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New York's Career Magnet Schools

Lauded as Nation's Model

By SUSAN CHIRA

New York City's beleaguered public schools are now being held up as the best in the country for something — creating a network of magnet schools that do not end up segregating students by race or class.

A report released today by researchers at Columbia University's Teachers College praises New York City as a national model for its career magnet schools, which draw students from across the city and prepare them for both specific careers and college.

'Most Exciting Set of Choices

"Among the big cities, this is the most egalitarian I know and probably the most exciting set of choices for a student in high school," said Robert L. Crain, a professor of sociology and education at Teachers College and the main author of the report. "All the chronic problems big cities have are as bad here as anywhere else, but at the same time there are these experimental schools. It's like a swamp — there are these mangrove trees growing out of it that are quite amazing."

New York City offers 133 career magnet schools, 8 of them in separate schools, like the Murry Bergtraum High School for Business Careers, and the rest housed within regular neighborhood high schools. Career magnets offer specialized courses in such areas as health, business, computers, law and medicine. They are different from New York City's most famous magnet schools, like Stuyvesant High School or Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music and the Arts, which are the most sought-after public schools in New York.

New York's success has broad implications for the nationwide debate about allowing students to choose which school, the report says. Based on a study of more than 4,000 ninth graders, the report says that students who attend career magnet schools improve their reading scores, earn more credits toward graduation and are less likely to drop out.

Moreover, the report says, New York City offers these opportunities to a broad range of students, because, unlike other cities, it requires magnet schools to admit weak students along with strong ones.

The study was commissioned by the National Center for Research in Vocational Education at the University of California at Berkeley.

But New York's system has also drawn criticism. Some administrators and teachers at career magnet schools say that forcing the schools to admit low-scoring students has weakened the quality of the

programs and hurt those students who cannot meet the programs' standards.

Others say that New York City still has not gone far enough in offering all students good choices, leaving about a third of New York City students in neighborhood schools that may be weaker because magnet schools have taken the most motivated students.

In New York's system, while schools like Stuyvesant screen all their applicants, career magnet

dents get their first choices, and about one-third of all New York City students end up in one of the career magnet schools.

Other cities usually allow magnet schools to select their students or admit students on a first-come, first-served basis. Critics have assailed such policies because they tend to favor students with the best-educated, most aggressive or shrewdest parents and because they tend to weaken neighborhood schools.

The report praises New York's procedure as a model way to address those concerns. New York City's magnet schools serve a broad range of students, Professor Crain said, not just the most talented or most privileged. He did note that in many cases, students were reluctant to choose a magnet school if they feared they would be in a racial minority.

Over all, the report says, students in career magnet schools did better than their peers who were denied entry and were attending neighborhood schools. And students of all reading abilities who were admitted to career magnet schools were much less likely to drop out after middle school. Average readers attending magnet schools increased their reading skills nearly twice as fast as their counterparts in neighborhood schools and earned one-fourth more credits toward graduation, suggesting they were more likely to graduate.

Possibility of Intimidation

These results confirm several other studies showing that students who have chosen their school do better. The researchers also noted that teachers in the career magnet programs were extremely proud of their programs and felt deeply committed to them, suggesting that teachers, too, benefit from school choice.

Some principals and teachers have argued, however, that New York City has damaged outstanding programs in the name of egalitarianism by forcing them to admit students who cannot do the work and to deny places to good students who want to attend.

The report noted that many teachers and principals opposed the lottery system that forced them to admit students with lower reading scores, which was introduced in 1987.

When the researchers compared the performances of poor and average readers in career magnet and neighborhood schools, they found that those in the career magnet schools were absent more and had less improvement in reading scores than those who were denied acceptance to the magnet schools and ended up in neighborhood schools. The researchers suggested the students may have been intimidated or alienated by the career magnet schools' demands.

But at the same time, the poor readers in the magnet schools were more likely to pass the Regents mathematics test than the poor readers who lost the lottery and attended neighborhood schools.



OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT
WASHINGTON

April 21, 1992

MEMORANDUM FOR THE VICE PRESIDENT

FROM: Allan B. Hubbard *ABH*

Attached is a good update on choice, especially in California.

cc: William Kristol
Bill Burrow
John McConnell
Matt Scully
David Juday
✓ Richard Porter

WSJ
4/20/92

Grass-Roots Choice

Imagine that education reform in this country is taking place in two separate classrooms. The classroom in Washington, D.C., is filled with remedial students — Members of Congress and sometimes the Bush administration. They can't quite grasp the need for fundamental reform and waste time yawning over old lesson plans written by school administrators. The other classroom is animated — filled with parents, business leaders and dissident educators. Unwilling to fall behind, they've begun their own grass-roots reform efforts.

All over the country, in fact, people have decided that the fastest route to real educational reform is to allow parents to send their children to the public or private school of their choice. "Choice isn't the only reform we need," says John Chubb, a Brookings Institution scholar, "but it's a necessary precondition for other kinds of reforms."

Business leaders especially, who've invested billions of dollars in public education with meager results, are now warming up to choice. Pat Rooney, the president of Golden Rule Insurance Co., has given out 700 scholarships to inner-city students in Indianapolis so they can attend private schools. Since his program started, the local public schools have scrambled to implement their own reforms.

Programs similar to Mr. Rooney's are now planned for Detroit, Atlanta, Cleveland and Chicago. James Leininger, the founder of Kenetic Concepts Inc., read about Mr. Rooney in these columns last August 2 ("Education's Golden Rule") and decided to start his own version in San Antonio. Last week, KCI, the USAA Federal Savings Bank and the San Antonio Express-News created a \$1.5 million scholarship fund so parents can choose their own schools.

Families are eligible if their child qualifies for a low-cost school lunch. The first 700 who apply will receive a three-year scholarship for half the tuition costs at a private school, up to \$750 a year. Students can also use the money as tuition if they are transfer students at a public school outside their area. The Express-News printed the scholarship form in last Thursday's paper and more than 300 parents mailed their applications the same day.

The most ambitious choice program is in California, where a coalition of parents and business leaders called ExCEL is trying to qualify an initiative for the November ballot. It would grant students who wanted to attend a private school a \$2,500 annual state scholarship, or somewhat less than half the average cost of a public-school education.

The initiative's sponsors, who in-

clude Joseph Alibrandi, the CEO of Whittaker Corp., and former Democratic Senator John Tunney, have been subjected to a campaign of vilification and intimidation. The California Teachers Association has sent teachers to cluster near signature tables and talk people out of signing the choice petition. Many school boards have openly voted to oppose the initiative despite legal prohibitions against such action.

Choice supporters are fighting back. Last week, they were granted a temporary restraining order against the Las Virgenes School District in Los Angeles, after a flier attacking the initiative was sent out by the district under its nonprofit postal permit. District officials claimed they were at least partly reimbursed by the flier's sponsors, but Judge Robert O'Brien, a Jerry Brown appointee, ordered the district not to spend any more resources against choice.

Another temporary restraining order was issued last Friday against the Los Angeles City Unified School District, after choice supporters filed suit charging the district had used its cable-TV channel to attack the initiative. One of the parents bringing the suit is Star Parker, a small-business woman. Ms. Parker is a black single mother who was on welfare for three years in the 1980s. She's outraged that school officials are using tax money to try to prevent her from voting for a plan that would let her 11-year-old daughter, April, attend a better school.

"The rich have choice now," she told us. "If I'd stayed on welfare, I could also have had choice. They would have let me attend a state university in a good neighborhood, and they would have allowed me to send April to a good school there instead of where I live. The only people who don't have choice today are the working poor and the middle class."

Ms. Parker says 60% of minority students now fail to graduate in her area, and that the only way the schools will improve is if the jobs of bureaucrats in them are threatened. What most galls parents such as Ms. Parker is that the educational establishment doesn't even want parents to have a chance to vote on choice.

The offensive by the California teachers' unions has hurt the collection of signatures. ExCEL has to turn in more than 800,000 names by next Monday. They have a number (800 962-ABCD or 310 416-9601) to take requests for petitions. Ms. Parker thinks educational reform has to be on California's ballot this fall. "If it isn't, you can bet the educational status quo will decide they now don't have to change anything."

