

STATE VOUCHER ACTIVITY

* States in parenthesis designate that the session has adjourned for the year.

* Florida will be the lone statewide voucher program. The Governor is expected to sign a negotiated bill June 15.

* Public voucher programs also exist in two cities: Milwaukee and Cleveland.

* Arizona, Maine, and Vermont each offer limited voucher variations, detailed in the fourth column.

* An "X" signifies state legislative activity in 1999 – also detailed in the fourth column.

State	Law	1999	Detail
AL			
(AK)		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 5) was introduced in the Judiciary and Health, Education, and Social Services and Finance Committees. Hearings were held on February 16, March 3, and March 10, but the legislation did not move further.
(AZ)	Var.	X	• State law allows special education students to use state funding to attend private schools. • Voucher legislation (HB 2279, HB 2574, SB 1072, SB 1371) was introduced in the respective Education Committees. HB 2279 passed the House on March 15 and passed the Senate Education Committee on March 25. However, the bill did not move further before the end of the session.
(AR)		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 2275) was introduced in the House Education Committee but did not move further.
CA		X	• Voucher legislation (ABx1 5, ABx1 24, SBx 9, SB 882) was introduced in the respective Education Committees. ABx1 5 and ABx1 24 were scheduled to be heard in the Assembly Education Committee on March 15, but the hearing was cancelled. ABx1 5, ABx1 24, and SBx1 9 did not move further before deadline. SB 882 was voted down on April 21 in the Senate Education Committee. • An initiative drive has begun collecting signatures to put the issue of a voucher constitutional amendment on the March 2000 ballot.
(CO)			
CT		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 5241) has been introduced in the House Education Committee.
DE			
(FL)	X		• Governor Bush's voucher proposal was introduced in HB 751 and SB 1756. HB 751 hearings were held throughout the week of February 22 in the House Select Committee on Transforming Florida Schools. The Committee voted down an amendment to strike the voucher provisions and passed the bill on March 3. HB 751 passed the House on March 25. SB 1756 was heard in the Senate Education Committee, where an amendment to strike the voucher provisions was defeated on March 16. SB 1756 then passed the Committee on March 25 and passed the Senate on April 16. The House passed a negotiated bill on April 28, followed by the Senate on April 30. The Governor is expected to sign the bill June 15. • Other voucher legislation (HB 143, HB 751, SB 100, SB 116, SB 1756) was introduced in the House Education Innovation and Senate Education Committees but did not move further.
(GA)		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 195, SB 68) was introduced in the respective Education Committees. SB 68 was voted down in Committee and voted down as an amendment to other education legislation on the floor of the Senate.
(HA)			
(ID)			
(IL)		X	• Voucher legislation (SB 329) was introduced in the Senate Education Committee and voted down.
(IN)			
(IA)			
(KS)		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 2462, HB 2504, SB 295) was introduced in the respective Education Committees but did not move further.
(KY)			• No legislative session.
LA		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 1652, HB 1770, HB 1953, SB 299, SB 964, SB 1115) has been introduced in the respective Education Committees. HB 1770 was to be heard in the House Education Committee on May 12, but it was cancelled. SB 299 was heard in the Senate Education Committee on May 7, where it was replaced by SB 1115 and then transferred to the Senate Finance Committee. Currently, the Finance Committee is stuck on a tie vote. SB 964 passed the Senate Education Committee on May 27.

ME	Var.	X	• State law allows districts to send students to non-religious private schools and pay their tuition, if no public school exists to serve secondary school students. The U.S. Court of Appeals recently upheld the constitutionality of limiting the use of the vouchers to non-religious schools – specifically holding it unconstitutional for the state to issue vouchers to religious schools. • Voucher legislation (LD 781, LD 2080, LD 2170) was introduced in the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. They were heard in Committee on April 12 and voted down.
(MD)		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 579, HB 668) was heard in the House Ways and Means Committee on March 18 and voted down.
MA			
MI		X	• Voucher legislation (SB 31, SB 216) has been introduced in the Senate Appropriations Committee. • A voucher constitutional amendment is expected on the November 2000 ballot.
(MN)			
(MS)		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 437, HB 500) was introduced in the House Education and Appropriations Committees but did not move further.
(MO)		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 937) was introduced in the House Education Committee but did not move further.
(MT)			
(NE)		X	• Voucher legislation (LB 483) was heard in the Education Committee on March 9 but did not move further.
NV		X	• Voucher legislation (AB 507, SB 385) was introduced in the Assembly Education and Senate Human Resources and Facilities Committees. AB 507 was heard in Committee on April 8 but did not move further. SB 385 was heard in Committee on April 7.
NH		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 633, HB 701) was introduced in the House Education Committee. HB 701 was heard on March 10 and voted down – and then voted down on the House floor on April 14. HB 633 passed the Committee on May 12, with an amendment to exclude religious schools. HB 633 passed the House on May 20 and is now in the Senate Education Committee.
NJ		X	• Voucher legislation (A 1128, S 1537) has been introduced in the respective Education Committees.
(NM)		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 303, SB 289) was introduced but did not move before the end of the regular session. • Governor Johnson vetoed the Education Funding Bill because it did not include voucher provisions. The session ended in March, but the Governor called a special session in early May in order to push voucher legislation. • Voucher bills (HB 4, HB 21, HB 27, SB 2, SB 7, SB 44, SB 48) were introduced. Several hearings were held in early May by a Joint Committee of both houses. SB 2 was voted down by the Senate on May 10. HB 4 was voted down by the House on May 10. The other voucher bills did not move further. • Legislation to study vouchers (HJM 2) was introduced but did not move further.
NY			• New York City Mayor Guiliani has called for a voucher pilot program.
NC			
(ND)			
OH	X	X	• In late May, the Ohio Supreme Court struck down the Cleveland school voucher program. Holding that the creation of the program violated the state's single subject rule (established as part of the state budget in 1995 instead of a freestanding piece of legislation), the court ordered the program to cease operating by June 30, 1999. • Since struck down for technical reasons, the State Legislature is expected to consider a bill to reintroduce the voucher program. • Before the Ohio Supreme Court decision, legislation expanding the voucher program (HB 147) had already been introduced in the House Education Committee.
(OK)			
OR			
PA		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 1374, SB 324, SB 866) has been introduced in the respective Education Committees. • Governor Ridge has put forth a voucher program in his budget.
RI			

(SC)		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 4070) was introduced in the House Education and Public Works Committee but did not move further. • Legislation establishing a task force to study vouchers (HB 4062) was introduced in the House Education and Public Works Committee but did not move further.
(SD)			
(TN)			
(TX)		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 171, HB 709, HB 1569, HB 2118, HB 2366, SB 10) was introduced. The House bills were heard in the House Public Education Committee on April 22 but did not move further. SB 10 was heard in the Senate Education Committee on March 24 and passed. It was then placed on the Senate Intent Calendar for floor consideration but did not move further. There were also concerns that vouchers would be brought forward on the floor of either house as amendments, but this did not occur. • Governor Bush advocated vouchers during his State of the State Address on January 28.
(UT)			
(VT)	Var.	X	• State law allows students who reside in towns without public schools to attend approved, independent private schools. • Voucher legislation (HB 346, SB 65) was introduced in the respective Education Committees but did not move further.
(VA)		X	• In May, Governor Gilmore strongly advocated voucher legislation for next year's session. • Voucher legislation (HB 2681) did not move before the Committee deadline.
(WA)		X	• Voucher legislation (HB 1670, SB 5949) was introduced in the respective Education Committees but did not move further.
(WV)			
WI	X		• On May 14, the Milwaukee School Board dropped its opposition to the city's private school choice program, endorsing Governor Thompson's budget proposals to fund the initiative.
(WY)			

* Prepared by the Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs (June 7, 1999).

WHY VOUCHERS WON'T WORK

May 17, 1999

All parents should be able to choose the education that is best for their children. A wide variety of public school options can help *all* students achieve to high standards and can promote family involvement in education. However, private school vouchers – which spend taxpayer dollars without improving the public schools – are not part of any constructive school choice proposal. **At a time when the public is demanding better schools, more accountability and safer, more stimulating classroom environments, voucher programs would take public education in the opposite direction.**

- **Vouchers undermine public education.** Similar to the educational fads of past decades, voucher proposals offer a quick fix for a few students without helping to improve the public schools that serve the vast majority of America's students. Public schools serve about 46 million students today, while private schools serve only 6 million students. Our nation's taxpayers cannot afford to pay private school tuition for all public school students, and private schools do not have the capacity to serve all students. **Any serious attempt to improve educational options for *all* students must work within the public school system to improve all schools.**

Vouchers siphon scarce resources from the public schools, while the demands on the public schools are constantly increasing; enrollments are rising; more students are coming to school each year with serious educational disadvantages including poverty, limited English proficiency, learning disabilities, and non-traditional family situations; and there is a shortage of qualified teachers to respond to these growing needs. For example, the voucher program in Milwaukee cost the public school district \$22 million in taxpayer dollars this year. According to the superintendent of the San Antonio public school district, they lost \$4 million in funding as a result of the privately funded voucher program. [Education Week, 3/18/99]

Public schools are a fundamental institution in our democracy, and they are one of the only remaining sources of community in our increasingly individualistic society. Public schools do not just serve the public, they create the public [insert more of argument from the white paper.] Privatizing public education is not the solution for America's children.

- **Private Schools are not accountable to the public.** The lack of public accountability for private schools has already caused problems with fraud and mismanagement in the two existing publicly funded voucher programs: **The publicly funded voucher program in Cleveland ran 41 percent over budget last year, and it has been accused of mispending \$1.9 million state tax dollars.** At least \$1.4 million of this money was spent largely on taxis that were used instead of school buses to transport children to school. [Plain Dealer, 3/28/98] **Three voucher schools in Milwaukee closed in the middle of the 1995-96 school year amidst controversies over fraud and mismanagement.** In addition, as many as 40 percent of the religious schools in the Milwaukee voucher program failed to demonstrate that they were meeting the random selection requirements for enrolling students.
- **The impact of vouchers on student achievement is unclear.** **Private school voucher programs have produced only mediocre results so far.** In Cleveland, voucher students did not outperform their public school counterparts when prior achievement and other background characteristics were taken into account. Second year results found no significant differences in reading, mathematics, social studies, or the full battery. The report also found that in newly created private schools, students scored significantly lower than their public school counterparts. [Metcalf, *Evaluation of*

[Get the Ce Ce Rouse analysis of the Milwaukee studies – shows that class size reduction, not vouchers, is the cause of improved achievement in private schools...]

Much of the difference in performance between public and private schools can be explained by the family background of the students. For example, students in private church-related schools are at least two-thirds more likely to come from high-income families (top fifth of families) than students in public schools. [Current Population Survey, 1994] Some private school administrators have acknowledged that selective admissions policies contribute to their success. *“We’ve learned that if you don’t have control over admissions, you don’t have control over your product,”* said John Holmes, director of government affairs for the 3,500-member Association of Christian Schools International. [Wall Street Journal, 1/26/99] It is not clear that private schools would be able to maintain their high performance records if they enrolled many of the disadvantaged or low-performing students currently attending public schools.

- **Private schools, not parents, are the ones who do the choosing.** Private schools can choose their students rather than accepting every student who knocks on their door, and often they send back to the public schools the students who are most difficult to educate – students with disabilities, limited English proficiency, or discipline problems. For example, **forty percent of children eligible for vouchers through the Milwaukee program were rejected for admission by all 102 participating private schools**, and 80 percent of all voucher students attended just three private schools. [Worker’s World, 12/03/99] [Insert stats about students rejected from Cleveland program here.]
- **Vouchers do not benefit the students who need the most help.** The two publicly funded voucher programs in the U.S. have both provided vouchers to a number of students who were already attending private schools. More than one-third of the students who receive vouchers through Milwaukee’s publicly funded voucher program – 2,250 of the 6,200 students – attended private school before they joined the voucher program. [Houston Chronicle, 3/28/99] And more than 1,000 of the 4,000 students who receive vouchers through Cleveland’s publicly funded voucher program previously attended private schools. [EdWeek, 1/20/99]

Voucher programs often cover only part of the cost of private school tuition, requiring that families make a substantial contribution in order to use the vouchers. As many as 46 percent of students dropped out of the Milwaukee voucher program in the first year, and 28 percent dropped out in the fifth year, reporting that the \$3,600 voucher was not sufficient to cover hidden costs such as registration fees, books, uniforms and transportation.

Even when restricted to low-income families, voucher programs skim the students with the most advantaged backgrounds relative to others who are eligible – students who previously attended private schools, students with higher incomes, and students with more highly educated parents. A study of the privately funded voucher program in San Antonio reported that mothers of low-income voucher students were three times more likely to have had some college education than mothers of comparable public school students (55% vs. 19%). [Martinez, “The Consequences of School Choice: Who Leaves and Who Stays in the Inner City.”1995]

- **Private schools would have to compromise their independence to receive public funds.** Receiving taxpayer dollars carries with it certain responsibilities and obligations, and private schools may not be willing to accept the oversight that is necessary to ensure that federal funding is not being misspent. For example, **64 private schools in Miami have signed a letter stating that they will not participate in the recently passed state-wide voucher program**, because they do not want to sacrifice their independence. [find citation for this.]

A 1998 survey of private schools conducted by the U.S. Department of Education in 22 urban areas nationwide found that: 86 percent of religious schools surveyed would not participate in a voucher program that allowed exceptions from religious instruction or activities; one-third to one-half would not participate if they had to accept randomly assigned transfer students from the public schools; and **only 15 to 31 percent of private schools surveyed would participate in a voucher program if they were required to accept students with special needs such as learning disabilities, limited English proficiency or low achievement.**

About 90 percent of the nation's 26,000 private schools claim a religious identity, according to the Heritage Foundation. Joe Loconte, a fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation, warned in a recent editorial that **common private school practices such as selective admissions and religious education could be restricted under voucher programs.** Joseph McTighe of the Council of American Private Education adds, *"Many religious classrooms – Catholic, Protestant and Jewish – are designed to marry the sacred and the secular,"* and *"these schools don't want to compromise the purpose for which they exist."* [Wall Street Journal, 1/26/99]

- **Overall, public schools are doing a good job.** Public schools today are graduating far higher percentages of students than they did years ago. More than 87 percent of students graduate from high school today as compared to only 78 percent in 1970. And the national average on the SAT test has improved slightly, even as a greater percentage of students take the exam each year. [College enrollment rate is also increasing.] Further, the vast majority of students enrolled in the nation's elite universities attended public high schools, including about 80 percent of the students at Stanford and XX percent of the students at Yale University. **Clearly, many public schools are holding students to high standards.**
- **Many school districts are already offering high-quality public school choices to parents.** There is already a great deal of variety and innovation in public education at the local level that provides choices for parents and students. A few examples include: schools within schools, school-to-work programs, high schools collaborating with local colleges, schools that focus on special themes and fields, districts with open-enrollment policies, inter-district choice, and intra-district choice systems.
- **Public school choice can serve many more students than vouchers could ever reach.** More than one million students recently applied for vouchers offered by a group of private businessmen. Every one of these students and families were looking for new educational options, but only 40,000 students received vouchers. The other 960,000 students and families were not helped. [New York Times, 4/21/99] In comparison, **all one million students could have access to new high-quality educational options by making public school choice widely available.**

Charter Schools-

Center for Educational Research:

1,682 Schools

approximately 350, 000 students

31 states, and the District

(5 more have laws, but no schools yet)

new states: Oklahoma and Oregon

highest is Arizona, with 348 schools

23 states with strong/ medium laws, 12 with weak laws

The State of Charter Schools Third-Year Report — May 1999

Executive Summary

What sets charter schools apart from other public schools is their charter — a contract with a state or local agency that provides the school with public funds for a specified time. This contract frees charter schools from a number of regulations that otherwise apply to public schools. In exchange, the charter schools are accountable for improving student performance and achieving goals set out in the charter.

This Third-Year Report of the National Study of Charter Schools provides descriptive information on charter schools that were operating in the 1997-98 school year. Subsequent reports of the National Study will address broad policy issues concerning the charter school movement and its potential effects on America's system of public education.

