

M E M O

TO: Mike Cohen
FROM: Bill Kincaid *BK*
DATE: September 17, 1996
RE: David Osborne Article on Public School Choice in Minnesota

I thought you would be interested in the attached Washington Post Magazine article from this weekend, in which David Osborne reviews Minnesota's experience with public school choice -- and concludes "school choice works."

Osborne says that "roughly 19 percent of Minnesota public school students -- more than 150,000 in all -- attend schools they or their parents chose. Since 1986, the number of alternative schools in Minnesota has tripled from 108 to more than 300. A competitive market has begun to emerge."

The piece goes on to discuss the changes that schools have made in response to competitive pressures. High schools "doubled the number of Advanced Placement courses they offered and tripled the number of students who took them. Almost 40 percent had also hired colleges to teach courses on their campuses." Of those participating in Minnesota's choice program allowing juniors and seniors to take their high school dollars to colleges, 73 percent of students were "very satisfied" with their experience while 95 percent of parents "probably" or "definitely" would encourage their children to participate again.

You might share a copy of this with Bruce Reed. I read his briefing on charter schools out in Fresno and I think we need to stress that charter schools, while exciting, are not the only alternative to vouchers, but one of several different options within public school choice. I am also attaching a page from the briefing package on vouchers that Jon, Jennifer and I assembled which underscores this point. Let me know if you need the rest of the package.

Thanks.

Schools Without Boundaries

By David Osborne

FEW ISSUES IN AMERICAN EDUCATION are more controversial than school choice. Seventeen states have passed public school choice laws, giving students the right to leave their school district and attend another public school. These are *not* voucher programs; with a few exceptions, parents can't take their public dollars to a private school. Instead, public dollars move with a student to the new public school, creating competition between districts.

The theory is simple: Different students learn in different ways, so they need different kinds of schools. Hence students should be able to choose the schools that suit their needs. If we then let public dollars follow children to their new schools, we create consequences for performance. Good schools earn larger budgets; bad schools have to shrink and, in some cases, close.

The logical result should be that principals, teachers and superintendents work harder to improve their schools.

The Minnesota Story: Minnesota has gone the furthest to test this theory. Since 1990, it has allowed:

- Families to leave their districts and take their public dollars with them to another district.
- High school juniors and seniors to take their public dollars to any college in the state and earn both high school and college credit.
- Dropouts and students at risk of dropping out to choose any public school in the state, as well as private alternative schools that contract with public districts.
- Parents, teachers and others to create new independent public schools, called "charter schools."

Overall, roughly 19 percent of Minnesota public school students—more than 150,000 in all—attend schools they or their parents chose. Since 1986, the number of alternative schools in Minnesota has tripled from 108 to more than 300. A competitive market has begun to emerge.

As choice began, academics James Tenbusch and Michael Garet surveyed 126 high school principals. Most said they were making changes to compete: lengthening their hours, adding more counseling and developing new educational programs. If they didn't, they said, they might lose students and money.

In an intensive study of eight districts, the University of Minnesota's Cheryl Lange found that, "Parents are flexing their political muscles by demanding desired programs and services. If the requests are not honored, many threaten to

leave the district. Findings suggest that it doesn't take a large number of families threatening transfer for administrators to take seriously the requests."

As one superintendent told her, "Open enrollment has a lot of impact on us. One of the things it does is that we don't dare, even under budget constraints, we don't dare curtail programs." Cuts come out of administration, not education.

Opponents of public school choice often argue that it will help the brightest, most affluent students, but leave poor students behind in inferior schools, increasing racial segregation.

This hasn't happened in Minnesota, in part because so many specialized, alternative schools have been created for at-risk kids. In addition, the choice legislation says a student can't change districts if it would increase racial segregation, a rule that has kept white students from leaving Minneapolis for suburban districts.

The Bottom Line: Minnesota is just beginning to use statewide tests, so there is no data to indicate whether students are learning more in

their schools of choice.

Hard data does exist on one choice program—the one that lets juniors and seniors take their high school dollars to colleges. An evaluation by the state legislature found that 6 percent of all juniors and seniors were taking some college courses (12.5 percent in the Twin Cities). With the exception of those at technical colleges, they had a higher collective grade point average than college freshmen.

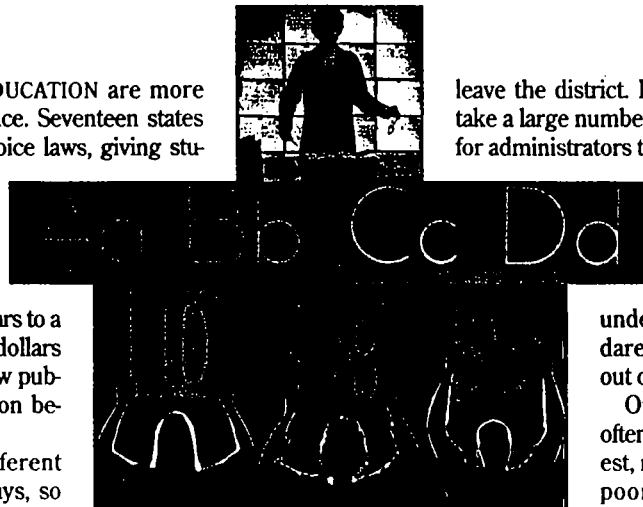
Some 73 percent of these students said they were "very satisfied" with their experience, while 95 percent of parents said they would "probably" or "definitely" encourage their children to participate again.

Spurred by competition, high schools had doubled the number of Advanced Placement courses they offered and tripled the number of students who took them. Almost 40 percent had also hired colleges to teach courses on their campuses.

Ultimately, citizens are the arbiters of any public program's success, and Minnesotans love school choice. By 1994, 86 percent of adults surveyed supported the program. Seventy-one percent said the increased competition would improve the quality of education.

The early returns are in, and they are clear: School choice works. ■

David Osborne, coauthor of Reinventing Government, is a managing partner of the Reinventing Government Network, a consulting firm.



**Says one superintendent:
'One of the things it does is that... even under budget constraints, we don't dare curtail programs.'**

M E M O

TO: Mike Smith
Gerry Tirozzi
Terry Peterson
David Frank
Kevin Sullivan
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Melissa Oppenheimer
Tanya Oubre
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Gabriela Uro
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The piece goes on to discuss the changes that schools have made in response to competitive pressures. High schools "doubled the number of Advanced Placement courses they offered and tripled the number of students who took them. Almost 40 percent had also hired colleges to teach courses on their campuses." Of those participating in Minnesota's choice program allowing juniors and seniors to take their high school dollars to colleges, 73 percent of students were "very satisfied" with their experience while 95 percent of parents "probably" or "definitely" would encourage their children to participate again.

We should follow up with some of the in-depth studies this short piece relies on, and work this information into our statements on the promise of choice options within the public education system.

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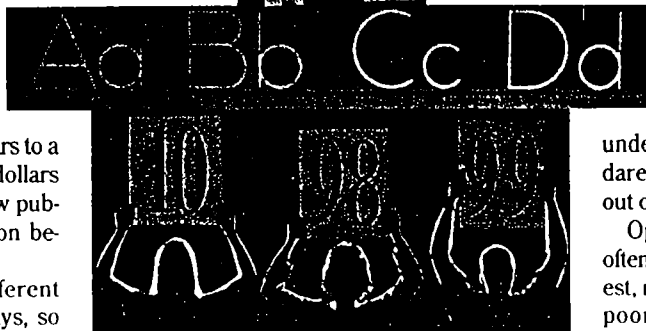
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Materials on Public School Choice and Private School Vouchers

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Background Information on Public School Choice and Vouchers

Summary

The Clinton Administration supports public school choice as a way to offer the benefits of choice without the negative consequences of a voucher program. The perceived benefits of private schools fade away when raw test scores of public and private school students are adjusted to control for the higher socio-economic level of private school students. After controlling for student background, public schools of choice actually show a larger achievement benefit than private schools, both religious and nonreligious.

Why the Clinton Administration Favors Public School Choice over Private School Vouchers

Public school choice makes good sense. The Clinton Administration has aggressively promoted improving local public schools, expanding public school choice and charter schools, and increasing parent involvement in education:

“I challenge every state to give all parents the right to choose which public school their children will attend; and to let teachers form new schools with a charter they can keep only if they do a good job.”

-- President Bill Clinton
State of the Union Address, 1996

In 1993, the Clinton Administration proposed a charter school program to provide new seed capital to help parents, teachers, businesses, and others start up charter schools to provide more choice, competition and opportunity within public education. Enacted in 1994, this program is now helping to start up charter schools in 11 states; the Clinton Administration's call to provide \$40 million for this program this year was cut in half in the House and the Senate proposals. Meanwhile, five states have enacted laws authorizing charter schools since the President's State of the Union appeal in January for more public school choice.

But using public tax dollars for private school vouchers is a bad idea. It would polarize Americans and would sacrifice the time-honored tradition of the American neighborhood public school for the sake of a social experiment.

- Controversy over vouchers polarizes communities when they should be coming together to do the hard work of improving the local public schools that 89% of parents rely on. In fact, local and state voucher disputes have divided citizens rather than unifying them around tougher standards, getting technology into the classroom, and other basic improvement strategies we know can work. Voucher disputes rob us of the time, energy, and common purpose that we need to put these effective reforms into action.
- Vouchers would siphon off dollars from neighborhood public schools into private schools of any type that will continue to be funded whether or not they meet community expectations or

needs. Vouchers would erode community control over how its education tax dollars are spent, and, at the expense of taxpayers, would support schools that can pick and choose among their students. Over the next ten years, student enrollment at public schools is projected to rise higher than ever before; it doesn't make sense to rob public education of dollars just as this new baby boom brings record numbers of students into our public schools.

- The results of this social experiment would be a dangerous erosion of public education -- a fundamental pillar of the American way of life, and a bond holding communities together. It is our unique blend of unity and diversity -- forged partly through the common experience of public education -- that sets our nation apart from countries that have disintegrated into ethnic conflicts and wars. Vouchers would also signal a retreat from our commitment to educate all of our children, not just the wealthiest or the easiest to deal with.
- Vouchers would undermine private and parochial education, making them less private and less parochial. If public funds are used to support the basic costs of private schools, we will see increased calls for private schools to become regulated and more directly accountable to public officials. This would fundamentally alter the nature of private schooling, taking the "private" out of private schools.

Quick fixes like vouchers are no substitute for consistent attention to the basics of American education. Anyone who has spent time learning about education knows there are no quick fixes to the challenges facing our nation's schools. Improving the education of our nation's children depends on consistent attention to the basics, discipline, quality teachers, and on Americans rolling up their sleeves to work together to improve our public schools across America.

The American public also favors public school choice over private school vouchers.

Nationally, 69% of the public favors letting parents choose the public school their child attends (Gallup, 1991), while 61% oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense (Gallup, 1996). Although support for vouchers has risen slightly, it is still opposed by a substantial majority.

Student Performance in Parochial Schools, Public Schools, and Voucher Programs

Much of the difference between performance in public and private schools can be explained by the family background of the students (i.e., family income, parents' educational attainment) (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore, 1982).

- Students in private church-related schools are at least two-thirds more likely to come from high-income families (the top fifth of families) than students in public schools. (Current Population Surveys, 1994)
- Even when studies control for family background, they probably still overstate achievement differences because they usually cannot control for "self-selection bias"-- the fact that parents and students who choose schools other than their neighborhood school may have higher level of motivation than similar families who do not exercise choice.

Research indicates that public schools of choice show as large a benefit (if not larger) than private schools in producing better student achievement. For example, a recent analysis comparing 10th graders in Catholic schools, nonreligious private schools, and magnet schools to

those in comprehensive public high schools (Adam Gamoran (1996), in Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, based on data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey) found that, after controlling for pre-existing differences among students:

- Magnet schools showed the strongest achievement benefit, with significantly higher achievement in reading, social studies, and science.
- Catholic schools showed a positive impact on math and reading skills, but the reading advantage was not as large as for magnet schools. They showed no significant impact on science.
- Nonreligious private schools did not have significantly different achievement levels than the comprehensive public high schools in any subject.

Probably the most effective educational choice that parents and students can make is to choose to take more challenging courses.

- Research shows that one factor that produces clear and substantial gains in student achievement is taking tougher courses. For example, Gamoran (1996) found that after controlling for coursetaking and other student factors, both Catholic and nonreligious private schools showed no significant advantage in any subject, while public magnet schools continued to show a significant advantage in reading, social studies, and science.

The assumed benefits of existing private school voucher programs have yet to be substantiated.

- The state-sponsored evaluation of Milwaukee's publicly-funded voucher program (Witte, 1994) found that most participating parents expressed satisfaction with the program, but students' achievement did not improve significantly from their previous achievement in public schools. Recently, Greene and Peterson have challenged the Witte findings, but methodological problems call their results into question. Their analysis was based on a biased sample of voucher students (those who remained in the program for a full four years). Fully half of the voucher students were removed from the analysis. The result was that the voucher students and the public school comparison group were not comparable from the beginning.
- A Hudson Institute study (1996) of the privately-funded voucher program in Indianapolis concluded that the voucher students performed "as well as [public school] students in the earlier grades and seem to be doing better in the middle-school grades." However, this appears to be an overly generous characterization of their data, which showed that the voucher students' average test scores were below those of public school students in grade 2, about the same in grades 3 and 6, and higher only in grade 8.

Private School Voucher Programs and Proposals

Milwaukee and Cleveland are currently the only communities in the United States to provide publicly-funded tuition vouchers, but privately-funded voucher programs are operating in 23 cities and voucher proposals are being debated in at least 11 states.

- **Milwaukee, Wisconsin.** In operation since 1991, this program provides vouchers worth the equivalent of Milwaukee's per pupil state aid (about \$3,600 in 1995-96) to about 1,400 low-income students to attend any state-certified non-sectarian private school. In August 1996, a state trial court declined to lift an existing injunction against participation of religious schools, pending its hearing of the case, but did allow a substantial expansion of the program to allow more students to receive vouchers to attend non-religious schools. The timetable for hearing the case is uncertain at this time; whatever the outcome, the losing party is expected to appeal.
- **Cleveland, Ohio.** This pilot voucher program, which includes religious schools, began issuing vouchers in August 1996 despite continuing litigation over the constitutionality of the program. In July 1996, an Ohio state court found the voucher plan constitutional, and although the ACLU and Ohio teacher's union have appealed, the Ohio Court of Appeals declined to issue an injunction halting the program until pending its decision. Vouchers of up to \$2,500 are being issued to about 2,000 low-income students for the 1996-97 school year; about one-third of the applicants were already attending private schools. So far 49 private schools are participating, including 39 religious schools; tuition at these schools ranges from \$710 to \$3,640.
- **Privately-funded voucher programs.** Voucher programs sponsored by private coalitions of businesses, foundations, and individual donors provide vouchers to about 9,900 students in 23 cities, with 16,580 students on waiting lists. These programs typically provide vouchers for up to half the cost of tuition, up to a locally determined limit, to students who are eligible for free or reduced price lunch.
- **State voucher proposals.** During the most recent legislative sessions, voucher proposals appeared on legislative agendas in at least 11 states, including Arizona, California, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Proposals ranged from pilot projects serving a limited number of students in one school district to statewide programs open to all low-income students in the state.

What the Research Shows About Vouchers, Charter Schools, and Public School Choice

What is the Evidence on School Choice?

A growing research base on both public and private school choice suggests some common themes.

- Studies of existing private school voucher programs have not found substantial achievement benefits for these programs.
 - Most differences between performance in public and private schools can be explained by the family background of the students (i.e., family income, parents' educational attainment) (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore, High school achievement: Public, Catholic and private schools compared, 1982). Even when studies control for these factors, they probably still overstate achievement differences because they usually cannot control for "self-selection bias"-- the fact that parents and students who choose to attend schools other than their neighborhood school may have higher motivation and place a higher priority on education than similar families who do not exercise choice.
 - An evaluation of Milwaukee's publicly-funded voucher program found that virtually all participating parents expressed satisfaction with the program, but students' achievement did not improve significantly from their previous achievement in public schools. (Witte et al., Fourth-Year Report: Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, 1994)
 - Paul Peterson, a Kennedy School professor, claims to have found evidence that the Milwaukee voucher program had a substantial positive impact on the achievement of students who remained in the program for 3-4 years (Greene, Peterson, Du, et al., "The effectiveness of school choice in Milwaukee: A secondary analysis of data from the program's evaluation," 1996), but their methodology is seriously flawed. First, their claim that their study was based on a random sample of voucher students and non-selected applicants is invalidated by the attrition of 85-95% of the voucher and control group students from the study by the third and fourth years of the analysis -- the only years where they found any statistically significant results. Moreover, their results are not statistically significant when they control for family background or prior achievement.
 - A Hudson Institute study of the privately-funded voucher program in Indianapolis found that the voucher students performed "as well as [public school] students in the earlier grades and seem to be doing better in the middle-school grades." However, this appears to be an overly generous characterization of their data, which showed that the voucher students' average test scores were below those of public school students in grade 2, about the same in grades 3 and 6, and higher only in grade 8. (Weinschrott and Kilgore, "Educational Choice Charitable Trust: An experiment in school choice," 1996)
- Some research indicates that public schools of choice show as large a benefit (if not larger) than private schools in producing better student achievement. For example, a recent analysis comparing 10th graders in Catholic schools, nonreligious private schools, and magnet schools to those in comprehensive public high schools (Gamoran, "Student achievement in public

magnet, public comprehensive, and private city high schools," Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 1996) found that, after controlling for pre-existing differences among students:

- **Magnet schools** showed the strongest achievement benefit, with significantly higher achievement in reading, social studies, and science.
- **Catholic schools** showed a positive impact on math and reading skills, but the reading advantage was not as large as for magnet schools, and there was no significant impact on science or social studies.
- **Nonreligious private schools** did not have significantly higher achievement levels than the comprehensive public high schools in any subject.
- There is little evidence to support the idea that private school vouchers can stimulate improvement in the public schools -- they are too small and too costly to have an impact.
 - Existing privately-funded voucher programs in Milwaukee, Indianapolis, and San Antonio have served only 1-2% of local students. The expectation that vouchers will "force bad schools to close" is unrealistic unless all or most of the students in the district use vouchers.
 - A voucher program open to all students would generate the large additional cost of paying tuition for 6 million children already enrolled in private schools (about \$6 billion for a \$1,000 voucher and \$30 billion for a \$5,000 voucher).
- Public school choice programs, however, serve large percentages of public school students (about 11% nationwide) and findings from Minnesota, which has an extensive array of public school choice programs, suggest that they do create competitive pressures that stimulate changes in public school systems.
 - Overall, roughly 19% of Minnesota public school students (and their parents) participate in public school choice programs including open enrollment, postsecondary options, and charter schools.
 - High schools have doubled the number of Advanced Placement courses offered and the number of students taking these courses has tripled. (Nathan and Ysseldyke, "What Minnesota has learned about school choice," Phi Delta Kappan, May 1994)
 - A survey of high school principals found that most said they were making changes to compete, including lengthening their hours and developing new educational programs. (Tenbusch and Garet)
 - In an intensive study of 8 Minnesota districts, Lange found that "Parents are flexing their political muscles by demanding desired programs and services... Findings suggest that it doesn't take a large number of families threatening transfer for administrators to take seriously the requests."
- Private school vouchers do skim more advantaged students -- those whose parents have more

education, higher expectations for their children, and higher incomes. This finding holds even for programs where vouchers are restricted to low-income families.

- In San Antonio, for example, 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%).
- Probably the most effective educational choice that parents and students can make is to choose to take more challenging courses.
- Research shows that one factor that produces clear and substantial gains in student achievement is taking tougher courses. For example, Gamoran found that after controlling for coursetaking and other student factors, both Catholic and nonreligious private schools showed no significant advantage in any subject, while public magnet schools continued to show a significant advantage in reading, social studies, and science. (Gamoran, "Student achievement in public magnet, public comprehensive, and private city high schools," Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 1996)

What Do We Know About Charter Schools?

