we must reach and involve in the legislative and grassroots processes, thereby winning their loyalty as committed customers. They are the ones who believe we have the product they want and, in effect, have "set their foot in our door to shop".



Horizon Project

Inspired by the bold example of Virginia Gilder, the New York philanthropist who offered to pay the private school tuition of every student in one of the worst performing schools in Albany, New York, we initiated what is perhaps our most exciting project this year. We committed up to \$50 million, over ten years to the Horizon Project, to give every single low-income child in an entire school district access to any religious, secular, private, or public school in the San Antonio area. We chose the largely Hispanic Edgewood District in San Antonio, where 94 percent of the 14,000 students from low-income families are eligible for vouchers.

With our ten-year commitment to Edgewood students, we will be able to test the effects of school choice in the market place. We want to know whether private schools will expand and new private schools emerge once vouchers are offered on a sustained basis. We're also interested in seeing how the public schools will respond to competition and whether population patterns will

HORIZON
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

change. Already, 2,000 applications have been received (1,500 of them from the public schools) and nearly 1,000 have been approved as eligible. A total of 722 students have actually enrolled in private schools, including two new schools that were created as a result of the project.

Some interesting things are beginning to occur. First, we learned that over 100 of the students applying for Horizon vouchers had been attending public schools outside the Edgewood District. In other words, these students actually lived in the Edgewood District, but were giving false addresses outside the district in order to attend a different public school. We are calling this practice "black market choice"!!! Also, a new apartment complex in the district is now advertising our program as an incentive for residents to sign their lease and move into the district! Should vouchers make the Edgewood district more attractive to live in, urban renewal will be an additional benefit of school choice.

Just several weeks ago, the Edgewood Independent School



The Horizon Project is the most ambitious, most focused school choice program in the nation with an entire school district targeted numbering over 14,000 students.

District officials announced that \$120,000 was being committed to hire an independent consultant to come in and take a look at ways to cut costs! Since the district loses around \$5,000 for every lost student, they have also lifted their attendance zone ban. Now, students from other school districts can cross district lines and attend Edgewood. In other words, public school choice has come to San Antonio as a direct result of our efforts!

Many more positive things are happening with this exciting new project. An independent parents' group is being organized to lobby for publicly funded school choice. And, as the Texas Legislature gears up for a school choice voucher battle, the program will be in the spotlight, not just in Texas, but also nationally. It has already attracted significant media attention, including major write-ups in most of the national print media, as well as television programs like CNN and the Lehrer News Hour.

Building from the Grassroots Up: Campaign to Educate America

Our Campaign to Educate America will provide an answer to the thousands of parents whose children are wait-listed for private voucher programs. It will direct them to our grassroots networks, which will then organize them as a powerful voice in the school choice debate.

Through our matching grant program, we were able to partner with two existing grassroots parents' organizations and create four from scratch - places where we see some form of school choice legislation likely to pass in the next three years. These organizations are now responsible for recruiting and organizing grassroots activists from every social sector - from parents, religious, business and civic leaders to members of the news media, and policy makers. But even after the legislative battle is won, these parents' organizations will be critical in sustaining an effective public school choice system.



In addition to providing financial support to these parent organizations, CEO AMERICA has been an invaluable advisory and technical resource. We have helped to identify key leadership and staff; designed media, marketing and communications campaigns; conducted research using surveys and focus groups, and developed fundraising plans. As we expand our grassroots network, our institutional knowledge and experience will allow us to replicate successful models in other cities and states.

Children First Magazine

Another exciting new project this year has been our magazine, *Children First*. Launching a national magazine has been a learning process for us, and the project has evolved quite a bit since we first expanded our mission to include grassroots and educational activities. Originally it had been our intent to primarily target policy makers, businessmen, legislators, and members of the news media with our success stories. But after conducting extensive focus group research in August, it became clear to us that the positive message and engaging format of *Children First* would best serve to motivate an altogether overlooked audience - low-income parents themselves.

This new publication is designed to tell the stories of families and children whose lives have been positively changed by school choice and then to market those stories primarily to other parents. In other words, win more parents over as customers of school choice and create the demand for reform. The Fall 1998 issue of *Children First* featured a story on the first privately-funded school choice program in the country, the Educational CHOICE Charitable Trust of Indianapolis, Indiana, started by insurance magnate, J. Patrick Rooney of Golden Rule Insurance. Already we are being inundated by an overwhelmingly positive response. In fact, the Chicago Tribune has expressed an interest in writing an article on the kids and program featured.



Conferences & Events: Building a Bridge between Leaders & Grassroots



Building upon our hard work in the field and our strong ties to the public policy and business communities, CEO AMERICA hosted three very important events this past year which played a significant role in bringing together the players in the school choice movement and drew national media and Congressional attention to their great accomplishments.

The first event was our Fourth Annual Founders Meeting, held in New York City in April. This was our most successful and best attended meeting since our first meeting in Orlando in 1994. We highlighted five privately funded programs in New York, leadership awards were presented to Peter Flanigan, New York City Mayor Rudy Guiliani, Wall Street Journal Editorial Writer John Fund, New York native and Minnesota Governor Arne Carlson, former Congressman and Reverend Floyd Flake, and private-voucher funders Dick Gilder, Virginia Gilder, Bruce Kovner, and Roger Hertog.



The second event was the Washington, D.C. Golfing for Kids Charity Golf Tournament held in Bethesda, Maryland, at the PGA Avenel Golf Course in May. Fifteen members of Congress participated in the event including Senators Dan Coats and Don Nickles, as well as Congressman Bill Archer.

Our third event was held in September at the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C. The National School Choice Conference, co-hosted by the National Center for Policy Analysis, was designed to bring together leading school choice proponents and to honor Members of Congress with "Excellence in Leadership Awards" for outstanding leadership in pushing federal school choice legislation. Among those in attendance were former Education Secretary William Bennett; syndicated columnist Mona Charen; former Attorney General Ed Meese; and Arizona Superintendent of Education, Lisa Keegan.

Members of Congress who received awards included Senators Coverdell, Coats, Lieberman, Torricelli, and Congressmen Arney, Gingrich, Archer, Watts, Talent, and former Congressman Floyd Flake.

CONCLUSION

This year has been a good one for CEO AMERICA and the school choice movement, but it has also been a great one for the children of America and their parents. When the Supreme Court recently let stand Wisconsin's lower court ruling, it opened the floodgates for taxpayer-funded school vouchers. This judicial support, combined with the boost of the \$50 million Horizon program and the Children's Scholarship Fund's extraordinary commitment of \$100 million in challenge grants for voucher programs will create an incredible demand for hundreds of thousands of parents who want a better education for their children.