Growth Trends: The charter movement continued to expand in 1998

- An additional 361 charter schools opened in 1998, bringing the total to 1,050 charter schools in operation in 27 states plus the District of Columbia. Including multiple branches of a school operating under the same charter, the total number of charter school sites operating was 1,129 as of September 1998.
- The demand for charter schools remains high — 7 of 10 report that they have a waiting list.
- Thirteen charter schools closed in 1997-98. In total, 32 charter schools — which is about three percent of all charter schools — have closed since the first charter school opened in 1992.
- The number of students in charter schools increased in 1997-98 by about 50,000, bringing the total to about 160,000 students. This total represents only 0.6 percent of all public school students in the 23 charter states plus the District of Columbia that had open charter schools as of June, 1998.
- During the 1998 legislative session, four new states — Idaho, Missouri, Virginia, and Utah — passed charter legislation, bringing the total to 33 states and the District of Columbia¹. Several charter states amended their laws — two increased the number of charters that can be granted; two expanded the number of agencies allowed to grant charters; one that previously only allowed pre-existing public schools authorized newly created charter schools; two authorized funds for capital improvement needs of charter schools; and one state increased the length of the charter term.

Characteristics of Charter Schools: Most charter schools are newly created, small schools. The charter schools that opened during 1997-98 were more likely to be newly-created, small schools than charter schools opening in prior years.

- Even more so than in the past, recently opened charter schools are small. Currently, the median enrollment of all charter schools is about 132 students per school, whereas all public schools in the charter states have a median of about 486 students. The median size reported in the Second-Year Report was about 149 students per charter school.
- Many charter schools have atypical grade configurations. For 1997-98, one of four charter schools spanned K-12, K-8, or were ungraded compared to fewer than one in ten with similar configurations for all public schools.
- Seven of ten charter schools are now newly created schools, compared to six of ten for 1996-97. These schools are smaller, on average, than converted pre-existing public schools. Nine of the 33 states with charter laws allow private schools to convert to charter schools. Private school conversions represent 11 percent of all charter schools.

- Most charter school teachers are certificated, but in those states that allow non-certificated teachers charter schools have a somewhat lower percentage of certificated teachers than charter schools in other states.
- About two of three charter schools of a subsample of charter schools had a student to computer ratio of fewer than 10 students per computer. The National Study estimates a median ratio for all charter schools of 6 to 1.

Students of Charter Schools: Nationwide, students in charter schools have similar demographic characteristics to students in all public schools. However, charter schools in some states serve significantly higher percentages of minority or economically disadvantaged students.

- Our data contain no evidence that charter schools disproportionately serve white and economically advantaged students.
- White students made up about 52 percent of charter school enrollment and about 58 percent of public school enrollment in 1997-98. These figures are the same as in 1996-97.
- Charter schools in several states — Connecticut, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina and Texas — serve a much higher percentage of students of color than all public schools in those states.
- Seven of ten charter schools have a student racial/ethnic composition that was similar to its surrounding districts. About 16 percent of charter schools serve a higher percentage of students of color than their surrounding districts.
- The estimated percentage of LEP students in charter schools is 10.1 percent, which is a slight drop from the 12.7 percent reported for 1996-97. The comparable figure for all public schools in the 23 charter states and the District of Columbia is approximately 10.7 percent.
- Without regard to differences across states, the reported percentage of students with disabilities at charter schools is 8 percent, which is somewhat less than the 11 percent for all public schools in these states.

The Founding of Charter Schools: Most charter schools aim to realize an alternative vision of schooling.

- Nearly seven of ten newly created charter schools seek to realize an alternative vision of schooling, and an additional two of ten were founded especially to serve a special target population of students. Four of ten public schools report that they converted to charter status in order to gain autonomy from district and state regulations.
- Many private schools that converted to charter status sought public funds so that they could stabilize their finances and attract students.

Challenges Implementing Charter Schools: Practically all charter schools have had to overcome obstacles during their development.

- Most charter schools continue to cite resource limitations as a serious implementation difficulty.
- Newly created charter schools were more likely to cite resource limitations as a major difficulty than pre-existing charter schools.
- About three of ten charter schools that were formerly public schools reported that state or local board opposition or regulations presented obstacles to their school's implementation. About one in five schools that were formerly public indicated that they had difficulty with teacher unions or

collective bargaining agreements.

Autonomy and Accountability: Charter schools, particularly newly created ones, have considerable autonomy. They provide standard financial and student achievement reports to different constituencies depending on the state's approach to accountability.

- The majority of charter schools felt they had primary control over most areas critical to school operations. Fewer charter schools felt they had control over student admissions, budget, student assessment, and school calendar. Compared to newly created charter schools, a lower proportion of pre-existing public schools said they had primary control.
- Most charter schools provide one or more non-instructional services (e.g. health services, social services, and before and after schools care). Three of ten newly created charter schools that provided services chose to provide services themselves, with the remainder provided by districts and other outside providers. In contrast, about six of ten pre-existing charter schools rely on districts. Pre-existing private schools were equally likely to provide services themselves and use an outside provider.
- Nearly nine of ten charter schools were monitored for accountability in terms of financial accounts; seven of ten for student achievement and for student attendance; and six of ten for compliance with regulations and instructional practices.
- The states differ greatly in how they approach accountability, with some following a "centralized" state agency approach, others a "market" driven approach, and still others a "district-based" approach that relies on local accountability within a framework of state testing.
- More than 80 percent of charter schools (based on a subsample of schools) said they made reports during the 1997-98 school year for accountability purposes to one or more constituencies, including their chartering agency, school governing board, state Department of Education, parents, the community, or private funders.
- Almost 90 percent of charter schools (based on a subsample of schools) used student achievement tests, augmented by other measures of student performance and school success to make reports to their chartering agency, the schools governing board, and/or parents.

¹New York enacted charter legislation in December 1998.

-###-

[Acknowledgments]



[About This Report]

CHARTER SCHOOLS: *Today*
CHANGING THE FACE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

SERVING SPECIAL POPULATIONS

As *Figure 9* illustrates, charter schools specialize in serving special populations of students, particularly those typically underserved by the district school system, such as at-risk (27 percent), special education (20 percent), minority (20 percent) and low-income (19 percent) students.

Because the survey provided little definition in this area, charter schools often checked more than one box, such

as “at-risk” and “minority.” Interestingly, almost all respondents (80 percent) marked general population at the same time they marked a specific sub-population, demonstrating that most charter schools believe that their special populations reflect the general population they serve. That may be because relatively large numbers of charter schools are in areas where children are most disadvantaged.

Figure 9: Populations Served/Targeted

General	80%
At-risk/dropouts	27%
Special education	20%
Minority	20%
Low-income	19%
Gifted and talented	14%
Adjudicated youth	9%
Teen parents	9%
Expelled youth	8%
Disabled	6%
ESL/bilingual	5%
Other	0%

(298 schools responding)

CHARTER SCHOOLS:

*Today*CHANGING THE FACE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

THE SURVEY'S KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL.

Charter schools deliver the smaller size that parents want and that is conducive to educational achievement. Average enrollment is about 250, and two-thirds of charter schools have significant waiting lists.

CHARTERS OFFER CHOICES.

Charter schools have responded to students' and parents' well-documented demand for higher standards and more specific, comprehensive school curricula.

MOST CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE START-UPS.

More than three-quarters of responding charter schools are start-up schools, a figure that continues to grow.

MULTIPLE CHARTERING AUTHORITIES LEAD TO MORE CHARTERS.

A majority of charter schools are approved by an agency other than the local school board. Local school boards, however, chartered 43 percent of respondents, and they are more likely to grant charters when state laws allow for multiple charter-granting bodies.

FUNDING AND FACILITIES ARE MAJOR CHALLENGES.

Nearly 40 percent of responding charter schools cite funding as a major challenge. Nearly one-quarter cite facilities as a significant challenge.

CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE WORKING OVERTIME TO DELIVER QUALITY EDUCATION.

Charter schools set their own schedules, and about one-fifth report having either extended-day or extended-year schedules.

EDUCATING UNDERSERVED STUDENTS.

Charter schools serve large percentages of children who are typically underserved in America's schools.

CHARTER SCHOOLS: *Today* CHANGING THE FACE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION



**Figure 3:
Charter School
Types**

Start-ups
77%
Private school conversions
11%
Public school conversions
9%
Other public program conversions
3%
(273 schools responding)

MOST CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE START-UPS

More than three-quarters of survey respondents indicated that their charter schools are start-up schools (*Figure 3*), likely reflecting the reality that it often is easier to start from scratch than to transform an existing culture. This conclusion is supported by trend data, which show that the number of charter school start-ups is growing, while the number of charter school conversions — existing public or private schools that become

charter schools — is declining (*Figure 4*).

Our survey found that a high percentage of private schools than public schools converted to charter schools. This finding, however, may be an anomaly. Only nine states allow private school convert to charters so either these states had a surge of conversions or a disproportionate number of private school conversions responded.

Figure 4: Trend Data on Charter School Types

	U.S. Department of Education, May 1997	U.S. Department of Education, May 1998
Start-ups	56%	70%
Private school conversions	11%	11%
Public school conversions	32%	19%
Other program conversions		

MULTIPLE AUTHORITIES LEAD TO MORE CHARTERS

A review of who grants charters (*Figure 5*) illustrates the impact of different state charter laws. Overall, agencies other than local school boards authorize more charters than any other chartering authority; 57 percent of charters are granted by alternative sponsoring authorities.

Local school boards, however, grant 43 percent of charters in this survey. A state-by-state analysis of charter-authorizing bodies, moreover, indicates that

boards and universities, to authorize charters. Only 4.5 percent of charter schools are in the 11 states that allow only local school boards to grant charters, and on average, states with multiple chartering authorities or appeals process have 91 percent more charter schools than states where local school boards are the only charter-granting body.

California and Michigan, for example, allow for multiple chartering bodies or appeals, and these two states are home to more than 25 percent of all charter

local school boards are more likely to grant charters when the state law allows alternative bodies, such as state school

schools in the United States. Further on chartering authorities can be found Figure 5a in the Appendices.



Copyright 2000 The Buffalo News
The Buffalo News

January 30, 2000, Sunday, FINAL EDITION

SECTION: VIEWPOINTS, Pg. 1H

LENGTH: 3035 words

HEADLINE: FIGHTING FOR OUR CHILDREN;
IN THE BATTLE FOR A QUALITY EDUCATION, **CHARTER SCHOOLS** MAY PROVIDE;
THE COMPETITION THAT SPURS PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO CLEAN UP THEIR ACT

BYLINE: MIKE VOGEL; News Editorial Writer

BODY:

The battle has been joined.

In the crucial arena of education, lines have been drawn and salvos fired. On one side are the forces of educational revolution, on the other the entrenched interests of an educational establishment buttressed by years of administration theory and decades of teacher contracts.

In the middle are the children of New York State.

For organizers of the state's first real wave of **charter schools** -including two proposed Buffalo facilities that were awarded charters Tuesday -- the key to a better future for our children is increased school choice, and better flexibility to meet their academic and developmental needs. Shaking up the establishment is a small price to pay for that freedom, they argue.

And they're right. For even if **charter schools** die in the process -- and some will -- they will have shed light on the problems of an educational system that isn't working as well as it should be, especially in poorer neighborhoods.

They will have highlighted possibilities. They will have enhanced competition in the school systems, forcing established public schools to meet the challenge by **improving**. They will have shifted at least some of the emphasis and energy back to education, instead of the educational system.

"Today, there's not much flexibility in the system," says Kevin J. Helfer, the former Common Council member who is a strong advocate of publicly funded but privately run **charter schools**.

The charter concept "is not the cure-all, but it provides competition," he adds. "And if you're going to **improve** any system, you need competition."

Like any good battle, this one was joined with a surprise attack in the middle of the night. A favorite cause of Gov. George E. Pataki, **charter school** legislation hadn't drawn much debate or been given much of a chance -- until the governor, locked in session-ending budget debates with Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver and Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno late in 1998, laid it on the table as one of his policy-setting conditions in return for a whopping 38 percent pay raise for state legislators.

Suddenly -- and with virtually no additional debate -- New York State had a new **Charter School** Law. And groups of parents statewide started scrambling to get their educational ideas ready for this September's wave of 100 new charters set to join the first five schools now open.

In this case at least, bad lawmaking led to a good law.

"I think New York has one of the strongest **charter school** laws in the country," argues Patricia U. Pitts, executive director of the Buffalo Niagara Partnership's **Charter School** Initiative. "It has taken off in other states. It has grown by leaps and bounds."

There are **charter schools** in 38 states and the District of Columbia; there were 1,684 such schools nationwide in 1999, and President Clinton wants 3,000 up and running by the time he leaves office in a year.

To put **charter schools** in perspective: There are between 87,000 and 88,000 public schools in the country, run by 14,800 school boards. Public school enrollment is about 45 million **students**, a sixth of the nation's population. **Charter schools** enrolled about 350,000 **students** last year.

That's far less than the 2.5 million **students** in the Catholic school system or even the 700,000 to 2 million estimated home-schooled **students**, and it's still catching up to the 400,000 in non-sectarian **private schools**.

Still, public schools are clearly feeling the heat.

"I see the potential for dividing our communities and our children in ways that are unhealthy," says Alison C. Hyde of East Aurora, vice president of the New York State School Boards Association.

"The children say we need books and good things in the schools now. How can competition that is draining funds provoke the schools that remain into doing better with less, for the 90 percent of the **students** who remain?"

But that battle already has been lost. The law is on the books.

"It's very painful to the schools. It takes dollars right out of the public school system," adds State Education Commissioner Richard P. Mills. "But you can't rail against this. I see no indication the legislation will **change**."

The issues in this battle are clearly defined. By siphoning off the per-pupil share of state school operating aid for each child who shifts to a charter from a district school, the new facilities weaken funding for existing public schools. Teachers and school facility expenses still must be paid, even if pupils and their shares of tax revenues are lost.

There also are fears the new state-chartered schools will further impoverish public schools by "cherry picking" the best **students** with the most concerned and involved parents, although the few studies done so far don't bear that out. Some charters, in fact, target at-risk children.

In Minnesota, where the nation's first **charter school** opened in 1992, Alexis de Tocqueville Institution researchers found that charters "serve a larger proportion of poor, disadvantaged and special-needs children." The U.S. Department of Education's third-year **report** on "The State of **Charter Schools**" indicates charters -- which are largely urban schools -- enroll a greater percentage of African-American **students** than public schools in general (23.6 percent to 5.2 percent) and **students** with limited English proficiency (11.2 percent to 3.4 percent).

Nationwide, polls reflect public dismay at the performance of what many see as a failing educational system, one now defined less by the needs of children than by a web of teacher and administrator contracts with rules for overtime, scheduling and assignments.

By giving parents more flexible alternatives and a chance to pick schools based on performance, charters should force public schools into innovation and **improvement**.

The whole charter concept hinges on finding new and creative ways to provide better education in schools that have more control over their budgets, staffs and teaching strategies.

Generally organized by parents, they also seek much greater parental involvement than public schools. Some mandate volunteer time from parents; others benefit simply from the fact that parents who seek out **charter schools** already are involved in their children's education.

Polled by the non-profit group Public Agenda, most Americans showed a firm belief that parents -- not schools -- will always be the key to a good education. A whopping 86 percent of respondents to extensive telephone and mail surveys agreed that "parents are the most important reason kids succeed or fail in school."

Aaron Dare, an Urban League leader, founded New York's first **charter school** with just that in mind. In the Albany neighborhood in which he grew up, he saw parents dropping off children at the same schools that had failed his generation -- schools, he told a New York City luncheon audience last September, that "stole promise, stole potential and set children on a course of compromise."

"I was determined, however, to roll up my sleeves and work with the parents to ensure our children had access -- not as a privilege, but as a right -- to a quality education," said the man who launched Albany's New Covenant **Charter School**. "This is what the entire **charter school** movement is about. This is the only agenda there is to advance."

The typical day in any public school follows a routine defined by district-level school policies and staff contracts. **Charter schools** try not to be typical, and their individualized school-day routines are defined by the vision of their founders. One proposed Buffalo school wants an emphasis on Spanish and the arts, while another wants to give inner-city children the year-round school schedule its organizers failed to wrest from the city school system.

It's perestroika in the classroom. Instead of a highly centralized, Soviet-style organization -- with a main office controlling both staffing and spending at all its far-flung educational plants -- the shift is toward private educational enterprise and less-regulated individual facilities free to do whatever it takes to turn out a competitive product: a well-educated child.

Private schools, of course, have been doing that for years. But they haven't been doing it with tax dollars. When a pupil leaves a public school to go to a charter, the per-child share of the home district's "approved operating expense" -- \$ 5,823 in Buffalo -- goes along.

So far, though, the arguments against diverting state aid to **charter schools** seem overblown. If Buffalo's two first-round Buffalo charters plan to open this fall with their planned start-up enrollment of 300 pupils, the impact will be about \$ 1.75 million -- for a city system that fumbled nearly \$ 9 million in state special education aid through bureaucratic errors last year, and is seeking an overall budget of \$ 511 million this year. And with no suburban charters in this round, other local districts will see no loss at all.