Because charter schools have been operating for a short time, no comprehensive data yet exists on the impact of charter schools on student achievement. However, some individual charter schools -- including Vaughn elementary school in Los Angeles -- have seen impressive gains in student achievement and attendance. Moreover, research suggests that public school choice and greater school autonomy promote a sense of ownership by school staff, students, and parents that helps galvanize efforts towards common goals. The Department of Education recently awarded a four-year contract to evaluate the impact of charter schools on student achievement and on educational systems. For now, we do know:

- Despite some implementation problems, the charter school approach is rapidly expanding. Approximately 25 states have enacted charter school laws, and about 400 charter schools are operating in the 1996-97 school year, more than triple the number of charter schools in 1994-95. States that have granted the most charters include California (85), Arizona (49), Michigan (30), Colorado (20), Minnesota (20), and Massachusetts (14).
- Contrary to concerns that charter schools might "cream" off the most advantaged students, most evidence indicates that charter schools serve above-average proportions of at-risk and minority students:
 - A Hudson Institute study of 34 charter schools in 7 states found that more than half of the charter school students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, compared to slightly over 33% in conventional schools in these states. The study also found that charter school students were racially diverse: 37% were white; 30% Hispanic; and 19% African-American. (Finn, Manno, and Bierlein, "Charter schools in action: What have we learned?" Hudson Institute, 1996)
 - Bierlein found charter schools tend to attract an overproportion of minority students when compared to state averages in most of the 5 states she studied. For example, in

Michigan 39% of students attending charter schools are black, compared with 16% for the state as a whole. (Bierlein, "Charter schools: Initial findings," published by the Education Commission of the States, February 1996)

- Studies show that charter schools need help with start-up costs.
 - A 1995 survey by the Education Commission of the States and the University of Minnesota found that the most significant obstacle facing charters is a lack of access to start-up funds. (Education Commission of the States and the Center for School Change, Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, "Charter schools...What are they up to?", August 1995)
 - Nineteen of the 27 new schools in the Hudson Institute's sample experienced significant problems obtaining initial funds. The researchers reported hearing of other schools that never opened due to inadequate initial funding. Charter school representatives cited facilities as the third most difficult barrier (behind lack of start-up funds and finances) they had to overcome in establishing their charter school. (Finn, Manno, and Bierlein, "Charter schools in action: What have we learned?", Hudson Institute, 1996)
- In some cases, charter schools are not provided adequate autonomy. Without significant independence from traditional regulations, charter schools may be unable to implement innovative ways of increasing student achievement. The Hudson report observed that political battles with local school boards and requirements to meet unanticipated laws and regulations were common problems experienced by charter schools. A 1995 GAO report noted that many charter schools are subject to district rules unless waivers are granted, and some districts have denied waiver requests from charter schools. Charter supporters say autonomy is critical to their success.
- Charter schools are provided flexibility in exchange for accountability, but it is not clear that the schools and States have developed consistently sound evaluation methods. The promise of charter schools lies partly in greater accountability for results within public schooling; a challenge is developing clear performance objectives tied to student achievement for which charter schools are held accountable.
 - The Hudson Institute study found that "State charter laws are stronger on theory than practice when it comes to accountability and evaluation. No state yet has in place a fully satisfactory plan, though several are making good progress." (Finn, Manno, and Bierlein, "Charter schools in action: What have we learned?", Hudson Institute, 1996)
 - A GAO study also raised questions about charter schools plans for assessing student performance. GAO found that charter schools are using a wide variety of tools to assess student achievement and that schools were in various stages of implementing their assessment systems. However, the report questioned whether adequate baseline data were being collected to gauge changes in student performance; whether charter schools will report data by race, sex, or socioeconomic status so that the performance of specific student groups can be determined; and what the effects will be of requiring charter schools to meet State performance standards and to use standardized, norm-referenced tests -- for example, would it discourage charter schools from targeting low-achieving student populations? (United States General Accounting Office, "Charter schools: New models for public schools provides opportunities and challenges," January 1995)

How Can Public School Choice and Charter Schools Contribute to Successful School Reform?

- Characteristics that typify successful schools of choice are also features of effective schools generally. Enabling both students and staff to choose their schools may encourage the development of such features.
 - **Greater school autonomy** can contribute to conditions that make optimal learning possible. Teachers need to be given responsibility for making professional decisions regarding classroom practice and school policy.
 - Effective schools are organized around **a clear vision** of educational excellence and equity for all students.
 - **Teamwork** characterizes effective working relationships among teachers and students. Cooperative learning has emerged as one of the most promising strategies to improve student achievement and engagement. Teamwork also contributes to teachers learning from each other, one of most effective forms of professional development.
- Implementing a school choice system that benefits all students requires careful planning.
 - Choice programs should include strategies that attempt to increase the proportion of active choosers and decrease the proportion of non-choosers, so that all families are making active, informed decisions about their children's education. These strategies could include:
 - 1) **making every school in the district a magnet school**, so that all families must choose;
 - 2) providing an accessible and high-quality **parent information system**; and
 - 3) assuring that **transportation** is available so that choosing a school outside of the neighborhood is a real option for every student.
 - Educators need to focus more systematically on the supply side of educational choice. Crain et al. (1992) found modest evidence that students in career-oriented magnet programs performed best in programs that have a strong career focus with a **distinctive curriculum**, provide more hands-on computer experience, and provide more placement services. Other research has found that schools designed around **coherent educational approaches** seem to attract families for academic reasons, rather than on the basis of race, class, or convenience.

Bill -
FY1
- Jan

Points on choice and charter schools: (11/9)

What is being worked out in debates over (and implementation of) charter schools and choice initiatives? This country is working out what principles should continue to frame our public education system, and what are the parameters around schools that are public receive public taxpayer funding. This takes conceptual work, rigorous research, and careful policy development and attention to implementation.

Essentially, question must be: what are the principles of public education that should guide experimentation with new types of choice, innovation, as well as basic structural and governance changes in public education? As a society, we need to agree on some of these principles -- and then be vigilant that these principles are reflected in policy development and implementation, as well as in the development of publicly funded schools.

What are these principles?

- ▶ Preserve and strengthen America's commitment to providing free, high-quality K-12 (and through 14th) education for all. This is a critical element in ensuring equal opportunity and fostering a democratic society with educated, informed citizens contributing to the nation's civic, social, economic, and political life.
- ▶ The notion of the common school, where kids of all races, ethnicities, and economic circumstances learn, grow, and play together. This is critical for preparing our children to live in a tolerant and diverse society. Not only is a fair and open admissions policy needed, but -- in public school choice plans -- it is critical to have transportation, good information and counseling to help parents make good choices.

Moreover, the public discourse (especially around choice) must emphasize the need for schools to be open to -- and aggressively reach out and recruit -- students of all kinds. Even the strongest policies regarding admissions, transportation, and information will not ensure fair access and preservation of the common school unless a commitment to diversity and the common school is embedded in public discourse, and the thinking and behavior of policymakers, community leaders and schools.

- ▶ Accountability to the public. Publicly funded schools need to be accountable to the public. Moreover, charter schools provide a vehicle for experimenting with a dramatic shift from regulatory accountability to serious accountability for results.
- ▶ Focus on student achievement, teaching and learning.
- ▶ Willingness to let go of top-down, bureaucratic controls, and empower teachers and communities within a system of accountable public schools. This includes providing charters, contracts, and more autonomy to groups that are capable of running great public schools.

- ▶ Within these basic principles, willingness to find common ground, and try out new ways of doing things. Perhaps can include allowing state boards of education to charter schools (or take appeals of local board decisions), permitting teachers in charter schools to choose whether or not to unionize, and deregulation along with careful attention to good measures of performance. Perhaps most important, bring a spirit of cooperation, and willingness to listen to others, ferret out fundamental principles, come to agreement on less salient issues. Defensiveness, acrimony, refusal to listen to opponents and critics can prevent us from moving forward together.

Bill K.

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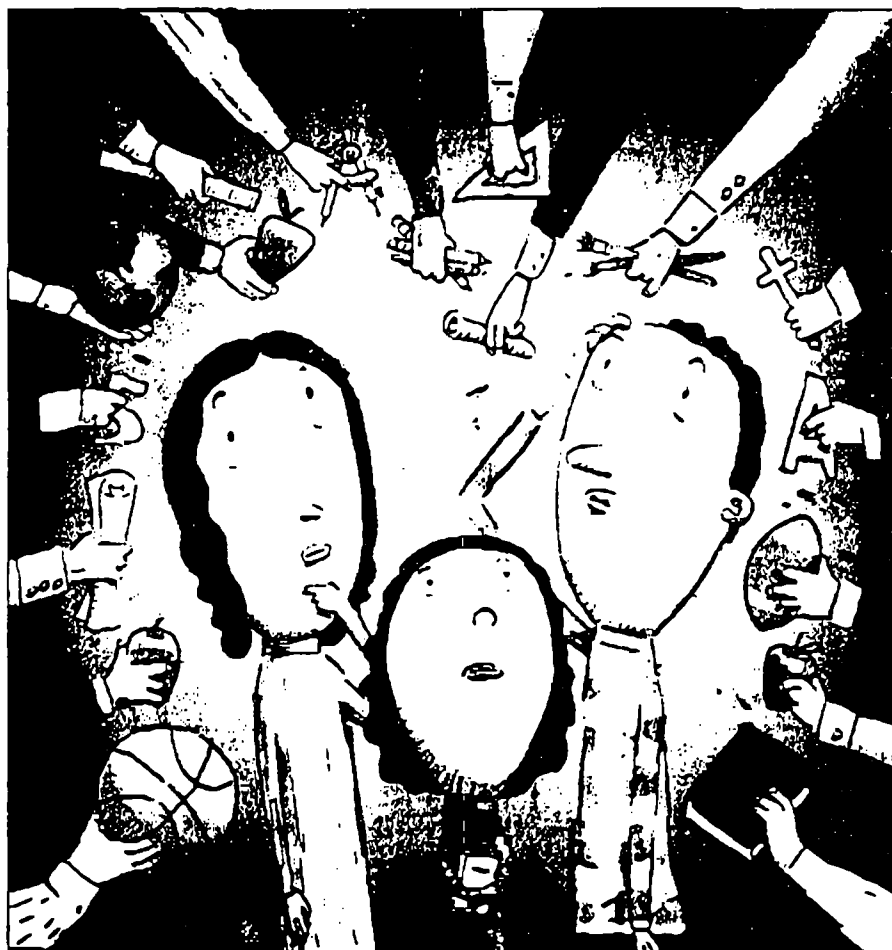
The Educational Consequences of Choice

BY PAUL T. HILL

There is ample evidence, according to Mr. Hill, that universal public school choice would strongly benefit all children, including the disadvantaged, by promoting candid and demanding relationships among teachers, parents, and students.

MANY MEMBERS of the education establishment claim that universal public school choice would be of little value to the low-income and minority students who now attend the worst schools. They say that the best schools would take advantage of a larger pool of applicants to become even more selective than they are now and that schools that did admit disadvantaged children would not work very hard to meet their needs.

However, there is ample evidence that choice strongly benefits all children, including the disadvantaged. Choice promotes the candid and demanding relationships among teachers, parents, and students that are essential to effective schooling. It can make the difference between schools that are apathetic providers of routine academic courses and schools that are true



communities that develop students as whole people.

Much of the evidence for these conclusions comes from my study of a privately funded voucher program, the Student-Sponsor Partnership Program in New York City. Under that program, individual sponsors pay tuition for low-income minority students — many of whom have failed in public schools and are not Catholic — to attend New York City Catholic high schools. The program selects students from the bottom of the New York City public school population. They and their parents have only to accept the opportunity offered. My study compared the educational experiences and achievement of these private voucher students with the experiences of similar students in public

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Illustration by Jem Sullivan

high schools in New York City.¹ Other evidence is drawn from Robert Crain's study of nonselective magnet schools in New York City and my subsequent studies of site-based management and foundation-funded public high school reform efforts.²

How Choice Affects Schools

Starting with Milton Friedman, the advocates of choice have argued that competition is a powerful force for school quality. The attitudes and behavior of teachers and administrators in schools of choice show how competition affects schooling. Schools of choice need to attract students in order to survive. Though some can rely on a reputation for exclusivity or superior quality, not all schools can credibly claim to be the best. But every school can offer something that gives it an identity — a specific curriculum, social climate, or extracurricular program — that attracts the interest of parents and students. Once a school has established an identity, it must deliver on its promises well enough to keep current students from transferring out, to create "brand loyalty" among families with several children, and to attract enough new families to fill the entering class each year.

The need for product differentiation encourages a number of behaviors that advocates of "effective schools" have tried to promote in public school staffs. School staffs have a strong incentive to articulate a mission for the school and to ensure that all elements of the school contribute to its attainment. The mission must also be easy to explain to parents. That means that it must be focused on what children will experience in school and what they will be able to do when they leave — not on subtleties of educational technique that may matter only to professionals.

Once a school of choice has established an identity, the staff has a strong incentive to avoid major disruptions in the program. The demands of sheer economic survival also make teachers concerned about the performance of the school as a whole. If a school is forced to close because too few students want to attend it, all teachers have to find new jobs, no matter how well they have been teaching their own classes. Teachers therefore have strong incentives to keep their own work in line with the school's mission, to help one another, to identify weaknesses, and to ensure that variations in teacher performance do not harm the school's ultimate product and reputation.

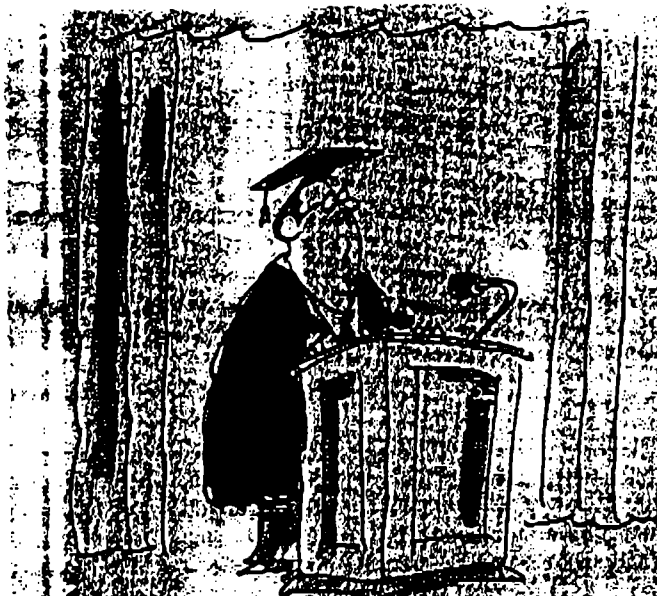
All these behaviors are evident in public magnet schools, which must continually justify their existence in the face of pressures for uniformity,

and in the financially struggling non-elite religious schools such as those attended by the Partnership students. Staff members in such schools are eligible to work in regular public schools for equal or greater pay, but they stay in schools of choice either out of commitment to the kind of education being offered in them or because they prefer the working conditions. They therefore value their jobs, which they know would go away if their schools were forced to close.

Staff members know that the continuation of their jobs depends on their own performance and that of their co-workers. Thus they are quick to seek advice from other teachers if a particular class is not going well and to alert their colleagues or the school management if another teacher is not pulling his or her weight. They are also very reluctant to give up on a student, knowing that too many stories of failure can wreck a school's reputation. Even when the student population changes because of worsening economic conditions or demographic shifts, teachers and administrators in schools of choice have the strongest possible incentive to maintain the level of student performance.

In contrast, staff members in a compulsory attendance public school need not fear for their jobs if their school fails to perform. As long as there are students in the neighborhood, they will be assigned to attend the school. Even if (as can happen in New York) the state intervenes to close the school, the teachers and administrators will be assigned to a similar school in the local system. The school's reputation may be a source of pride, but people's livelihoods do not depend on it. Though most teachers want to do a good job, they are not driven by economic necessity to question their own performance or to confront others who are not producing. Students who fail do not constitute a particular threat to the school. Staff members, knowing that serious self-assessment can lead to painful adult confrontations, have strong incentives to assign the blame for declining student performance or rising dropout rates to factors over which the school has no control.

A small number of schools of choice may have so many applicants that they can reject a student who shows the first sign of becoming an academic or behavior problem. But in a competitive situation, such as that faced by the New York City Catholic and nonselective magnet schools, schools of choice have no such luxury. Such schools must be, in Robert Slavin's term, relentless in improving their own performance and in helping students achieve. Contrary to the claims of the antichoice education establishment, schools of choice cannot survive by hand-picking the easiest students to educate. They must, instead, work to influence the atti-



Due Oppen
"Racism" Hello students, traders in student loan defaults.

tudes and motivations, as well as the academic performance, of their students.

Staff members in schools of choice must treat all students as if they are educable, not frozen in either their academic abilities or their attitudes. This difference between schools of choice and compulsory attendance public schools is epitomized in a sign displayed in a private school classroom: "Attitude is a choice."

How Choice Affects Parents

Most of the literature promoting choice stresses the importance of making parents consumers, courted and feared by school staffs. As the preceding section shows, the possibility that parents will withdraw their children from a school of choice is a powerful motivator for teachers and principals. That same possibility also means that parents can intervene effectively if schools mistreat or neglect their children.

But the connections between parents and schools of choice are more complex than this raw economic relationship. For all but the most opinionated and aggressive parents, the choice of a school is more akin to the choice of a family doctor or pastor than to the choice of a car dealer or grocery store. The parent's status as a consumer is important, but it is only the foundation of a much richer set of trust relationships between parent and child and child and school.

As James Coleman has pointed out, parents who choose a school for their child give the school a grant of parental authority. Parents who could have chosen any number of schools have selected this one. For whatever reason — religious conviction, educational taste, confidence in the school staff, or personal convenience — the parents want the child to attend a particular school. Though the parents might change their minds if things go especially badly, the child knows that a change of school can upset and inconvenience the parents. Most children, not wanting to risk an upheaval at home, have a strong incentive to succeed in the school their parents have chosen for them.

As the experience of Partnership students demonstrates, this grant of parental authority greatly increases the school's leverage over its students. As one student put it, "My mother says that I am lucky to be going to this school, and I had better not mess up." Another reported, "My uncle said [the public school the student previously attended] was no good, but if I couldn't do good here, there is something wrong with me." A student who skips school, does not study, or displays a sullen attitude is risking a confrontation with a parent. Though a few children will endure such a confrontation, the vast majority will not. School staff members are therefore able to use the parent's grant of authority to make demands on the student, as did one principal in the Partnership program who told a student, "Your mother didn't send you here to hang out in the rest room. She sent you here to learn."

Chosen schools also have leverage in dealing with parents. The threat of rejection that motivates teachers and principals cuts both ways: the school can likewise decide not to continue educating a student. Once they have chosen a school and adjusted their transportation plans and schedules accordingly, parents do not like to make changes. Unless the school has failed to keep its part of the bargain, parents are also reluctant

to see their children's education disrupted. Schools can, consequently, make demands on parents — to monitor homework, ensure student attendance, and see to it that the student comes to school fed, rested, and ready to learn.

Schools in the Partnership program unhesitatingly made such demands on parents. They understood that parents lacked the time and money to make donations, raise funds, or attend frequent meetings. But the schools were direct and demanding about what parents had to do if their children were to succeed in school. Partnership schools found foster homes for students whose families were disrupted by death, unemployment, illness, or imprisonment. But they expected the family to support the educational process whenever it was physically possible.

Much of a school's influence is based on the parents' trust in the school's competence and concern for its students. Schools of choice, like family doctors, are influential because they are trusted. Patients follow their doctors' advice primarily because they believe it will make them healthier and only secondarily because they fear that the doctor will refuse to see them again if they do not take the medicine prescribed. The same is true with families. Because parents have chosen a school and because the school has an incentive to be as helpful as possible, a relationship of trust is created. Families that deal with the same school over a long time, especially those that have sent several children there, develop particularly strong bonds of sentiment and loyalty toward the school.