By expanding our Campaign to Educate America Program, CEO AMERICA will provide the mechanism to educate and organize these parents to propel the school choice movement to the next level. We realize that our plans are ambitious, but we strongly believe that, if we are given adequate resources early in this program, then we can make a real impact in the school choice movement. In the last few months, we have worked hard to test market our product and refine our national strategy and, based on our preliminary findings, we know we are headed in the right direction.

Although we are still a long way from achieving our aspirations where every child in America has the best schooling options available, we are making progress and I am convinced we will eventually prevail. In the meantime, we will remain vigilant, as vigilance is the eternal price of freedom.

Thank you for your support, friendship, and involvement. God bless you.

Sincerely,

Fritz S. Steiger
President



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By Judith Brody Saks

In November, Donald Boggs, president of the Organization of School Administrators and Supervisors for the Detroit Public Schools, went to examine Milwaukee's school voucher program, one of only two voucher programs in the country. The trip, organized by Teach Michigan, a nonprofit organization that supports vouchers and school choice, and sponsored by the Detroit Chamber of Commerce Foundation, was intended to help a delegation of business and community leaders get the facts about vouchers in a no-pressure, non-proselytizing way.

Boggs says he spent a few hours at the Bruce Guadalupe Community School, a private school in the voucher program. What he saw was certainly appealing: a new building, children who seemed "amiable, happy, and well supervised," all-day kindergartens for 4 and 5-year-olds, and relatively small classes, staffed by aides and parent volunteers as well as teachers, for students in grades 1-8. He acknowledges, though, that he spent most of his time observing the physical plant and decorum rather than extensively examining the Milwaukee program's controversial data on academic achievement (see sidebar on page 26).

Boggs did not become a convert to vouchers. "Nothing we saw there changed my mind," he says. Like other

voucher opponents, he remains convinced that vouchers are a "cheap way out" for those unwilling to foot the bill to give the nation's big-city schools the drastic overhaul most of them desperately need. He argues that vouchers will, in reality, create a two-tier system for students, leaving the public schools to educate the students no private schools will want to—or will have to—accept.

The Detroit delegation was seeking an objective view of the voucher issue, but objectivity is hard to come by. Passions run high on both sides, despite the fact that there is little evidence about vouchers' success—or lack of success—on which to base an opinion. Speculation and conjecture, combined with ideological fervor and rhetoric, have characterized much of the debate. And an array of special-interest groups, including teachers unions and civil liberties groups on one side and conservative Christian groups and many Republican lawmakers on the other, have dominated the discussion.

A policy debate

The debate shows no sign of subsiding even though the American public has soundly rejected vouchers whenever the issue is put to a statewide vote. Most recently, voters in Washington state defeated a voucher initiative by a 2-1 margin; that vote followed earlier voucher defeats in Oregon, Colorado, and California. The most recent Gallup Poll indicates that, by a 61-36 margin, Americans still oppose the

Patricia Williams walked her daughter, sixth-grader Latricia and kindergartner Angela, to St. Francis Catholic School in September. The family has taken advantage of the city's new voucher program, which pays for a limited number of students to attend private and parochial schools.

idea of allowing parents to use public money to send children to private schools.

A key public policy issue is at stake: Who will have the right to spend the huge sums of money involved—those who provide public education, or the students who “consume” it? Arnold Fege, director of government relations for the National PTA, which “unequivocally opposes” spending public monies for private and religious schools, puts the issue this way: “We are in a battle for public resources, with \$386 billion a year at stake. The real fight is over how many of those dollars the private sector will get.”

Given the critical nature of the issue, educators across the country are looking with intense interest at both the Milwaukee plan, which began in 1990, and at a newer voucher program in Cleveland, which last fall became the first U.S. school district to allow poor students in grades K-3 to attend religious and secular private schools with public money.

The Cleveland program is currently awaiting action from the Ohio Court of Appeals after a trial judge ruled that the pilot program, funded with \$5.2 million in state money, did not violate constitutional prohibitions against government support of religious institutions. Supporters of the Milwaukee Parental Choice plan, as that city's voucher program is called, were handed a legal setback in January when a Wisconsin circuit court judge ruled that an expanded version of the plan—which would include religious schools and substantially increase the number of students eligible to participate—violated the state constitution. Voucher advocates are appealing the decision, which came as no surprise. So important are both the Milwaukee and Cleveland cases, in fact, that both sides say they are prepared to take them to the U.S. Supreme Court if necessary.

If these voucher programs survive the constitutional challenges they now face, they will surely set a precedent that may ultimately transform—and, some say, irrevocably harm—America's venerable public school system. Calling this political crisis “different” from other previous assaults on public education, Bella Rosenberg, assistant to Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, says, “There has never before been a time when the continued existence of public education has been in question.”

In a voucher plan, public tax money goes directly to parents to pay tuition at the school they want their child to attend. Some proposed systems would allow parents to use vouchers at schools within their own districts; others would be statewide in scope. Some proposals would limit vouchers to public schools; others would allow parents to use vouchers for any secular or religious private school. Some proposals call for income limits to determine eligibility; others would make vouchers universally available.

The Cleveland and Milwaukee programs, designed to help a small number of poor students escape troubled urban schools, use income limits to determine who may qualify. That fact alone makes the debate more complex, since many people who support the desire of poor, minority

families to improve their children's lives are not sure which side of the issue to embrace. But many observers say that these small, means-tested programs are not aimed primarily at helping the poor but at opening the door to a universal voucher system for every child in America. With a universal system, they predict, affluent students already in pricey, secular, private schools will be subsidized, and religious schools will flourish—all with public funds.

The roots of choice

The battle, many observers agree, is politically, rather than educationally, driven. Its roots go back as early as 1955, when free-market economist Milton Friedman argued that competition could improve public schools. The issue got a political boost in the 1980s, when the Reagan administration promoted the voucher concept in the form of tuition tax credits. In 1990, *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*, a now famous book on school choice by Terry Moe and John Chubb, gave the movement a philosophical push. A series of recent events have ratcheted up the debate. The implementation of the Cleveland plan, controversy over the proposed inclusion of religious schools in the Milwaukee plan, last year's failed attempt by Congress to mandate a voucher plan for the embattled District of Columbia public schools, and Republican presidential nominee Bob Dole's call for federally funded vouchers all helped fan the flames.