"Given the thousands of public schools in the State of New York, 100 start-up **charter schools** will have virtually no impact," notes Buffalo attorney Steven H. Polowitz, a supporter of the new law.

To stave off a stampede, state law forbids "conversions" of existing **private schools** into new **charter schools**. The charter concept also is less controversial than vouchers, which allow parents to spend a share of taxpayer funding on religious schools. But charters are not, as one respondent to the Public Agenda polls guessed, "free **private schools**."

"These are public schools, entirely," said Robert M. Bennett, a member of the State Board of Regents. They will undergo an annual performance review and an annual financial audit, to make sure they meet their own goals as well as "meet or exceed" Regents education standards.

"It's not that (parents) want private rather than public," argues State University at New Paltz dean Gerald

Benjamin; "it's that they want better education."

"There are things that are making **charter schools** very attractive to parents," adds state School Boards Association spokesman David Ernst. "School boards have to pay attention to that."

Charter schools are, in fact, privately run public schools. With some exceptions, they must follow the "free and open to everyone" mandate that is a cornerstone of public education. They have a lot in common with the Buffalo system's magnet schools, but they have the freedom to seek supplemental private funding and to follow philosophies ranging from Montessori and individually tailored academics to back-to-basics, discipline and uniforms.

Unless they have more than 250 **students**, they also don't have to comply with their host district's teacher contracts -- giving them the right to adjust hours, alter the school year and involve parents more fully in the teaching process.

Charter schools are still very much an experiment.

Some of them will fail.

Self-organized **charter school** boards also lack some of the accountability of democratically elected public school boards, and the lack of public oversight can lead to problems that affect children's lives.

"It's a concern of a lot of us, I think, that a lot of the charters are dubious," said Arnold Gardner, another State Board of Regents member from Buffalo. "They require rigorous examination."

By January of 1999, 34 of the first 1,100 **charter schools** had closed -- a failure rate of 2.7 percent. The Center for Education Reform identified three key factors: Funding (partly due to too few **students**), mismanagement (including inflated enrollment figures triggering too-great diversions of public funds) and management disputes.

Beyond the hope and the hype, University of California at Los Angeles professor and researcher Amy Stuart Wells argued this fall, **charter schools** aren't really living up to their claims.

In Massachusetts, the nation's largest **charter school** -- the 1,142-pupil Boston Renaissance **Charter School**, recently profiled in this newspaper -struggles with problems related to size and the purchase of a large downtown building, although the smaller and hybrid charter-district Mission Hill School nearby delights parents with **student** success stories.

And in Albany, the trustees at Dare's New Covenant School recently gave the national for-profit firm that actually runs the school two months to clear up a long list of parental complaints about overcrowding, understaffing and inaccessibility.

Still, parent support for most **charter schools** -- including New Covenant -remains strong. Most **charter schools** are turning educational visions into parent-supported realities, turning around problem kids and scoring well in standardized testing. And six of seven national and state studies -- including Arizona, Michigan, California and Massachusetts -- show that the vast majority of **charter schools** are not only staying open, they're having the hoped-for "positive ripple effect" in triggering **change** and innovation in public school districts.

"A bad school should close," former Council Member Kevin Helfer says. "Kids can be hurt, but they're also hurt by bad public schools that stay open. If you're not going to challenge, you're not going to make **changes**."

Policy-makers such as Assemblyman Sam Hoyt, D-Buffalo, don't see the diversion of public school resources as that unfair.

"I don't buy that," he says. "If the status quo isn't working, we ought to try something different. This is

an experiment."

The experiment is needed. Widespread dissatisfaction with public-school performance -- the kind of dissatisfaction that triggered the Regents' current push for tougher academic standards -- is based on a perception, at least, that the education system is broken and isn't doing enough to fix itself.

Studies routinely document shortfalls in **student** performance in today's public schools. Most recently, the National Assessment of Educational Progress -- commonly termed the nation's **report** card -- found New York **students** ranking slightly below the national average in writing skills. And that average was nothing to write home about; only about one-quarter of American elementary and secondary **students** are writing at "proficient" levels. Math and science skills will be tested this year.

People have noticed.

"I think people are starting to see. They may not understand vouchers or charters, but they know reform," Helfer says. "They want choice, and they want **improvement**."

In efforts to meet that demand, two national trends have emerged in education over the past 15 years. One is the push to higher standards, described by the Education Commission of the States as an effort to **improve** performance and strengthen accountability. The other is a push to decentralize decision-making, shifting greater authority and responsibility for results to the school level.

In New York, tough new Regents standards fit one of those trends. **Charter school** legislation meets the other, in a way that heads off the even more controversial voucher system being tried in Cleveland and Milwaukee.

Teacher unions tend to see vouchers as even more of a threat than **charter schools**, because they divert tax-based funding completely away from public education. And while small New York charters will be free of such negotiated teacher benefits as scheduling restrictions, overtime and seniority preference for assignments, large **charter schools** will have to match local district contracts.

"Unions are not an impediment," says Buffalo Teachers Federation president Philip Rumore. "We work with the districts."

At a recent Chautauqua Institution conference on regionalism in education, Rumore ticked off a list of good-school attributes: Smaller class size, parent involvement, adequately trained teachers, adequate supplies, good administration and early inclusion of art, music and physical education.

All that can be done with proper public school funding, he added.

"I think we can compete, and if we can't, there's something wrong with us," he said.

To Rumore, **charter schools** are acceptable "as long as there's a level playing field, they meet the same requirements and accept the same **students** without taking money from us." But, he added, "we see money coming out of our system that we can't afford to lose."

Deborah Springpeace, a native Western New Yorker who taught at South Park High School for five years, is Rumore's worst nightmare. She's a convert from both private and public schools -- including stints teaching a small group of bright kids including Caroline Kennedy, and a job writing Buffalo's African-American studies curriculum -- to **charter schools**.

She is now a vice president for Edison Schools -- which, along with Beacon and Advantage, is among the major "for-hire" education firms providing teachers, administrators and curriculums to some of the nation's **charter schools**. She works under intense media and public scrutiny as principal of the 665-pupil Seven Hills **Charter School** in inner-city Worcester, Mass.

Fearing profit-driven decision making, teachers' unions will lobby Albany to boot such firms out of New

York State. But Springpeace says teachers should view charters, and firms like hers, as avenues toward across-the-board **improvements** in public education.

"I'm a lifer in public schools," she says. "I don't want to see **charter schools** negatively impact the public school system."

In the final analysis, **charter schools** do threaten public schools, and that's the whole point. To meet that threat, public schools themselves must **improve**.

That's imperative. American public education is a good system that could be better. Complacency isn't an option -- and stress for adults is OK, if it means better schooling and better lives for children.

In a limited way -- with only 50 charters available from the Regents, and another 50 from the state university system's trustees -- charters promise at least the chance to force that **change** for the better.

Charter schools offer no magic bullets -- but they deserve a chance to show what can happen when schools are targeted solely on the needs of the children, and not on the needs of the educational establishment.

GRAPHIC: SHARTON CANTILLON/Buffalo News; First graders Shawn Sanders and Jasmine Maxwell-Davis grab their lunches at Boston's Renaissance **Charter School**, which is struggling with problems related to size and the purchase of a large downtown building.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: February 2, 2000



Kendra L. Brooks
01/18/2000 01:13:39 PM

Record Type: Record

To: Andy Rotherham/OPD/EOP@EOP

cc:

Subject: miller piece

Copyright 1999 Information Access Company,
a Thomson Corporation Company;
ASAP
Copyright 1999 The Atlantic Monthly Magazine
The Atlantic Monthly

July 1, 1999

SECTION: No. 1, Vol. 284; Pg. 15 ; ISSN: 1072-7825

IAC-ACC-NO: 54860693

LENGTH: 6473 words

HEADLINE: Education: A Bold Experiment to Fix City Schools; school
vouchers

BYLINE: Miller, Matthew

BODY:

Depending on whom you listen to - conservative or liberal - vouchers are either a lifeline or a death knell for America's urban public schools. Yet a case can be made for vouchers that everyone can support - and the time for a "grand bargain" is at hand.

WHEN Maria Neri's daughter Tina finished eighth grade, two years ago, her scholarship at a Catholic elementary school in south-central Los Angeles ended. The parochial high school in which Neri (not her real name) hoped to enroll Tina charges \$ 3,500 a year-a third less than the \$ 5,400 Los Angeles would spend to educate Tina in public school. Neri, thirty-three, earns \$ 600 a month as a part- time teacher's aide; she's looking for a second, and perhaps a third, job. Her husband, from whom she is separated, earns \$ 1,200 a month as a laborer in a glass factory. He pays his wife's monthly rent of \$ 340, but offers no support beyond that. After paying for food, a phone, gas, and other expenses, Neri had no money left to put toward private school for Tina. Yet she was afraid to send Tina to the neighborhood public school, where the walls were covered with graffiti, and "cholos," or gang members, had been involved in shootings that brought police helicopters to the campus. So Neri used her sister's address to enroll Tina at another public school, which, though twenty minutes away, at least seemed safer. But it is

far from ideal. Classrooms each have forty to forty-five children belonging to several different grades. Tina, sixteen, says the teachers often have the students watch movies. Her math teacher was so confused about who Tina was that he gave her an F for not completing many assignments—a grade he changed, with embarrassment and an apology, after Neri confronted him with Tina's completed workbook. "I can see the difference," Neri says. "She's going down." Tina says she would go back to Catholic school if they could afford it. "I talk to my daughter," Neri explains, "and say, 'I'm sorry.'"

Neri's desire to send Tina to a better school is at the heart of one of the nation's most important and most demagogic debates. Through vouchers, often touted as an answer to Neri's problem, the government would give parents some or all of the money it now spends educating their children to use at a school of their choice. Depending on whom you listen to, vouchers are either a lifeline or a death knell. "It is quite simply an issue of survival for our nation's poorest students," says Dan Coats, a Republican and a former senator from Indiana. But Kweisi Mfume, the president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, calls vouchers a "terrible threat," and Sandra Feldman, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, says they mean "a radical abandonment of public schools and public education."

These are heated claims, especially given the relatively small number of students who are involved in voucher programs today. Just over 52 million students attend grades K through 12 in the United States. Only two cities offer publicly funded vouchers: in Milwaukee (whose breakthrough program was begun in 1990) roughly 6,000 of 107,000 students get vouchers; in Cleveland about 4,000 of 77,000 do. In May, Florida approved a plan under which students at the poorest-performing schools would get vouchers. Four schools are expected to be eligible this year, and 12,000 of the state's 2.3 million K-12 kids are expected to use vouchers over the next four years. Privately funded voucher programs in thirty-one cities served roughly 12,000 children last year; ten new such programs came into being for the 1998-1999 school year. Two wealthy investors, Ted Forstmann and John Walton, recently announced a plan to fund (along with other donors) \$ 170 million in vouchers, which will reach 40,000 new students over the next four years.

Add these numbers up and you get 74,000 children—about 0.1 percent of students. Add 200,000 for those students in the 1,200 charter schools around the country (which also give parents a choice), and the proportion comes to only 0.5 percent of schoolchildren. In other words, the school-choice debate is taking place utterly at the margins. At this rate, for all the fuss, it's hard to imagine that any impact could be made on the skills and life chances of students stuck in our worst public schools in time to prevent what the Reverend Floyd Flake, a voucher advocate and a former Democratic congressman from New York, calls "educational genocide."

This tragedy is most pronounced in big cities, whose public schools together serve six million children. Despite heroic local efforts and pockets of success, depressing evidence mounts of an achievement gap between students in cities and those in suburbs, where, school-watchers say, most schools are doing fine, largely because they're safer, better funded, and less prone to the social ills that plague cities. Of Detroit's eleventh-graders 8.5

percent were deemed "proficient" in science on Michigan's 1997 statewide exam. Fourth-graders in Hartford were a tenth as likely as Connecticut students overall to show proficiency on the state's three achievement tests in 1996. Only two percent of Cleveland's minority tenth-graders have taken algebra. "The numbers tell a sad and alarming story," a special report in Education Week concluded last January. "Most 4th graders who live in U.S. cities can't read and understand a simple children's book, and most 8th graders can't use arithmetic to solve a practical problem." As polls prove, increasing numbers of urban parents like Maria Neri want a way out. It seems immoral to argue that they must wait for the day when urban public schools are somehow "fixed." It's even harder to argue that bigger voucher programs could make things worse.

Yet a political standoff has kept vouchers unavailable to nearly 99 percent of urban schoolchildren. Bill Clinton and most leading Democrats oppose them, saying we should fix existing public schools, not drain money from the system. Teachers' unions, the staunchest foes of vouchers, are among the party's biggest donors, and sent more delegates to the 1996 Democratic National Convention than did the state of California. Republicans endorse vouchers as a market-based way to shake up calcified bureaucracies, but they generally push plans that affect only a few students. The distrust that has led to today's gridlock is profound. Republicans view Democrats as union pawns defending a failed status quo; Democrats think Republicans want to use urban woes as justification for scrapping public education and the taxes that fund it.

MISSING entirely from the debate is the progressive pro-voucher perspective. To listen to the unions and the NAACP, one would think that vouchers were the evil brainchild of the economist Milton Friedman and his conservative devotees, lately joined by a handful of desperate but misguided urban blacks. In fact vouchers have a long but unappreciated intellectual pedigree among reformers who have sought to help poor children and to equalize funding in rich and poor districts. This "voucher left" has always had less cash and political power than its conservative counterpart or its union foes. It has been ignored by the press and trounced in internecine wars. But if urban children are to have any hope, the voucher left's best days must lie ahead.

Finding a productive compromise means recalling the role of progressives in the history of the voucher movement and exposing the political charades that poison debate. It means finding a way for unorthodox new leaders to build a coalition- of liberals for whom the moral urgency of helping city children trumps ancient union ties, and of conservatives who reject a laissez-faire approach to life's unfairness. The goal of such a coalition should be a "grand bargain" for urban schools: a major multi-year test of vouchers that touches not 5,000 but 500,000 children, and eventually five million-and increases school spending in the process. The conventional wisdom says that today's whittled-down pilot programs are all that is politically achievable. The paradox is that only through bigger thinking about how vouchers might help can a durable coalition emerge.

IN 1962 John E. "Jack" Coons, an idealistic thirty-two-year-old law professor at Northwestern University, was asked by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission to study whether Chicago schools were complying with

cutt
out

desegregation orders. Coons soon found that what really interested him was a different question: Why were suburban schools so much better than those downtown? Over the next few years Coons, eventually joined by two law students, Stephen Sugarman and William Clune, found one answer in what would become a source of enduring outrage: America's property-tax-based system of public-school finance created dramatic disparities in the resources available to educate children.

This financial aspect of education's vaunted tradition of "local control" is rarely the subject of national controversy. In part that is because it gives the nation's most powerful citizens both lower taxes and better schools. Imagine two towns, Slumville and Suburbia. Slumville has \$ 100,000 in taxable property per pupil; Suburbia has \$ 300,000. If Slumville votes to tax its property at four percent, it raises \$ 4,000 per pupil. But Suburbia can tax itself at two percent and raise \$ 6,000 per pupil. Suburbia's tax rate is half as high, but its public schools enjoy 50 percent more resources per student.

In the 1960s affluent districts routinely spent twice what nearby poorer ones did, and sometimes four or five times as much. To Coons and his colleagues, such inequity in a public service was indefensible. Beginning with *Private Wealth and Public Education*, a book that he, Sugarman, and Clune published in 1970, Coons has denounced the system eloquently. It's worth sampling his arguments, because the left's case for choice is usually drowned out by the right's cheerleading for markets, or by urban blacks' cry for help. In a 1992 essay, "School Choice as Simple Justice," Coons wrote,

This socialism for the rich we blithely call "public," though no other public service entails such financial exclusivity. Whether the library, the swimming pool, the highway or the hospital-if it is "public," it is accessible. But admission to the government school comes only with the price of the house. If the school is in Beverly Hills or Scarsdale, the poor need not apply.

Coons's point was simple: the quality of public education should not depend on local wealth-unless it is the wealth of a state as a whole. "Everyone ought to be put in a roughly equivalent position with regard to what the state will do," Coons, now an emeritus law professor at Berkeley, says.

Coons and Sugarman made a successful case for the unconstitutionality of the school-finance system in California's famous Serrano case in 1971, beginning a national movement to litigate for school equity. Although it was little noticed then, they cited vouchers as a potential remedy. The idea was to give courts a way to instruct legislatures to fix things without having to mess with local control. Asking legislatures to centralize school funding at the state level was a political nonstarter. But through various formulas, Coons and Sugarman argued, the state could give families in poorer districts enough cash in the form of vouchers to bring education spending in those districts up to that of better-off districts. And what could be more "local," they reasoned, than giving families direct control over the cash to use at schools as they chose?