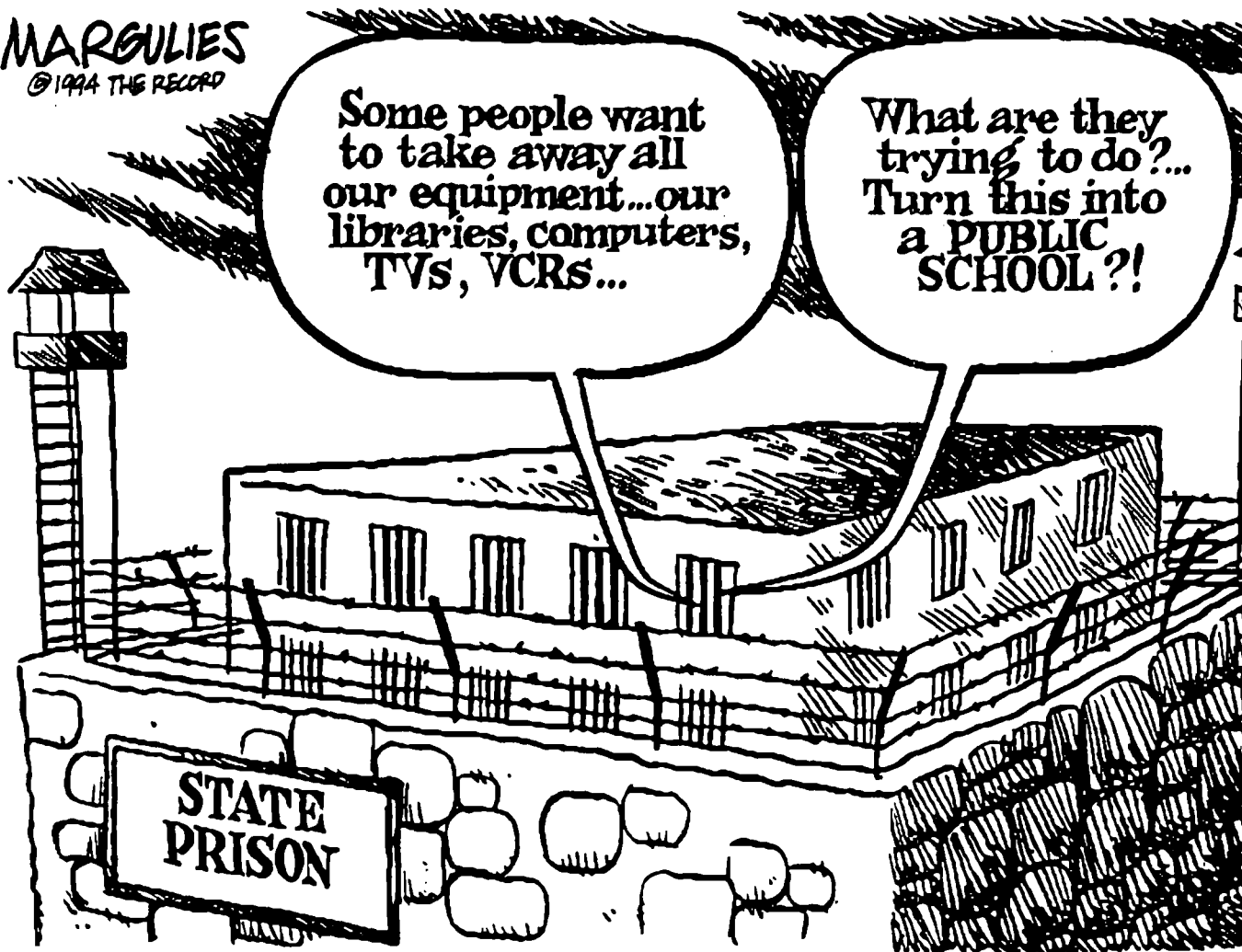
Any relationship of trust can be misused, and some schools of choice may retain parents' confidence longer than their performance merits. But in most cases major benefits accrue to all parties. The Partnership schools felt confident in exhorting parents to become more important forces in their children's lives and to reinforce the school's opposition to the harmful elements of students' peer culture. One Partnership school principal required that parents attend only one meeting each year, before classes started in September, so that she could urge parents to hold their children to traditional family standards, no matter how much children appeared to reject them.

These conditions are not impossible to achieve in compulsory attendance public schools, but there they require a great deal of personal effort, whereas they are intrinsic to choice schools. An attendance-zoned school, to which children are assigned because they are of mandatory school age and live in the neighborhood, has no definite grant of parental authority. As a result, teachers in regular public schools all over the country complain, "We can't teach these kids if their families don't care."

Choice affects the relationships between schools and parents even if a chosen school falls short of a parent's ideal. As long as the parent thinks the chosen school is better than any available alternative, the parent has reason to feel commitment to it. Schools need not be highly distinctive to get the benefit of a parent's choice. Even though educators may think low-cost parochial schools are all quite similar, the parents who choose among them usually think the differences are important. The longer a family stays with a school, the more importance history and personal relationships assume.

Compulsory attendance schools can build personal loyalties, and a parent whose children attend such a school can come to believe that it is just the right one. In such cases, the school probably gains an important grant of parental authority. But choice

MARGULIES
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may play an important part even then. Higher-income parents, who always have the capacity to remove their children from compulsory attendance schools, are the ones most likely to develop close relationships with teachers and administrators. Lower-income parents, who have little choice about where their children attend school, seldom develop strong feelings of confidence and loyalty. Parent advisory councils and other mechanisms for parent involvement in school governance affect only the few parents who participate.

As experience with the Partnership program shows, however, choice gives low-income parents the same sense of commitment and loyalty that higher-income parents enjoy. The schools' religious identity obviously builds some trust. But the fact that the parents have been able to accept or reject the scholarship creates a sense of mutual commitment between parent and school.

How Choice Affects Students

Many of the effects of choice on students are implicit in the foregoing discussion. Students in schools of choice benefit from the teachers' and principals' need to create a defined image and reputation. Students also benefit from their parents' commitment to the school and from the school's consequent

ability to make demands on their parents and themselves.

Beyond these advantages, students derive two other benefits from being in schools of choice. First, they gain from being in a situation in which they must make commitments and take them seriously. Second, they gain from observing adults working in a common enterprise in which performance matters and both success and failure have real consequences.

Student commitment. Students may prefer not to attend any school at all, but if they have a preference for the school they attend over other alternative schools, they are susceptible to influence by the chosen school. This is true even if the school preference is based on nonacademic factors, such as location, sports teams, or presence of friends. It is especially important if students have knowingly chosen a school that offers a particular academic emphasis or makes special demands on effort and performance. When students make such a commitment, they implicitly affirm that the chosen school is more attractive than the alternatives. Though they may prefer not to do everything the school requires, they know that acting on those impulses could result in their being forced to leave the chosen school and go to another one that is less attractive to them.

Students in the Partnership schools frankly admitted that they had made a tradeoff in accepting scholarships to attend private schools. All knew that leaving public school would sep-

arate them from friends and neighborhood and would subject them to firm demands about attendance and academic effort. They accepted the scholarships for many reasons — because the private schools were safer, because they hoped (along with virtually all high school students) to attend college someday, or because they liked the schools' traditions and sports teams. But they all understood what the schools would demand of them because the school admissions counselors and the Partnership program itself made sure that they knew.

Once they accepted the schools' demands, they had given the schools leverage: teachers and administrators could assign homework, take attendance, grade performance, and administer consequences just as they had said they would. Armed with this power, the Partnership schools exercised their authority confidently — not in a harsh or morally superior way, but matter-of-factly, as the simple consequence of a well-understood bargain.

Less than 10% of the students who were offered scholarships rejected them, and less than 5% of the students admitted to private schools left, either voluntarily or at the schools' initiative. The vast majority of students understood the bargain they had made, and they accepted, albeit grudgingly, the schools' rigorous execution of it. When students failed to complete assigned work or broke school rules, teachers consistently said, "You made an agreement when you came here — now live up to it." For the vast majority of students, the need to abide by their prior commitments both influenced their behavior and changed their attitudes. In surveys and interviews, virtually all students said that their effort, attendance, and attitudes about schooling had all changed since they joined the Partnership program.

Emulation of adult working relationships. During the fieldwork for my study and in subsequent work in urban high schools, I saw students encounter a hidden curriculum, taught not didactically but by example. The example is provided by teachers and administrators, the only people whom students routinely see at work. It can send a powerful message to students about whether or not the work of adults is informed by clear goals and requires or rewards collaborative effort, initiative, reciprocity, or risk-taking.

As Carl Glickman and others confirm, teachers in compulsory attendance schools often feel that they have little control over the conditions of their own work and think that they and their colleagues are neither rewarded for diligence nor punished for negligence. For adults in such situations, the apparently rational response is to do exactly what their formal job descriptions require and not take responsibility for the overall product of the organization in which they work. Albert Shanker's quote from an urban teacher, "I taught them but they didn't learn it," sums up the phenomenon. Many teachers and administrators in compulsory attendance schools think differently, but they are not rewarded by the organization or, in many cases, appreciated by their co-workers. For students, who seldom observe any adults other than teachers at work, the message can be powerful: large organizations that employ adults do not have clear goals and do not require or support effective work.

The hidden curriculum in schools of choice is different. The adults in such schools are not necessarily more virtuous than teachers and administrators elsewhere, but because they are

linked in a common enterprise they have incentives to work together and to hold one another accountable. The version of adult life and responsibility modeled in such schools is very different from that evident in schools that lack a clear mission and in which staff members do not have to perform in order to keep their jobs. The message to students is that adults depend on and influence one another and that they care about whether they and others are contributing to the success of a broader enterprise.

Students get the message. One student interviewed at a compulsory attendance school stated bluntly what other students had said less directly: "Nobody here does any more than you have to do. I'm not going to be a chump." Students in Partnership schools, to the contrary, saw how hard faculty members worked to make the school succeed. As one Partnership student who had recently transferred from public school told me, "In public school the teachers say, 'I get paid whether you learn this or not.' Here they say, 'You are going to learn this if it takes all day. I don't care how long it takes: I live upstairs.'"

It does not take a private or religious school to teach these lessons. Many of the nonselective magnet schools in Crain's and my studies provide similar examples of earnest adult collaboration. There are, furthermore, many teachers and administrators in compulsory attendance schools who offer sterling personal examples. But these individuals are forced to overcome the context in which they work, whereas teachers and administrators in schools of choice are reinforced by everything about their working environment.

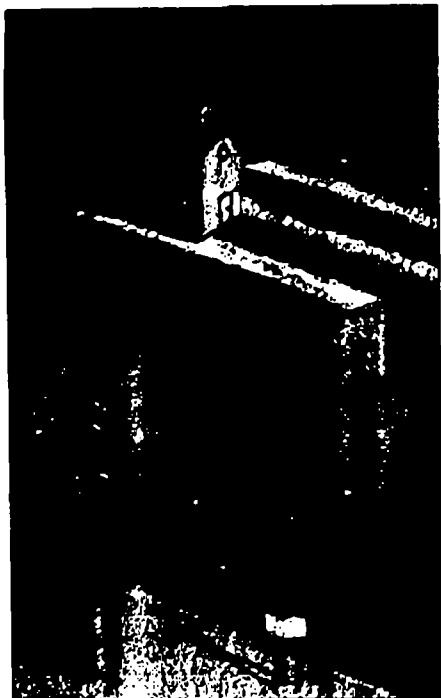
Conclusion

Several current educational reform movements — going under such names as decentralization, charters, and school contracting — all hope to create the conditions under which public schools can develop these attributes. Doing so will require profound change in the missions and operations of public schools. It surely requires choice — choice of schools by teachers, students, and parents; choice by schools concerning how long to stick with a student who will not fulfill the school's work requirements; and choice by public officials regarding whether to continue supporting a failing school or to close and recommitment it with a new staff and management.

As educational environments, schools of choice are profoundly different from compulsory attendance schools. Even when their academic offerings are not much different from those of compulsory attendance schools, schools of choice become places in which parents and teachers are collaborators, bargains among adults and between adults and children are made and kept, effort is rewarded, and actions have consistent consequences. Such environments motivate student effort in the short run. In the longer run, they socialize students into the values and attitudes required in real adult life.

1. Paul T. Hill, *High Schools with Character* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1990).

2. Robert Crain et al., *The Effectiveness of New York City's Career Magnets* (Berkeley, Calif.: National Center for Research on Vocational Education, 1992); and Paul T. Hill and Josephine J. Bonan, *Decentralization and Accountability in Public Education* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1991).



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COMMENTARY

Charter Schools: Escape or Reform?

By Marc Dean Millot,
Paul T. Hill,
and Robin Lake

The charter school movement, started as a means of escape for small numbers of dissidents, is evolving into an engine of broader reform for public education. The movement is still small, with fewer than 800 of the nation's 85,000 public schools operating under charters that allow public funding and freedom of action in return for accountability for results, but it might soon be strong enough to transform the definition of public education and the ways school districts operate.

Perhaps the most important sign that the charter school movement is maturing from escape to reform is the effort in many states to raise or eliminate the ridiculously low caps on the numbers of charter schools (25 in Massachusetts and Colorado; 100 in all of California). Without arbitrary caps, the numbers of charter schools in any locality would be limited only by the supply of qualified applicants. In some communities, all public schools might eventually be operated by independent groups of teachers, parents, social-service agencies, teachers' unions, or independent nonprofits.

This possibility is a long way from the original dreams of the few teachers and parents who just wanted to remove their own schools from the burdens of regulation and school board oversight. Early charter school supporters saw local boards as major impediments to educational innovation. They wanted to make it easy, almost automatic, for private groups to get charters. The law in Michigan, for example, makes it possible for school sponsors to bypass local boards entirely, by requesting charters from other public agencies, including state colleges and universities.

The possibility of unlimited numbers of charter schools puts a different light on the desirability of automatic approval and multiple routes of authorization. If charters are to become widespread or universal, some mechanism of community oversight is necessary. Charter schools will not be isolated exceptions—they will be the way that the community educates many or all of its children. Some community forum or agent must ensure that there is a school for every student, that parents get help validating schools' claims, and that there is some connection between what students are taught at one level of education (for example, elementary school) and what the next higher level of education requires. If they are seen as normal ways of delivering public education, charter schools are not about total autonomy. They are about educational diversity, innovation, responsiveness to community needs, and ultimately, improved performance.

Those who, like the present authors, see charter

schools as a means of escape for small numbers of dissidents, need to be reformed into the kinds of community agencies described above, not bypassed entirely. They want charter school laws to transform local boards from operators of a highly regulated bureaucracy into managers of a system of individual schools, each with its own mission, clientele, and basis of accountability.

Supporters of reform-oriented charter school laws do not want to go back to the system of bureaucratic control that led to the charter movement in the first place. They want to create a system of charter schools that takes account of both the public and the private interests in schooling. Charter bills now being drafted in several states would change the powers of local school boards so they can and must authorize charter schools. They would constrain local boards' discretion so that a charter must be granted to any group that can meet established criteria. Once a charter is granted, a school's survival would depend on whether the parents and teachers who run it deliver the kinds of instruction promised and whether, on objective measures, students are learning. Private interests, as represented by parent choice, would count, too. Parents could choose among schools, and no school could survive without students. But, again representing a balance of the public and private interests in education, a charter school where students were not learning could be shut down whether or not parents were happy.

No one entirely trusts today's local school boards to give charter applicants a fair chance. Both the "escape" and the "reform" theories of charter schools call for charter applicants to have recourse to appeal if a local board turns down an application. The difference is that the escape-oriented statutes try to set up appeal venues that have biases toward approval of all charter applications, letting a potential school provider shop for an authorizer that is sympathetic with its proposal. Reform-oriented statutes now being drafted would constrain a local board's discretion so that a charter must be granted to any group that can meet established criteria—and cannot be granted to any applicant that fails to meet them.

A move toward objective criteria protects qualified applicants from local boards that would deny charters merely to avoid competition, even while it protects the public from unqualified charter providers. Charter schools could therefore be trusted to claim increasingly large shares of public



Terry E. Smith

Then, local boards would no longer operate schools themselves. They would be more like the Federal Communications and Securities and Exchange commissions, which promote fair competition and

Continued on Page 46

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Defending Grammarcheck and Other Writing Tools

To the Editor:

While I am in complete agreement with J. Martin Rochester's Commentary condemning the new English standards on the grounds of vagueness, lack of attention to "rigor," and overemphasis on political correctness ("The Decline of Literacy," May 16, 1996), I take issue with his disparagement of age-appropriate literature, peer editing, and the valuable word processor tools for checking spelling and grammar.

Many of us, like Mr. Rochester, were extraordinarily fortunate that we survived "drill and kill" writing curricula and the exposure to "classic" literature that was developmentally inappropriate. In the best circumstances, we learned to love reading and writing and perhaps went on to become teachers and professors. However, too many children shut down in the educational system for a variety of reasons, even the "bright" and "gifted" students. I continually hear the voice of a close friend who went through independent school with me in the 1960s; she takes no pleasure in reading as an adult because our curriculum of classics taught too early completely turned her off. In our increasingly visual and technologically driven society,

we cannot afford alienating our kids from the pleasures of a book.

Mr. Rochester writes: "Inventive spelling presumes that kids' egos are so fragile and their creative juices so constipated that the mere correction of spelling errors by a teacher in early grades will ... produce instant 'shutdown' and scar the poor child for life." Many elementary and middle school English teachers have been teaching "process writing" (based on the Writing Workshop models of Donald Graves, Nancie Atwell, and Lucy Calkins, among others) for the past 10 to 15 years. The purpose is to help children see writing as a process of discrete, recursive steps. Most of us encourage inventive spelling in the drafting stage only, so that the child can focus first on getting her ideas onto paper or the word processor. The teacher then comments on content only, and the child revises, adding, deleting, and/or clarifying content.

The child then moves into the editing stage: He self-edits,

looking for punctuation, grammar, and spelling errors, often in successive stages. The child first runs spellcheck, circles incorrectly spelled words that he



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cannot correct, and then uses the dictionary or asks the teacher.

Although all of my English students have been exposed to years of instruction in spelling rules as well as lists of words to memorize for weekly tests, many still cannot spell with the degree of automaticity that we would hope for in the 7th grade. The reason is not lack of instruction, nor an unwillingness

to learn, nor laziness; rather, some of these children cannot spell. For them, spellcheck is an extraordinary tool to use during the editing stage of their writing. Many of them learn to recognize correct spelling when viewing options in a list.

Similarly, I believe that grammarcheck increases kids' awareness of the fine points in grammar. I would not generally discuss in my grammar and punctuation curriculum the use of active vs. passive voice. However, when a student receives the message by running grammarcheck that he is writing heavily in the passive voice, I am delighted to discuss this fine point in a personal editing conference. By running grammarcheck, this student advanced his knowledge of grammar and became a better writer.

Many teachers also teach and model "peer editing," which Mr. Rochester characterizes as "the blind leading the blind." Based on numerous observations of middle school students, I strongly disagree. Many children can block out the content of a peer's work, as opposed to their own writing, and concentrate solely on editing. In addition, peer editing increases kids' collaborative skills and teaches them that help is available from

a variety of sources, not only the teacher. Peer editing is a valuable supplement to, not a replacement of, teacher input. By the final draft, the child's piece of writing is free of spelling errors; and in many classes, the child's weekly spelling words are compiled from those misspelled in his or her own writing.

English teachers are implementing essential standards when we teach children to love expressing themselves through the written word, to develop their writing through successive stages, to use all the tools of editing, and to take pleasure in reading books that are developmentally appropriate and raise crucial ethical questions. Certainly "literacy still counts," as Mr. Rochester concludes, but we cannot expect to arrive at it without careful consideration of the many paths and processes that lead to that goal.

As for his comment that "a truly literate person should not have to rely on the crutch of spellcheck or grammarcheck," most writers welcome any tool that makes their writing easier. Or does Mr. Rochester use a quill pen on parchment?

Pamela Miller Ness
English Teacher
The Dalton School
New York, N.Y.

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Charters: Escape or Reform?

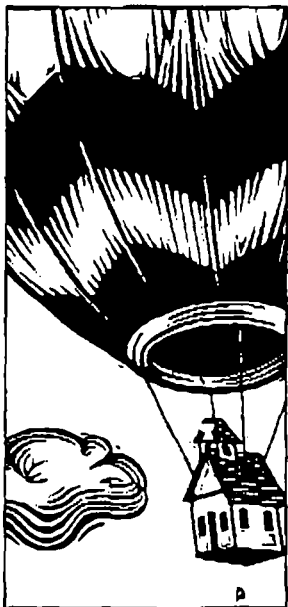
Continued from Page 56

protect consumers, than like an armed service or police department, which runs everything directly.