More important, voucher proponents have been able to reframe the debate in a new and compelling way. When the same basic issue was called tuition tax credits or “parochial aid,” it made little political headway. But with its new name—parental choice—and its embrace of low-income, minority students, it has received considerably more attention in the press and in state legislatures. “The fight was no longer about tax dollars going to religion, but rather about whether one was for or against ‘parents’ and for or against ‘freedom of choice.’ The repackaging and new spin of this old idea was brilliant politics which totally reshuffled the political deck,” comments Mordecai Lee, executive director of the Milwaukee Jewish Council for Community Relations, in the Summer 1996 issue of *Rethinking Schools*. Lee was vice chair of the Wisconsin Coalition for Public Education, a coalition of 26 civic, religious, and educational groups that tried, unsuccessfully, to stop the state legislation from expanding the Milwaukee program to include religious schools.

Perhaps more than any other factor, though, a tremendous despair with the state of many inner-city school systems and the slow pace of reform has propelled the voucher debate forward. In Washington, D.C., for example, a federally appointed financial control board fired the superintendent and transferred the powers of an elected school board to an appointed board of trustees and a chief executive officer. The control board said the school system was in such crisis that nothing short of a radical overhaul would work.

“There is a tremendous dissatisfaction with public education. This [voucher] issue wouldn't be getting anywhere if this weren't the case,” asserts Rosenberg, whose union, the AFT, while being “deeply and unabashedly committed to the role of public education in a democracy,” has been a critic of public schools and is lobbying hard for higher standards and more discipline. Surveys show the overwhelming majority of people deeply support the *idea* of public education, she says, but the reality is that “people are deeply



Students gather at the door of Cleveland's St. Francis Catholic School, which is part of that city's voucher program.

frustrated, angry at school boards and politicians, and they are right—they have every right to be."

Voucher proponents accuse teachers, administrators, school board members, and others in the education establishment of protecting the system and the status quo at the expense of the individual child. "Through its bitter opposi-

tion to viable structural reforms within public education, it [the public education lobby] has actually encouraged support for private school vouchers," charges Diane Ravitch, a senior research scholar at New York University, in the January/February 1996 issue of the *New Democrat*. "If the defenders of the present system stand firm against structural change, they will succeed mainly in convincing disgruntled parents that the only way out is through private school vouchers."

Who supports vouchers?

Voucher supporters include a wide range of people who are linked together not so much by ideology as by a confluence of interests, notes Peter Cookson, director of outreach and innovation at Columbia University's Teachers College. Libertarians, who believe the public school "monopoly" robs people of freedom of choice, often supply the philosophy and provide the arguments, although they do not have much political clout, says Cookson. These libertarian ideas have coalesced and come together with those of free-market theorists and entrepreneurs,

TWO VIEWS OF VOUCHERS' EFFECTIVENESS

Do voucher programs work? Researchers looking at the six-year-old Milwaukee Parental Choice Program have drawn contradictory conclusions about the key issue of academic achievement.

A study released last summer by Jay Greene of the University of Houston's Center for Public Policy and Paul E. Peterson of Harvard University's Program in Education Policy and Governance contradicts five years' worth of evaluations by John Witte and his colleagues at the Department of Political Science of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Witte's group, which evaluated the program for the first five years after it started in 1990, called the academic results "mixed," noting that changes in achievement scores varied considerably during that time. Witte found no differences in achievement between voucher students and comparable public school students in any year of the program.

Greene and Peterson, however, found that the reading scores of voucher students in their third and fourth years were, on average, from 3 to 5 percentile points higher than those of students who applied to the program but who were not selected and stayed in public school; math scores, on average, were 5 and 12 percentile points higher for the third and fourth years, respectively.

The validity of both studies has come under attack. Voucher opponents have used Witte's work as proof that vouchers do not work; proponents seized upon Greene's

and Peterson's work to show that they do. Exchanging salvos in the media, Peterson and Greene called Witte's studies "so methodologically flawed as to be worthless." In response, Witte called the Peterson study a "confusing, tortured effort to try to find any evidence that students enrolled in private schools under the choice program do better than any students in the Milwaukee Public Schools."

The different research designs of the two studies make it hard to take their real measure. Witte compared data for students in all 12 of the private schools in the program with scores from Milwaukee public school students as a whole and from the district's low-income students. Peterson and his colleagues compared the choice students with students who had applied to the voucher program but were not admitted, a design they said allowed them to compare two randomly selected groups of students. Witte looked at changes in test scores from year to year; Peterson examined only three of the participating private schools and measured the cumulative effect of the choice program on test scores for each child for the entire time the child was in the program.

Voucher opponents and proponents alike have voiced their opinions on the virtues of the two studies. The American Federation of Teachers, for example, weighed in with a critical analysis of the Greene-Peterson study. Citing "serious methodological flaws," the AFT paper noted that the student selection process was not random, as Peterson

whose mantra is, "The market is a better provider of schools than the government is." This loose coalition of voucher advocates also includes many conservative and mainstream Republican governors, members of Congress, and state legislators, supported by some urban Democratic mayors and city council members. Republican governors head Wisconsin and Ohio, the two states with voucher plans.

Evangelical Christians also play a major role in the debate. Increasingly, conservative Christians, even though they appeared to exert less clout in the November elections than expected, have the money and political power to turn their "family values" agenda into concrete action. Conservative Christian schools, which represent by far the fastest growing segment of nonpublic schools, would have much to gain from a widespread voucher system. Brian Lopina, director of government affairs for the Christian Coalition, says the 1.7-million member organization mounted an active lobbying campaign on behalf of all the priorities—including vouchers—outlined in its "Contract with the American Family." He says the coalition spent \$5 million in the first half of 1996 for lobbying Congress alone. "Our top priorities are the items in the contract; those will be continuing issues before the next Congress," he says.

Catholics, hurt by a system that has refused to give public aid to religious schools, also have a great deal to gain from a voucher system. Catholic school enrollments are climbing again after nearly 30 years of decline, and their emphasis on values, discipline, and a core curriculum make

Catholic schools an attractive alternative for many inner-city parents. Parochial schools already have about 12 percent non-Catholic enrollment, chiefly in urban areas; in the Cleveland plan, 32 of the 51 participating schools are Catholic. Although most voucher plans would not cover tuition for many expensive, secular private schools, they would cover the average Catholic school tuition of \$2,300. Tuition is kept relatively low not only because church subsidies and fund-raising activities underwrite a substantial portion of the costs, but also because Catholic students in many states receive transportation and other services at public expense. Lower teacher salaries (about 60 to 75 percent of average public school salaries) help reduce costs, as does the lack of a bureaucratic superstructure.