COMMENTARY

KEN ADELMAN

“What works in our schools?” is a more interesting and instructive line of inquiry than “What fails?” That something works in New York City schools is most interesting and instructive of all.

Yet school choice does.

“It’s like a swamp,” Professor Robert L. Crain of Columbia University Teachers College called New York City. Yet “there are these mangrove trees growing out of it that are quite amazing.”

He should know. For Mr. Crain was the prime author of a new report on the hot topic of school choice.

Advocates long claimed that all people, including poor people, should have the same ability to choose a school as do the rich, who can always send their children to private or boarding schools. Besides, nothing, they claim, improves performance like competition.

Opponents long derided the scheme as a cheap Reagan era notion that helps the better-off, relegating the worse-off to yet more loathsome conditions. The choice schools, they claim, will be filled with white, middle-class children, while minority students will fall further behind in their shabby neighborhood schools.

Teacher unions have been scared that choice would threaten job security, and the hordes of school administrators contend that choice schools are more expensive than neighborhood schools.

Yet Mr. Crain and his team of researchers found good news. “Among the big cities, this is the most egalitarian program I know and probably the most exciting set of choices for a student in high school.”

The data speaks for itself. Students in New York choice schools increased their reading skills nearly twice as fast, on the average, as children attending neighborhood schools. They earned one-fourth more credits toward graduation.

Such stunning results come from these choice schools, which offer students the ability to specialize in health, business, computers, law or medicine. Racial balance and equity are assured; choice schools must accept less-able students along with the gifted.

New York’s results reinforce research elsewhere across the nation. It shows that pupils do better and parents participate more in schools they choose. And teachers are prouder and perform better there.

If choice schools work in New York City, they can work anywhere,

School choice working

As Vice President Dan Quayle said there in February: “The liberal vision of a happy, productive and content welfare state hasn’t even worked on 22 square miles of the most valuable real estate in the world.”

New York City burdens its citizens with the highest local tax in the United States and goes broke even with that. One in every eight New Yorkers is on welfare. Its relatively smaller tax base must support relatively larger costs. Each student

If choice schools work in New York City, they can work anywhere, for conditions are simply miserable.

enrolled in public school costs \$7,000 — more than twice that of private schools there (\$3,000).

Businesses are hit up so hard for tax funds that they flee. A business located in New York City is taxed at three times the rate paid in Chicago or Los Angeles. Consequently, in the next two years the city will lose some 320,000 private-sector jobs.

Choice schools have proven worthy elsewhere, too.

John A. Murphy, who recently completed seven years as superintendent of Prince George’s County public schools, said he’d “love to see, in every school system, parents able to pick any school they want. If one school doesn’t get picked, the school closes up and everybody at that school says goodbye, since they haven’t done their job well.”

From Mr. Murphy’s experience in the heavily black school system, he found that “a choice system brings much more harmony between the home and school. Rather than forced busing for integration, which antagonizes many people, there is voluntary busing to get to the school of choice. There’s no resentment of parents in this case, even though the child may get on the same bus and go the same distance to the integrated school. The relationship between school and home is much more positive then, and the child’s

30 Section 1 Chicago Tribune, Thursday, April 23

O'Malley & Collin INC.



BlameFest Word is that Lou Konzca, the chief bridge engineer fired by Rich Daley on Wednesday, was supposed to retire around the first of the year. But he was asked to stay on until work on the Kennedy Expressway bridges was finished. And who asked him? The mayor . . . The buzz on LaSalle Street is that Corporation Counsel Kelly Welsh is looking for big-time plaintiff lawyers to help represent the city against other big-time plaintiff lawyers who will be suing. . . And haven't there been tense scenes in law firms between litigators who want to go for the suits and bond lawyers who want to keep the city's business? Wasn't one confrontation at Mayer, Brown & Platt, First Brother Bill Daley's old firm?

Great Chicago political game The water bomb Rich Daley dumped on Jim Edgar has the Guv on the defensive, which is just where the mayor wants him as they negotiate over who picks up how much of The Flood's bills. Edgar's side says he scored points with Downstate and the burbs by standing tall against the city. But look for Edgar to make it very clear in his meeting with Vice President Dan Quayle Thursday that he's very concerned about Chicago. And Rep. Dan Rostenkowski tells INC. that he hopes Daley and Edgar solve their differences soon so Rosty can work on getting President Bush to bail the city out.