In their haste to be free of school districts and to establish their own schools, followers of the "escape" theory of charter schools give up an important source of financial and administrative support. Without some external support, charter schools must provide for themselves all the protections once provided by the district, including start-up capital, liability insurance and teacher retirement, legal advice, and other professional services. As some charter school operators have already found, skimping on assistance and advice puts the whole enterprise at risk, including children's educational opportunities, the founders' own time and money, and the public's funds. Total autonomy is an illusion. Even well-established independent schools join associations to provide access to teacher

ment, performance assessment, and help with self-evaluation.

If they are to become central to a whole community's effort to educate its children, charter schools must have clear and reliable relationships



TERRY E. SMITH

with community agencies that can authorize charters, guarantee funding, and hold school operators

accountable. These relationships—which for the want of a better term we call local school boards—are as essential to a charter-based reform of public education as are the groups of teachers, parents, and others who agree to accept charters to operate individual schools. If the

If charter schools are for reform, we must devise a system of public education that combines the educational advantages of school independence with the economic advantages of school districts.

local mix of schools depends entirely on individual initiative, no one is responsible for the overall quality and appropriateness

of a community's schools. This consequence is scarcely different from the results of a voucher scheme, under which schools are provided only by private entrepreneurs.

All charter school supporters agree that charter schools should be run by their own founders and staff, and freed from most of the process requirements that limit how current public schools hire and teach. But it matters whether charter schooling is about escape or reform. If charter schools are for escape, charter laws should make it easy for new schools to form without prior community scrutiny of school plans or operators' qualifications, enroll students, and claim public funds. Charter schools' survival should depend almost exclusively on parent satisfaction; no elected board or appointed superintendent should have any discretion about the establishment, continuation, or closing of a charter school.

But if charter schools are for reform, we must devise a system of public education that combines the educational advantages of school independence with the economic advantages of school districts. Today, local school boards are a problem for all charter school applicants. But in the long run, local boards with new missions and limitations can be integral parts of the charter school movement.

Some student program

Parental Choice and Public School Competition Incentive grants:

Overview and Purpose: This initiative would provide 5-10 large urban districts with four-year incentive grants to provide students and their families with maximum choice in public education. This would be a competitive grant program for districts that show how they will use the grant to leverage federal and other funds to provide parents with:

- ▶ maximum choice among public schools, including high-quality neighborhood schools, charter schools, and magnet schools responding to the needs of local children and families.
- ▶ maximum choice within schools with programs like schools-within-schools and more personalized learning environments.
- ▶ maximum choice of advanced classes in local public schools and local colleges.
- ▶ maximum choice of after-school programs, mentors and other connections with community institutions like museums, employers, and cultural and scientific organizations.

Proposals must show serious promise to strengthen and improve a district's entire public educational system, and how all children -- particularly those who are disadvantaged -- will benefit.

Core Components of Public School Choice Plans: To be funded, proposals would need to show how the plan will:

1) Let all parents choose what public school their child will attend. (Depending on the plan, parents might be able to choose any public school in the school district, any public school in a particular subzone of a district, or among public schools elsewhere in the state.)

2) Provide all parents with the information and assistance needed to make informed choices about what school and after-school program their child will attend. All parents will need access to relevant and clear information about every school in the district, including information on how well students are making progress toward high academic standards. Information should be provided in many forms, ranging from written materials, videos, and parent visits to schools and parent resource centers.

3) Strengthen and improve a district's entire public educational system. In the absence of serious school improvement efforts, choice plans will not reach their full potential.

4) Ensure adequate transportation for students to get to schools and after-school programs of their choice

5) Provide opportunities for teachers and others to start new public charter schools or schools-within-schools that can compete with existing schools.

6) Develop challenging academic standards and assessments by which parents will be able to judge all schools.

7) Include strong evaluation and research components that will allow schools to learn from the successes of other schools, and other communities to learn from these system-wide public school choice efforts.

8) Leverage federal and other funds to support and institutionalize this effort. This incentive grant program should be the glue that holds a package of federal and other funds together. Other federal funds can be used to develop a supply of good schools and programs, provide information about those schools and programs, and ensure that students and their families have maximum choice among those schools and programs. (Federal funds that can be included in a proposal include Goals 2000 -- for standards and assessment development and school improvement strategies -- and federal programs for charter schools, magnet schools, school-to-work, reading, after-school programs, and educational technology.)

Use of Funds: Grants can be used to pay for development and communication of good information and school report cards, the development of parental information and outreach centers, the provision of adequate transportation, the development or adoption of challenging standards and assessments, resources to support overhaul of (or intervention in) under-performing schools, start-up funds for new schools, and partnerships with local colleges to expand AP and other advanced classes from which high school students can choose.

Budget Estimates for Grant Program:

Needs work.

Principles that should drive public school choice plans that can help all students reach high standards

- 1) All schools participating in a choice plan and receiving public funds should be public schools that meet certain clearly defined public purposes.
- 2) All parents in a district should be able to choose what public school their child attends.
- 3) There should be relevant and clear information on every school in the district, with information on core educational issues (test scores, philosophy of education, etc.) and other information that is relevant to parents.
- 4) Schools should have fair admissions policies.
- 5) Free transportation should be available to any student who needs it.
- 6) Schools should be held to high academic standards, and given more flexibility in how to meet these standards.

Potential benefits of public school choice. Advocates argue that choice can:

- 1) Provide students and their families with more options in public education. Choice can provide more options of public schools that focus on a particular content area (whether an add-on specialty, or a theme -- like the environment or writing -- infused into the school's entire curriculum), instructional method, size, academic or career interest, location, or simply quality of education. All of these options are offered within a system of public education. (One size doesn't fit all)
- 2) Cause public schools to change and improve. With the appearance of appealing choices in public education, schools might take serious steps to avoid -- or respond to -- declining student enrollment and funds. Teachers and principals might also respond by doing something that is common to most good schools: developing, communicating, and sustaining a clear vision. (Competition can lead be healthy, leading to school improvement)
- 3) Lead to greater parental involvement, and give parents a greater say in their child's education. Learning about and choosing a child's school may in themselves be important forms of parental involvement. When parents choose a school for their child, they may develop a greater sense of ownership over their child's education, and a greater commitment to making sure the choice turns out well -- particularly if parents choose a school because they believe in its special mission or focus. The ability to choose may give parents greater confidence in seeking changes at their child's school, and may cause the school to take their ideas and concerns more seriously.
- 4) Empower teachers and other educators to create effective, creative schools that meet the needs of their students, and/or choose the type of public school they would like to be part of.
- 5) (Not necessarily intrinsic to public school choice plans, and not an argument we are likely to fully share...) Give schools more leverage over students and their families, giving them power to ask students (and parents) to meet certain expectations or to leave the school.
- 6) (A complicated argument with many possible permutations, not necessarily intrinsic to public school choice plans, and not necessarily an argument that we would share...) Free schools up from the demands imposed by all of the constituencies that influence school board decisions, making it easier to respond to the needs of their students and families. This argument seems to gloss over many complicated and important issues relating to the nature of public education. E.G., where do you draw the line between unimportant demands imposed by private interests, and important parameters rooted in public desires for education to serve certain public purposes. Distinguishing one from the other seems to require a much more thoughtful articulation and application of principles of public education. (Widely shared public purposes include providing educational opportunities to disadvantaged children, prohibiting discrimination, fostering racial diversity and tolerance, socializing children to certain American values. Significant but hotly debated purposes include the kind of job protections provided to employees in public schools, and how to address a wide array of students with disabilities and other special needs.)

Potential drawbacks or risks of public school choice. While most critics stress that the details of choice plans will lead to vastly different results, they say that choice plans might:

1) Leave poor, disadvantaged, and minority students behind in schools that have fewer resources to address their educational needs. Some argue that choice will lead to educated, involved parents making active choices to get their children into the best schools, leaving behind the children of less educated, less involved parents. Parents working long hours may have little time to learn about their child's choices, poorly educated parents may not acquire and use information about schools, struggling parents may feel disenfranchised and too preoccupied with other issues to navigate through complicated systems and choices.

Some critics say these problems are most serious in systems where only some parents choose their child's school, where neighborhood schools that serve most students are of low quality, where good transportation is not available, or where schools can pick and chose students (in obvious or not so obvious ways). These concerns have led to choice models where all parents choose their child' school, the creation of parent information and resource centers that provide information to -- and counsel -- parents, good transportation plans, and a focus on equitable admissions policies.

2) Can lead to schools making only cosmetic changes unrelated to real school and student performance, and obscure a lack of attention to fundamental school improvement. Under choice plans, many parents make choices about schools for reasons that may be important to them but are not directly related to the quality of their child's education. Parents may choose a school because it offers a certain extra-curricular program, is in a certain location, or has simply marketed itself well. Some worry that attention to such minor changes will take the place of a focus on what matters in fundamentally improving schools.

Concerns about this problem has led some to recommend that choice plans include a strong focus on school improvement, and understandable information about core educational issues at every school. Also might drive a focus on academic standards and assessments.

3) Can make schools less diverse, with students and families congregating along racial, cultural, or other lines. Some families may choose schools where their children can be with children and families who are most like them in a variety of ways. Some fear that this would deprive students of the ability to learn from a wide array of other students and enjoy the benefits of a diverse environment, as well as limit the nation's ability to live together peaceably and tolerantly in an increasingly diverse society.

Concerns about this problem have fostered "controlled choice" plans that permit choices only when they do not undermine racial diversity in schools, and efforts to get schools to aggressively recruit diverse populations. It also can be important to clearly define public education as a place where a wide array of students of all races and cultures can learn and grow together

Some Major Issues to Consider:

- 1) To what extent should specific kinds of public school choice plans (e.g., controlled choice, interdistrict choice, intra-district choice) be encouraged? Should applicants choose what kind of choice plan they would like to adopt as long as they met certain principles or goals outlined in the new program?
- 2) Should this be a new, separate grant program? Alternatively, could a criteria for all or some recipients of a larger, broader urban school district grant be the development of quality public school choice plans?
- 3) Should we consider smaller-scale options for a programs, like simply funding:
 - ▶ single high-priority items in a public school choice plan, like the development of parent information and resource centers.
 - ▶ the development of model school report cards.
 - ▶ research and/ or technical assistance on public school choice plans
- 4) How should desegregation be handled in this program?
- 5) Could a public school choice proposal -- or a portion of it -- consist of adding new criteria or a focus for existing federal programs like charter schools, Goals 2000 local grants, Goals 2000 parent resource centers, appropriating funds for community schools program.

Next steps:

- 1) Meet at 10am on Monday
- 2) Discuss, brainstorm, rework framework for this and any other options
- 3) Find information about Cambridge, other examples
- 4) Review any articles
- 5) Develop budgets, cost estimates, research summaries.

Examples of different types of public school choice plans:

Cambridge, MA (controlled choice)

Montclair, NJ (controlled choice)

District 4, New York (development of specialized schools)

Minnesota (open enrollment, post-secondary options, charter schools)

New York City, Milwaukee, etc. (magnet schools)

San Diego, and a couple of small all-charter school districts (charter schools in a district)

Author: Tanya Oubre at WDCT02
Date: 9/27/96 3:15 PM
Priority: Normal
TO: Jonathan Schnur at WDCB01
TO: John Fiegel at WDCJ02
TO: William Kincaid at WDCT01
TO: Stephanie Stullich at WDCT01
TO: Mikel Morton at WDCB01
TO: Kirk Winters at WDCT01
TO: Melissa Oppenheimer at WDCT01
CC: Gerald N. Tirozzi at WDCJ01
CC: Mike Smith at WDCT01
CC: Leah Vosburgh at WDCB02
Subject: Notes - 9/18 Mtg on Public Sch Choice - Next Mtg 10/2

----- Message Contents -----

****Follow-up meeting on Public School Choice -- October 2 at 4:30 PM in 5143 (Mike Smith's Old Office). Please come prepared to discuss the items under MAJOR POINTS from the meeting notes. Thanks.**

NOTES FROM 9/18 MEETING

ATTENDEES:

Mike Smith, Gerry Tirozzi, John Fiegel, Melissa Oppenheimer, Bill Kincaid, Stephanie Stullich, John Schnur, Kirk Winters, Tanya Oubre

MAJOR POINTS

1. Discussed need to examine choice defined broadly - beyond charters/magnets. What are the parameters e.g. cost, transportation, equity, that should be part of public school choice
2. Discussed some key principles for public school choice:
 - part of overall plan
 - no selectivity.
 - no extra money b/c of nature of school
 - transportation
 - parent information/informed choices
 - equity
3. Discussed next steps
 - Develop a compendium of good examples. How does district develop choice plan?
 - Think about what government can do to foster/stimulate development of good public school choice plans? TA? Downsides?
 - Think through what the principles should be for a choice plan?
 - Examine literature

ACTION ITEMS

1. The group (except Mike and Gerry) will meet two to three times over the next month to consider public school choice issues and make a recommendation to Mike and Gerry regarding next steps.
2. NEXT meeting - October 2 at 4:30PM

M E M O

TO: Mike Smith
Gerry Tirozzi
Terry Peterson
David Frank
Kevin Sullivan
Jon Schnur
Jennifer Davis
Melissa Oppenheimer
Tanya Oubre
Stephanie Stullich
Gabriela Uro
Kirk Winters

FROM: Bill Kincaid

DATE: September 17, 1996

RE: David Osborne Article on Public School Choice in Minnesota

I thought you would be interested in the attached Washington Post Magazine article from this weekend, in which David Osborne (of reinventing government fame) reviews Minnesota's experience with public school choice -- and concludes "school choice works."

Osborne says that "roughly 19 percent of Minnesota public school students -- more than 150,000 in all -- attend schools they or their parents chose. Since 1986, the number of alternative schools in Minnesota has tripled from 108 to more than 300. A competitive market has begun to emerge."

The piece goes on to discuss the changes that schools have made in response to competitive pressures. High schools "doubled the number of Advanced Placement courses they offered and tripled the number of students who took them. Almost 40 percent had also hired colleges to teach courses on their campuses." Of those participating in Minnesota's choice program allowing juniors and seniors to take their high school dollars to colleges, 73 percent of students were "very satisfied" with their experience while 95 percent of parents "probably" or "definitely" would encourage their children to participate again.

We should follow up with some of the in-depth studies this short piece relies on, and work this information into our statements on the promise of choice options within the public education system.

Schools Without Boundaries

By David Osborne

FEW ISSUES IN AMERICAN EDUCATION are more controversial than school choice. Seventeen states have passed public school choice laws, giving students the right to leave their school district and attend another public school. These are *not* voucher programs; with a few exceptions, parents can't take their public dollars to a private school. Instead, public dollars move with a student to the new public school, creating competition between districts.

The theory is simple: Different students learn in different ways, so they need different kinds of schools. Hence students should be able to choose the schools that suit their needs. If we then let public dollars follow children to their new schools, we create consequences for performance. Good schools earn larger budgets; bad schools have to shrink and, in some cases, close.

The logical result should be that principals, teachers and superintendents work harder to improve their schools.

The Minnesota Story: Minnesota has gone the furthest to test this theory. Since 1990, it has allowed:

- Families to leave their districts and take their public dollars with them to another district.
- High school juniors and seniors to take their public dollars to any college in the state and earn both high school and college credit.
- Dropouts and students at risk of dropping out to choose any public school in the state, as well as private alternative schools that contract with public districts.
- Parents, teachers and others to create new independent public schools, called "charter schools."

Overall, roughly 19 percent of Minnesota public school students—more than 150,000 in all—attend schools they or their parents chose. Since 1986, the number of alternative schools in Minnesota has tripled from 108 to more than 300. A competitive market has begun to emerge.

As choice began, academics James Tenbusch and Michael Garey surveyed 126 high school principals. Most said they were making changes to compete: lengthening their hours, adding more counseling and developing new educational programs. If they didn't, they said, they might lose students and money.

In an intensive study of eight districts, the University of Minnesota's Cheryl Lange found that, "Parents are flexing their political muscles by demanding desired programs and services. If the requests are not honored, many threaten to

leave the district. Findings suggest that it doesn't take a large number of families threatening transfer for administrators to take seriously the requests."

As one superintendent told her, "Open enrollment has a lot of impact on us. One of the things it does is that we don't dare, even under budget constraints, we don't dare curtail programs." Cuts come out of administration, not education.

Opponents of public school choice often argue that it will help the brightest, most affluent students, but leave poor students behind in inferior schools, increasing racial segregation. This hasn't happened in Minnesota, in part because so many specialized, alternative schools have been created for at-risk kids. In addition, the choice legislation says a student can't change districts if it would increase racial segregation, a rule that has kept white students from leaving Minneapolis for suburban districts.

The Bottom Line: Minnesota is just beginning to use statewide tests, so there is no data to indicate whether students are learning more in

their schools of choice.

Hard data does exist on one choice program—the one that lets juniors and seniors take their high school dollars to colleges. An evaluation by the state legislature found that 6 percent of all juniors and seniors were taking some college courses (12.5 percent in the Twin Cities). With the exception of those at technical colleges, they had a higher collective grade point average than college freshmen.

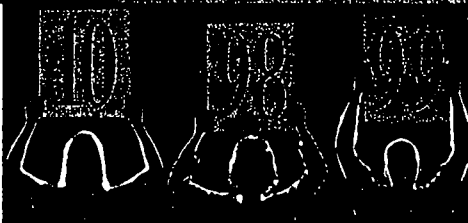
Some 73 percent of these students said they were "very satisfied" with their experience, while 95 percent of parents said they would "probably" or "definitely" encourage their children to participate again.

Spurred by competition, high schools had doubled the number of Advanced Placement courses they offered and tripled the number of students who took them. Almost 40 percent had also hired colleges to teach courses on their campuses.

Ultimately, citizens are the arbiters of any public program's success, and Minnesotans love school choice. By 1994, 86 percent of adults surveyed supported the program. Seventy-one percent said the increased competition would improve the quality of education.

The early returns are in, and they are clear: School choice works. ■

David Osborne, coauthor of Reinventing Government, is a managing partner of the Reinventing Government Network, a consulting firm.



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Wash Post Magazine
9/15/96 p. 8

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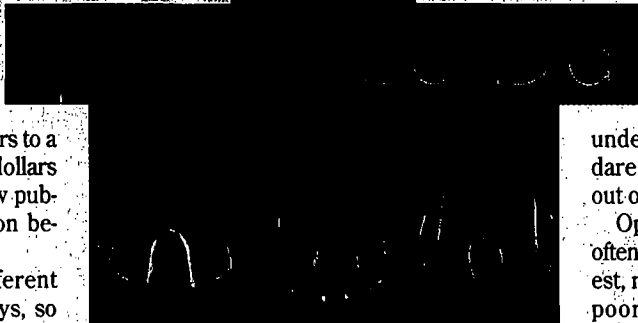
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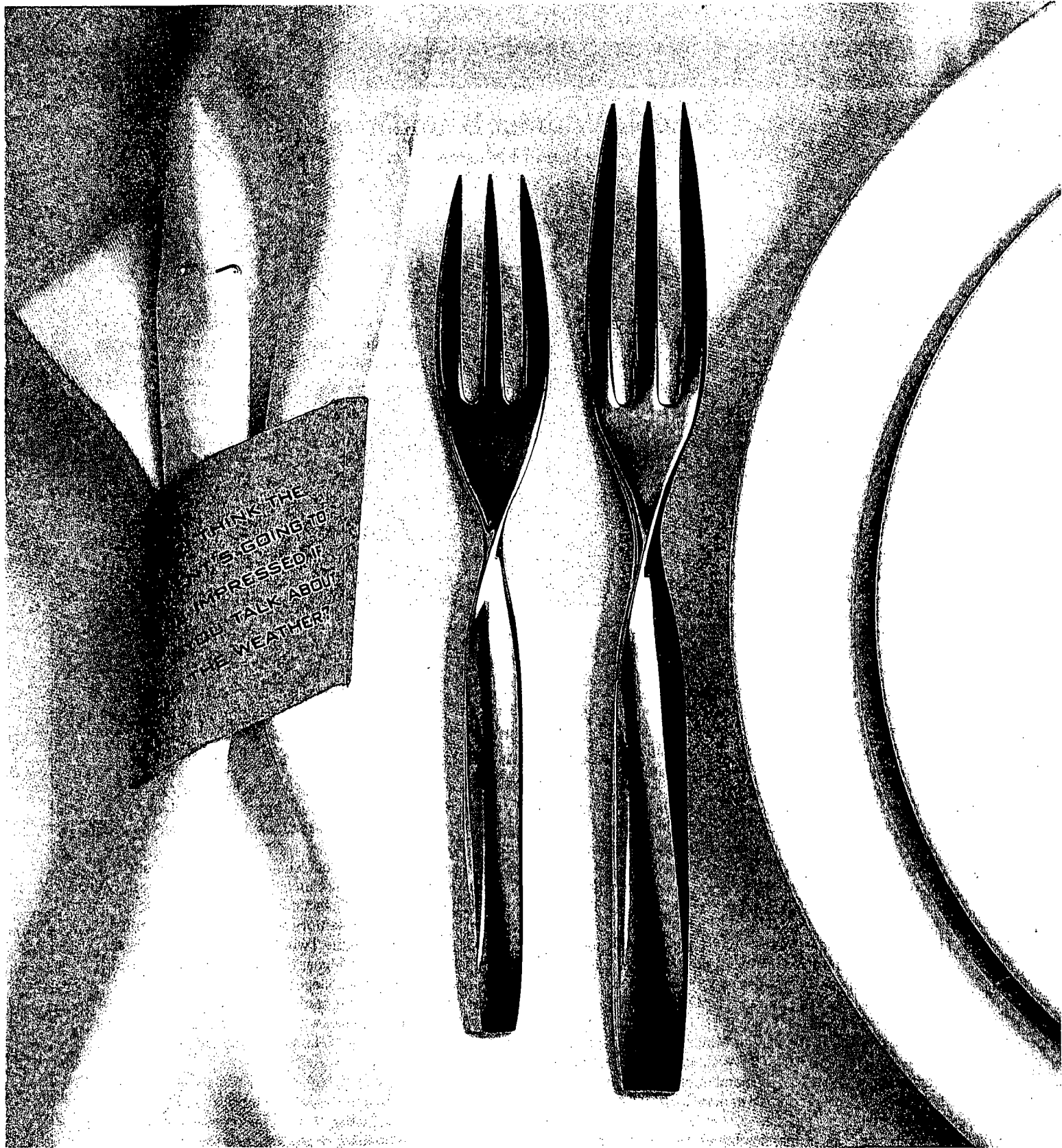
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THINK THE
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TALK ABOUT
THE WEATHER?