Leonard DeFiore, president of the National Catholic Educational Association in Washington, D.C., says his organization supports vouchers that would allow all parents to choose a school, but that, as a first step, means-tested plans are an excellent place to start. "Almost no one defends urban public education as being adequate," he says. "Where choice is missing and vitally needed is for those in inner-city schools which are underperforming."

The voucher issue also has won growing support among some low-income minority parents. A study by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank that specializes in research on African Americans, found that 61 percent of African Americans favored vouchers. The center also found that only 5.7 percent of African Americans rated their local public

claimed, because the private schools in the program retained the right to choose students. Moreover, the AFT charged, the two groups of students were not similar, "especially on parent education level, one of the most significant out-of-school influences on achievement research has ever found." Once the mother's education is taken into account, the AFT said, the so-called private school advantage disappears.

Not surprisingly, an analysis by Dorothy Hanks of the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think tank in Washington, D.C., came to a different conclusion. "Contrary to the claims of the education establishment, choice does not leave children of poor families in failing schools," she wrote. "Rather, it is their ticket out. Schools of choice have proven their ability—and their desire—to improve the academic outcomes of poor children."

Many observers agree, however, that both studies were affected by the program's high attrition rate; an average of 30 percent drop out each year, leaving a small data pool from which to measure results. Because of the small sample, particularly by the third and fourth years, many observers were disturbed by the Greene-Peterson claim that "if similar success could be achieved for all minority students nationwide, it could close the gap separating white and minority test scores by somewhere between one-third and more than one-half."

Even if the Peterson study were correct, Witte says, bas-

ing such claims on such modest evidence is "bizarre, unless one is committed to an ideological position." Charging that the Greene-Peterson study was totally politically driven, he says choice advocates are looking for any evidence they can find to support their court case, which "could be the biggest church/state case of the century. The stakes are very high."

Witte's annual evaluations review more than educational achievement, however. They also look at parental satisfaction with the voucher program, and, by that measure, the program fares well. Overall, he concludes that the majority of students and parents who participated in the program were better off despite the fact that achievement, as measured by standardized tests, was no different than the achievement of students in the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS).

Witte also notes that the current program does not harm the city's existing education system. "The students in the choice program were not the best or even the average students from the Milwaukee system," he says. "Thus both in terms of size and the potential for 'creaming' (i.e., skimming off the best students) this program as currently configured poses little threat to the MPS system." He adds, however, that because voucher parents were more educated and more involved in their children's previous public schools than are the average MPS parents, their loss could be construed as "potentially detrimental."—J.B.S.

schools as "excellent," compared with 19.9 percent of the general population.

Who opposes vouchers?

Doing battle against vouchers are the country's two teachers unions, the AFT and the National Education Association. The two unions are politically and financially powerful but often are viewed as special-interest groups that want to defend their turf. Indeed, some observers believe voucher proposals are intended, in part, to break the power of the unions, and, since those unions give the Democratic party significant financial support, ultimately to break the power of the Democrats as well. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, civil liberties groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union and People for the American Way, many mainstream religious organizations, and education associations such as the National PTA and national and state associations of school board members and school administrators also oppose vouchers. Vouchers, they say, would undermine the time-honored tradition of the American common school, a tradition that creates a strong citizenry that can work together and get along with one another.

"Isn't there something fundamentally unique and beneficial to the tradition of public education that transcends debate—so it's not just a consumer-driven debate, but involves the larger public interest?" asks Michael Resnik, senior associate executive director of the National School Boards Association in Alexandria, Va. "We are a nation with a common culture. If vouchers become universal and niche schools arise, we can end up balkanizing the country."

AFT President Albert Shanker agrees. In an Oct. 27, 1996, *New York Times Magazine* article, he is quoted as saying: With a voucher system, "you'll end up with kids of different religions, nationalities, and languages going off to different schools to maintain their separateness, and I think we'd have a terrible social price to pay for it. You'll end up with creationist schools, Louis Farrakhan schools."

Proponents, on the other hand, advance the "free choice" argument—the right of the individual child to have the education his family chooses. Denying free choice to all is an injustice, says Patrick Reilly, executive director of Citizens for Educational Freedom, founded in 1959 as the first organization to focus on school choice; it exists solely to lobby for vouchers and tax credits. "The current system in which the government collects taxes for education but uses those tax dollars only at government schools is an injustice to parents who wish to send their children to non-government schools," he says. "The system as a whole is a purely socialistic system in which the government refuses to acknowledge that private schools are a valid option."

Opponents respond that a widespread voucher system would drain funds from the public schools, to the detriment of the children already there. Taxpayers' money would shift from public schools, open to all students, to schools that can exclude students based on ability to pay, academic achievement, or behavior; these schools are not accountable to the community as a whole or to any public authority. Further, voucher programs have the potential to skim off the best students and most committed parents, and to increase segregation by race and class. Public school would become "educational ghettos" for students with severe physical, academic, and emotional problems, opponents argue. Because those

students are expensive to educate, private schools would not want to, and don't have to, accept them.

Voucher proponents argue, on the other hand, that the nation already has a two-tier school system—the floundering big-city schools and those in the rest of the country. Vouchers would especially benefit low-income families who, for the first time, would have opportunities to improve their lives by becoming consumers of education services—opportunities more affluent people have had for generations. Proponents say poor children in inner-city schools cannot wait for each new promise or each new initiative to work while the school roof is almost literally falling down around them.

"We're opting for systemic change, yet people in the meantime are suffering, systems are failing," says Tim Sullivan, spokesman for the Center for Education Reform, a Washington, D.C. advocacy organization which, he says, is not crusading for a national voucher system but is on a crusade to assist reform efforts. "Parents are desperate. All they want is the chance to put the child in a place where the child might get a better education and feel more safe and more secure."

That certainly seems to be the case in the financially and academically troubled Cleveland schools, where parents in much higher numbers than expected opted for the voucher program. Originally, 6,200 applied (although only 2,684 had their income and residency requirements verified), says Bert L. Holt, director of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, which is run by the state education department. The program accepted, by lottery, 1,801 children; about 25 percent were already in private school.

In applying for the program, parents told Holt they wanted their children to have something they believed they couldn't find in the Cleveland Public Schools—an education that was "highly structured, safe, and had high expectations and standards of behavior and performance," she says.