THOMAS SOWELL

. . and waiting

If you think the Washington establishment looks out for its own special interests, and has a public-be-damned attitude, you should look at California, where that attitude is even more blatantly shown by the public school establishment.

Education officials have used the taxpayers' money to try to keep taxpayers from having a chance to vote whether to have parental choice in public schools. The Los Angeles Unified School District has used its taxpayer-provided cable television channel to propagandize against allowing the public to vote in November on an initiative to permit school choice. It is opposing the collection of signatures to allow the choice initiative to appear on the ballot.

In other words, they don't want the public to have even the choice as to whether to vote for or against choice.

It has taken a court order to stop the Los Angeles Unified School District from using its educational channel for political propaganda. Another court order was needed to

stop the Las Virgenes School District from misusing its non-profit postal permit to propagandize against the same ballot initiative.

That's not the half of it. The California teachers' unions have likewise gone on the offensive to prevent the collecting of signatures needed to get the issue on the ballot. A union "hot line" phone number has been set up, so that anyone who sees signatures being collected can immediately contact the union, which will then dispatch people to stop it.

The union says that its methods are simply persuasion, but there have been reports of the intimidating encirclement of people trying to collect signatures.

The sad fact is that these public-be-damned tactics may work. The filing of signatures needs to begin Monday, and there may or may not be enough to get the issue on the November ballot. Fortunately, the promoters of the petition have also set up a couple of hot lines for people who want to see the public get a right to vote on the issues.

One is a free 800 number: 800/962-ABCD. The other number is 310/416-9601.

Anyone who thinks the voters should have an opportunity to decide for themselves whether to have

Once the public has a choice — and especially after it exercises that choice and sees the benefits to the children — there will be no stopping the call for fundamental changes in the way our public schools function and malfunction.

school choice policies should call these numbers. If the misuse of public property and goon squad tactics work to keep the issue off the ballot, the educational establishment will not only win politically, they are al-

most certain to claim this proves the public agrees with them.

Why is there such an all-out effort to keep the school choice initiative off the ballot?

The educational establishment knows that any such reforms have to be headed off at the pass, because once the public has a choice — and especially after it exercises that choice and sees the benefits to the children — there will be no stopping the call for fundamental changes in the way our public schools function and malfunction.

What is being proposed in California, and in some other states as well, is that parents who want to take their children out of the public schools be allowed about half as much money as the school system gets for teaching them. With only half as much money as the public school system spends per child, many private schools can do a much better job of educating them. Study after study has shown that.

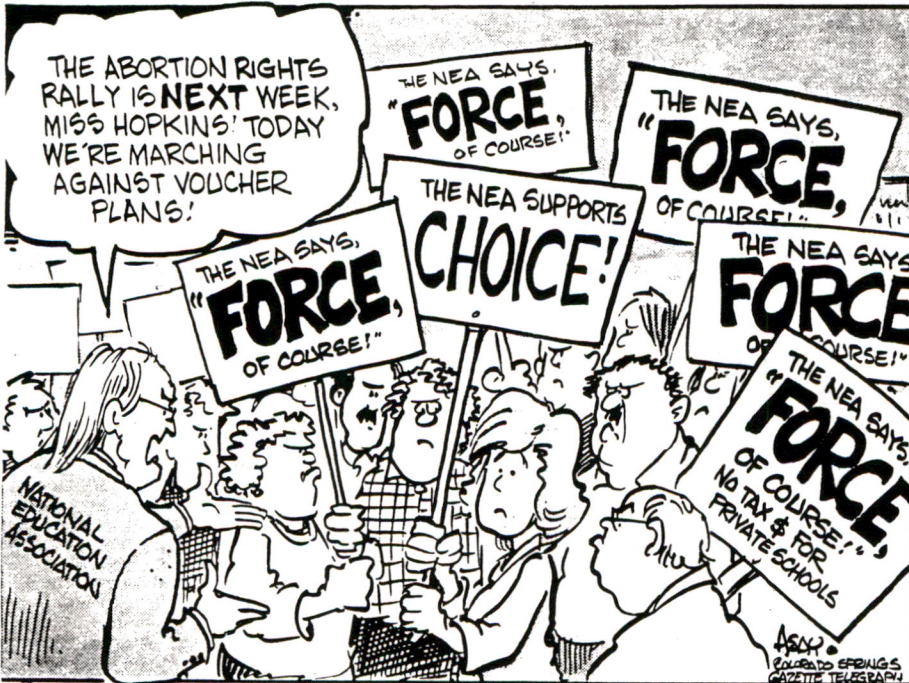
Most people haven't read those studies, so the educational establishment is still safe. But once people get a chance to see the difference with their own eyes, public schools are going to have to shape up or ship out. Some of the incompetent teachers and administrators currently enjoying iron-clad job protection and automatic raises are going to be in big trouble.