Turn to our new sections like Chattering Class, a guide to buzzwords in popular culture. Or Backlight, an interactive window on Washington's history. In the Specialist, local celebrities reveal where they buy the things they're celebrated for. We also have Dilbert, other new features, and of course, the old favorites: the crossword puzzle, Phyllis Richman's dining guide and Dave Barry.

The Washington Post Magazine
PEOPLE ARE TALKING

Author: Jonathan Schnur at WDCB01
Date: 9/16/96 2:22 PM
Priority: Normal
TO: William Kincaid at WDCT01
Subject: Re: 1996-09-12 Briefing by Bruce Reed on Charter Schools Pro

----- Message Contents -----

Definitely. We need to get him our draft Q&A, and suggest he incorporate some of our language into his plugs for charter schools.

--jon

Doesn't this come off a little bit as "here, we have a better panacea for you"? Don't pin all your hopes on vouchers--pin them on charters!

Bill

Forward Header

Subject: 1996-09-12 Briefing by Bruce Reed on Charter Schools Program
Author: Eileen Nicosia at WDCB01
Date: 9/13/96 2:07 PM

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary
(Fresno, California)

For Immediate Release

September 12, 1996

PRESS BRIEFING
BY BRUCE REED

The Dailey Elementary School
Fresno, California

10:35 A.M. PDT

MR. REED: Okay. Go ahead and fire away, I hope I have the answers. I'm Bruce Reed.

Q Bruce, is this an alternative to the voucher or -- try any type of choice; and it's only 300 schools, so this isn't a viable alternative, charter schools?

MR. REED: Well, we think that charter schools are the wave of the future. Let me explain how a charter school works. Twenty-five states have passed laws that allow parents and teachers to

M E M O

TO: Mike Smith
Gerry Tirozzi ✓
Terry Peterson
David Frank
Kevin Sullivan
Jon Schnur
Jennifer Davis
Melissa Oppenheimer
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FROM: Bill Kincaid

DATE: September 17, 1996

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I thought you would be interested in the attached Washington Post Magazine article from this weekend, in which David Osborne (of reinventing government fame) reviews Minnesota's experience with public school choice -- and concludes "school choice works."

Osborne says that "roughly 19 percent of Minnesota public school students -- more than 150,000 in all -- attend schools they or their parents chose. Since 1986, the number of alternative schools in Minnesota has tripled from 108 to more than 300. A competitive market has begun to emerge."

The piece goes on to discuss the changes that schools have made in response to competitive pressures. High schools "doubled the number of Advanced Placement courses they offered and tripled the number of students who took them. Almost 40 percent had also hired colleges to teach courses on their campuses." Of those participating in Minnesota's choice program allowing juniors and seniors to take their high school dollars to colleges, 73 percent of students were "very satisfied" with their experience while 95 percent of parents "probably" or "definitely" would encourage their children to participate again.

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COMMENTARY

Charter Schools: Escape or Reform?

By Marc Dean Millett,
Paul T. Hill,
and Robin Lake

The charter school movement, started as a means of escape for small numbers of dissidents, is evolving into an engine of broader reform for public education. The movement is still small, with fewer than 300 of the nation's 85,000 public schools operating under charters that allow public funding and freedom of action in return for accountability for results, but it might soon be strong enough to transform the definition of public education and the ways school districts operate.

Perhaps the most important sign that the charter school movement is maturing from escape to reform is the effort in many states to raise or eliminate the ridiculously low caps on the numbers of charter schools (25 in Massachusetts and Colorado; 100 in all of California). Without arbitrary caps, the numbers of charter schools in any locality would be limited only by the supply of qualified applicants. In some communities, all public schools might eventually be operated by independent groups of teachers, parents, social-service agencies, teachers' unions, or independent nonprofits.

This possibility is a long way from the original dreams of the few teachers and parents who just wanted to remove their own schools from the burdens of regulation and school board oversight. Early charter school supporters saw local boards as major impediments to educational innovation. They wanted to make it easy, almost automatic, for private groups to get charters. The law in Michigan, for example, makes it possible for school sponsors to bypass local boards entirely, by requesting charters from other public agencies, including state colleges and universities.

The possibility of unlimited numbers of charter schools puts a different light on the desirability of automatic approval and multiple routes of authorization. If charters are to become widespread or universal, some mechanism of community oversight is necessary. Charter schools will not be isolated exceptions—they will be the way that the community educates many or all of its children. Some community forum or agent must ensure that there is a school for every student, that parents get help validating schools' claims, and that there is some connection between what students are taught at one level of education (for example, elementary school) and what the next higher level of education requires. If they are seen as normal ways of delivering public education, charter schools are not about total autonomy. They are about educational diversity, innovation, responsiveness to community needs, and ultimately, improved performance.

Those who, like the present authors, see charter

they now operate. But they think boards need to be reformed into the kinds of community agencies described above, not bypassed entirely. They want charter school laws to transform local boards from operators of a highly regulated bureaucracy into managers of a system of individual schools, each with its own mission, clientele, and basis of accountability.

Supporters of reform-oriented charter school laws do not want to go back to the system of bureaucratic control that led to the charter movement in the first place. They want to create a system of charter schools that takes account of both the public and the private interests in schooling. Charter bills now being drafted in several states would change the powers of local school boards so they can and must authorize charter schools. They would constrain local boards' discretion so that a charter must be granted to any group that can meet established criteria. Once a charter is granted, a school's survival would depend on whether the parents and teachers who run it deliver the kinds of instruction promised and whether, on objective measures, students are learning. Private interests, as represented by parent choice, would count, too. Parents could choose among schools, and no school could survive without students. But, again representing a balance of the public and private interests in education, a charter school where students were not learning could be shut down whether or not parents were happy.

No one entirely trusts today's local school boards to give charter applicants a fair chance. Both the "escape" and the "reform" theories of charter schools call for charter applicants to have recourse to appeal if a local board turns down an application. The difference is that the escape-oriented statutes try to set up appeal venues that have biases toward approval of all charter applications, letting a potential school provider shop for an authorizer that is sympathetic with its proposal. Reform-oriented statutes now being drafted would constrain a local board's discretion so that a charter must be granted to any group that can meet established criteria—and cannot be granted to any applicant that fails to meet them.

A move toward objective criteria protects qualified applicants from local boards that would deny charters merely to avoid competition, even while it protects the public from unqualified charter providers. Charter schools could therefore be trusted to claim increasingly large shares of public



Then, local boards would no longer operate schools themselves. They would be more like the Federal Communications and Securities and Exchange commissions, which promote fair competition and
Continued on Page 46

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Defending Grammarcheck and Other Writing Tools

To the Editor:

While I am in complete agreement with J. Martin Rochester's Commentary condemning the new English standards on the grounds of vagueness, lack of attention to "rigor," and overemphasis on political correctness ("The Decline of Literacy," May 16, 1996), I take issue with his disparagement of age-appropriate literature, peer editing, and the valuable word processor tools for checking spelling and grammar.

Many of us, like Mr. Rochester, were extraordinarily fortunate that we survived "drill and kill" writing curricula and the exposure to "classic" literature that was developmentally inappropriate. In the best circumstances, we learned to love reading and writing and perhaps went on to become teachers and professors. However, too many children shut down in the educational system for a variety of reasons, even the "bright" and "gifted" students. I continually hear the voice of a close friend who went through independent school with me in the 1960s; she takes no pleasure in reading as an adult because our curriculum of classics taught too early completely turned her off. In our increasingly visual and technologically driven society,

we cannot afford alienating our kids from the pleasures of a book.

Mr. Rochester writes: "Inventive spelling presumes that kids' egos are so fragile and their creative juices so constipated that the mere correction of spelling errors by a teacher in early grades will ... produce instant 'shutdown' and scar the poor child for life." Many elementary and middle school English teachers have been teaching "process writing" (based on the Writing Workshop models of Donald Graves, Nancie Atwell, and Lucy Calkins, among others) for the past 10 to 15 years. The purpose is to help children see writing as a process of discrete, recursive steps. Most of us encourage inventive spelling in the drafting stage only, so that the child can focus first on getting her ideas onto paper or the word processor. The teacher then comments on content only, and the child revises, adding, deleting, and/or clarifying content.

The child then moves into the editing stage: He self-edits,

looking for punctuation, grammar, and spelling errors, often in successive stages. The child first runs spellcheck, circles incorrectly spelled words that he



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cannot correct, and then uses the dictionary or asks the teacher.

Although all of my English students have been exposed to years of instruction in spelling rules as well as lists of words to memorize for weekly tests, many still cannot spell with the degree of automaticity that we would hope for in the 7th grade. The reason is not lack of instruction, nor an unwillingness

to learn, nor laziness; rather, some of these children cannot spell. For them, spellcheck is an extraordinary tool to use during the editing stage of their writing. Many of them learn to recognize correct spelling when viewing options in a list.

Similarly, I believe that grammarcheck increases kids' awareness of the fine points in grammar. I would not generally discuss in my grammar and punctuation curriculum the use of active vs. passive voice. However, when a student receives the message by running grammarcheck that he is writing heavily in the passive voice, I am delighted to discuss this fine point in a personal editing conference. By running grammarcheck, this student advanced his knowledge of grammar and became a better writer.

Many teachers also teach and model "peer editing," which Mr. Rochester characterizes as "the blind leading the blind." Based on numerous observations of middle school students, I strongly disagree. Many children can block out the content of a peer's work, as opposed to their own writing, and concentrate solely on editing. In addition, peer editing increases kids' collaborative skills and teaches them that help is available from

a variety of sources, not only the teacher. Peer editing is a valuable supplement to, not a replacement of, teacher input. By the final draft, the child's piece of writing is free of spelling errors; and in many classes, the child's weekly spelling words are compiled from those misspelled in his or her own writing.

English teachers are implementing essential standards when we teach children to love expressing themselves through the written word, to develop their writing through successive stages, to use all the tools of editing, and to take pleasure in reading books that are developmentally appropriate and raise crucial ethical questions. Certainly "literacy still counts," as Mr. Rochester concludes, but we cannot expect to arrive at it without careful consideration of the many paths and processes that lead to that goal.

As for his comment that "a truly literate person should not have to rely on the crutch of spellcheck or grammarcheck," most writers welcome any tool that makes their writing easier. Or does Mr. Rochester use a quill pen on parchment?

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Charters: Escape or Reform?

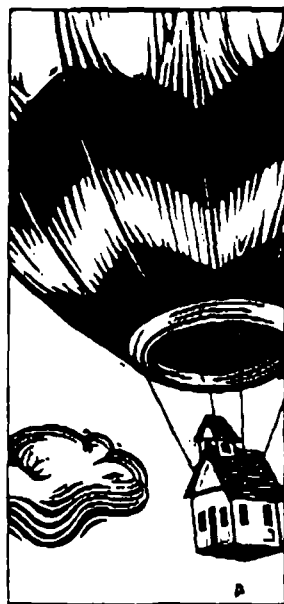
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protect consumers, than like an armed service or police department, which runs everything directly.

In their haste to be free of school districts and to establish their own schools, followers of the "escape" theory of charter schools give up an important source of financial and administrative support. Without some external support, charter schools must provide for themselves all the protections once provided by the district, including start-up capital, liability insurance and teacher retirement, legal advice, and other professional services. As some charter school operators have already found, skimping on assistance and advice puts the whole enterprise at risk, including children's educational opportunities, the founders' own time and money, and the public's funds. Total autonomy is an illusion. Even well-established independent schools join associations to provide access to teacher

ment, performance assessment, and help with self-evaluation.

If they are to become central to a whole community's effort to educate its children, charter schools must have clear and reliable relationships



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with community agencies that can authorize charters, guarantee funding, and hold school operators to their promises. These commu-

nity agencies—which for the want of a better term we call local school boards—are as essential to a charter-based reform of public education as are the groups of teachers, parents, and others who agree to accept charters to operate individual schools. If the

If charter schools are for reform, we must devise a system of public education that combines the educational advantages of school independence with the economic advantages of school districts.

local mix of schools depends entirely on individual initiative, no one is responsible for the overall quality and appropriateness

of a community's schools. This consequence is scarcely different from the results of a voucher scheme, under which schools are provided only by private entrepreneurs.

All charter school supporters agree that charter schools should be run by their own founders and staff, and freed from most of the process requirements that limit how current public schools hire and teach. But it matters whether charter schooling is about escape or reform. If charter schools are for escape, charter laws should make it easy for new schools to form without prior community scrutiny of school plans or operators' qualifications, enroll students, and claim public funds. Charter schools' survival should depend almost exclusively on parent satisfaction; no elected board or appointed superintendent should have any discretion about the establishment, continuation, or closing of a charter school.

But if charter schools are for reform, we must devise a system of public education that combines the educational advantages of school independence with the economic advantages of school districts. Today, local school boards are a problem for all charter school applicants. But in the long run, local boards with new missions and limitations can be integral parts of the charter school movement.

The Educational Consequences of Choice

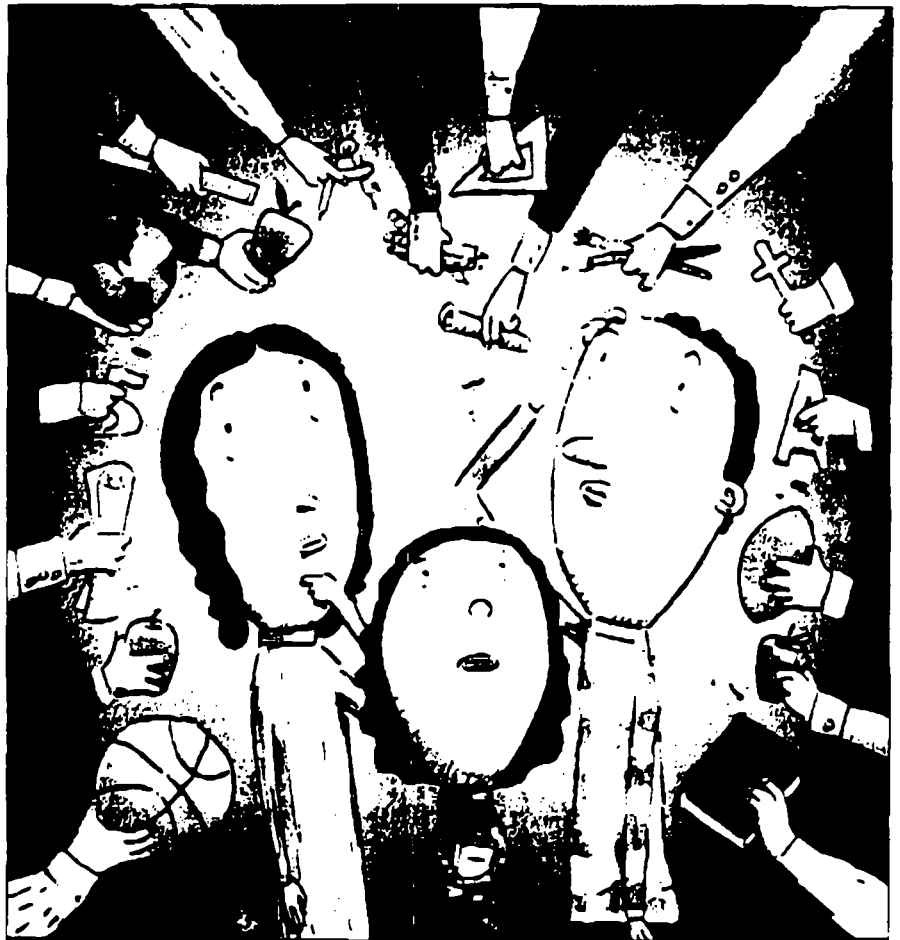
BY PAUL T. HILL

There is ample evidence, according to Mr. Hill, that universal public school choice would strongly benefit all children, including the disadvantaged, by promoting candid and demanding relationships among teachers, parents, and students.

MANY MEMBERS of the education establishment claim that universal public school choice would be of little value to the low-income and minority students who now attend the worst schools. They say that the best schools would take advantage of a larger pool of applicants to become even more selective than they are now and that schools that did admit disadvantaged children would not work very hard to meet their needs.

However, there is ample evidence that choice strongly benefits all children, including the disadvantaged. Choice promotes the candid and demanding relationships among teachers, parents, and students that are essential to effective schooling. It can make the difference between schools that are apathetic providers of routine academic courses and schools that are true

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communities that develop students as whole people.

Much of the evidence for these conclusions comes from my study of a privately funded voucher program, the Student-Sponsor Partnership Program in New York City. Under that program, individual sponsors pay tuition for low-income minority students — many of whom have failed in public schools and are not Catholic — to attend New York City Catholic high schools. The program selects students from the bottom of the New York City public school population. They and their parents have only to accept the opportunity offered. My study compared the educational experiences and achievement of these private voucher students with the experiences of similar students in public

high schools in New York City.¹ Other evidence is drawn from Robert Crain's study of nonselective magnet schools in New York City and my subsequent studies of site-based management and foundation-funded public high school reform efforts.²

How Choice Affects Schools

Starting with Milton Friedman, the advocates of choice have argued that competition is a powerful force for school quality. The attitudes and behavior of teachers and administrators in schools of choice show how competition affects schooling. Schools of choice need to attract students in order to survive. Though some can rely on a reputation for exclusivity or superior quality, not all schools can credibly claim to be the best. But every school can offer something that gives it an identity — a specific curriculum, social climate, or extracurricular program — that attracts the interest of parents and students. Once a school has established an identity, it must deliver on its promises well enough to keep current students from transferring out, to create "brand loyalty" among families with several children, and to attract enough new families to fill the entering class each year.

The need for product differentiation encourages a number of behaviors that advocates of "effective schools" have tried to promote in public school staffs. School staffs have a strong incentive to articulate a mission for the school and to ensure that all elements of the school contribute to its attainment. The mission must also be easy to explain to parents. That means that it must be focused on what children will experience in school and what they will be able to do when they leave — not on subtleties of educational technique that may matter only to professionals.