While Holt believes it's "absolutely imperative" that urban schools throughout America be improved, she also sees this voucher program as important in serving a population that needs immediate help. "I really do take offense that, when it comes to poor people making a little bit of movement, the program is politicized and questioned and out-and-out sabotaged," she says.

Proponents argue that an unrestricted voucher system, one that truly allows for freedom of choice, would serve as a catalyst for improving public education. They see vouchers as a wake-up call for public schools, particularly in the inner cities. "Assuming that government schools are willing to make changes to compete, there is no reason why public schools wouldn't exist. A large number of Americans would still find the common school model appealing," says Reilly.

Even Terry Peterson, senior adviser and counselor to the U.S. Secretary of Education, who calls "vouchers a very narrow plank that takes you into a swimming pool with no water," sees some value in the voucher debate. He says it has focused people on a "mainstream agenda" of education issues that include improving safety, boosting reading scores, getting and keeping better teachers, increasing and using technology in schools, and preparing students for college. "It focuses on the fact that we do need to improve schools, so let's stop fighting about fringe issues brought up by extremist groups," he says. "Their motives may be legitimate, but it distracts you from dealing with the various kinds of things you must do to fix schools for *all* kids." ■

Date: Feb. 23, 1999
To: Representative Vic Kohring
From: Donna & Bill Walker
2234 Kissee Ct.
Anchorage, Ak. 99517
Re: Education Vouchers

Thank you for sponsoring HB5. We support your effort wholeheartedly. All four of our children received their elementary education at Sunrise Christian School & it was the best decision we could have made for them. When Polaris K-12 opened several years ago we thought this might provide a comparable education as it was very difficult paying tuition for 4 children. But after one year, we moved them back to Sunrise--there simply was no comparison to the quality of education at Sunrise. As our children have moved into junior high & high school, they continue to be excellent students & are very involved in school, church & community activities. We credit the wonderful foundation they received at Sunrise for much of their success. The public school system could learn a lot from some of these small private schools that get by on a shoestring budget but provide an outstanding education program. Education vouchers will make this a viable option for others.

Subject: [Fwd: Education Voucher bill proposal]
Date: Tue, 23 Feb 1999 07:43:44 -0900
From: Representative Vic Kohring <Representative_Vic_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us>
Organization: Alaska State Legislature
To: Randy_Lorenz@legis.state.ak.us

Subject: Education Voucher bill proposal
Date: Tue, 23 Feb 1999 07:24:51 -0900
From: Gateway Authorized Customer <leola@alaska.net>
Organization: Gateway 2000
To: Representative_Vic_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us

Dear Representative Kohring:

I wish to let you know of my support for the bill introduced to the Alaska Legislature for education vouchers for citizens who teach their child at home or who enroll their children in a private school. I have two children enrolled in a Christian school. I am a single working mother, and the greater part of the monthly child support their father provides goes towards their tuition. I also own my home and pay my annual taxes in support of the public schools.

I send you my encouragement, appreciation and support for your sponsorship of the bill, and I'm hoping for success in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Leola Monfrey
3506 Carpenter Cir.
Anchorage, AK 99517

Ronald Nordquist

From: Ronald Nordquist <ron.freda@worldnet.att.net>
To: _Vick_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us
Subject: ron.freda@worldnet.att.net
Date: Tuesday, February 23, 1999 12:18 PM

In regard to Sponsor Substitute For House Bill No. 5

Education Vouchers

We are very much in favor of the voucher program. We have two young girls that are in a private school due to unhappy experiences with the Anchorage School District.

It would be very nice to have assistance in paying our education bills. We are property owners, also business owners, and we feel that we do pay more than our share in school taxes.

The Anchorage School District yearly budget is more than out of control.

Monies should be put for the students education, NOT for oversized Administration and their benefits.

It is very important that something be done about the cost of education in the State of Alaska, mostly in the Anchorage area.

The Nordquists

Ronald and Freda

2/18/99

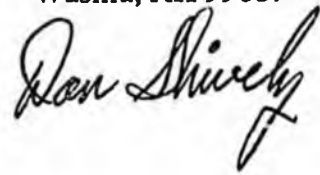
Dear Representative Kohring,

I'm writing concerning House bill 5. My sons are 16 and 18 years old and have been in private schools their entire lives. My oldest son will start collage for an Engineering Degree next fall at UAA, the other is still considering what he will do. Private education is a fine place for children to learn. We have borne the cost our selves and have been happy to do so. I do believe that we as citizens all have a right to the same funding resources regardless of where we choose to send our kids to school.

Thank you for your work on this bill.

Thank you,

Dan Shively
PO Box 876137
Wasilla, AK 99687

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dan Shively". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name and address.

February 19, 1999


RE: School Vouchers

Honorable Vic Kohring
State Capitol Room 421
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

Dear Honorable Vic Kohring,

I am glad to see that you are introducing a bill on school vouchers. I definitely do not like some of the things my child comes home from school with. The schools here, for some reason, think that these kids have to learn the native languages and about parents molesting their children. My child is *only* in first grade. Their being taught all about environmentalism and their being taught to go around to all the stores and ask for money because businesses have deep pockets. When kids come out of the Sitka school system they do not want to touch natural resources and they all look for government type jobs or anything that is not natural resources. We do not really have any private schools here. We had one, but it had to close because they tried to keep the tuition low which made it too hard to obtain a building. The private school was not at all popular with the public schools in town. The private school did try to keep the tuition so low they never had any money. A voucher would make a better opportunity for new schools here. It would be a parents dream for a better education for our children and a better future. We are not going to get the social teachings and the slanted environmental views out of the public schools. Our only way to combat this problem is for more private schools. I hope you get somewhere with school vouchers. Most people are busy working so you probably will not hear from them but they *are* out there. Another reason why you may not hear from people (especially in small towns) is because teachers will find out which parents are causing what they perceive to be trouble and may take it out on their child. For instance, the child may all of a sudden become a trouble-maker or all of a sudden be classified as slow at reading. From the words I have heard teachers say during wage negotiations, I do not trust them. There are some good teachers out there but you don't hear from them so they are of no value.

Sincerely,



Mike Svenson

104 SHARON DRIVE
SITKA, AK 99835

Subject: Vouchers

Date: Mon, 22 Feb 1999 12:19:05 -0900

From: David Chapman <chapmand@mtaonline.net>

To: Randy_Lorenz@legis.state.ak.us

Dear Mr. Kohring,

We are a home school family and would like to give our opinion on vouchers.