COONS and Sugarman, focusing on school equity, thus arrived at a policy that Milton Friedman had been urging through a principled commitment to liberty and to its embodiment, the market. Friedman's 1955 essay "The Role of Government in Education" is viewed as the fountainhead of the voucher

movement. In an ideal world, the future Nobel laureate reasoned, the government might have no role in schooling at all; yet a minimum required level of education and its financing by the state could be justified.

A stable and democratic society is impossible without widespread acceptance of some common set of values and without a minimum degree of literacy and knowledge on the part of most citizens . . . the gain from the education of a child accrues not only to the child or to his parents but to other members of the society. . . . Yet it is not feasible to identify the particular individuals (or families) benefitted or the money value of the benefit and so to charge for the services rendered.

However, Friedman said, if this "neighborhood effect" meant that the government was warranted in paying for K-12 education, another question remained: Should the government run the schools as well? Friedman's view was that schools could be just as "public" if the government financed but didn't administer them. That notion remains virtually unintelligible to leaders in public education, perhaps because it is so threatening.

Friedman's analogy (adopted by every voucher proponent since) was to the G.I. Bill, which gave veterans a maximum sum per year to spend at the institution of their choice, provided that it met certain minimum standards. Likewise, for elementary and secondary schooling Friedman envisioned a universal voucher scheme that would give parents a fixed sum per child, redeemable at an "approved" school of their choice. Such a school might be nonprofit or for profit, religious or secular. Parents could add to the sum if they wished. The role of government would be limited to assuring that "approved" schools included some common content in their programs, "much as it now inspects restaurants to assure that they maintain minimum sanitary standards." In Friedman's view, market-style competition for students would spur the development of schools that were better tailored to families' needs and cost less than those run by notoriously inefficient public bureaucracies.

Friedman's and Coons's different angles of vision represent the ancient tug between liberty and equality within the pro-voucher camp—a debate the two have waged since Friedman was an occasional guest on Coons's Chicago radio show, *Problems of the City*, in the 1960s. Friedman today isn't bothered by issues of school-finance equity. "What's your view of inequity in clothing and food?" he snapped when asked recently, saying that such concerns reflect Coons's "socialistic approach." And even if public schools were making every child an Einstein, Friedman says, he would still want vouchers. "Private enterprise as opposed to collectivism," he says, "would always be better."

Coons is less ideological. In his view, choice would improve the public schools, which he believes would always be chosen by the majority, even with a full-blown voucher system. The prospect of losing students (and thus funding) would force improvements faster than today's seemingly endless rounds of ineffectual education fads. If poor children got a decent education under the current system, he adds, he probably wouldn't have devoted his life to these issues.

The fate of disadvantaged children under a voucher regime is where the Coons-Friedman clash is sharpest. Coons would be glad to offer vouchers

to all low-income students and to no one else if such a step were necessary for consensus. He fears that under a universal voucher system they could get left behind, as schools competed to recruit better-off, smarter, healthier (nondisabled) students. The incentives are plain: such children would be easier to teach, and schools could charge wealthy families far more than the voucher amount to maximize profit. Coons and the voucher left therefore insist that any universal scheme should include protections for low-income and disabled children. Examples would be increasing the voucher amount for those children to make them more attractive to schools, and letting schools redeem their vouchers only if, say, 15 percent of new places were reserved for such children, for whom the voucher would cover tuition. To Friedman, these are unacceptable intrusions on schools' freedom to operate as they like, turning vouchers into "a welfare program, not an education program."

WITHOUT a link to unions—which, despite the waning of their influence, remain one of the few sources of progressive ideas in American public life—liberal pro-voucher champions have had little political impact. The muting of their voice, combined with the ease of legislating pilot programs, explains why few urban children have a choice today. What's more, deceptive arguments by both teachers' unions and conservative activists keep the broader public confused.

Teachers' unions (and voucher foes generally) rely on five dubious arguments.

There's no evidence that vouchers work. The trials have been so isolated, unions say, that their results are unproved. That's a nervy case to make when it is union opposition that has kept the trials small. Pro- and anti-voucher forces have funded research in Milwaukee and Cleveland that purports to show why Johnny is doing demonstrably better or worse under vouchers. It is impossible to make sense of these dueling studies, whose sample sizes are so small that results seem to turn on whether, say, three children in Cleveland handed in their homework on time. Wealthy conservatives are now offering vouchers to all 14,000 at-risk children in a poor San Antonio district in part so as to compile a broader database from which to judge the impact of voucher systems. (In the first semester of the program 566 children taking vouchers left district schools.) For now the "no evidence" argument says more about union chutzpah than about voucher performance.

IF THAT WORKS,
WHY?

Vouchers drain money from public schools. Sandra Feldman, of the American Federation of Teachers, says that the \$10 million Cleveland uses to give vouchers to 4,000 children would be better spent on measures that would benefit every child, such as shrinking class sizes and launching proven reading programs. But this is disingenuous. Cleveland provided the \$10 million in addition to more than \$600 million in existing school spending in order to mollify unions, which insisted that vouchers not "come out of the hide" of public schools. It's unfair for unions to turn around and complain that the extra cash they insisted on should have gone elsewhere. The truth is that public schools are free to fund such measures now by shifting priorities within their budgets. And when broader voucher plans let the amount that public schools receive per student follow students who leave the system, the public-school coffers are not drained—schools receive the resources their

ACCOUNTABILITY

enrollment merits.

Vouchers are unconstitutional. Some critics say that voucher use at religious schools violates the Constitution's ban on "establishment of religion," but the better view of the Supreme Court's confusing jurisprudence here suggests that's wrong. After all, no one thinks that federal student loans are unconstitutional when they are used by students to attend Notre Dame. Last June, Wisconsin's highest court upheld Milwaukee's plan, because the voucher goes to parents to use where they like, not to any particular type of school. In union hands, moreover, this legal complaint seems suspiciously tactical. It can't be that we are constitutionally obligated to imprison urban children in failing schools.

Charter
Schools

The capacity isn't there. Public schools serve 46 million K-12 children, private schools six million. Since private schools can't accommodate more than a fraction of today's students, opponents say, vouchers can't be a meaningful part of school reform. "Where are these schools going to come from?" Sandra Feldman repeatedly asked during an interview with me.

The first response to this argument is to ask, Then what's the problem? If as a practical matter unions feel that most children with vouchers will remain where they are, it's hard to see what the harm is in trying them. A second response is that even relatively few defections from public schools may spur efforts to improve them. Districts with innovative charter schools have reported such a reaction.

The larger answer, however, is that broader voucher schemes would prompt many institutions and entrepreneurs to add schools and spaces to the "market." This would happen not overnight but over a number of years. The initial spaces would be likely to come from Catholic schools, which account for half the private-school slots in the country. Jerome Porath, the schools chief for the Los Angeles archdiocese, says that if every student got a voucher worth an amount close to the current per-pupil expenditure in California, over several years enough facilities could be built or rented "to accommodate everybody who wanted to come." "We'll get out our spreadsheets and figure it out," he says. Milton Friedman adds, "You can't think of it in terms of the existing stock of schools. There will be a flood of new schools started."

Profit is bad. Voucher foes act as if there were something venal about the profit motive when applied to schools. But public education is already big business. The \$ 320 billion spent last year on K-12 schooling is lusted after by textbook publishers, test designers, building contractors, food and janitorial services, and software companies, to name only a few examples. This largesse inevitably brings scandals-for example, the California flap in 1996 over whether campaign contributions influenced a big textbook purchase. Like health care, defense, and other major public services, schools will always be partly about business; vouchers would simply change who controls the flow of cash. There's no reason to think that the abuses under a voucher system would be worse than abuses today.

Voucher foes make other unpersuasive claims. They say that vouchers will cream off the most-talented children and the most-active parents-a worry that seems acute primarily because today's voucher plans remain tiny. They

say that private schools will unfairly be able to avoid troublemaking kids by not admitting them- ignoring the fact that public districts themselves often send such kids to special schools of "last resort." They say the oversight that will follow public money will make private schools resemble public bureaucracies-ignoring the greater flexibility that most analysts say such schools will retain in hiring and firing, resource allocation, and curriculum design. Finally, they argue that it is crazy to subsidize more-affluent parents who already pay for private school-a seemingly powerful charge until one recalls that such families are now paying twice for schools, and that vouchers offered only to poor families would avoid the problem entirely.

For their part, conservative voucher fans peddle one big misconception: vouchers can save lots of money because per-pupil spending in private schools is typically less than half that in public schools today. It is true that religious schools have fewer administrators and lower-paid teachers, and invest less in such amenities as theaters, labs, and gymnasiums. But private schools don't have to take costly disabled and "special education" children; and often public schools must offer extras such as English as a Second Language, breakfast and lunch programs, and transportation. When such differences are taken into account, and hidden subsidies for church space and staff in religious schools are counted, the gap shrinks. Coons says that a voucher's value needs to be no lower than 85 percent of total per-pupil spending in order to stimulate capital investment in new schools. Set it too low, and the result will be simply to fill the handful of empty Catholic-school seats.

PS
=

The right's claim that vouchers will deliver big savings also ignores the case for spending more in many big cities, where dilapidated buildings may collectively require as much as \$ 50 billion in repairs. Some public school bureaucracies-Washington, D.C., and St. Louis come to mind-seem so hopeless that it would be senseless to pour new money in until management has improved. But despite run-down buildings and higher proportions of special-needs students, cities such as Philadelphia and Baltimore spend substantially less per pupil than do their states overall.

KEVIN

DISINGENUOUS rhetoric, visceral distrust, maximal posturing, minimal progress. Political debates escape this kind of dead end when grassroots pressure makes the status quo untenable, or when leaders emerge with fresh ways of framing the issues. It's possible that urban schools will fall so far that the poor revolt; or crime, bred by ignorance, might worsen in ways that force society to act. There's a better path to hope for, however, if new leaders can teach us to think differently about today's predicament.

Sounds of rethinking and compromise are in the air. Arthur Levine, the president of Columbia University's Teachers College, is a lifelong liberal and a voucher foe. Yet, frustrated by the seemingly hopeless troubles of inner cities, Levine called last June for a "rescue operation" that would give vouchers to two to three million poor children at the worst urban public schools. "For me," Levine says, "it's the equivalent of Schindler's list." Lisa Graham Keegan, Arizona's superintendent of public instruction and a rising Republican star, calls the property-tax base for school finance "pernicious" and "wholly unfair." She wants a system of "student-centered funding," in which revenues from a source other than property taxes would be distributed by the state on an equal per-pupil basis through vouchers.

If leading liberals are willing to question the public school monopoly, and prominent conservatives hear the call of justice, the voucher debate has a chance to move forward. The sensible first step would be a much bigger road test. Here's the idea I have put to various players in the debate: Suppose everyone came together and said, Let's take three or four big cities where we agree the public schools are failing. (Leave out dens of mismanagement like Newark and Washington, where spending is high but ineffective.) In these cities we'll raise per-pupil spending by 20 percent, giving urban schools the resources the left says they need, and thus going far to achieve the Coons vision of funding equity. But we'll implement this increase by way of a universal voucher system that finally gives every child a choice. So, for example, in a city that now spends \$ 5,000 per pupil, every child would get a \$ 6,000 voucher.

Such a proposal, serving half a million children, would cost \$ 660 million a year. If the voucher system were then extended to all six million big-city children (a logical step if results of the trial were promising), the price tag would be \$ 8 billion a year, or 0.4 percent of federal spending. (For purposes of discussion, I left aside the question of who outside the district would fund the 20 percent increase, though the surplus-rich federal government comes readily to mind.) The responses to this idea suggest how quickly the scale of today's debate could change-and who is responsible if it doesn't.

Jack Coons, the "egalitarian," said it sounds great. Clint Bolick, a conservative lawyer who is active in the voucher movement, also thought it could work-though, he said, the spending increase would mean that "some of my fellow conservatives would have apoplexy." Polly Williams, who led the drive to enact vouchers in Milwaukee, was anxious about extending them to students who aren't poor, so we agreed to give them only to children eligible for the federal school-lunch program. This would still get vouchers to 78,000 children in Milwaukee instead of the current 6,000, and to four million city children nationwide. We would move pretty far toward universal coverage this way, since, sadly, two out of three city children qualify for school-lunch assistance.

What about the NAACP? To date the organization has welcomed philanthropic efforts, but when public funds are at issue, it stands by the unions. Julian Bond, the chairman of the NAACP, recently called vouchers "pork for private schools." Yet when I asked Kweisi Mfume, the NAACP president, about this proposal, he didn't hesitate. "I don't have a problem with that at all," he said. Mfume says that NAACP opposition has been not ideological but based on three concerns: the association doesn't want programs that leave nearly every child out; it wants accountability to the public on student performance; and it wants an honest approach to higher costs-such as those for transportation-that must be paid to make the system work for poor children. The pilot programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland fail especially on grounds one and three; the bargain I sketched addresses them. Mfume said he was open to the proposal as long as the NAACP's concerns were met, even if that meant taking a stance different from the unions'.

"It's a bad idea," Milton Friedman said at first, arguing that any increase in

B¹⁶

spending would "fuel the racketeers in the education business." Friedman's point is that raising spending could create further opportunities for profit-hungry operators to take the vouchers and run schools much more efficiently-not to their benefit. Owing to systematic federal overpayments, Medicare HMOs face just such scams in many places today.

But outliers like Washington, D.C., aside, it's not clear that urban schools are overspending. Given that, isn't it worth running a little risk to get a substantial voucher test under way? It seemed that Friedman wouldn't sign on, but toward the end of our discussion he relented. "I'll tell you what I would go for," he said. Friedman has always believed that so many families would flee public schools if given a voucher worth even half what is now spent per pupil that resources for each child remaining in the system would rise. (If ten public school children have \$ 5,000 spent on each of them, and three leave taking \$ 2,500 each, spending on the seven remaining would rise about 20 percent, to just under \$ 6,100.) So he would approve of a 20 percent increase in per-pupil spending for those who remained, as long as the voucher was worth only half that. Since Friedman thinks that this 20 percent increase will come over time anyway, he's not compromising his ideals. His principled accommodation is to put his money where his beliefs are and increase spending up front as part of the deal.

But look where we are. Baltimore spends \$ 6,400 per pupil today-versus \$ 6,800 spent by Maryland overall. According to Mfume's reasoning, the NAACP would accept a citywide voucher at roughly \$ 7,600. Friedman could live with \$ 7,600 for current public school pupils but would want a voucher for departing students at \$ 3,800. Surely there's a deal to be made here-and a chance, therefore, to help millions of children while meaningfully evaluating voucher efficacy, addressing questions about everything from student achievement to private profiteering.

What about the politicians? Lamar Alexander seems the likeliest to raise these issues thoughtfully in the 2000 election campaign; as a former Tennessee governor and the Secretary of Education under George Bush, he knows more about schooling than any other presidential aspirant. He has also been down this road before. Alexander bears scars from his ill-fated 1992 struggle to enact a voucher test at the federal level. Called the G.I. Bill for Kids, the plan would have spent \$ 500 million in new federal dollars to give the parents of half a million low- and middle-income children each a \$ 1,000 voucher to use at the schools of their choice. Alexander wagered (correctly) that conservative groups would be content with tiny sums of new money to get their foot in the door, and (incorrectly) that new cash for schools would be something the unions couldn't be seen opposing. In a Democratic Congress the bill went nowhere. Today Alexander says he would urge states to shift toward child-centered funding. And he'd go to Congress with an updated version of Bush's 1992 bill, featuring \$ 1,500 per voucher and an overall \$ 1 billion price tag.

I asked Alexander if he wasn't thinking too small: \$ 1,500 vouchers would be nowhere near sufficient to spark the creation of new schools. And with vouchers spread thin across the country, he would get no trial of how broad-based choice can improve schooling in a community. Why not try the 20 percent spending boost in exchange for universal vouchers in a few cities?

The voluble Alexander went silent for perhaps fifteen seconds as he considered whether to go on record in favor of a policy that would raise spending substantially-something that conservative primary voters would reject.

At length he said yes. Higher per-pupil spending wouldn't be his preferred solution, of course, but if that's what it took to get a bold voucher plan into failing cities, he'd live with it. "I would go high because the stakes are high," he explained, "and to expose the hypocrisy of the unions. If I told the National Education Association that we'd double it in the five largest cities, they wouldn't take it."

Was he right? I met with Bob Chase, the president of the National Education Association, in the union's headquarters in Washington. He made the familiar case for why vouchers are ineffectual today and would be a threatening distraction for public schools if tried more broadly. Only 25 percent of the adult population has children in the schools, he explained. We need to help the other 75 percent understand why financial support of schools is important. In this regard I sketched the deal: a handful of cities, higher spending, but only through vouchers. My tape recorder captured the staccato response.