Once a school of choice has established an identity, the staff has a strong incentive to avoid major disruptions in the program. The demands of sheer economic survival also make teachers concerned about the performance of the school as a whole. If a school is forced to close because too few students want to attend it, all teachers have to find new jobs, no matter how well they have been teaching their own classes. Teachers therefore have strong incentives to keep their own work in line with the school's mission, to help one another, to identify weaknesses, and to ensure that variations in teacher performance do not harm the school's ultimate product and reputation.

All these behaviors are evident in public magnet schools, which must continually justify their existence in the face of pressures for uniformity,

and in the financially struggling non-elite religious schools such as those attended by the Partnership students. Staff members in such schools are eligible to work in regular public schools for equal or greater pay, but they stay in schools of choice either out of commitment to the kind of education being offered in them or because they prefer the working conditions. They therefore value their jobs, which they know would go away if their schools were forced to close.

Staff members know that the continuation of their jobs depends on their own performance and that of their co-workers. Thus they are quick to seek advice from other teachers if a particular class is not going well and to alert their colleagues or the school management if another teacher is not pulling his or her weight. They are also very reluctant to give up on a student, knowing that too many stories of failure can wreck a school's reputation. Even when the student population changes because of worsening economic conditions or demographic shifts, teachers and administrators in schools of choice have the strongest possible incentive to maintain the level of student performance.

In contrast, staff members in a compulsory attendance public school need not fear for their jobs if their school fails to perform. As long as there are students in the neighborhood, they will be assigned to attend the school. Even if (as can happen in New York) the state intervenes to close the school, the teachers and administrators will be assigned to a similar school in the local system. The school's reputation may be a source of pride, but people's livelihoods do not depend on it. Though most teachers want to do a good job, they are not driven by economic necessity to question their own performance or to confront others who are not producing. Students who fail do not constitute a particular threat to the school. Staff members, knowing that serious self-assessment can lead to painful adult confrontations, have strong incentives to assign the blame for declining student performance or rising dropout rates to factors over which the school has no control.

A small number of schools of choice may have so many applicants that they can reject a student who shows the first sign of becoming an academic or behavior problem. But in a competitive situation, such as that faced by the New York City Catholic and nonselective magnet schools, schools of choice have no such luxury. Such schools must be, in Robert Slavin's term, relentless in improving their own performance and in helping students achieve. Contrary to the claims of the antichoice education establishment, schools of choice cannot survive by hand-picking the easiest students to educate. They must, instead, work to influence the atti-



tudes and motivations, as well as the academic performance, of their students.

Staff members in schools of choice must treat all students as if they are educable, not frozen in either their academic abilities or their attitudes. This difference between schools of choice and compulsory attendance public schools is epitomized in a sign displayed in a private school classroom: "Attitude is a choice."

How Choice Affects Parents

Most of the literature promoting choice stresses the importance of making parents consumers, courted and feared by school staffs. As the preceding section shows, the possibility that parents will withdraw their children from a school of choice is a powerful motivator for teachers and principals. That same possibility also means that parents can intervene effectively if schools mistreat or neglect their children.

But the connections between parents and schools of choice are more complex than this raw economic relationship. For all but the most opinionated and aggressive parents, the choice of a school is more akin to the choice of a family doctor or pastor than to the choice of a car dealer or grocery store. The parent's status as a consumer is important, but it is only the foundation of a much richer set of trust relationships between parent and child and child and school.

As James Coleman has pointed out, parents who choose a school for their child give the school a grant of parental authority. Parents who could have chosen any number of schools have selected this one. For whatever reason — religious conviction, educational taste, confidence in the school staff, or personal convenience — the parents want the child to attend a particular school. Though the parents might change their minds if things go especially badly, the child knows that a change of school can upset and inconvenience the parents. Most children, not wanting to risk an upheaval at home, have a strong incentive to succeed in the school their parents have chosen for them.

As the experience of Partnership students demonstrates, this grant of parental authority greatly increases the school's leverage over its students. As one student put it, "My mother says that I am lucky to be going to this school, and I had better not mess up." Another reported, "My uncle said [the public school the student previously attended] was no good, but if I couldn't do good here, there is something wrong with me." A student who skips school, does not study, or displays a sullen attitude is risking a confrontation with a parent. Though a few children will endure such a confrontation, the vast majority will not. School staff members are therefore able to use the parent's grant of authority to make demands on the student, as did one principal in the Partnership program who told a student, "Your mother didn't send you here to hang out in the rest room. She sent you here to learn."

Chosen schools also have leverage in dealing with parents. The threat of rejection that motivates teachers and principals cuts both ways: the school can likewise decide not to continue educating a student. Once they have chosen a school and adjusted their transportation plans and schedules accordingly, parents do not like to make changes. Unless the school has failed to keep its part of the bargain, parents are also reluctant

to see their children's education disrupted. Schools can, consequently, make demands on parents — to monitor homework, ensure student attendance, and see to it that the student comes to school fed, rested, and ready to learn.

Schools in the Partnership program unhesitatingly made such demands on parents. They understood that parents lacked the time and money to make donations, raise funds, or attend frequent meetings. But the schools were direct and demanding about what parents had to do if their children were to succeed in school. Partnership schools found foster homes for students whose families were disrupted by death, unemployment, illness, or imprisonment. But they expected the family to support the educational process whenever it was physically possible.

Much of a school's influence is based on the parents' trust in the school's competence and concern for its students. Schools of choice, like family doctors, are influential because they are trusted. Patients follow their doctors' advice primarily because they believe it will make them healthier and only secondarily because they fear that the doctor will refuse to see them again if they do not take the medicine prescribed. The same is true with families. Because parents have chosen a school and because the school has an incentive to be as helpful as possible, a relationship of trust is created. Families that deal with the same school over a long time, especially those that have sent several children there, develop particularly strong bonds of sentiment and loyalty toward the school.

Any relationship of trust can be misused, and some schools of choice may retain parents' confidence longer than their performance merits. But in most cases major benefits accrue to all parties. The Partnership schools felt confident in exhorting parents to become more important forces in their children's lives and to reinforce the school's opposition to the harmful elements of students' peer culture. One Partnership school principal required that parents attend only one meeting each year, before classes started in September, so that she could urge parents to hold their children to traditional family standards, no matter how much children appeared to reject them.

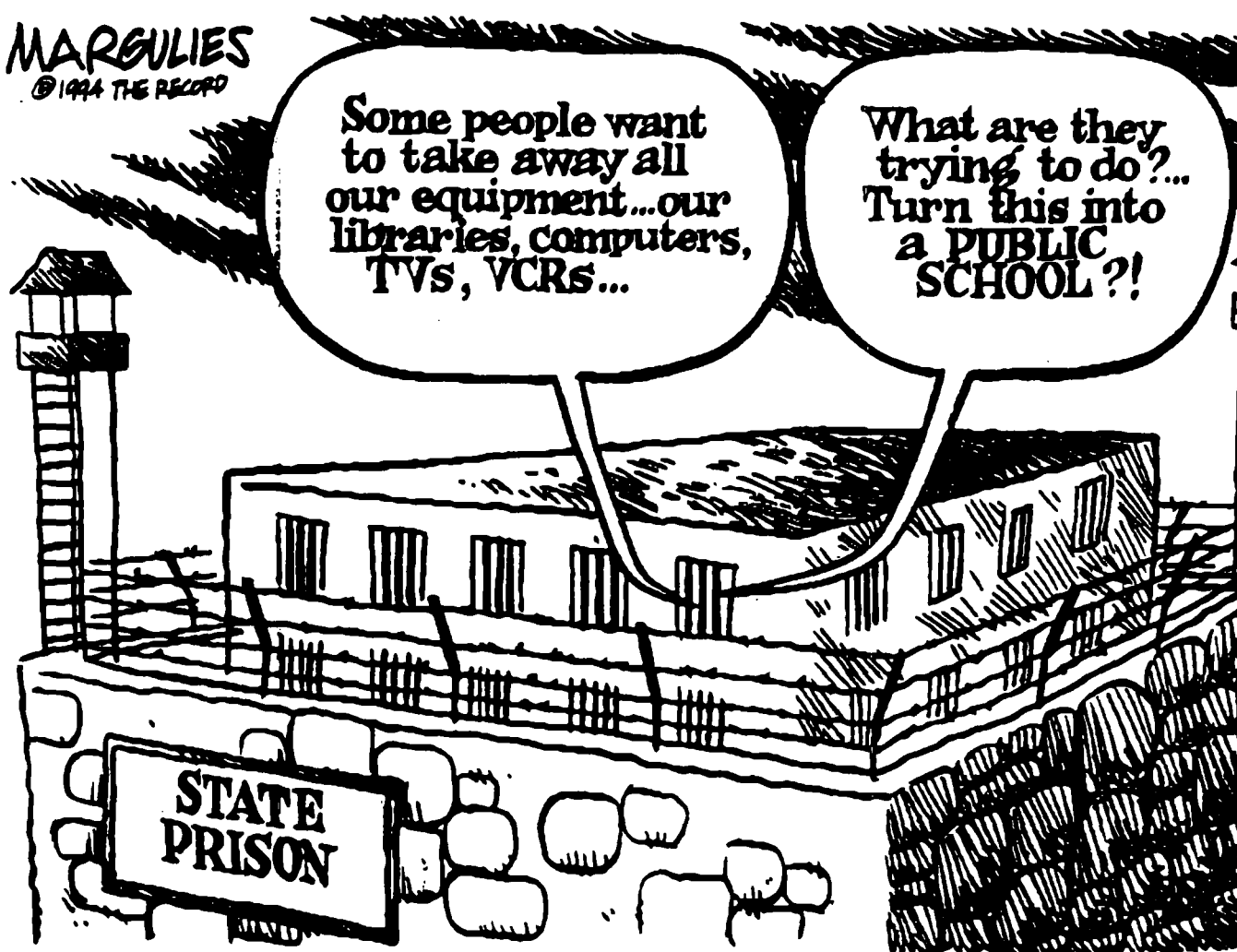
These conditions are not impossible to achieve in compulsory attendance public schools, but there they require a great deal of personal effort, whereas they are intrinsic to choice schools. An attendance-zoned school, to which children are assigned because they are of mandatory school age and live in the neighborhood, has no definite grant of parental authority. As a result, teachers in regular public schools all over the country complain, "We can't teach these kids if their families don't care."

Choice affects the relationships between schools and parents even if a chosen school falls short of a parent's ideal. As long as the parent thinks the chosen school is better than any available alternative, the parent has reason to feel commitment to it. Schools need not be highly distinctive to get the benefit of a parent's choice. Even though educators may think low-cost parochial schools are all quite similar, the parents who choose among them usually think the differences are important. The longer a family stays with a school, the more importance history and personal relationships assume.

Compulsory attendance schools can build personal loyalties, and a parent whose children attend such a school can come to believe that it is just the right one. In such cases, the school probably gains an important grant of parental authority. But choice

MARGULIES

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may play an important part even then. Higher-income parents, who always have the capacity to remove their children from compulsory attendance schools, are the ones most likely to develop close relationships with teachers and administrators. Lower-income parents, who have little choice about where their children attend school, seldom develop strong feelings of confidence and loyalty. Parent advisory councils and other mechanisms for parent involvement in school governance affect only the few parents who participate.

As experience with the Partnership program shows, however, choice gives low-income parents the same sense of commitment and loyalty that higher-income parents enjoy. The schools' religious identity obviously builds some trust. But the fact that the parents have been able to accept or reject the scholarship creates a sense of mutual commitment between parent and school.

How Choice Affects Students

Many of the effects of choice on students are implicit in the foregoing discussion. Students in schools of choice benefit from the teachers' and principals' need to create a defined image and reputation. Students also benefit from their parents' commitment to the school and from the school's consequent

ability to make demands on their parents and themselves.

Beyond these advantages, students derive two other benefits from being in schools of choice. First, they gain from being in a situation in which they must make commitments and take them seriously. Second, they gain from observing adults working in a common enterprise in which performance matters and both success and failure have real consequences.

Student commitment. Students may prefer not to attend any school at all, but if they have a preference for the school they attend over other alternative schools, they are susceptible to influence by the chosen school. This is true even if the school preference is based on nonacademic factors, such as location, sports teams, or presence of friends. It is especially important if students have knowingly chosen a school that offers a particular academic emphasis or makes special demands on effort and performance. When students make such a commitment, they implicitly affirm that the chosen school is more attractive than the alternatives. Though they may prefer not to do everything the school requires, they know that acting on those impulses could result in their being forced to leave the chosen school and go to another one that is less attractive to them.

Students in the Partnership schools frankly admitted that they had made a tradeoff in accepting scholarships to attend private schools. All knew that leaving public school would sep-

arate them from friends and neighborhood and would subject them to firm demands about attendance and academic effort. They accepted the scholarships for many reasons — because the private schools were safer, because they hoped (along with virtually all high school students) to attend college someday, or because they liked the schools' traditions and sports teams. But they all understood what the schools would demand of them because the school admissions counselors and the Partnership program itself made sure that they knew.

Once they accepted the schools' demands, they had given the schools leverage: teachers and administrators could assign homework, take attendance, grade performance, and administer consequences just as they had said they would. Armed with this power, the Partnership schools exercised their authority confidently — not in a harsh or morally superior way, but matter-of-factly, as the simple consequence of a well-understood bargain.

Less than 10% of the students who were offered scholarships rejected them, and less than 5% of the students admitted to private schools left, either voluntarily or at the schools' initiative. The vast majority of students understood the bargain they had made, and they accepted, albeit grudgingly, the schools' rigorous execution of it. When students failed to complete assigned work or broke school rules, teachers consistently said, "You made an agreement when you came here — now live up to it." For the vast majority of students, the need to abide by their prior commitments both influenced their behavior and changed their attitudes. In surveys and interviews, virtually all students said that their effort, attendance, and attitudes about schooling had all changed since they joined the Partnership program.

Emulation of adult working relationships. During the fieldwork for my study and in subsequent work in urban high schools, I saw students encounter a hidden curriculum, taught not didactically but by example. The example is provided by teachers and administrators, the only people whom students routinely see at work. It can send a powerful message to students about whether or not the work of adults is informed by clear goals and requires or rewards collaborative effort, initiative, reciprocity, or risk-taking.

As Carl Glickman and others confirm, teachers in compulsory attendance schools often feel that they have little control over the conditions of their own work and think that they and their colleagues are neither rewarded for diligence nor punished for negligence. For adults in such situations, the apparently rational response is to do exactly what their formal job descriptions require and not take responsibility for the overall product of the organization in which they work. Albert Shanker's quote from an urban teacher, "I taught them but they didn't learn it," sums up the phenomenon. Many teachers and administrators in compulsory attendance schools think differently, but they are not rewarded by the organization or, in many cases, appreciated by their co-workers. For students, who seldom observe any adults other than teachers at work, the message can be powerful: large organizations that employ adults do not have clear goals and do not require or support effective work.

The hidden curriculum in schools of choice is different. The adults in such schools are not necessarily more virtuous than teachers and administrators elsewhere, but because they are

linked in a common enterprise they have incentives to work together and to hold one another accountable. The version of adult life and responsibility modeled in such schools is very different from that evident in schools that lack a clear mission and in which staff members do not have to perform in order to keep their jobs. The message to students is that adults depend on and influence one another and that they care about whether they and others are contributing to the success of a broader enterprise.

Students get the message. One student interviewed at a compulsory attendance school stated bluntly what other students had said less directly: "Nobody here does any more than you have to do. I'm not going to be a chump." Students in Partnership schools, to the contrary, saw how hard faculty members worked to make the school succeed. As one Partnership student who had recently transferred from public school told me, "In public school the teachers say, 'I get paid whether you learn this or not.' Here they say, 'You are going to learn this if it takes all day. I don't care how long it takes: I live upstairs.'"

It does not take a private or religious school to teach these lessons. Many of the nonselective magnet schools in Crain's and my studies provide similar examples of earnest adult collaboration. There are, furthermore, many teachers and administrators in compulsory attendance schools who offer sterling personal examples. But these individuals are forced to overcome the context in which they work, whereas teachers and administrators in schools of choice are reinforced by everything about their working environment.

Conclusion

Several current educational reform movements — going under such names as decentralization, charters, and school contracting — all hope to create the conditions under which public schools can develop these attributes. Doing so will require profound change in the missions and operations of public schools. It surely requires choice — choice of schools by teachers, students, and parents; choice by schools concerning how long to stick with a student who will not fulfill the school's work requirements; and choice by public officials regarding whether to continue supporting a failing school or to close and recommission it with a new staff and management.

As educational environments, schools of choice are profoundly different from compulsory attendance schools. Even when their academic offerings are not much different from those of compulsory attendance schools, schools of choice become places in which parents and teachers are collaborators, bargains among adults and between adults and children are made and kept, effort is rewarded, and actions have consistent consequences. Such environments motivate student effort in the short run. In the longer run, they socialize students into the values and attitudes required in real adult life.

1. Paul T. Hill, *High Schools with Character* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1990).

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ED282350 86 Choice in the Public Schools. ERIC Digest, Number Seventeen.
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ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, Oreg.

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TEXT: In the U. S., parents are limited to three basic options when deciding how they want their children to be educated at the primary and secondary grade levels: (1) home schooling, (2) paying tuition to send their children to private schools, or (3) sending their children to the public schools closest to their homes.

Many parents, however, would like these options to be expanded, and some educators are proposing means of making more options available.

WHY DO PARENTS WANT MORE SCHOOLING OPTIONS?

The reasons vary considerably from family to family. Some parents simply feel that the particular public schools closest to their homes are not doing a good job. Others are interested in specific educational programs not available in their neighborhood schools. And many parents who send their children to private schools resent paying tuition for those schools and paying taxes to support public schools that their children do not attend.

WHAT PROPOSALS HAVE EDUCATORS ADVANCED TO GIVE PARENTS A GREATER SAY IN HOW AND WHERE THEIR CHILDREN WILL BE EDUCATED?

Educators' proposals include magnet schools, work-based attendance, voucher systems, and open enrollment.

Magnet schools offer special programs not available at traditional schools and are open to students from throughout the school district.

Work-based attendance is a plan by which parents can elect to send their child to a school near either parent's workplace instead of a school close to their home.

A wide range of voucher systems has been proposed. In all such systems, tax money is furnished directly to parents in the form of vouchers they can use to pay tuition at the school they want their child to attend. Some proposals would limit parents to using vouchers at schools within their own districts; others would be statewide in scope. Some would limit voucher use to public schools; others would permit parents to use vouchers at any school they wish--public or private, secular or religious.

Open enrollment plans are discussed in a later section.

WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPAL DRAWBACKS OF MAGNET SCHOOLS, WORK-BASED ATTENDANCE, AND VOUCHER SYSTEMS?

Magnet schools have generally met with approval, but it can be argued that the magnet school concept doesn't go far enough. Usually a school district offers only one magnet school at any given grade level. Parents who are unhappy with their local school and with what the district magnet school has to offer are out of luck.

Much the same can be said about work-based attendance. A choice among three different schools isn't much of a choice if all three are traditional schools teaching the same subject matter and using the same pedagogical methods.

Voucher proposals have met with strong opposition from teachers' associations, administrators, some educators, and some members of minority groups. Teachers and administrators worry about the instability that could result if parents shopped around the district or even the state when choosing schools for their children. Some educators also fear the possibility of charlatans setting up low quality private schools to make money out of vouchers. And some members of minority groups are concerned lest middle-class white parents use vouchers as a means of pulling their children out of desegregated schools.

One proposal that seems quite promising and has generally worked out well where it has been tried is open enrollment.

WHAT IS OPEN ENROLLMENT?

Essentially, open enrollment is a policy allowing parents to select from among a variety of school programs. The Minneapolis Public Schools provide an example of how such a policy works.

Prior to the 1982-83 school year, Minneapolis supported a wide range of school programs but lacked a coherent policy to ensure that all families within the district had equal access to all programs. To remedy the problem, Minneapolis adopted an open enrollment policy.

In March 1982, a guide to the programs available in the district was mailed to every student's home, together with a card on which the parents could indicate their preference. Those preferences determined the number of sites allocated for each program. To ease transportation problems, the city was divided into three geographic areas, with parents sending their children to a school within their geographic area offering the program they desired. However, for single-site programs (such as the Montessori school and the magnet high schools), enrollment was on a districtwide basis. After enrollment projections for the various schools were available, the teachers, in order of seniority, bid for the jobs they wanted for which they were qualified.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS OF AN OPEN ENROLLMENT POLICY?