We would only be in favor of them if there is absolutely no government intervention concerning what or how our children are taught at home. We

are not enrolled in any state supported program, and don't plan to be, and

we don't want to lose the freedoms we enjoy in this wonderful state.

Thank you very much for the fine job you have been doing in the legislature.

God Bless you and your family.

Sincerely,

David and Tina Chapman

PO Box 4088

Palmer, AK 99645

Subject: school voucher

Date: Mon, 22 Feb 1999 17:17:45 -0800

From: Hao <hao@alaska.net>

To: Randy_Lorenz@legis.state.ak.us

From: Rick Hao 521 S Lane Anch Ak 338-1200

I support Rep.Vic Kohring bill to provide a school voucher system for the State of Alaska. This bill will help change the aptitude and attitude of education professionals and what the public demands from our public education system.

Subject: school vouchers

Date: Mon, 22 Feb 1999 08:46:47 -0900

From: "Dr. Kevin Tomera" <ktomera@alaska.net>

To: <Representative_Vic_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us>

I support school vouchers
kelly tomera
1820 stanford dr
anchorage ak 99508
ktomera@alaska.net

Subject: House Bill No. 5

Date: Thu, 18 Feb 1999 03:50:10 -0900

From: Bill Malchow <malchow@alaska.net>

To: Representative_Vic_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us

Vic,

I am in full support of this bill you are sponsoring for Education Vouchers!

Thanks,

William K. Malchow
17824 Sanctuary Dr.
E.R. AK 99577

(907) 696-1866

Subject: School Voucher System

Date: Thu, 18 Feb 1999 11:01:48 -1000

From: "Andrew J Bond" <ABOND@mail.aai.arco.com>

**To: Representative_Vic_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us, Representative_Joe_Green@legis.state.ak.us,
Senator_Jerry_Ward@legis.state.ak.us**

Representative Kohring,

I was very happy to see you had proposed HB-5 to offer school vouchers. Unfortunately when I read the fine print I see that I have no chance to qualify. I can understand trying to base the payment on income level. But I think that will also cause some problems. It is still a huge burden for a family with several kids in private school making as much money as I do. I think a better system would be phase out the voucher amount as income increases. Starting at 200% of the poverty level and maybe phasing out at \$100,000 of taxable income. Those are just rough figures off the top of my head.

I can see a situation developing where families at 200% of the poverty level or below would begin to fill the private schools and force out middle income families who get no benefit. I think you need a system where everyone benefits to a certain level. Your plan might remove a large section of the "trouble makers" from the public schools and send them to private schools. I also think that even those at the low end of the income scale should have to pay some portion of the tuition rather than receiving a full payment voucher. Then they will also be making a sacrifice for their children's education rather than just taking advantage of the system.

The public schools need some competition to bring down soaring education costs and teachers salaries. This will be a great way to start getting the K-12 education budget more under control. As you well know, private schools generally provide better education at half the cost of the public schools on a per student basis.

So in closing, I sure like the voucher plan. I just think it needs modification to benefit more than just the lower income section of the population.

Andy Bond
House 10, Senate E
12100 Woodway Circle
Anchorage, AK 99516
(907) 263-4623

Subject: HB 5, education voucher

Date: Sat, 20 Feb 1999 10:35:23 -0900

From: Peter Brautigam <peter@hartig.com>

To: Representative_Vic_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us

I would like to express my support for education vouchers as presented in HB 5. Although private education is a choice, we should all have the same opportunity for our children to have a choice between public and private education. This would provide us all an equal opportunity.

Peter Brautigam
Anchorage, Alaska
peter@hartig.com

Subject: vouchers

Date: Thu, 7 Jan 1999 23:55:15 -0900

From: "JACKSON 6 FAMILY" <mjackson1@ideafamilies.org>

To: <Representative_Vic_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us>

DEAR REP. VIC KOHRING,

I WANT TO THANK YOU FOR THE STEP YOU ARE TAKING IN THE AREA OF THE VOUCHER SYSTEM. I KNOW YOU ARE STANDING UPON A CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECT. JUST WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT WE ARE SUPPORTING YOU IN PRAYER. LOTS OF ATTACKS HAPPEN WHEN YOU ROCK THE BOAT. I HAVE HOMESCHOoled ALL 4 OF MY CHILDREN. 2 ARE NOW IN PRIVATE SCHOOL AND 2 ARE STILL HOME SCHOoled AND ARE IN THE IDEA PROGRAM. WHAT A TREMENDOUS BLESSING THIS GALENA PROGRAM IS. ALL THOSE YEARS OF BEING ALL ALONE SO TO SPEAK AND TO THOINK THAT I NOW HAVE HELP THAT DOESN'T CONTROL ME IS WONDERFUL. I TRY TO IMAGINE WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO HAVE ASSISTANCE IN PRIVATE SCHOOL, WHICH IS WHERE MY 2 OLDEST NOW ARE AND IT WOULD BE A BIT OF HEAVEN. I ALWAYS WONDERED WHY WE PAY SCHOOL TAXES AND OUR CHILDREN DID NOT ATTENDSCHOOL. I WONDER ALOT OF THINGS. I JUST WANTED TO TAKE THE TIME TO THANK YOU AND LET YOU KNOW WE AS A FAMILY ARE BEHIND YOU. STAY STRONG. REMEMBER TO KEEP FRESH AND TAKE A WALK IF YOU H AVE TO AS THE PRESSURE MOUNTS.

OUR LOVE AND PRAYERS,
SHERRI JACKSON AND FAMILY
907-248-0995

Subject: Thanks for your hard work!

Date: Sat, 20 Feb 1999 20:33:42 -0900

From: vicki hoyman <hoyhouse@mtaonline.net>

To: Representative_Vic_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us

Dear Mr. Kohring,

I want to take time to sincerely thank you for the stands you take on several issues that mean alot to me. We are a family of 6 in Palmer enjoying our 14th year of home schooling. It has been one of the greatest joys and challenges of my life. I never would have dreamed, growing up in the home of a public school teacher, that I would one day home school all my children! I thank the Lord daily for the privilege and also that I live in a state that is very "home school friendly". This year we hesitantly signed up for Cyber Lynx out of the Nenana school district, I say hesitantly because the whole program seemed to good to be true! We have found it most helpful and it has been so awesome to have some money to purchase materials, lessons etc. I know the Matsu-school district thinks all of us who signed up for these cyber schools are taking money out of their pockets but I don't know of one family that took their kids out of public school this year to join a cyber school like Cyber Lynx or IDEA. Everyone I know has been doing home school all along. I have 4 children and we have given them a quality education for an incredibly low price. Everyone in the public school fusses about lack of funding, all the money in the world can't promise a good education, it requires a healthy environment, a teacher who really loves the kids, and a contagious love for learning! You are welcome at our home school anyday! I could write volumes about the fun things we have done together, places we've went, projects we've accomplished! Thank you for supporting home schoolers! We truly do appreciate you!