"Is there any circumstance under which that would be something that . . ."

"No."

". . . you guys could live with? Why?"

"No."

"Double school spending . . ."

"No."

". . . in inner cities?"

"No."

"Triple it . . ."

"No."

". . . but give them a voucher?"

"Cause, one, that's not going to happen. I'm not going to answer a hypothetical [question] when nothing like that is ever possible."

"But teachers use hypotheticals every day."

"Not in arguments like this we don't. . . . It's pure and simply not going to happen. I'm not even going to use the intellectual processes to see if in fact that could work or not work, because it's not going to happen. That's a fact."

Sandra Feldman was similarly unwilling to consider such a plan. If new money is available for cities, both said, it should be spent to improve the existing system. They would fund pay raises to attract teachers to work downtown, turnaround programs for troubled schools, and general urban programs for health, nutrition, and parenting skills. Of course, pay raises-or smaller class sizes, or any specific reform-could happen under vouchers, if that's what schools felt was needed to attract students.

IF one believes that urban education won't improve under the same approach that has failed for years, the path to progress through vouchers follows a simple logic. A progressive hand is needed to pursue the benefits of vouchers without risk to the poor. A number of conservatives are open to such efforts if they make possible larger voucher trials. Given the disastrous state of many urban schools, the Democratic Party should be the natural home of this progressive influence. It is not, because teachers' unions loom large in Democratic fundraising and campaigns. Yet the Republicans' commitment to minorities will probably never be trusted to carry this issue alone. And, not unreasonably, Republicans are unlikely to increase spending for urban schools without ensuring that such increases are tied to system-wide reform.

Changing the Democratic Party's approach to vouchers is therefore the only way to do something serious for urban children anytime soon. This conclusion begets another political syllogism, and an opportunity. Most observers believe that if the NAACP embraced vouchers, it would force the unions to reassess their opposition. Teacher intransigence is sustainable only as long as minority leaders support it, because the children whose future is being blighted are mostly black and Hispanic. Yet as Kweisi Mfume makes clear, getting the NAACP to change its stance would require voucher plans much bolder and more comprehensive than today's pilots.

Thus thinking bigger makes progress likelier. "That's why I've taken the more radical side," explains Floyd Flake, who quit Congress to run his church school and pursue these issues. "It's the only way to force the debate."

At some level even the unions know that their stonewalling is indefensible. "I would never argue with an individual parent who wanted to figure out a way to get his or her child into a better situation," Sandra Feldman says. "But to me, as a matter of public policy, that's not a good argument. The objective is to make the schools good-not to escape them."

But what if the ability to escape might help to make the schools better? And what if testing this proposition can't make anyone worse off? Yes, big voucher plans may require an act of faith, but it wouldn't be the first gamble in American education to work. A much smaller federal government rolled the dice on land-grant colleges in the 1860s with only a notion of what would happen; the research they sparked made U.S. agriculture the world's most productive. The G.I. Bill helped to spawn the postwar middle class. The moral urgency of today's voucher gamble is much greater. For all these reasons, Democrats should see large-scale urban voucher programs as an opportunity, not a threat. After all, once they embraced such a grand bargain, Democrats would be in the driver's seat. They retain, at least for now, the moral authority to speak in behalf of the disadvantaged, and

Republicans would not be able to shrink from solutions they have long sought. The alternative is a Democratic Party that favors its funders at the expense of its constituents.

Matthew Miller ("A Bold Experiment to Fix City Schools") is a syndicated columnist and a contributing writer for The New Republic. He is a co-host of Left, Right & Center, on KCRW-FM in Los Angeles, and a senior fellow at the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania.

Copyright (c) 1999 by The Atlantic Monthly Company. All rights reserved. The Atlantic Monthly; July, 1999; Education: A Bold Experiment to Fix City Schools; Volume 284, No. 1; pages 15 - 30.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

IAC-CREATE-DATE: August 2, 1999

LOAD-DATE: August 03, 1999

FOCUSTM

Search: General News;vouchers and miller and cleveland

To narrow this search, please enter a word or phrase:

Example: House of Representatives

About LEXIS-NEXIS | Terms and Conditions | What's New
Copyright© 1999 LEXIS-NEXIS, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Copyright 1992 National Public Radio

NPR

SHOW: AIR DATE: Thursday, June 25, 1992,

June 24, 1992, Wednesday

LENGTH: 981 words

HEADLINE: "EDUCATION VOUCHER" PROGRAM CRITICIZED

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

Neal Conan, host:

Today President Bush is expected to make his latest bid for school choice when he unveils a proposal for a \$ 2 billion education voucher program. Administration officials have likened it to the GI bill that helped World War II veterans pay for their college education. The GI bill for children would provide \$ 1,000 vouchers to poor and middle-class-income children for tuition at the public, private or religious schools of their parents' choice. Opposition to the bill is expected in Congress and among the public education advocates who are key to its success. NPR's Claudio Sanchez reports.

Claudio Sanchez reporting:

Three months ago when Secretary of **Education Lamar Alexander** tried to sell the **GI bill** for kids idea to school officials from some of the nation's largest public school systems, most of them sneered, and then they dismissed the idea. John Debeck, a school board member from San Diego, California, stood up and told Alexander that his proposal just didn't add up.

John Debeck (School Board Member, San Diego): In San Diego, I'm looking around to see where these kids might go if they used this \$ 1,000. They couldn't go to private schools in San Diego for that \$ 1,000. The inner-city child would have to bring up at least another \$ 10,000 to \$ 12,000 in order to get the tuition for those schools. So what good is your proposal for them?

Secretary Lamar Alexander (Education Department): If they're going to a school that isn't meeting their needs, and they're the children of a single mother who's making \$ 10,000 a year, they may move to another public school, and the school can spend that on adding four hours a day. It can spend that on--on--on typewriters. It can spend that on health services. It can spend that on fixing the roof. It can spend it any way they want to.

Sanchez: A public school that attracts enough voucher students, Alexander said, could pay for services and materials that it can't afford now. It's a mistake to assume that needy parents will automatically choose private or parochial schools, Alexander said, but if they do, \$ 1,000 will cover most if not all of the child's tuition, particularly at Catholic elementary schools that rarely charge more than \$ 1,200. A voucher program wouldn't just give parents the wherewithal to choose, Alexander said, it would help parents lead education reform.

Alexander: And I'm assuming that this won't even be at issue by the year 2000, because I think that we'll have a redefinition of public education, some general consensus and agreement about what schools are suitable schools for government money to follow children to, and that this idea that we're talking about in this meeting will become the most important basis for federal support for elementary and secondary schools that serve poor children by the turn of the century.

Sanchez: By promoting vouchers as a program for the working poor, experts say, the Bush administration may be able to dismiss critics who in the past have denounced vouchers as a ploy by the

religious right to get government subsidies for its schools.

What's clear is that the strength of the president's proposal comes from a growing disillusionment with public education, particularly among the working poor. Alice Watkins of the National Center for Law and Education has been working with poor families as an education advocate since 1964. Maybe it is time to give vouchers a chance, Watkins says, but if it's going to be equitable, the Bush administration must guarantee that private schools offer the same services that public schools are obligated to provide.

Alice Watkins (NCLE): Transportation has to be provided--free transportation--whether Whether it's within the district or ac--across district lines. There has to be access for all students. We can't have barriers because of gender or--or race or economic class or educational disadvantage or disability or limited proficiency, etc.

Sanchez: Private and parochial school officials who've helped the Bush administration develop its voucher plan say they've been meeting most of the same standards public schools do, because they've been admitting more and more learning disabled and disadvantaged children in recent years.

But Sister Catherine McNamee, president of the National Catholic Education Association, readily concedes that private sectarian schools are not about to relinquish the rights to deny admission to kids whose behavior would threaten the learning environment that has attracted the families they now serve.

Sister Catherine McNamee (NCEA, President): No school should have to keep violent children in the school. The teachers can't teach if they're afraid for their lives. Parents are afraid to send their children to the school. Children are afraid to walk to school. They're afraid they're going to be killed on the playground or something. That should not happen in the public schools either.

Sanchez: Catholic schools do stand to benefit the most from a voucher plan, because at least half of the nation's 28,000 private schools are Catholic. And during the last 10 years, they've received the bulk of the children who've fled public schools. What's not clear is whether private or religious schools will take the neediest children and turn out better students. The US Education Department's own studies show that the overall academic performance of public vs. private school children is negligible. And even if a voucher allows poor families to choose a private school, will that school be obligated to choose that family? Congress will take up the president's voucher plan and all the questions it poses in the coming weeks. I'm Claudio Sanchez in Washington.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: July 6, 1992

FOCUS™

Search: Advanced Search;lamar alexander w/5 education w/5 gi bill

To narrow this search, please enter a word or phrase:

Example: House of Representatives

Copyright 1992 Federal Information Systems Corporation
Federal News Service

View Related Topics

JUNE 25, 1992, THURSDAY

SECTION: WHITE HOUSE BRIEFING

LENGTH: 6050 words

**HEADLINE: SPECIAL WHITE HOUSE BRIEFING
WITH
LAMAR ALEXANDER, SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
SUBJECT: PROPOSED STATE AND LOCAL GI BILLS FOR KIDS**

BODY:

SEC. ALEXANDER: I'll be glad to try to answer questions. Let me make a brief -- let me use an example which may help you to understand how the proposed state and local GI bills for kids would work. First, of course, the idea is that -- let's take Milwaukee. Milwaukee is already a city where the state and local government gives -- has an experiment to give 1,000 low-income families up to \$2500 to go to private non-religious schools, and now the foundations have come along, and businesses, and said, "We'll give you money to also go to religious schools."

What the GI bill for kids would do is to say to Milwaukee, "We have \$1,000 for every single child in Milwaukee, if you want it, but Milwaukee has to do two things to get it. One is open all its public schools, or a great many of its public schools to all of the children in Milwaukee, and second, let the federal money -- the \$1,000 coming in be spent at any school -- public, private, or religious -- just the way that if you were in Milwaukee you could spend it at Marquette or at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee.

To give you an example, let's say you're -- if you're Maria and you're 27, and you've got a son named David and he's 11, and he's in the 5th grade. And his teacher doesn't think he can learn, you're worried about guns in the schools, and you're working until 6:00 p.m. and the school closes at 3:00 p.m. Option number one you have is to move to another public school where the teacher thinks David can learn, where there are no guns in the schools, and which is open at 6:00 p.m. tonight, and your \$1,000 goes with you. Option number two you would have is to go to the Catholic school down the street -- the average tuition at Catholic elementary schools in America like the one David might attend is about \$1,000 all across the country. The average tuition for all private schools in America of all kinds is about \$2,000 to \$2,100, so this is a real option.

Option number three would be to stay in the same school -- public school where you now are. The principal might say to you, "Maria, we would rather -- we would love to have David stay in the school, and his \$1,000 as well, because we think we could open up to 7:00 p.m., we can get the guns out, we can hire a physics teachers, and we ought to be, with our public money, be able to do better than the Catholic school down the street."

Option number four would be -- Maria works at the shopping center, and the shopping center decides that it's going to join partnership with the public school system and the New American Schools Development Corporation, and create one of the best schools in the world at the shopping center for people of all ages -- child care for the baby, an elementary school for David, and programs at night for Maria to learn English or to continue her education in math or other subjects.

Option number five would be that you can use up to \$500 of this \$1,000 -- Maria can -- to buy other academic programs for her son, David. So she might leave \$500 at the public school where he now attends and go down the street to the Catholic school from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. at night when she gets off work for an after-school academic program.

The schools in Compton, California, where I was about a month ago, and the superintendent said, "If we could open these schools on Saturdays and in the summers, we wouldn't have 5,000 gang members in a city the size of 90,000." This money is available -- all of it is available to public schools if the public schools can attract the students. That is what is different about this proposal today.

And as the mayor of Milwaukee said a little earlier, it will damage the public schools just about as much as the GI bill damaged public universities. And what the GI bill and Pell Grants and other federal grants have done to public universities is over the last 50 years give them the impetus for change and the dollars to help them become the best in the world, which is exactly what we'd like to do with our public -- with our school systems.

Yes?

Q Mr. Secretary, the Senate has already turned down a proposal along these same lines exactly on the grounds that it's federal money, public taxpayer money going to religious schools. What makes you think that anything is going to change for this proposal?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, the Berlin Wall came down after awhile, and this will pass just about as suddenly. The Senate has passed for 50 years a GI bill. It did not say: You can't take that federal money to Notre Dame, you can't take it to Yeshiva, you can't take it to Howard, you can't take it to SMU. We've even had GIs, hundreds of thousands of them since World War II, up until 1989, taking that federal money to high schools to get their high school degree. Just two years ago, the Congress enacted a day care program which gives parents vouchers to spend at any day care center they choose -- public, private or religious.

So we have the odd situation of you can take the baby to any day care center and you can go to any college or university, but only the monopoly can provide a school for your elementary or secondary school person, and the monopoly gets to tell you exactly which school to go to, and only the rich have a choice.

Q Just to follow up then, also part of what you're indicating, quite clearly, is that you are looking at this as taxpayer money that will indeed be going to religious schools, which would seem to directly contradict the President's remark outside.

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, of course not. This is aid to families, not aid to schools. The GI bill was aid to veterans, not aid to Notre Dame. The day care vouchers are aid to single mothers who are poor, not aid to the day care center their child attends. There's absolutely no church/state question about this sort of aid to families. If there is, we'll have to cancel all the federal-guaranteed student loans and Pell Grants we have.

And one out of two American four-year college students has a federal grant or a federal loan which they can spend at Notre Dame, Vandervilt, Stanford, Berea, the Theological Seminary, the Baptist College, the Community College, any sort of lawfully operating college they choose. And the net result of that, over the 50 years, has been to increase the number -- the percentage of students that go to public schools from 50 percent to nearly 80 percent, and to create the best system of colleges and universities in the world.

Yes, ma'am?

Q Secretary Alexander, if we could get into some numbers. You've got a half billion dollar proposal here, for which you say states are going to compete. Can you tell us how many children you think potentially are eligible in the country for this sort of help, if you include all low and middle income children? How you anticipate lowering that number to accommodate \$1,000 per child with half a billion dollars. That's only 500,000 children, isn't it?

SEC. ALEXANDER: That's 500,000 children. This is the largest new program in the President's budget this year. It would affect a half million American children. It would cover every middle or low income child in 50 cities the size of Trenton, New Jersey, in 25 cities the size of San Jose, California, in seven cities the size of Little Rock.

We don't think it would be responsible, no matter how strongly we believe in this idea, to say, we've got a good idea, let's just give \$35 billion to it. Our goal is to encourage state and local governments to do the same thing. What we want to show over four years is what happens when middle and low income families have the same choices of schools that wealthy families already have. And we want to put enough money in it so that the public schools have a chance to change and compete and the money to do the job.

I mean, let's take Milwaukee as an example. Federal education aid to Milwaukee schools today is \$35 million. If Milwaukee were to apply for and receive a full amount of money for the GI bill for kids, it would receive an additional \$72 million through the families to the schools that serve the children who need it the most. So that's a lot of money, all of which can go to public schools if they can compete for the children.

Q How many children do you think there are in the United States in that low and middle income --

SEC. ALEXANDER: We would estimate that 30, 35 million children. And the amount of money that it

would take to give every child in America \$1,000 to spend at any school would be \$30 billion to \$35 billion. But America spends \$260 billion a year on elementary and secondary education. In the '90s, the federal government will increase its contributions to elementary and secondary education. And what we want to do is try something different. Instead of pouring the money into regulated programs, let's give the money to the families, as we have for 50 years in higher education, and let them select the school and let's see what happens. I think it will release so much energy and creativity in public as well as private schools that we won't recognize them in four years in the cities where this is tried.

Yes?

Q You obviously feel that you can do something for half a million. What about the 30-million-plus kids who aren't going to get this kind of aid?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, if I were a big-spending person from another party, I would probably come in and recommend 35 billion [dollars], but I'm a prudent person who recommends enough money to show the country whether this will work, and if it does work, then I would recommend that as a nation we start spending our money this way. We can spend state dollars, private dollars, local dollars, federal dollars to create \$1,000 scholarships for every family in the country if we wish to. I mean, every state could spend their money this way, if they would, now, and they spend about \$5,500 a year per student in America, state and local governments do today. So they could spend that money this way if they would choose to.