The obvious benefit is that, properly administered, an open enrollment policy appears to accomplish what parents and educators want: a wide range of programs from which to choose. Also, this goal is accomplished without raising the constitutional issues of church-state separation that arise when the government subsidizes religious schools.

At the same time, open enrollment is not a panacea. It becomes almost meaningless if all a district has to offer is a choice among several schools that teach the same subjects in the same ways. Open enrollment would appear to be most meaningful in a district with a large population base and the capacity to develop a wide range of programs.

It could be argued that open enrollment might promote the kind of instability feared by critics of the voucher system. It appears, however, that when parents are given the opportunity to choose from among a number of programs, they usually stay with their original choices.

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under OERI contract. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.

ED322275 Mar 90 Public School Choice: Issues and Concerns for Urban Educators. ERIC/CUE Digest No. 63.

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THIS DIGEST WAS CREATED BY ERIC, THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ERIC, CONTACT ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC

As policymakers continue to seek new methods of reforming public education, school choice--the practice of allowing parents and students to choose among a variety of schools--has emerged as one of the most widely supported issues of the decade. Yet, for many, it is not clear how choice should be structured or how to assure that those students with the fewest resources will not be shut out of the best schools.

Recent debates on school choice are concerned less with whether there should be more choice in education than with how much choice should be offered to whom. Existing choice plans vary dramatically in size, shape and purpose. How students are matched to schools, the degree of government regulation, percentage of students given choice, distance traveled by students, and participating schools' admission criteria are examples of choice plan characteristics that differ from one district or state to the next.

Seven states have now adopted statewide open enrollment choice plans that permit students to transfer from one school district to another, taking state funds with them. Meanwhile, hundreds of individual public school districts across the country have instituted some degree of school choice through magnet school programs and voluntary desegregation plans. Wisconsin recently extended school choice to private non-sectarian schools by offering low-income students in Milwaukee state-financed tuition vouchers (Wells, 1990).

While it may not be necessary for all school choice plans to look exactly alike, researchers point out that different types of choice programs have different impacts, especially on the education of low-income and minority populations.

THE POLITICS OF SCHOOL CHOICE

The school choice movement has widespread, diversified political appeal. Reasons for this support include the following:

It can, given the right circumstances, enable low-income and minority families to avoid poorly run and overcrowded urban schools.

It infuses free market, competitive principles into a sluggish public education system.

It allows individual families, not bureaucratic school systems, to have more control over which schools their children attend and what services are provided there.

It is considered a low-cost solution to what are considered enormous problems in public education.

It is purported to lead to better matches between pupil needs and school offerings.

It may increase parent involvement in education.

But school choice is not without its critics. They argue that many choice programs discriminate against poor and minority parents who are less informed about how the educational system works or are too overwhelmed with day-to-day survival to research the various educational options; by default, some students will be left behind in the less popular schools, which often end up with fewer resources.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT SCHOOL CHOICE

The varied opinions on school choice and its potential impacts are grounded in little empirical research, mainly because there is a dearth of well-documented experience on how school choice programs affect either academic achievement or educational opportunities. As McDonnell (1989) points out, studies of existing choice arrangements within the public schools are merely "suggestive of the conditions" that could make a more universal system of public school choice work effectively.

Yet, some school districts with choice programs, such as New York City's District 4 and the Cambridge, MA, public schools, have already experienced higher achievement test scores since their choice programs began (Paulu, 1989).

A recent study by Chubb and Moe (1990) employs a national longitudinal survey to show that "a well-organized school can make a meaningful difference for student achievement, regardless of the ability and background of its students" (p.129). They argue that a deregulated, free-market system in which schools are run autonomously without government bureaucratic constraints will better meet the needs of individual parents and students.

Yet, other researchers question whether a deregulated choice system will necessarily result in more effectively run schools or will only encourage schools to add features attractive to choosers (i.e., an enhanced sports program) but extraneous to good education, and to develop sophisticated marketing techniques (Clune, 1989).

Riddle and Stedman (1989) question the assumption that more school choice will improve parent involvement in education. They point to a study in New York City's Community School District 4 that shows no evidence of greater parent involvement as a result of enhanced educational choice. They also raise the issue of whether parents who transfer their children outside of their home school districts will find their ability to influence the new school diminished because they will not vote for the school board members who control their children's school and may not always have the time or the transportation to go to meetings and events at the school.

Elmore's extensive review (1986) of the literature on school choice provides some evidence that parents differ by race and social class in the amount of information they have about available educational options; and in their preferences for academic content, discipline, and instructional style. He concludes that a possible consequence of experiments with increased choice is a situation in which "nominally neutral mechanisms" produce highly segregated school populations. Competition among families to get their children into the "best" schools will lead them to use their "market power"-- i.e. money, time, influence, and access--to ensure that their children are accepted at their desired schools. Unstructured, deregulated competition would leave students from less "powerful" families in less attractive schools.

Yet, in a 1985 study of parental decision-making about schools, Darling-Hammond and Kirby surveyed 476 parents of public and private school students and found that although lower-income parents had fewer choices in terms of which neighborhood they would live in, they were more likely to seek out school alternatives at the time of enrollment. Those least likely to make choices were residents of rural areas and parents who had themselves attended only private schools.

VARIATIONS IN SCHOOL CHOICE PLANS

Controlled Choice. In what are commonly called "controlled choice" programs, such as those in Montclair, NJ, Cambridge, MA, and 17 other districts in Massachusetts, parents must choose a school for their children because there are no assigned or zoned schools. Schools are given the freedom to develop special educational programs to attract students, and the most popular programs are duplicated in more than one school to avoid a monopoly.

Parents in these districts register their children for school at parent information centers where they confer with parent liaisons and student assignment officers about the various educational programs available.

making choice as equitable as possible should be heeded. They include the following (Nathan, 1989; McDonnell, 1989):

- o a clear goal statement.
- o outreach to, and information and counseling for, parents.
- o a fair, unrestrictive, noncompetitive, and equitable admissions procedure, with particular attention paid to criteria for enrollment in the most desirable schools.
- o Provision of adequate transportation for students.

Finally, as Riddle and Stedman assert, the conditions for success in education may indeed come through choice plans, but will ultimately have more to do with the commitment of school systems to improving the education of choosers and non-choosers alike.

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement.

ED340813 Aug 91 Improving Urban Education with Magnet Schools. ERIC/CUE Digest, Number 76.
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Despite the wide variety of magnet schools and programs, magnets differ from "regular" or "zoned" schools in three principal ways: (1) Magnets have a unified curriculum based on a special theme or method of instruction; (2) enrollment is open to students beyond the geographic attendance zone; and (3) students and parents choose the school.

Magnets were developed in large urban universities in the 1970s primarily as an aid in desegregating schools. The idea was to create schools so good that they would draw a racial cross-section of students out of the segregated neighborhood boundaries, avoiding the political opposition engendered by mandatory busing.

Virtually all magnets now have long waiting lists, despite that in many, students have to travel long distances to school, the class day is longer, and the work is harder than in nonmagnets. Moreover, some are in rundown neighborhoods; some have large pupil/teacher ratios; and some are in decaying, depressing buildings. (In the successful Fashion Industries High School in New York City, for example, classrooms and hallways have not been painted since 1940 (Mitchell, Russell, & Benson, 1989).

What, then, draws so many students to magnets? This digest suggests ways that magnet schools are perceived to provide a superior education.

THE APPEAL OF MAGNET SCHOOLS

1. Program coherence. Magnets have a specialized core curriculum or specialized pedagogy. The consistency of the theme or method of teaching, and the identification of staff with its theme, curriculum, methods, goals, and activities all mesh to form a coherent whole.
2. A safer, more orderly climate; an environment conducive to learning; and an image of excellence. Magnets have a strong commitment to parent involvement and they try to mold student attitudes and values. As a result, magnets attract better-motivated students, which reinforces the favorable school atmosphere.
3. A sense of shared enterprise and a committed, enthusiastic faculty and student body. Because of the school's nurturing atmosphere and its image of excellence, and because more students apply than get accepted, students who are admitted, and teachers who teach in a magnet, feel special about themselves and their school.
4. Career preparation. The school's focus on an occupation or a field of study -- and the attendant job prospects -- gives students a sense of direction and lets them justify to themselves, their parents, and their peers the effort they put into schoolwork.
5. A committed, charismatic principal.
6. Implementation of educational reforms. Magnets are frequently associated with reform measures such as an absence of tracking, contextual teaching, cooperative learning, and teacher collegiality.
7. School autonomy. Staff at most magnets are relatively free to solve their own problems in their own way, without needing approval from the school district. This independence contributes to the feeling among students and staff that the school is their special, unique creation.

Not all magnets have all of these characteristics, of course, and they are not totally free of constraints. Like other schools, magnets must meet city and state requirements in areas such as curriculum, student body diversity, and the selection, hiring, and retention of teachers. They are also, like other schools, subject to state and local budget allocations and the priorities established for those allocations.

ARE MAGNET SCHOOLS BETTER THAN REGULAR, ZONED SCHOOLS?

The answer is not clear-cut. Two reports, both using 1983 data on 45 magnets in 15 urban districts, came up with different emphases. Blank (1990) stressed the educational achievement of magnets, reporting that 80 percent of the magnet schools had average reading and math achievement scores above their district average.

Dentler (1990a), conversely, concluded that while a few magnets were exceptionally good, "

- * 26 of the 45 magnets equaled or exceeded the mean reading scores for their districts, 14 exceeded the district average by 10 or more points, and 7 exceeded it by at least 30 points. However, the reading score of 6 magnets was below average.

- * Most magnets equaled or exceeded district averages in math, 13 of them by 10 points or more, and 6 by at least 30 points. However, seven fell below average in mathematics.

Hill, Foster, & Gendler's 1990 study of inner-city public and Catholic schools included three magnet ("focus") schools. The Catholic schools included New York's Partnership Program, which pays tuition for public students to attend inner-city Catholic high schools. Most of the students selected for the Partnership Program were African American or Puerto Rican, from single-parent welfare homes, and had poor academic records.

Hill et al. (1990) found that the focus and the Catholic schools far exceeded the "zoned" schools in graduation rates; percentages of students completing an academically demanding college prep course; percentages of students taking the SAT; and SAT scores.

Some magnets have exceptionally good records with inner-city student populations. Mitchell, Russell, & Benson (1989) selected nine exemplary magnets and found attendance rates higher and dropout rates lower than at most schools in their districts. In Chicago, where the high school dropout rate is 45 percent, the rate at the School for Agricultural Sciences -- 89 percent African American and Hispanic -- is less than 2 percent. The Manhattan Center for Science and Math, where 98 percent of its students are African American or Hispanic and over three-fourths are from low-income families, the dropout rate is under 2 percent, and 97 percent of its graduates enroll in college (1989).

ISSUES FOR POLICYMAKERS

The very success of magnet schools raises a central question of whether their success comes at the expense of nonmagnets.

Student creaming. Are magnets successful, for example, because they draw the best students from other schools? Magnets do draw to their halls -- and away from nonmagnets -- better, more highly motivated students.

But it is equally evident that pedagogical and administrative features of magnets produce powerful effects in and of themselves. Their focus, organizational cohesiveness, strong leadership by the principal, and relative freedom from central office rules and procedures are highly correlated with improved achievement scores.

Furthermore, the use of selective admissions criteria varies. According to 1983 data cited by Dentler (1990b), nearly two-thirds of the magnets were selective in their admission of students on criteria other than race or ethnicity. More recently, Blank (1990) found that only 15 percent of magnets used "highly selective" criteria such as test scores. But even when a magnet school has no such admissions criteria,

most of the students are select: with very rare exceptions, students with failing grades, or records of bad behavior or truancy, do not get selected in magnets.

However, Dentler's 1983 data found that half of the magnets with the highest achievement scores were not at all selective (Dentler, 1990a). Hill et al. found considerable success at magnets and Catholic schools even when the students had previous poor academic records, and the better results were not caused by differences in curricula, teacher traits, or student backgrounds. The key factors were a clearly defined purpose and the organizational cohesion and flexibility to pursue that purpose.

Resource hogging. Another concern is whether magnets draw scarce resources away from other schools. They cost more, particularly high schools, and some require heavy capital outlays. While Mitchell et al. (1989) found the difference in operating and recurring costs between magnets and nonmagnets "relatively small," McDonnell said that, "Magnets cost from 10 to 12 percent more than traditional schools" (1989, p. 2). But Chabotar (1988, cited in Dentler, 1990a) found that the cost differentials decline over time as start-up costs are absorbed. Still, some magnets provide quality education even when they face the same resource problems as nonmagnets.

Elitism. A broader issue centers around a key strength of magnets -- their ability to focus on student outcomes and on a unique mission. Nonmagnets have diffuse missions, a great variety of programs, and "are controlled by piecemeal demands, rules, claimed entitlements, and contractual provisions" (Hill et al., 1990, p. 38). However, they have diffuse missions and a variety of programs because the many constituencies with a stake in public schooling demand them. These demands are legitimate, and a large, unanswered question is whether magnets succeed because the regular public schools are left with the burden of responding to these contingencies.

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This Digest was developed by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education with funding from the Office of Budget and Evaluation Service and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement. U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. RI88062013. The opinions expressed in this Digest do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.

ED344342 Jun 92 Controlled Choice: An Alternative School Choice Plan. ERIC Digest, Number 70.
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School choice is one of the hottest topics in education. Not only does it have the attention of educators, it has the endorsement of President Bush and a large following of parents. Books are being written, arguments waged, and bills drafted. There is a growing feeling that if parents can choose which schools their children attend, education will improve.

However, there are groups urging caution. Some are concerned that issues of equity will be passed over in the push for school choice, causing at-risk students to fall further behind. Because of these concerns, choice plans that focus on equity have begun to receive national attention. Foremost among these is controlled choice, which attempts to create equitable education in a district by providing choice while simultaneously preserving racial and ethnic balance.

WHAT IS CONTROLLED CHOICE?

Controlled choice differs from other choice plans, such as open enrollment and voucher models, in that it does not rely on market competition between schools to initiate school improvement (Chubb and Moe 1990). As one of the original designers of controlled choice has written, the market analogy "is inappropriate in an educational situation" because it ignores the social aspect of education by promoting strong schools rather than nurturing weak ones (Willie 1990/91).

Controlled choice attempts to provide choice while maintaining ethnic and racial integration. Controlled choice plans do away with neighborhood attendance districts, create zones, and allow families to choose within their zone, provided that admitting students to their school of choice does not upset the racial and ethnic balance at that school (Alves and Willie 1990).

A few cities have used controlled choice since the 1970s, but most programs are patterned after a plan that was first implemented in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1981. Designed by Michael Alves and Charles Willie, the Cambridge plan has evolved into a system where new families visit a central registration area, choose four schools, and rank them in order of preference. The district reviews the lists and tries to assign students to their choices, but it also tries to ensure that no school exceeds its capacity and all schools reflect the district's racial and ethnic composition (Tan 1990). Not all students receive their first preference, but a balance is struck between allowing parents and students some choice while ensuring that schools remain integrated, with the overall intent of school improvement (Yanofsky and Young 1992).

WHAT OTHER CITIES HAVE CONTROLLED CHOICE PLANS?

Controlled choice in general and the Cambridge plan in particular have stirred up both local and national interest. In Massachusetts, several cities have adopted it, most notably Boston (Alves and Willie 1990). Alves and Willie also have created or are creating plans for several other cities, including Milwaukee, Seattle, San Jose, Little Rock, Hartford, and Rockville, Maryland (Alves, personal communication; Willie 1990/91). A handful of cities, including White Plains, New York (Yanofsky and Young), have independently adopted it.

Most of these districts adopted controlled choice in response to changing demographics and previous desegregation plans that did not work. In Cambridge, it was a response to a failed magnet school program (Tan); in Boston, it followed fifteen years of divisive busing (Alves and Willie); in White Plains, it replaced a plan that was over twenty years old (Yanofsky and Young).

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF CONTROLLED CHOICE?

Although most districts adopt a controlled-choice plan primarily as a means of achieving desegregation, it does more than just desegregate. The following elements, found in most plans, are what make controlled choice more than just a desegregation system.

Replication of Successful Programs. Controlled choice reorganizes residential attendance areas into zones that may not be equal in quality of education when they are created. To ensure that no student has fewer or less desirable choices than others, any program that is successful in one zone must be replicated in all the other zones (Alves and Willie). In smaller cities, this is not a problem (Yanofsky and Young), but in large urban areas such as Boston and Seattle, replication is difficult, yet vital to establishing educational equity (Glenn 1990-91).

Parent Information Centers. The success of any choice plan can hinge on whether parents have the information they need to make educated choices. Many districts follow the example of Cambridge, which has a center that issues all publications in multiple languages, offers tours, makes phone calls to homes, and compiles data on each school (Tan). These centers help parents research their choices and have the additional benefit of encouraging parent involvement (Yanofsky and Young).

School Improvement. In contrast to the competition between schools that a voucher plan might generate, controlled-choice districts assist low-performing and unpopular schools in their efforts to improve. In Boston, the district urges unsuccessful schools to improve by offering them funds and granting them more flexibility in their restructuring attempts (Glenn).

Fair Assignment Criteria. Although controlled-choice districts cannot assign all students to their first-choice schools, districts try to avoid subjective and unfair assignments by establishing clear assignment criteria. This process is often as simple as prioritizing factors such as whether a family has other children in the chosen school, what a student's racial/ethnic background is, where a family lives, and when the application was turned in (Yanofsky and Young).

HOW MUCH CHOICE DOES CONTROLLED CHOICE OFFER?

The primary controversy regarding controlled choice concerns whether it is still choice if it is controlled. Since no controlled-choice district can send every student to his or her first choice, the number of students getting their schools of choice versus the number bused to an undesirable school is a point of contention.

Most controlled-choice districts assign about 85 percent of students to one of their first two choices (75 percent first, 10 percent second) (Alves, personal communication) and 90 percent to one of their choices (Glenn), leaving about 10 percent attending schools they did not choose.

Some argue that a certain amount of forced busing is a tradeoff, since controlled choice dramatically reduced the amount of forced busing in several districts. In the first year of controlled choice in Boston, for example, the number of students bused forcibly dropped by 60 percent (Alves, personal communication).

However, most critics of controlled choice agree with Thernstrom (1991), who argues that "there is too little choice in controlled choice" and that any and all "involuntary assignments are indefensible."

DOES THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IMPROVE WITH CONTROLLED CHOICE?

The other major issue is whether controlled-choice plans actually improve schools. In the words of Chubb and Moe, the Cambridge plan "does not go far enough," in that all choices and changes "remain firmly under the control of all the usual democratic institutions." A step has been taken in the right direction, they argue, but the full benefits of choice will not be realized until districts remove all controls and force schools to compete against one another.

Thernstrom asserts that parent centers provide districts with a means to manipulate choices by making unpopular, low-quality schools appear attractive. These types of controls, she contends, negate improvement efforts because they provide schools with students and money without forcing them to improve.

Largely because most controlled-choice plans are so new, the jury is still out on how much improvement controlled choice has stimulated in schools. Many districts are still working on effective improvement plans, and, in the case of Boston, which adopted controlled choice in 1989, "it is clear that there is nothing simple or automatic about harnessing choice to school improvement" (Glenn).

Cambridge provides the most comprehensive data regarding the relationship between controlled choice and school improvement. In the first years of controlled choice there, when the student mixtures in Cambridge schools were altered, dramatic changes occurred in test scores. For example, after four years at the elementary school that used to have the highest achievement, the number of students who passed the district tests had dropped by 6 percent from first-year levels. However, the previously worst School had improved by 28 percent, and the district as a whole had passed 14 percent more students. Since then, Cambridge students have performed below the state average but better than students in similar districts, and their scores have continued to rise (Tan). This seems to indicate that, at least in Cambridge, controlled choice has been improving educational quality.

On the national level, however, controlled choice has yet to prove itself. As Chubb and Moe imply, perhaps it is a stepping stone to a better system. Nonetheless, for the time being at least, controlled choice is a reasonable alternative for districts concerned with establishing educational equity within the context of school choice.