Their own desperate efforts to keep the issue off the ballot in the first place betray their clear understanding that their hides are at stake because their schools cannot measure up to the competition. As for misusing public institutions to fight their political battles, that is nothing new for California's teachers and administrators.

Only last year, they gave out classroom assignments to their students to write to the state legislature to protest against not getting as much money as they wanted in the state budget. Some of these letters contained threats of physical violence against the legislators.

Only after cries of outrage against these tactics did the head of the California school system send out a memo saying, "It would be legally safer to avoid such activities." As for the morality of using children in this way, his spokesman declared that "having kids use class time to address public officials on current events is appropriate."

The time is long overdue to rein in these arrogant bureaucrats. Choice is only a necessary first step. At the very least, the voters deserve a choice as to whether to exercise choice in their children's education.



Poll: Bush tops Clinton on economy

By Judy Keen
USA TODAY

President Bush has regained a key measure of political strength: Voters now say he, not Bill Clinton, would do a better job handling the economy.

A new USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup poll shows Bush benefits from doubts about Clinton.

A month ago, 49% said Clinton could better handle the economy. Now that's only 36%.

Still, 73% disapprove of Bush's economic management.

That isn't all good news for Clinton. "With Republicans in power and the economy sour," says Everett Ladd of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, "Clinton still didn't get any mileage."

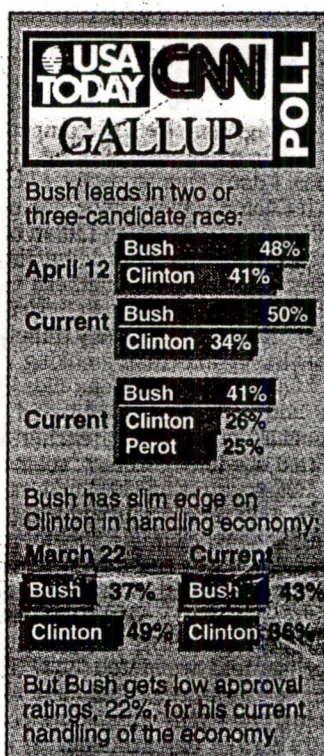
Says Bush campaign chief Robert Mosbacher: "We don't want to jump up and down and say there's nothing to worry about anymore, but it's moving in the right direction."

Clinton aide Dee Dee Myers says the poll reflects the brutal New York primary. "But we've now sort of turned the corner. ... We're beginning to define this as a Bush-Clinton race."

Other findings from the poll of 1,004 registered voters:

► Bush held a lead over Clinton, and in a three-way race, with Ross Perot. Perot got 25%, drawing support almost equally from Bush and Clinton.

► Opinions about Bush improved slightly, from 44% unfavorable a month ago to 41% now; Clinton's unfavorable rating rose 9 points to 49%.



By Ron Coddington, USA TODAY

Clinton's unfavorable numbers might be hard to budge. "Once an opinion has been formed, it's very, very hard to move significantly," says Ladd.

► Fewer are pessimistic about the economy. Just less than half said it's getting worse — down from 71% in January.

► Barbara Bush has a higher favorability rating — 81% vs. Hillary Clinton's 38%.

The poll, done April 20-22, has a 3% margin of error.

► Voters' advice, 6A