Q Aside from this kind of GI Bill for kids, are you satisfied the administration is doing all it can for the other 30 million?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Yes. The more the spotlight is on the President's education program, the better I like it. He has set a direction for education. He has mobilized virtually every state, 1,400 communities. We have 700 design teams creating break-the-mold schools; we have higher standards being set in seven or eight academic subjects, a national examination system being established; we're fighting with Congress to get government off the teachers' backs; and we're giving families more choices of schools. And those are several revolutions that, if the President is permitted to be reelected, will literally transform our education system. And so I am satisfied.

Q Are you satisfied that while you're taking care of -- obviously, this is a principle that you think will work. Are you satisfied you're also doing enough for school systems which aren't funded by the federal government but are trying to make it and, according to education surveys, aren't doing that great a job for those other 30 million?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, the reason they're not doing that great a job is that we've got a system that stymies the teachers and bores the children. And if all we did was just double the amount of money that we're spending into the same system, we would all be disappointed. So, while the President has record increases for Head Start, record increases to help families pay for college, record increases for math and science, education gets more money than any other new department -- any other department in the federal budget this year, most of his new investment is to create a revolution in the schools.

And he's going to get some real opposition on this. I mean, this is -- and I think it's important to give credit where credit is due. I mean, he has been consistent about this the whole time he has been here. The middle of a presidential campaign is not a particularly propitious time to create a proposal like this that will engender a lot of opposition, but I think it is an excellent example of what a president ought to be doing about education. I'm glad he's willing to do it.

Q Mr. Secretary, all of your programs seems to be pointed and aimed towards the year 2000.

SEC. ALEXANDER: Yes.

Q They're futuristic in orientation. But local schools, local communities have a problem now --

SEC. ALEXANDER: Right.

Q -- which is generally known as equalization in education funding. Urban school districts, school districts with the biggest problems, tend not to get the average; they get lower than the average. The school districts in the suburban communities tend not to get the average; they get above average. What is the federal government doing about the problem that exists today in cities like Newark, like Hartford, which aren't getting what cities in Connecticut like Farmington and West Hartford are receiving?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, if we wanted to take a city like Milwaukee, what we are proposing to do is put 72 million new federal dollars into the hands of the poorest families that they can spend to help their children get the best education in the world. That's \$72 million into a city that only today gets \$35 million from the federal government. If you're talking about a city like Indianapolis, instead of sending them \$14 million, we would send them \$36 million plus \$14 million. If you're talking about a city like

San Jose, California, instead of 5 million federal dollars, we would put \$20 million into the hands of middle and low income families so they can choose an education program that helps their families. And we're ready to do it next month if the Congress would like to pass it. The legislation's up there. The President's advocated it for four years. He's proposed a number of proposals. This is substantial new money and, in my opinion, the promise of more, because, if this were to work, it would represent a consensus about how the federal government might, as it can afford it, help make local schools better. There's always a dispute between conservatives and liberals as about how to do this. The conservatives are all for this, and so are many Democratic liberals. The mayor of Milwaukee was here today, and he's as strongly for this as a Republican conservative is. So, this will help that problem.

Q I'm not really talking about in terms of liberal versus conservative or Republican versus Democrat, but in terms of dollars. What can the federal --

SEC. ALEXANDER: This is dollars.

Q But what can the federal government do with the money that it currently spends to encourage states to equalize educational funding so that you don't have to put new money in, but take the current dollars that are used and distribute it more equally?

SEC. ALEXANDER: That's the states' business, and equalizing funding is not the problem. I mean, if you put more money into the same system, it won't make it better. We've already proved that. I mean, in the 1980s, spending for education more than doubled in real dollars and scores went down. And there are plenty of -- I mean, what you would do if you equalized spending is you'd be taking money out of big cities, and you might be putting it into rural areas that spend half as much and have better test scores. So, it is not -- it is not the spending of money alone that makes the difference. It's radically changing the schools. And what the President is saying is I'm willing to take the biggest new program in my budget this year and give a lot of federal money to parents who will change their schools so they can make them the best schools in the world. And if that works, more can come.

Q Mr. Secretary, are there any communities in the country now where there's a choice system operating where parents have the opportunity to choose between public and private schools?

SEC. ALEXANDER: I'm not sure I know of one. I know of a lot of progress in that direction.

Minneapolis is close because it has a state program to permit some participation in private, non-religious schools. Minnesota permits choice among all public schools. And Vermont has had for 75 years tuitioning, where school boards send their money and the kids to private schools. And many jurisdictions have different versions of choice.

But this will require some change in thinking in virtually every one of our school districts in the country for it to succeed. But I expect Milwaukee to go back, put its plan together, and be one of the first applicants for the program. And I can't imagine why other cities would not either because it would give them the opportunity to turn their schools upside down, open them up. Schools should be open till 10:00 at night, on Saturday, in the summer. They ought to be meeting the needs of disabled kids. They ought to have technology in them. They need to get rid of an antiquated set of structures that was designed for 100 years ago. This gives them the impetus to change and the money to pay for it.

Q Mr. Secretary, if you think that public schools need as much improvement as you think they do, why not limit this, at least in an experimental phase, to the public schools? Why not just provide the \$1,000 to the --

SEC. ALEXANDER: That would be like giving bonuses to Russian car manufacturers and saying, you know, work a little harder, or asking the Pony Express to run faster. What we're trying to do is imagine the telegraph and set a totally different way of thinking about education in front of the public school system and basically to say to it, if they can do it, you can do it as well. You've got twice or three times as much money to spend. If they can do it, you can do it.

Q Why do you have so little faith --

Q In your consultation with the private schools, have you secured from them some guarantee that they will provide the kinds of services that public schools are obligated to provide? Meaning free transportation, free access, and some disclosure standards for telling parents that they are (succeeding ?).

SEC. ALEXANDER: Our objective here is to create aid to families, not to schools, and not a new number of federal regulations. But the legislation does include anti-discrimination provisions that apply to race, that apply to children with disabilities, and that apply to discrimination based on gender.

Q What about disclosure?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Disclosure of what?

Q You require the public schools to check to see if they are doing (okay ?).

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, within -- of course, one of the President's plans is the national examination system that local school districts could use. We're going to call on the creativity of the American people to figure this out. I mean, rather than us doing it in Washington, we're inviting cities like Milwaukee, Indianapolis, and San Antonio to say, what could we do with our 72 million new dollars or 100 million new dollars; get with the parents; submit a plan; then we would send them the money, and we would watch what happens for four years. And if it helps create the best schools in the world, as it has done for our colleges and universities, well, then we can go forward with it.

Q Governor, you said that this was dropped right in the middle of a presidential campaign, and your colleague, Governor Clinton, has found President Bush wanting on education, and Ross Perot has ridiculed the President's program, including the meeting of the NGA in Charlottesville. Are you prepared to go on the campaign trail this fall and defend Bush as the education president? (Will you be ?) glad to do so?

SEC. ALEXANDER: The answer is absolutely yes. What I would prefer to do is to work with the Democratic governors and the Democratic mayors and everybody the way we've been working, because we've set national education goals with the leadership of the President. We're working on a consensus about national standards. And we've agreed on the basis of a national examination system and a variety of other changes. All of those things are bipartisan. I don't want to threaten that.

But I'm -- I -- the more the campaign focusses the spotlight on President Bush's education record, the better I like it, because one of the most important reasons to re-elect him is because of he's -- he is the best chance we have for a revolution in American education, and we need it.

Q But your answer suggested you expect Democrats to be coercive of Clinton. You don't really expect that, do you?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Be coercive of Clinton?

Q To accept what the Bush program is and the progress that you say has been made --

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, I think there are a lot of Democrats in this country who know that the best way -- one of the best ways to improve the schools is to give all parents choices of all schools. That is not a Republican idea. It happens to be the President's idea. There are a number of Republicans who disagree with it. There are a number of Democrats who support it. It happens to be the President's consistent about it. So, you know, if anybody wants to attack the President on education, that gives me a chance to make a case for him in education, and it's a good one.

Q What schools did you -- did you go to only private schools?

SEC. ALEXANDER: No, I didn't. I --

Q What's wrong with public education?

SEC. ALEXANDER: What's wrong with public education is it was invented for my grandfather. My grandfather in east Tennessee went to a school a lot like the one I went to. When he moved into the town of Maryville, in order to go to better schools -- he went for three months a year for four years. That's where my grandfather went to school. My father --

Q We're not talking about your father --

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, I'm getting to me. Just a minute. That's where I came from. We moved -- they moved into Maryville so my father could go to the public schools there because they were better. There was a little bit of choice back then, come to think of it. My father was the elementary school principal, and my mother had the only preschool program in the county, because the public schools didn't have it. It was private because the public schools didn't offer that service at a time when they should have been.

I went to those public schools. They were excellent public schools. They are among the best public schools there today. They spend about \$3,800 a year per student.

Q Would you consider yourself uneducated?

SEC. ALEXANDER: I consider myself well educated. And if every -- and if I were living in Maryville, I'd go again to those schools. But what I had a chance to do when I went to college was to choose among colleges and universities, and we have had a chance with our children to choose among public and private schools, including a child with a learning disability, including a child with a different sort of personality. And it gives us a choice that we think every family ought to have more of.

And the only thing I'm sure about is that won't even be an issue in five years, that the idea that in this country we could have a national policy that says "only the rich can have choices of the best schools", that's going to collapse all at once one of these days, and one of these days soon.

Q But why don't you make the public schools better by giving them more money? A lot of money was taken out of them in the Reagan era.

SEC. ALEXANDER: We -- no, it was not. There was -- in the 1980s, spending on elementary and secondary education went from about \$160 billion to more than \$400 billion, and they didn't get much better. So what we've discovered is that putting more money into more of the same won't work. What we're trying is, let's create a powerful force for change. That's the parents as the regulators, and then give all the schools including the public schools a lot of money to make the changes. And if that works, it will attract a lot more money to the public schools.

Q (Inaudible) -- trying to inject a little bit of reality into this when those of you in the administration --

SEC. ALEXANDER: You mean a little more.

Q -- a little reality into this when those of you in the administration suggest that you want to give poor and middle income parents the same choices as wealthy parents. No one in this --

SEC. ALEXANDER: I never said "same".

Q It's been -- it's been said.

SEC. ALEXANDER: No, ma'am, we're very careful. If you would study our words, we say we would like to give middle and low income families more of the same choices that wealthy families already have. The Pell grant and the --

Q (Inaudible) -- so careful. Not everyone is --

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, I work hard to make sure we're all that careful.

Q May I ask, you would concede that we're not going to be able to send everybody's kid to Sidwell Friends --

SEC. ALEXANDER: Or to Harvard.

Q Yes, all right.

SEC. ALEXANDER: Yeah, but our schools have gotten better. Our colleges and universities have become the best in the world without everyone having a chance to go to Harvard or Yale.

Q When you liken the public school system to Russian car manufacturers, and a lot of parents would agree with that, how did it get to that situation and why do you think a reasonably modest program -- which I think you would suggest this is given the whole universe of kids --

SEC. ALEXANDER: I would totally disagree --

Q -- is going to prime the pump to the extent that it's going to change this behemoth system?

SEC. ALEXANDER: That's beautiful rhetoric, and I wish I were as good.

Q It's a question, not rhetoric.

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, no, it's rhetoric, and it's excellently done. The --

Q (Off mike.) (Laughter.)

SEC. ALEXANDER: I -- ask me the question again, I'm so --

Q Why -- if you are talking about half a million children out of the universe of 35 million eligible children -- do you think helping them is going to move a system that is larded with administrative layers, that is trapped by teachers' unions, and is suffering from a lot of constraints? This is a fairly small program.

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, I remember -- well, first, it's a half million children, it's 50 cities the size of Trenton, it's the biggest new federal -- biggest new program in the president's budget. It's a big program. This is the only room in America, besides the Congress, where we wouldn't say half a billion dollars isn't a lot of money. But I think back to when I was the governor of Tennessee, and I went to General Motors and said, "Take the Saturn plant and put it next to the Nissan plant that's already producing the car that you hope to beat, and tell your managers and tell your union if the Japanese can do it, you can do it, too." Saturn put its plant next to the Nissan plant. The Nissan plant is enormously successful. If you'll read Consumer Reports this month, you'll see the Saturn plant is, too. And if Milwaukee turns its school systems upside down, and if its public schools as well as its private schools become the best in the world, then I think in Indianapolis, and in San Antonio, and in Nashville, and across this country, people will change their minds. And if they change their minds, they'll attract a lot more money to make the changes they need to do.

Q In your example, can Maria send her son, David, to the public school he's been attending all along with the \$1,000?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Thank you for the question because most people miss that. David can attend -- the \$1,000 goes to any school David attends, so the most obvious option is that it stays in the school where David is for the teachers and the principal to decide how to spend it to help David learn to high academic standards. This helps --

Q Do they have to certify that they're doing something special with the money? SEC. ALEXANDER: They have to certify -- they have to attract Maria. They have to convince her that the best place for

David to learn is in that school, and that just because she's middle- and low-income, she won't be denied the choice that other people have to choose another public school or a private school.

Q But some --

Q Mr. Secretary?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Sir?

Q A question from back here, everything has been up there.

SEC. ALEXANDER: Okay.

Q Okay, you keep saying this is aid to families and not aid to schools.

SEC. ALEXANDER: Yes.

Q The money ultimately goes to the schools. What's the difference?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, the difference is the United States Constitution -- the same difference with the GI bill, the same difference with the Pell Grant, the same difference with guaranteed student loans, of which there are \$63 billion this year. This is aid to families and not aid to any institution. And the courts have made it clear -- a clear difference. I mean, there are plenty of practical differences between aid to institutions and aid to families. We have 200 programs over in the Department of Education, most of them aid to institutions, and they're all tied up in rules and regulations that tell it -- they're sort of a federal recipe book for the teachers.

This, instead, would be aid to families, who would then let the money follow the child to the school.

And that's the regulatory authority. The parent becomes the regulator in this case, so aid to families instead of aid to institutions is a clear legal distinction and a practical one as well.

(Crosstalk.)

Q Mr. Alexander, your position on accreditation of colleges on issues of race and multiculturalism it seems has been very clear. Would you be willing to apply the same standards of accreditation for private schools in this program, meaning that you should look into the kind of curriculum that, though it may be a family's choice, would guarantee, based on your goals for the year 2000, that there are basic approaches -- sound approaches to education?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, I hadn't thought about getting involved with the accrediting institutions of elementary and secondary educations in this case because the states -- we -- the money would go any lawfully operating school. So we don't have the same analogous situation we do with colleges and universities. It will be up to the states to decide what a lawfully operating school would be, and not my concern.

Q The state of Wisconsin in the instance of Milwaukee has -- officials there say they have very little say in what a private parochial religious school can do, and if that parent is misled, they have no right to come in there and dismantle them.

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, you either trust the parents or you trust the bureaucrats, and we trust the parents.

STAFF: We're going to take two more questions.

Q You raised the issue of politics earlier. Have you done any vote counting up on the Hill, and what's the likelihood that anything like this is going to pass?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, I expect it to have distinguished sponsors. I expect it to gain bipartisan support. And, you know, gazing at the Berlin Wall, it's always hard to tell when it might come down, but it will come down. And when it did come down, it came down suddenly.

You know, if Milwaukee and Indianapolis and Miami all begin to add the numbers up, many of whom say they need more federal money to help make their schools better, the kind of places that would attract students, they're going to have to think, "Well, why should our congressman in Indianapolis turn our back on 36 million new dollars?" And in Milwaukee on 72 million new dollars, and in Little Rock on 20 million new dollars, and in Detroit on 139 million dollars.

You see, Detroit is a very interesting case because the principal there -- I mean the superintendent and the school board are already for choice of public schools. The Michigan Constitution gets in the way of any state money ending up in a religious school. They'll have to think about whether they're willing to use federal money in the same way that they allow federal money to be used at Michigan State and at the private universities. And if they are, then Detroit schools -- Detroit families get 139 million new dollars which could be spent at the schools parents think serve poor kids the best. So that's a lot of money for Detroit.

Q Are you saying that you expect some kind of grassroots pressure on Congress to help get something like this enacted?

SEC. ALEXANDER: With all respect to Congress, it is so far behind the curve on the education

revolution, that it will require a grassroots effort. One of the good things about the presidential campaign, I suppose -- and it's hard to think of many -- but one of the good things about it is that if Congress doesn't pass it this year, it will give the President an opportunity to go to the country and say, "My position is to give all parents choices of all schools, and my opponents are irrevocably opposed to that." If President Bush wins, he can go back to Congress with a mandate. There may be 100, 150 new congressmen, and I suspect the Berlin Wall come down.