Warmly,

Vicki Hoyman

Subject: Thanks for the call

Date: Sat, 20 Feb 1999 22:09:48 -0900

From: Steve Unfreid <unfreids@alaska.net>

Organization: Self

To: Representative_Vic_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us

Thanks for the call Saturday night reference my article in the Anchorage paper. After reading today's paper and reading Charles Reynolds piece, my wife (a stay-at-home/home school mom) sent in the following (even if it doesn't get printed, it may give you another angle on which to address this issue).

Steve Unfreid

I applaud Charles Reynolds (Letters Feb 20) for his clear grasp of our state constitution--understanding that no funding should go to support "...any religious or other private educational institution."

In fact, maybe we could get together and take every public school district in Alaska to court for their teaching of secular humanism. In the Humanist Manifesto #1, it clearly states that humanism is a religion. This is seen and taught every day in subjects like biology, where the theory and scientifically unprovable belief of evolution is the only thought presented for the origin of life. This belief that man is here by chance and is thus the only entity that can save us, is a religious, not scientific viewpoint.

You can't have it both ways. Either you do as Lawrence J. Freidberger advocated in his February 18 letter, and amend our constitution to allow funding for all (and thus break the religious monopoly held by our public schools), or you have our public schools cease their religious instruction. My guess is that Rep Vic Kohring's amendment is the most fair approach.

Kathe Unfreid
Wasilla AK
PO Box 672518
Chugiak Ak 99567
745-4092

Subject: House Bill No. 5

Date: Mon, 22 Feb 1999 01:19:28 -0500

From: "Stuart W. Holland" <swholland@compuserve.com>

To: "Rep. Vic Kohring" <Representative_Vic_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us>

Dear Representative Kohring,

Thank you for sponsoring the subject bill to administer a pilot program of education vouchers. I have two children who are currently enrolled in a private school, of which I am a school board member. I am thoroughly convinced that private school education would be the choice for many more families if they could afford it. Your proposed bill would allow more families to afford this choice.

A secondary benefit of this program would be to improve the quality of the public education system. If more families are leaving the current system, then pressure would naturally be placed on the public educators and their governing bodies to provide the quality education that parents are seeking.

Again, thank you for sponsoring this vital legislation! May God bless your efforts to improve the overall quality of our education system.

Sincerely,

Stuart Holland

home phone: 907-272-4460

email address: "swholland@compuserve.com"

Subject: Independent Board for Charter Schools

Date: Mon, 22 Feb 1999 05:14:43 -0900

From: Linda Sharp <lsharp@alaska.net>

**To: Representative_Vic_Kohring@legis.state.ak.us, lsharp@alaska.net,
no_spam_allowed@ibm.net, rjaur@alaska.net**

Dear Representative Kohring,

Have you introduced a bill for vouchers? If so, I would like to help you on it any way I can. Please send me a copy (fax 907-245-5502, mail 2710 West 34th Ave. Anchorage, 99517), if you have a bill.

Would you consider introducing a bill to change current charter school law to establish a Board for Charter Schools? I envision that the Board would be 7 to 9 people, all volunteers, equally representing our state's population. In other words, about half from Anchorage, one from Fairbanks, one from Southeast, one from Mat Su, one from Kenai and a 2 or 3 from the balance of state.

They would meet 4 to 6 times a year in Anchorage, so there would be flight and lodging expense. They would need an administrative person to handle papers and coordinate meetings and take minutes, so that would be about \$100K for wages, benefits and office operations. That could be subtracted from the DOE's allotment, as they would be replacing some DOE functions.

This Board would be a CHOICE for both existing charters and for newly proposing charters. This would replace the school districts as the sole authorizing authority, but of course, those preferring the districts could always stay or go with them also.

This is essential for our small charter to survive. We presently have to comply with all ASD Administrative procedures, and it would take us about \$150,000 a year to properly comply with all the reports, forms, procedures and meetings required to know and do that work. Our total funding is less than \$100. Education should be our mission, not administrative fulfillment.

In addition, for example, we needed a waiver to be able to consider using Viking Hall, where about 10 times a year in the evenings, for Sons of Norway social events, a liquor cabinet is unlocked to serve members up to 2 drinks per evening. ASD procedures said "no liquor on the premise." We were required to apply for a waiver to the policy.

The superintendent first decided to get a legal opinion. Then he wrote a memo to the School Board opposing it, although his legal opinion said it should be fine. Then we had to wait for the agenda to clear to allow us to appear and be heard before the School Board. This simple delay took more than two months.

You can't imagine the hours and expertise that have gone into simply finding a facility to please ASD. We were told recently by MOA Planning Officials that the ASD spends hundreds of thousands of dollars hiring MOA Planning Dept. to do what we are doing find a site. Then they spend \$1,000,000 to design. Then they spend \$10, \$20, \$30 million

or more to construct. We have only a few thousand dollars to accomplish it all. This is a ridiculous Catch 22..

Other people who I think would support / co-sign your bill, if you'd do it, include Reps. Dyson, James, Mulder, Ogan, Kott, Coghill, Halcro and maybe Kelly. Senators Miller, Taylor, Donley, Torgerson. There may be many others.

Please let me know if this is possible to get going and passed this year. I would do anything I could to help.

Many thanks for all you do.

Linda Sharp
Tel. 245-5501

Subject: Alaska PTA position on Vouchers

Date: Tue, 16 Feb 1999 13:12:21 -0900

From: Bogrens <bogren@alaska.net>

To: Representative_John_Coghill@legis.state.ak.us

CC: Representative_Fred_Dyson@legis.state.ak.us

Testimony

To: Alaska House of Representatives Health, Education and Social Services Committee

By: Betsy Turner-Bogren; Alaska PTA, Vice President, Legislative Affairs

Date: February 16, 1999

Re: House Bill 5, Voucher System for Education

The Alaska PTA has an annual membership of over 15,000. Our association is organized to include representation from six geographic regions covering the entire state and four active councils representing Ketchikan, the Mat/Su Borough, Fairbanks and Anchorage. Delegates from across Alaska meet annually to review our Legislative Program and adopt legislative priorities.