Q A final follow-up on that -- the point you just raised. How do you keep from making this look like it is simply an election year issue, campaign issue for the President rather than something that he legitimately thinks he can get enacted this year?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, there are two ways. First, you ought to see if this is just an idea or a principle that the President cooked up in the last two weeks. And as he said today in his speech, this is one bold, controversial position -- and there are others -- but this is one of them that he has consistently held for his entire time. Second, the best way to keep it from being a big issue is for the other presidential candidates to agree with it.

Q Secretary Alexander, you're throwing around big figures tantalizing these school districts --

SEC. ALEXANDER: I hope to.

Q -- 70 million [dollars] for Milwaukee, 130 [million dollars] for Detroit.

SEC. ALEXANDER: Right.

Q Well, that's about two-fifths of your 500 million [dollars]. Do you envision this -- it's a four-year program. Do you envision this as a multi-billion dollar long-term federal program? Are you going to give these districts 10 [billion dollars] or \$20 billion down the road to pay for this?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, we are now giving schools districts 10 [billion dollars] or \$12 billion in federal money through a series of tightly regulated programs. We might learn from this demonstration project that there's a better way to do that.

I do fully expect that in the 1990s that the federal government will continue to increase spending for elementary and secondary education. Under President Bush, spending for elementary and secondary education has gone up more rapidly than state and local spending for elementary and secondary education. It will keep going up. And so there is a very good possibility that a combination of new federal dollars, state and local dollars, and private funding, as in the Milwaukee case, could create a large number of scholarships for middle and low income children.

But we want to see what happens. I don't think it would be responsible to take much more money than this and throw it out there in a demonstration project. I think 50 cities the size of Trenton, seven the size of Milwaukee, or 25 the size of San Jose, California is enough to get a good idea of what happens when you give families more choices.

STAFF: Thank you.

Q Are you saying that all federal aid could conceivably -- going to schools could conceivably in the future end up as vouchers?

SEC. ALEXANDER: No, I didn't say that.

Q (Inaudible) -- you're asking for this -- I know you're saying it's aid to families. But just yesterday the Supreme Court wouldn't even let public schools hold a prayer at graduation. How is this going to be upheld constitutionally?

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, that's a different issue. There's nothing in yesterday's decision, because we've examined it, that has anything to do with this issue.

Thank you.

STAFF: Thank you.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

FOCUSTM

Search: Advanced Search;lamar alexander w/5 education w/5 gi bill

To narrow this search, please enter a word or phrase:

Example: House of Representatives

[About LEXIS-NEXIS](#) | [Terms and Conditions](#) | [What's New](#)
Copyright © 2000 LEXIS-NEXIS Group. All rights reserved.

Copyright 1992 Federal Information Systems Corporation
Federal News Service

View Related Topics

JULY 22, 1992, WEDNESDAY

SECTION: MAJOR LEADER SPECIAL TRANSCRIPT

LENGTH: 5340 words

HEADLINE: PRESS CONFERENCE WITH:
SENATOR JOHN DANFORTH (R-MI)
REPRESENTATIVE BILL GRADISON (R-OH)
US SECRETARY OF **EDUCATION LAMAR ALEXANDER**
SUBJECT: "GI BILL FOR CHILDREN" LEGISLATION
253 RUSSELL SENATE OFFICE BUILDING

BODY:

SEN. DANFORTH: Congressman Gradison and I are pleased to announce that today we are introducing the GI Bills for Children legislation, which was announced by the President at the White House several weeks ago. The Republican cosponsors so far -- and we are gathering numbers all the time -- are Senators Kasten, Brown, Cochran, Thurmond, Smith and D'Amato, all Senate Republicans.

We want to say that we have had very fruitful discussions with several members of the Democratic Party in the Senate on this legislation. I think that it's fair to say that this is not necessarily the best year to pick up bipartisan cosponsorship for legislation which is being introduced this year of this nature. But we believe that this is a long-term project and we are confident that next year, early next year, we are going to have substantial bipartisan support for the legislation.

We think the concept is very, very important, and it is, of course, to provide a half a billion dollars a year of new money for education. That in itself is an important announcement, given the present budgetary constraints. The new money is going to be available to selected geographical areas, and it's going to be available for parents, middle income and low income parents, to use on behalf of their children's education. The money can be used in public schools, the money can be used in private schools, in church schools; \$1,000 per child in the selected area.

The money follows the child; that is, the parent decides what school the child goes to, and the money is made available then to that school. The money can be divided up in this legislation, so that \$500 could go, for example, to the local public school, and \$500 could go to a school that provided after normal school hours educational opportunities or weekend educational opportunities, or summer educational opportunities. So there's a great deal of flexibility built into the legislation.

We believe that the key to this is to make available to, hopefully eventually all Americans, the same educational opportunities that are now available to more fortunate Americans. In many communities and many income levels, parents can pick the educational opportunities for their children. But often times where there is one public school and where the parents are people of modest means, there are no alternatives and the child is stuck in

the particular local public school. So therefore, we believe that choice is a matter of equity as well as a matter of good education. And for those reasons, we're particularly delighted to make this announcement today.

REP. GRADISON: Thank you, Senator. I needn't remind you that change is in the air and talk of change is very much in the air these days. What we're talking about is change in the way in which we think about financing education, by making it possible for the individual families to have more to say than they've had in the past about where their children are to be educated, and through this, to send a message to schools that those which do the better jobs, those which attract more students, those which perform better, are going, through a competitive process, to attract more students and grow and prosper and be able to take their good work -- reach more people with their good work.

Much has been made, very properly, of the word "choice" which is certainly the heart of this proposal. And the emphasis on choice, of course, has been on the family, as I just mentioned. But I would like also

to stress the fact that this is a demonstration program; it's an experiment. None of us can be absolutely sure how it's going to work until it is tried, which is why we're so anxious to get on with it. But there is an element of choice involved in the experimentation. States or communities or school districts that don't want to participate aren't required to participate; that's up to them. And even if a state or a school district does choose to participate, families which decide not to are not required to as well. In that sense, the whole concept of choice is built in here at every level.

It is certainly our hope that we will gradually build more support for this as the year goes on, and that when the elementary and secondary education bill is up for reconsideration next year that this proposal will be a centerpiece of proposals to expand and improve upon that very valuable legislation.

I have today introduced in the House, with over 20 cosponsors, a bill identical to the one introduced, or to be introduced by Senator Danforth and others. In our case, the backing is bipartisan and we have members of both parties in the House who are cosponsors of our legislation.

SEC. ALEXANDER: Yesterday -- well, first, I want to say this. I can think of no two members of the Congress who the President would be more delighted to have cosponsor this legislation. Senator Danforth and Congressman Gradison are thoughtful, sensible members of the United States Congress who have demonstrated in the past a real caring about children, about individuals, about civil rights, about education. And for them to step forward and take the lead on this legislation, which can fundamentally change education in America, is very helpful. We look forward to working with them and salute them for their leadership.

I was thinking, as they were talking, that yesterday I was in Philadelphia with President Bush and he was visiting a city where there are 117,000 children in Catholic schools. Their parents choose for them to go there, make that possible for them because they want, in their opinion, that option. Those are parents who are searching for the best possible education for their children.

I was thinking about my own family. My grandfather sold his farm a long time ago in the mountains of Tennessee and moved the whole family into the city so that my father could go to a better public school in that case, the same public school that I attended. He was looking for the best possible education for me and my sisters, and for my father and his brothers and sisters, in my grandfather's case.

And then I read in Time Magazine that my friend Bill Clinton's family moved when they were living outside Hot Springs; chose to bring Bill into the city so he could go to the Catholic school in Hot Springs. They were looking for the best educational opportunity for a youngster who would eventually grow up to be a Rhodes Scholar.

I think all parents want the best schools for their children, whether they're rich, middle income, or poor. That is a big part of the American dream. And what is ironic about our system today is only the rich have that opportunity. You can pick up any newspaper in any city in this country -- except Washington, DC, where it's illegal, interestingly enough, to give this sort of information -- and the ads about houses will say, in Nashville, for example, Area 2, Percy Preschool. And so people who have the money move across town so their child can go to the public school that's thought of as the best school for their child. Or if they have enough money, they might choose a private school in some cases.

So the purpose of this bill, proposed by President Bush, is very simply to give middle and low income families more of the same choices of all schools -- public, private and religious -- that people with money already have. It's not a new idea in America. In fact, it is a very old one. We want to apply some of the same principles to an elementary and secondary education that have worked so successfully with our colleges and universities.

As the President has said, his generation, coming out of World War II, used the GI bill to go to college. Nobody said you can't go to Notre Dame or to the Baptist College or to Howard University or to Brigham Young University, or even to Yeshiva or the religious seminary. Veterans with the GI bill went to the college of their choice. And as the Democratic Mayor of Milwaukee told the President the other day, the GI bill for kids will hurt the public schools

(MORE)

just about as much as the GI bill hurt the public universities. And what the GI bill did to the public universities was help make them the best in the world over the last 50 years.

The one point that I would like to mention, in conclusion, that often gets overlooked with this, is that all of this money could go to the public schools; all of this money could go to the public schools. This is not a bill to move children out of public schools into private schools. This is a bill to give parents consumer power to help schools change, and then to give those schools the money to make the changes.

So we would expect that if these middle and low income parents would select public and private schools

for their children, based upon how well that school met the child's need. And if the school closes at 3:00 when the child -- when the parent works till 6:00, if the school has teachers who think the parent can't learn, if the school is unsafe, then that parent ought to be able to take the child out of that school, go to another school, public or private, so the child can have an opportunity to get the best education in the world. That's what American parents want, and that's the idea. It's the largest new program in the President's budget. It affects half a million American children. It would last for four years, and we will see what happens when middle- and low-income children get the same choices that people with money already have.

Thank you very much.

Q Senator Danforth, since this is a smaller -- (inaudible) -- obviously you won't be able to fund all the kids who might be able to participate in this program. And as I understand the language the last I saw the bill, it would allow localities to come up with their own determination, up to a certain limit, for income eligibility. Is that correct?

SEN. DANFORTH: No, the income eligibility is the median income in the area.

SEC. ALEXANDER: Well, it could be up to the median income in the state or the country, whichever is higher. So, in Connecticut, it might cover families up to \$50,000, \$53,000, I think. Generally speaking, it would cover 60-65 percent of the children in most counties. But it is true that under the legislation as it's presently drafted, the city or the local governmental entity or the state could devise a plan that used a different income level. And that might be an idea that we would want to look at because we'd like to see what happens.

Senator, excuse me for butting in.

SEN. DANFORTH: No, no. That's -- I think that it's also important to recognize that it is a competition, as you point out.

This is not a national program. It's a competition. It is a pilot program, and it's half a billion dollars a year, which is a lot of money, given the present budgetary problems that we have. But it's certainly not nationwide in scope. And there are four criteria that are set forth in the legislation for participation. And one of the four criteria is the proportion of participating children who are from low-income families. So, insofar as that's part of it, this would be a program which would do what it's designed to do, and that is to give low-income kids and their families or middle-income kids and their families the same opportunities that people who live in more fortunate circumstances already have.

Q So, in other words, the intent here then is, because you have a limited amount of money to be able to serve a larger number of kids, the intent is to serve first the low-income children?

SEN. DANFORTH: The money would only be available to low- and middle-income people, people who are below the average in income. Secondly, in determining which particular geographical area was selected for the demonstration project, one of the four criteria that's looked at, it's not absolutely binding, but that's looked at is the income level of that particular region.

Q If I could follow up on that, how can you say this is for middle-income children, too, when the cap is placed at the median income? I mean, by definition, those eligible are below the median.

SEN. DANFORTH: That's correct.

Q So, how can you say it's for middle income?

SEN. DANFORTH: Well, I would say that it's -- I mean, the correct way to say it is people who are below the median income.

SEC. ALEXANDER: May I throw a little -- let me take an example or two.

(MORE)

Children, by and large, live in families that are poor. And so, typically, the number of children in a city that might be served by a program like this would be between 60 and 70 percent of the children. Just taking a few cities at random, based upon the work we've done: in Birmingham, if Birmingham were a participant in this program, 75 percent of the children would receive a \$1,000 scholarship which they might use at any school. In Mobile, it would be 66 percent. In Tucson, it would be 59 percent. In Little Rock, it would be 70 percent. In Compton, California and Los Angeles, where I'm going Friday -- hit by the riots -- it would be 66 percent. And so that would mean that a city like Compton, which now receives \$11 million in federal education grants, would get another \$20 million, which would only -- could only be spent at the schools that help the kids who need it the most.

So we think it's fair to say middle and low income, because typically about two-thirds of all the children in a participating jurisdiction would receive the thousand dollar scholarship.

Q Well, I agree with you that many of our children, in fact a majority of our children in many cities are

in dire straits financially, but is this an election year ploy to appeal to the middle class, when actually the program is geared for the lower class?

SEC. ALEXANDER: The President has been consistent about a number of things during his four years, but he has been absolutely consistent about his desire to try to give families more choices of all schools. And we've made a number of recommendations to the United States Congress which have not succeeded.

This is a different recommendation -- one that's bigger, one that involves new federal money, one that has money that can be used in public as well as private schools, one that has money, as Senator Danforth said, that can be used at -- for other academic programs. And just because the fourth year of the President's term is an election year was not a reason to find money in the budget for it. This is the money from the Defense Department that can be spent now for education that we often hear about, and it's not a good reason for the senator and the congressmen to wait -- to delay it. I think we should go forward, carry it to the American people, build support for it, try to pass it this year, and if it doesn't pass, have a stronger base of support for when the President is re-elected and a large -- and so many new members of Congress are here.

REP. GRADISON: As I see it, it's fairly clear that this idea has not attracted enormous support from the folks that run the Congress. Our approach here is to come up with an idea that we're absolutely convinced would be best for the education of children in America and take it to the American people, and try to build support there from the grass roots up, seeking out of the presidential election this fall and the re-election of President Bush a mandate to include this proposal as part of the larger re-authorization next year. So in that sense, the timing is quite intentional.

Elections sometimes make a difference. They sometimes decide issues. And this is an issue which we want to have debated this fall.

SEN. DANFORTH: Well, I might just add that to -- you know, I guess if a president did nothing, the president would be criticized for doing nothing, and then the president suggests doing something, and the president can be suggested -- can be criticized for doing something.

After the Rodney King verdict and the problem in Los Angeles, there was a tremendous cry throughout this country to do something about our cities. Many, many people were talking about it, and there's still legislation pending on the subject.

Well, one of the things that we kept hearing -- I think all of us kept hearing -- was that to create better opportunities for younger people in this country requires education. And it requires equity in education, and opportunity in education. If we are going to provide a better life for people who now don't have a very good life, we have to first provide the ability for them to do the job: to work, to participate. That means education. And that is why this legislation is important. A half a billion dollars of new money in education is important. And it's not so much important for kids who live in the wealthy suburbs, because their parents can afford educational choice and avail themselves of educational choice. But it's important for those kids who right now are stuck. It's important to give them the opportunity to get unstuck. And it's also important to do something else, because another thing we heard, particularly after Los Angeles, was that parental involvement in the lives of children is something that is very, very important. To engage the parent in the development and the education and the decisions relating to their kids, that's very, very important.

That is how this legislation is designed. The parent gets a choice that the parent now does not have, and that choice is to send the kid to a variety of schools. So, that is what we are after in this legislation. I think it is very timely, especially given Los Angeles, that we are coming forward with this now. And I believe that it's not -- clearly, it's not going to be enacted this year, but I think it should be on the national agenda in an election year, and I believe that it does have and will get growing bipartisan support.

Q I was wondering if you think the program -- (inaudible) -- outlined in the program falls a little bit short? (Inaudible) -- in an area like New England, most of the public schools provide low-level (investigations into this ?), and all of them have been mostly private schools, cost well over \$1,000 annually -- (inaudible) --

SEN. DANFORTH: You know, the average cost for -- first of all, let's say the District of Columbia is a winner in the competition. The first thing that this would mean is for every child in the District of Columbia who goes to a public school, that public school gets \$1,000 more per child, so it would be a terrific enrichment for the public schools.

The second thing is that the -- I think I've got this somewhere. Thirty percent of private schools, this is

the cost of educating a child in private schools -- 30 percent of the private schools cost less than \$1,000 for the child, and 42 percent of the Catholic schools right now cost less than \$1,000 a child. So, this is a very, very substantial help to private schools and to public schools to whom these kids would go.

Q If I could ask one more thing, back on politics again. How do you respond to Governor Clinton's feeling or his statement that choice is good, but it should only be regarded in public schools, not private?

SEN. DANFORTH: Well, because that's not the rule that we apply to the well-to-do. We don't apply that to wealthy families. We don't say that you have a choice only to send your children to certain schools. We say that you have a choice to send your children to the best school for your child. Now, as a matter of simple equity, we should provide that same opportunity for low-income people, for people who are below the median income, that we provide for wealthy kids. A child whose family earns \$200,000 a year, which is the figure that was mentioned frequently at the Democratic convention, the child of such a family can go to any school. And our view is that these same opportunities should be made available to a lot of kids in this country.

The GI Bill did this for colleges. The GI Bill didn't say, well, we're going to have some colleges for the poor people, and we're going to have other colleges for rich people. What the GI Bill said was that we're going to provide educational opportunities, the best educational opportunity you can find for yourself for people who've served in the military. So, it's exactly the same principle.

(MORE)

REP. GRADISON: I think there's another part to -- which I would like to add to the Senator's excellent response, and that is that the states make this determination and every state that I know of, including Arkansas, recognizes both public and certain non-public schools as legally constituted to meet the standards of the state as far as education for children. And I think that if the state is making that determination, there is no reason in the world that if the money is going to follow the child, it should not be able to go to an institution which the state itself says is good enough to meet the standards set by that state for the education of their children in that state.

SEC. ALEXANDER: I can't resist being just a little more specific about that if you don't mind. I told those two stories at the beginning. I think what was good enough for my father, who was moved into town so he could go to a better public school, and what was good enough for Governor Clinton, whose parents chose for him, according to Time magazine to go to a Catholic school in Hot Springs, ought to be good enough for other middle and low income families who can't afford that option today.

Q Senator Danforth, you say it's matter of equity that the federal government gives money to increase the choices of poor families in the field of education, but we don't consider it a matter of equity to increase funding to give these poor families greater choices in areas of real estate or transportation or any other area. Why is the federal government making a promise to increase --

SEN. DANFORTH: I don't think that that's correct. I mean I think that as a matter of fact, insofar as the federal government participates in a whole host of enterprises, certainly in the case of housing there is an emphasis to try to help the people who are less well off, so I think that is the general policy of the government.

Q (Off mike) -- to provide it but not to promise to equalize the choices as you are doing in education with the GI Bill, the promise to close the gap in choices.

SEN. DANFORTH: Yeah.

Q So I'm wondering, why is the federal government promising to equalize the number of choices between the rich and the poor families only in education?

SEN. DANFORTH: Well, I think that you know, generally speaking means testing is a principle that is followed by the federal government. The federal government does provide for example school lunches. The federal government does provide welfare. The federal government does provide food stamps. It provides a lot of things for low income people. But I think that the main thrust here is that education is the key to a person's future.

We talk so much in this country about people being locked in, people being locked into their circumstances, people being locked into poverty. Why in America should we settle for human beings, children being locked into poverty? Why should we be settling for children who do not have the opportunities to advance in life? Why should we settle for a situation where we create generation after generation of people who really are hopeless? They have been called the underclass. Why should we settle for that? Why shouldn't we attempt to provide first, greater opportunities for parental participation

in educational decisions? That in itself is a major plus.

Secondly, why shouldn't we provide for competitive alternatives within a geographical area so that the schools would be competing for these dollars which would be to the benefit of all schools. And why shouldn't we provide to families the opportunity to send the child to the best school available, and if the parents choose the public school, to enrich that public school by \$1,000 per person.

I think that the basic concept is absolutely fundamental to the future of this country, and I think that the basic concept is one that is truly as American as apple pie. It has to do with fairness and it has to do with opportunity and it has to do with the future. And that is what this program is. This is a major program. Yes, this is an election year. Yes, this is going to have a limited number, if any, Democratic cosponsors for a while, but this really speaks to the American people and I think to what makes this country great. REP. GRADISON: I'd like to add this thought. One may argue and your question suggests the point that we have programs which don't fully meet the needs of all the people in the country that are eligible for the program. I accept that. But there is definitely a tendency, as we review programs that we have on the books, to increase the options for the beneficiaries of those programs in terms of how they use those benefits.

Housing is a good example. It used to be if you wanted to qualify for federal housing benefits you had to use them in public housing only. Now, in more and more cases, we give vouchers and people go out to what? Private housing. When it comes to Medicaid, yes, there are a lot of people who aren't eligible for health care benefits, but of those who are, they're not told you can only use your Medicaid benefit at the public hospital or at the public health clinic. They can take those benefits to any hospital -- private, or public, Catholic or Jewish or nonpartisan. They can do the same thing with regard to their choice of physicians. We don't say to

people, when we give them a food stamp, you can only take this to a food distribution center which is run by your local, state or local government. They can go to any food store that anybody else can go to as long as they've got the food stamps to pay for food. It's exactly the same concept.

SEC. ALEXANDER: The one word -- the only word I'd like to see is the word "equalize." Our goal is to give middle and low income families more of the same choices of all schools that wealthy families already have. I'm not sure there's any way we could ever try to equalize. And that's not our goal anymore than the Pell grant and the guaranteed student loans, which go to one half of our four-year college students to help them pay their college bills, it doesn't make every opportunity exactly equal, but it surely does create enormous new opportunities for people who have less money.

Thank you for coming.

SEN. DANFORTH: Thank you.

END

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

FOCUSTM

Search: Advanced Search;lamar alexander w/5 education w/5 gi bill

To narrow this search, please enter a word or phrase:

FOCUS

Example: House of Representatives

Copyright 1992, The Commercial Appeal
The Commercial Appeal (Memphis)

June 26, 1992, Friday, FINAL EDITION

SECTION: NEWS, Pg. A2

LENGTH: 109 words

HEADLINE: BUSH DEFENDS 'GI BILL FOR KIDS'

BYLINE: From press services

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

BODY:

President Bush Thursday defended his proposal to give parents \$ 1,000 scholarships good at public and private schools.

Bush called the \$ 500 million proposal - dubbed the "**GI Bill** for kids" by **Education Secretary Lamar Alexander** - "a bold experiment to give low- income families more of the same choices of schools already available to wealthier families."

The plan is certain to intensify an election-year debate over choice and competition, which Bush views as a cure for mediocrity in education. Many Democrats support the idea, but they part company with Bush on using taxpayer dollars to subsidize private or parochial schools.

LOAD-DATE: April 3, 1996

FOCUSTM

Search: Advanced Search;lamar alexander w/5 education w/5 gi bill

To narrow this search, please enter a word or phrase:

FOCUS

Example: House of Representatives

Public Papers of the Presidents

June 26, 1992

CITE: 28 Weekly Comp. Pres. Doc. 1153**LENGTH:** 156 words**HEADLINE:** Checklist of White House Press Releases**HIGHLIGHT:***The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements.***BODY:***Released June 20*

Advance text:

Text of remarks to the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association in Universal City, California

Released June 23

Announcement:

Nomination of Katharine J. Armentrout to be U.S. District Judge for the District of Maryland

Announcement:

Nomination of James J. McMonagle to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Ohio

Released June 24

Statement:

Rail strike

Transcript:

Press briefing on the budget -- by Richard Darman, Director, Office of Management and Budget

Released June 25

Fact sheet:

Federal grants for State and local "GI bills" for Children

Transcript:

Press briefing on legislation proposing a "GI bill" for children -- by **Lamar Alexander**, Secretary of **Education***Released June 26*

Fact sheet:

"Utah Public Lands Wilderness Act"

Announcement:

Nomination of John A. Mendez to be U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of California

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

FOCUSTM

Search: Advanced Search;lamar alexander w/5 education w/5 gi bill

To narrow this search, please enter a word or phrase:

Example: **House of Representatives**

[About LEXIS-NEXIS](#) | [Terms and Conditions](#) | [What's New](#)
Copyright © 2000 LEXIS-NEXIS Group. All rights reserved.

John B. Buxton

01/31/2000 10:01:35 AM

Record Type: Record

To: Kendra L. Brooks/OPD/EOP, Bethany Little/OPD/EOP@EOP, Andy Rotherham/OPD/EOP@EOP

cc:

Subject: vouchers

Good piece from the NYT on voucher activity in NM and choice's momentum. I'm not sure that they've taken the public temperature correctly, but it's out there.

January 31, 2000

Poor Parents Are Leading the Way as
States Debate School Voucher Plans

Related Articles

Forum

[Join a Discussion on Ideas on Contemporary Education](#)

By MICHAEL JANOFSKY

LBUQUERQUE, Jan. 26 -- One mother said it was the violence. Another said it was the drug dealing. A third said it was the growing number of children she noticed each day smoking, hugging and kissing in the schoolyard.

One by one, two dozen parents from low-income neighborhoods here in southwest Albuquerque explained how fear and anguish had led them to remove their children from public schools and enroll them in private schools costing as much as \$2,000 a year.

Their stories unfolded as part of a plea to lawmakers to enact a school voucher program that would let them use public funds to help pay private school tuition. It is a plea that has caught the ear of Republicans here, particularly Gov. Gary E. Johnson, who is proposing what would be the most ambitious voucher program in the country.

But their heartfelt passion is being met with equal fervor by other politicians, as well as teachers and their union representatives, who fear that taking money out of public schools would hasten their erosion.

It is a debate playing out across the country with increasing intensity as more than 25 legislatures consider bills that would create some type of

system in which public dollars would be used for private and parochial schools like the Abundant Life Christian School here, where many parents pay \$2,000 a year for each child they enroll.

Even with violence, drugs, crowding and unqualified teachers undermining achievement in many public schools, few measures, if any, including New Mexico's, are expected to pass this year. But forces on both sides -- and experts who have studied the public and private financing of education -- say support for school vouchers is growing so rapidly, especially in poor neighborhoods, that more cities and states will eventually implement programs through legislation or statewide ballot initiatives.

"A lot of people have been talking about this issue for quite a few years," said Eric Hirsch, a senior policy specialist for the National Conference of State Legislatures, who tracks education issues. "A lot of states aren't quite there yet, but there are a lot of proposals out there."

Paul Peterson, a professor of government at Harvard who has studied the existing programs, said the growing popularity of charter schools around the country was strong evidence that more voucher programs were inevitable. Charter schools are public schools that operate largely free of state and local regulations and unions. They are intended to provide a creative alternative to traditional public schools but must demonstrate progress or risk being closed.

"Every time something is introduced that provides more choice, it is never taken away," Professor Peterson said. "Parents really like it so politicians can't afford to take it back. Vouchers may creep along because the political opposition is so intense, but it'll happen."

Only five public voucher programs are operating now -- in Milwaukee, Cleveland, Florida, Minnesota and Arizona -- each serving a relatively small percentage of children.

Here in New Mexico, legislation proposed last year and again this month by Governor Johnson, a Republican in his second term, would exceed them significantly by offering each of the state's 316,000 children in public schools a voucher worth \$3,500 a year that could be used for tuition at any private or parochial school in the state.

"You would like to have a choice," said Geri Paiz, a disgruntled mother who pulled the last three of her six children out of public schools this year and is now paying \$1,000 each for them to attend Catholic schools. "What they don't realize is that many parents would jump at the chance to have a choice."

For now, the slow pace of acceptance is largely owing to efforts of politically active and well-organized opponents, including unions like the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, who have strong ties to the Democratic Party.

They contend that using public dollars to help some students get into private schools hurts those left behind by taking money away from

teacher salaries, school construction and teaching materials. They also argue that private and parochial schools, which have the right to accept or reject applicants, would take only higher-performing children, leaving public-school classrooms filled with a higher percentage of students with learning, language and behavioral problems.

Independent studies of the Milwaukee and Cleveland programs have found that students who use vouchers to attend private schools perform at a slightly higher rate than public-school students. A greater advantage, as the studies show, may be satisfaction among parents -- for having the choice and for feeling secure that their children are learning in a safer environment.

But researchers like Kim Metcalf, a professor of education at Indiana University, say the programs are too young and too small to draw any definite conclusions, and some results may reflect factors that have little to do with the classroom.

"If you look at the performance of kids in private versus public schools, the private schools look substantially better," Mr. Metcalf said. "But there's a probability that private-school parents are better-educated, make more money and provide more intellectual stimulus at home."

Mr. Peterson said, "Nobody finds them bad for kids, and there is a tremendous enthusiasm from parents."

Despite their growing appeal among parents, private-school vouchers have achieved virtually no support at the national level since the Bush administration and, until recently, not much more in state legislatures, which have been debating the issue for more than 20 years. Ballot initiatives have fared no better, failing decisively in Michigan (1978), Oregon (1990), Colorado (1992) and California (1993).

To create a choice for parents, cities and states have more often allowed them to enroll children in any public school, the case in New Mexico, and have approved more charter schools, which now number 1,700 around the country, up from several hundred a few years ago.

The oldest of the voucher programs paid for with public money is Milwaukee's, in effect for 10 years, offering families that fall below certain income levels vouchers worth up to \$4,894 a year. Cleveland's five-year-old program uses other income levels to offer vouchers worth up to \$2,250. In Florida, which last year became the first state to approve a statewide measure, each public school is graded annually for overall academic achievement, and any child attending a school that has been judged to be "failing" two years in a row becomes eligible for \$3,500 from the state.

Programs in Minnesota and Arizona take a different approach, offering tax benefits for dollars invested in education. In Minnesota, families making less than \$37,500 with children in public or private schools are eligible for \$1,000 per child, to a maximum of two, as reimbursement from the state for certain educational expenses, including textbooks, tutors and computer equipment. All families are eligible for tax deductions

for tuition costs.

In Arizona, residents who donate to "student tuition organizations," which distribute money to needy families, can deduct the full amount of the donation from their taxes.

Despite formidable political opposition, proponents of vouchers in other states are pushing ahead.

Twice in the last three years, Gov. George W. Bush of Texas supported a proposed pilot program for students at low-performing schools. The legislation failed both times, but its sponsor, Senator Teel Bivans, an Amarillo Republican, intends to introduce it again when the Texas legislature returns to session next year. Mr. Bush continues to support vouchers as a Republican presidential candidate.

In Pennsylvania, another Republican governor, Tom Ridge, has failed four times since 1995 in efforts to push through legislation that would provide state money to children for private or parochial schools. A spokesman said the governor would keep trying through the end of his second term, in 2002.

Seven years after California's first ballot initiative on vouchers failed, supporters are trying again, collecting signatures to get a measure before voters in November. An initiative is also being developed in Michigan.

In Kansas, lawmakers are considering a pilot voucher proposal that would aid 300 at-risk children even though Gov. Bill Graves, a Republican, has clearly indicated he is "less than enthusiastic" about voucher programs of any kind, according to his spokesman.

Here in New Mexico, Governor Johnson has made vouchers a hallmark issue, convinced that the ever-increasing money spent on state public schools -- \$1.6 billion proposed this year, almost half the budget -- has not produced significant improvements in student performance.

Last year, he refused to sign a budget that did not include a voucher program and called in legislators for a special session to iron out their differences. Facing Democratic majorities in both chambers, Mr. Johnson finally signed a package that did not include vouchers, but he succeeded in creating new visibility for what he says is inevitable.

This year, Republicans in the House and Senate introduced his proposal again, and in his State of the State address this month, the voucher issue was the first he mentioned.

"Every state screams out about every single problem in education and asks what they should be doing," Mr. Johnson said in an interview. "By all measures, we're doing just a little bit worse year by year by year. But vouchers is the right vehicle, and ultimately you are going to see school reform based on choice happen."

Mr. Johnson conceded that he did not expect the measure to survive the legislature again this year. But with all 112 state lawmakers facing

re-election in November, "I want to make this the campaign issue this year," he said.

That prospect delights parents like Ms. Paiz and Elena Maldonado, who enrolled her daughter, Laura, 12, in the Abundant Life school two years ago because of gang activity and drugs at her public elementary school. Ms. Maldonado said she was a Democrat who planned to vote for Vice President Al Gore, a voucher opponent, in the presidential election. But she vowed to vote against her state legislators, who are Democrats, if they did not support a voucher program.

State Senator Linda M. Lopez, a Democrat from southwest Albuquerque, voted against the program last year but said she would keep an open mind, especially if she heard from more people like Ms. Maldonado.

But whether New Mexico or any other state approves a voucher system might ultimately depend less on local politics than on the United States Supreme Court. Seven months after the Ohio State Supreme Court ruled last year that the Cleveland program was constitutional, a Federal district judge ruled it unconstitutional. The critical issue is whether vouchers financed by taxpayers violate the separation of church and state when they are used for religious schools.

An appeals court is reviewing the case, but experts say any ruling would most likely be taken to the Supreme Court, which may be ready to consider the voucher issue after refusing to hear appeals of rulings that the programs in Milwaukee and Arizona were constitutional.

"If the Supreme Court rules that the Ohio program is constitutional, that could change everything," Mr. Metcalf said. "It would certainly open the door for virtually all of the 20 to 25 states considering legislation to push this through more quickly."