Last November delegates to the Alaska PTA Issues Conference adopted five legislative priorities including a statement opposing the creation of education vouchers. Our Association's statement is:

"Alaska PTA believes that public funds should be dedicated to public education. Alaska PTA opposes legislation, including the creation of vouchers or tax credits for private education, that would direct State funding away from public schools."

This statement was adopted by unanimous consent. It was the only priority adopted without discussion.

Support for public education had always been a priority for the Alaska PTA. Our members recognize that the creation of an educational voucher system would undermine State support by diverting funding resources to non-public institutions. We believe that every child in Alaska deserves access to high quality public education and that it is the State's responsibility to support public education with adequate funding.

On behalf of the Alaska PTA I would like to thank members of this Committee for your work to improve the quality of public education in Alaska. We encourage you to continue your efforts to find solutions that address the concerns of the Alaska PTA.

FEB 23 1999

COMMITTEE TESTIMONY Regarding HOUSE BILL NO.5
"Voucher System for Education"

My Name is Helene Antel Brooks. I am a wife, the mother of a student enrolled in the Mat-Su School District, an attorney, and a member of the Mat-Su School Board. I would have liked to present my views on this proposed piece of legislation in person; but, unfortunately other business commitments do not make that possible. These written comments will thus have to suffice.

It is with the utmost dismay that I find myself witness to intentional efforts by our elected representatives to dismantle the public school system. HB No. 5 is nothing more than a public attempt to validate parochial selfishness. Indeed, the public education system, not only in Alaska but across our great nation, is in need of care and revitalization. The appropriate response to this condition is to accept responsibility for it. The inappropriate response suggested by HB 5, is simply to run away. The temptation to flee public education by such means as a voucher system, is in reality a reflection of our inability to accept that we ourselves have created all of the alleged inadequacies of which we complain. As a society we have egregiously failed to support, nourish or adequately fund public education for several decades. We have diminished the potential success of our system of public education by abandoning it. The fault is not in the system; but, it is ours if public schools can no longer inspire and enable *all* young people to reach for the stars.

America was--and still is, a great experiment. It is based upon the precept that government is not something separate from the people. *Government is not they, it is we the people.* Democracy requires that we endeavor to *give all the same chances.* The weaker must grow strong and the ignorant more wise. The selfish must learn generosity. We must work together--not against each other, to strengthen our most vital public institution: education. If democracy as an institution is to live, we must recommit ourselves to it. We must not break that which binds diversity into a powerful whole by segregating ourselves into small pockets of like mindedness. Only as a diverse people united will we continue to stand.

America's system of public education gives both rich and poor, loved and unloved, the orphaned child and the child well cared for, the same chance to dream of limitless horizons. It is the cornerstone of our great nation. To even consider the voucher system proposed by HB 5, threatens to tear apart the American dream.

I am strongly opposed to HB 5

POM for Representative Kohring



From: Ms Frances Jacobson
POB 874152

Telephone: 376-8239

Wasilla, AK 99687

Constituent

Registered Voter: U

Bill: HB 5 Title: VOUCHER SYSTEM FOR EDUCATION
Message:

I ENCOURAGE YOU TO VOTE AGAINST HB 5 ON TWO POINTS: 1- VOUCHERS WILL ALLOW PUBLIC MONEY TO SUPPORT PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS, WHICH WOULD BE CONTRARY TO THE CONSTITUTION; 2- PRIVATE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ARE NOT CURRENTLY HELD TO THE SAME STANDARD OF ACCOUNTABILITY AS ARE PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND EDUCATIONAL DOLLARS SHOULD PROVIDE ACCOUNTABILITY.

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POM for Representative Kohring



From: Ms Carla Takesita
367 N Valley Way

Telephone: 745-3589

Palmer, AK 99645

NON Constituent

Registered Voter: U

Bill: HB 5 Title: VOUCHER SYSTEM FOR EDUCATION
Message:

I ASK YOU TO VOTE NO ON HB 5.

Entered in MAT on 2/16/99 POMID: 641

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Message 12 out of 12.

POM for Representative Kohring



From: Ms Laurel Fortunoff
501 McAdoo Way

Telephone: 376-1298

Wasilla, AK 99654

NON Constituent

Registered Voter: Y

Bill: HB 5 Title: VOUCHER SYSTEM FOR EDUCATION
Message:

I AM URGING ALL OF YOU TO VOTE AGAINST HB5. I DON'T FEEL WE CAN AFFORD TO GIVE MONEY TO PRIVATE SCHOOLS AT THIS TIME. I MOST PARTICULARLY DO NOT FEEL WE CAN SUPPORT PRIVATE SCHOOLS WHEN WE CANNOT SUPPORT OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS SYSTEM. I AM NOT AWARE OF ANY STUDIES REGARDING THIS TYPE OF PILOT PROGRAM SHOWING ANY POSITIVE IMPACT ON THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM.

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POM for Representative Kohring



From: Ms Mary Kay Flynn
POB 1415

Telephone: 745-4588

Palmer, AK 99645

NON Constituent

Registered Voter: U

Bill: HB 5 Title: VOUCHER SYSTEM FOR EDUCATION
Message:

URGING YOU TO VOTE NO ON HB 5. I AM ADAMATELY OPPOSED,

Entered in MAT on 2/16/99 POMID: 633

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Message 10 out of 12.

POM for Representative Kohring



From: Mrs Pattie Haugom
307 N Chugach

Telephone: 000-0000

Palmer, AK 99645

NON Constituent

Registered Voter: Y

Bill: HB 5 Title: VOUCHER SYSTEM FOR EDUCATION
Message:

I AM VEHEMENTLY OPPOSED TO THE VOUCHER SYSTEM PROPOSAL SPONSORED BY REP KOHRING. SUCH A SYSTEM WOULD PUT AN END TO PUBLIC EDUCATION IN ALASKA. PUBLIC EDUCATION IS ONE OF THE FEW THINGS THAT DOES WORK WELL IN A STATE AS WIDLY DIVERSIFY AS OURS. IF THIS LEGISLATION WERE TO PASS,ALASKAN CHILDREN WOULD QUICKLY FALL BEHIND THE REST OF THE NATION IN EDUCATION.

Entered in MAT on 2/16/99 POMID: 628

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