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ED377271 Nov 94 Selecting the Focus of a Focus School. ERIC/CUE Digest Number 102.
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THIS DIGEST WAS CREATED BY ERIC, THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ERIC, CONTACT ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC

Schools with a theme and schools targeted for particular students--both components of the focus school genre--have long been a part of the Nation's education system. In 1990, this concept of focus schools received a strong boost from a RAND Corporation study suggesting that special purpose schools would probably be preferable to comprehensive high school for most students in New York City (Hill, Foster, & Gendler, 1990). The study calls such schools "high schools with character"--those that have a clear, coherent commitment to character, as well as academic development; feature a core of shared learnings; emphasize the reciprocal responsibilities of the school's students and adults; and stress achievement.

Lately, a number of school districts, especially in urban areas, have been establishing focus schools, and a recent study suggests that 44 percent of the Nation's multi-school districts now have such schools (Steel & Levine, 1994). The ability of the school's focus to both attract students and staff and provide a framework for an effective education program is key to the success of such schools. Therefore, this digest discusses the issues involved in selecting an appropriate focus.

ISSUES OF PRINCIPLE

EQUITY ISSUES

Given the national commitment to equity, a school's focus should not segregate students along racial, ethnic, religious, gender, or socioeconomic class lines. To wit, schools designed to attract the gifted and talented, which admit only the ablest or best performing students, have met with increasing criticism. There are various ways to prevent the exclusion of disadvantaged and/or low-performing students from focus or theme schools, however. Minnesota's school choice law prohibits admissions requirements based on past academic performance or behavior. In Montclair, New Jersey, programs labelled "gifted and talented" exist, but any family wishing to enroll its children in them may do so--on the assumption that all children have talents. Another approach is New York City's, where a quarter of the seats in semi-selective high schools are saved for students admitted by lottery, even though they fail to meet admission requirements.

Focus schools designed to serve a particular disadvantaged minority are sometimes, but not always, considered a different matter. An early alternative school for Hispanic youngsters, Casa de la Raza in Berkeley, posed problems related to both the Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Appleton, 1973). Schools targeted explicitly for African American males, and excluding all others, have also been challenged in the courts (Jones, 1991). More recently, however, the Legacy School for Integrated Studies, one of New York's 34 new small high schools, seems to have met with no resistance, because, while it targets African American children and the poor, it does not exclude others.

Schools for marginal students, or programs targeted for dropout prone youngsters, also raise concerns. One is whether grouping students according to their alleged deficiencies is a form of tracking, since tracking tends to segregate and compound the problems of already disadvantaged students (Oakes, 1985).

EFFECTIVENESS

A focus should enhance a school's academic effectiveness as well as promote equity. Thus, it should attract students and staff who share an interest in a specific instructional program. Focus school advocates suggest that student interests and orientations, and family priorities, may offer far more practical guidance for developing programs and grouping students than do ability levels.

There is no longer reason to believe that what average, or even poor, students need instructionally is very different from what the ablest need. For instance, Resnick (1987) emphasizes that all of learning should be cooperative, active, contextualized, and concretized--features important for teaching at-risk students (Wehlage et al., 1989). Moreover, at least some educators specializing in services for the gifted have noted their similarity to those of the alternative schools promoted as a model for the restructuring of all schools. Finally, there is little reason to believe that just because one youngster is as bright as another that the two hold any interests in common. Thus, shared interest in either drama, technology, or democratic living may well drive an effective curriculum for a group of students regardless of their diverse abilities.

ISSUES OF ORGANIZATION

CURRICULUM

One popular type of focus is a curricular theme. According to a recent study (Steel & Levine, 1994), 38 percent of the Nation's magnet programs emphasize course content, with math-science-engineering, computer science, humanities, and multicultural studies the most frequent choices, although many secondary school magnets have a career-vocational theme.

A theme must be of sufficient breadth to articulate a full school program: course content and selection, pedagogy, activities, scheduling, and even school organization. The more school components the theme can guide and suffuse, the greater the coherence it will supply. Use of a theme in a magnet school ranges from simply providing elective courses in the theme area to infusing the entire educational program with content related to the theme to give it overall coherence (Blank et al., 1983). Many magnet schools choose the former approach, but studies critical of the fragmentation of the curriculum suggest that such schools may not offer much of an advantage (Sizer, 1984).

INSTRUCTION

By contrast, magnet and other schools selecting a pedagogical or instructional focus may have an advantage with regard to cohesion, since a particular instructional approach to teaching can more readily be brought to bear across the curriculum than can a theme based on content.

Some alternative schools, such as City-As-School and Walkabout or Challenge education, have an instructional orientation. This focus is also receiving increasing attention in some of the high school programs associated with the Coalition of Essential Schools. At Central Park East Secondary School in Manhattan, for instance, the theme is the cultivation of five "Habits of Mind," which are five core questions to be posed about all new content introduced (Henderson & Meier, n.d.). The focus of the Urban Academy, another member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, is the inquiry method (Raywid, 1994).

While content themes may have greater salience for students, school traits resulting from instructional foci, such as interesting classes and good treatment of students, are also valuable. One study of career magnet schools attributes the differential effects of such programs to the extent to which they develop, and students pursue, the announced theme (Crain, Heebner, & Si, 1992). John Goodlad, on the other hand, concluded that it is not the curriculum of a school that determines the way students and even staff respond to it; instead, response is determined by the way their lives are daily played out there (1983).

ORIENTATION

This leads to a third type of focus: an orientation or worldview. The "free" schools of the '60s, the "open" schools of the '60s and '70s, and the "traditional" or "fundamental" schools of the '70s and '80s are representative. These focus schools take a particular approach to instruction, but also recommend a fairly distinct set of educational goals and projects a clear character ideal or model, as well as a recognizable outlook on life and its purpose. Each is likely to attract a like-minded constituency. A shared set of assumptions and values, and acceptance of the resulting practices, can bring coherence to

the school's program and motivate students to apply themselves to it.

CONCLUSION

A theme or focus must possess logical coherence. Themes constructed on an additive basis to allow pursuit of pet projects cannot do this. A school with a theme consisting of an arts project, grandparents reading to youngsters, and field trips reflects a malady identified as "projectitis" (Hill & Bonan, 1991). Because the projects are disparate and unconnected, the school's overall program does not cohere. It also cannot attract a group of like-minded school constituents, only an assemblage strongly interested in one or two items on the projects list.

An effective theme or focus should have transformative power--which is not always so much a function of the theme's quality as of the seriousness with which it is taken. This can happen only if the traditional school model is modified considerably. It is not just a matter of reforming one or two components, even such central ones as curriculum and/or pedagogy. Restructuring involves both fundamental and pervasive change in school organization: redefining rules, roles, relationships, and responsibilities, along with such structural components as schedules, administrative units, and governance--and, or course, changes in content and presentation. A school that fulfills the promise of the focus school concept is also a restructured school or it has failed to deliver.

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This digest is based on a monograph, Focus Schools: A Genre to Consider, by Mary Anne Raywid, published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. It is available from the Clearinghouse for \$10.00, postage and handling included.

This Digest was developed by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. RR93002016. The opinions expressed in this Digest do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.

ED293225 88 Magnet Schools. ERIC Digest Series Number EA 26.

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THIS DIGEST WAS CREATED BY ERIC, THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER. FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT ERIC, CONTACT ACCESS ERIC 1-800-LET-ERIC

TEXT: The demands of a rapidly changing society and increasing pressure for desegregation (coupled with a rise in absenteeism, dropout rates, and academic failure in traditional schools) have led to the creation of over 1,000 magnet schools in urban school districts across the country. In order to facilitate the transition to a multiracial community and meet the prevailing desire for academic excellence, magnets have adopted innovative educational practices as an enticement for voluntary integration.

WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT THE POLICY AND OBJECTIVES OF MAGNET SCHOOLS?

Magnets meet racial quotas through voluntary enrollment and open access beyond established attendance zones. They emphasize a special curriculum or educational structure. Magnets attract students and parents by creating supportive, personal environments while placing high expectations on student potential and progress.

Parents, students, and community members assess the needs of their school district and design a specific magnet program to serve these needs. Magnets, which are set up primarily to meet federal requirements for desegregation, are also proving to be successful in serving the specific interests and abilities of a diverse student population.

WHAT ARE SOME METHODS MAGNET SCHOOLS USE TO MEET THEIR OBJECTIVES?

To move from desegregation to integration, magnet schools often adopt cooperative learning activities, assign multiracial seating, and encourage small group discussion. Extracurricular activities and special projects provide opportunities for students to share diverse skills, and multicultural lessons are regularly introduced into the curriculum. With an emphasis on mutual respect and appreciation and examples of positive interracial relations set by the staff, a general atmosphere of trust and goodwill is nurtured among all members of the school community.

Student evaluations are based on progress and effort as well as achievement, and may be written as comments rather than grades, thus diffusing competition, lessening the tendency to stereotype or create hierarchies among students, and avoiding the sense of failure those in the bottom half of traditional grading systems tend to feel. Instead, students are judged by their capacity to better their last performance and fulfill their own preestablished goals.

From individually guided education to back-to-basics techniques, magnets appeal to student interest across race, age, class, and achievement levels by offering challenging courses that focus on special themes, and by using approaches that match individual cognitive skills. Teachers have the opportunity to circulate in classes and attend to the specific learning needs of each student. Generally small and flexible, magnets change curriculum to meet student needs and depend on a resourceful, dedicated staff and supportive community.

HOW ARE MAGNET SCHOOLS MAKING AN IMPACT?

Studies show that magnets improve minority achievement without hurting white achievement. Denis Doyle and Marsha Levine (1984) report that student attendance and participation are higher in magnet schools, as are teacher satisfaction and parental control. Relations between diverse groups are generally harmonious. These results allow magnet schools to challenge the assumption that standardization is the most equitable system. Magnets serve as pilots for effective educational change.

WHAT ARE THE LIABILITIES OF MAGNET SCHOOLS?

WHAT ARE THE LIABILITIES OF MAGNET SCHOOLS?

Magnets have drawn criticism for several reasons. Mary Haywood Metz (1988) observes that beneath the American concept of standardized education lies the belief that public schools serve as a testing ground for talent and ability, where the best necessarily rise to the top regardless of class, race, or sex. In fact, although materials and lessons may match, subtle forces such as atmosphere, expectation, and cultural differences play a major role in the success or failure rate among schools. Thus, more privileged families can choose to live near "better" schools. Magnets, by offering attractive alternatives and extending the privilege of choice to disadvantaged populations, draw fire as elitist institutions that challenge the myth of fairness in public school standardization.

Another charge is that of tokenism. Some claim that magnets' selection processes (which vary among districts) draw only the best students and teachers. Consequently, magnets, with the veneer of accomplishing desegregation, actually leave most minority students worse off than before, offering the district an excuse not to implement more fundamental changes.

Problems also arise when teachers are nonvoluntary participants who must radically alter their style to suit the program. To establish and maintain magnet objectives, principals often need to play a stronger than usual role in shaping policy, a dynamic which can lead to teacher resentment and upset the crucial positive character of these programs. Because enrollment is voluntary and selective, magnets have also been accused of paying less heed than other schools to the suggestions of parents and students.

HOW CAN MAGNETS MEET THEIR SPECIFIC CHALLENGES?

Magnets must appear attractive but not elitist by appealing to interest rather than ability. They must appear diverse but not second-rate by providing sound criteria and objectives. They must develop in students both the ability to work cooperatively with persons of different backgrounds and skills and the ability to take responsibility for their own progress in learning. Magnets must respond to constituent needs--welcoming continual parent, community, teacher, and student input in design and direction--and make special efforts to encourage participation by the most marginalized and disadvantaged populations.

Magnet schools' innovative style should be guided, Metz (1986) advises, by leadership that can be strong without disempowering its staff. To remain viable, magnets must not be seen as temporary or experimental, but must participate in a mutually beneficial relationship with the regular schools. They must locate in neutral neighborhoods and avoid situations that indirectly discriminate (by causing, for example, black students to bus farther than whites). To avoid tokenism, George Tsapatsaris (1985) recommends that an array of magnets should be established until all children have the real option to attend schools of their choice. Furthermore, consistent long-term evaluation should be implemented to provide feedback on the effectiveness and future direction of each program.

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This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under OERI contract. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or the Department of Education.

Results and Future Prospects Of State Efforts to Increase Choice Among Schools

SAM ADAMS had dropped out of high school. After years of turmoil, Sam's parents had separated. His high school grades dropped during the period of family difficulty, and he fell behind. His high school of more than 2,000 students seemed impersonal; finally, he just left.

But then the state Sam lived in decided to permit high school students to enroll in community colleges, universities, and vocational/technical schools. After talking with his mother, Sam decided to attend a state university. He earned straight A's in his first semester and continued to make excellent grades. Sam says that the Minnesota Postsecondary Options Program "turned my life around and helped me get going in the right direction."

Sue Johnson seriously considered leaving teaching. She felt that administrators treated her like a child. Most of her friends looked down on teaching as a profession. Sue could earn more in other jobs, but she loved working with children. One August, Sue went to an education conference where she learned that her state board of education would grant variances from most regulations, permitting school districts to create alternative programs as long as the district and the state agreed on an evaluation plan.

After the conference, Sue met with several other dissatisfied teachers and parents, and together they persuaded

During the next decade, says Mr. Nathan, support for expanding parental choice in education will continue to grow. He outlines the current status of this movement and looks to the future.

BY JOE NATHAN

their district to start a public alternative program for 500 students between the ages of 5 and 18. The inner-city school that was born of this effort won national recognition for its success with students of various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds and ability levels. Looking back, Sue says, "The opportunity to help create and teach in a distinctive alternative program kept me in education. I was encouraged to use my energy, skills, and talent, rather than having to tiptoe around administrators."

Ann Tisdale, a parent in Buffalo, New York, says:

I think the magnet school program as a whole in this city is the greatest thing that ever happened to us — seriously. The reason I say that is because we — and I have to speak here as a minority person — we were wondering whether other schools — the non-minority schools — were maybe getting more equipment or better teachers. And I have the feeling this might have been true. . . . As a result of desegregation and the magnet schools, parents here feel we have more control over what's going to happen to our children. . . . For people like myself, who have choices and have made choices, we not only feel better

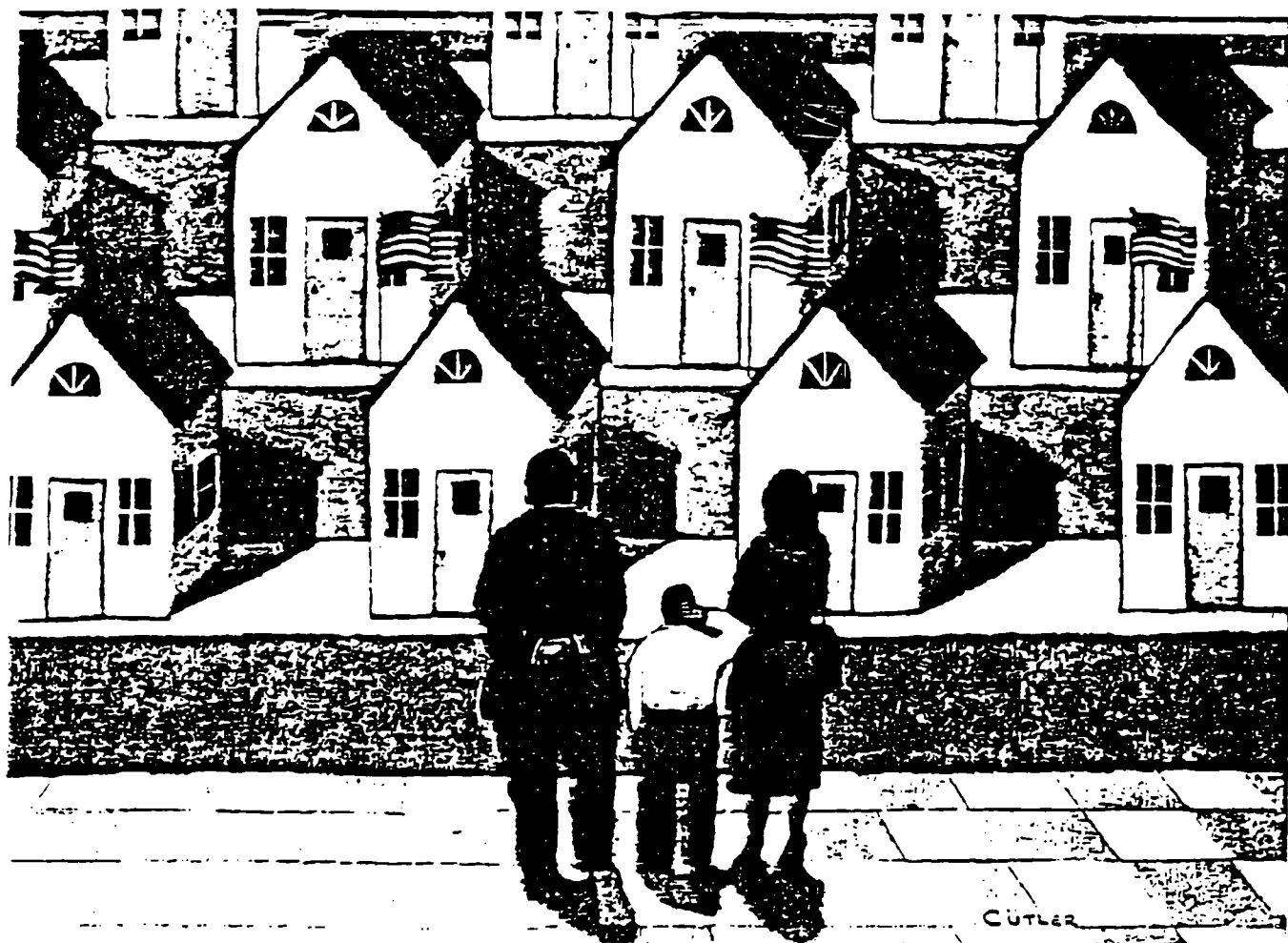
about the system because we have choice but because we think the quality of education has improved greatly — even in the non-magnet schools, because everyone is trying to provide programs that will make schools attractive.²

Carmen Holmes believes that, if all schools in Buffalo had gone ahead with proposals to achieve racial integration by telling parents that they must send their children to a certain school, she would have blown up the bridges leading from one section of the city to others. Instead, policy makers decided to try to integrate the schools and to improve student achievement at the same time by developing "controlled choice magnet programs. Today about 30% of the students in Buffalo attend these magnet schools. Holmes works as an aide at one of the magnet programs. She reports that "what we've got here in Buffalo is something unique. What we've gotten out of it is friendship, and it goes citywide."³

JOE NATHAN (University of Minnesota/Twin Cities Chapter) is an educator and author who coordinated the National Governors' Association report, Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education. The research he describes in this article was supported by the McKnight Foundation, but the views expressed are his own.

THE AIMS OF EXPANDING CHOICE

Government action to expand parental choice among schools has become more than a hot topic for debate. During the



past few years, a number of states have found that providing choices among schools has helped to:

- reduce dropouts.
- increase student achievement and appreciation of learning.
- improve parental involvement and satisfaction.
- encourage racial and economic integration.
- provide extra challenge for students dissatisfied with the conventional program, and
- raise the morale of educators who were allowed to create distinctive programs from which families can choose.

These outcomes caused the National Governors' Association to endorse the goal of providing more choice among public schools in its 1986 report, *Time for Results*.⁴ The governors concluded that carefully designed public systems that encourage choice among alternatives are central to efforts to increase student achievement, reduce the number of school dropouts, and increase the authority of teachers.

At the state and federal levels, discussions of plans that allow parents some choice of the school their children will attend have been quite different. While the debate at the federal level has focused on the constitutionality and impact of providing tax funds to private and parochial schools, most policy makers at the state level have proposed more choice among public programs — in a few cases including private, nonsectarian programs.

At least 15 states have taken formal action to increase the range of schools from which families may select. Others are likely to follow. These states face different challenges and have used choice for somewhat different purposes. Thus no two state plans are identical.

State action varies within several categories: *schools*, *students*, *scope*, and *standards*. Most states have included only public schools in their choice programs, although a few help support private, nonsectarian programs. Most state plans involve only elementary and secondary schools; a few enable high

school students to take courses at post-secondary institutions.

No state initiatives on choice deal with all K-12 students. Instead, they affect students of a certain age or students with certain characteristics, such as dropouts or dissatisfied students.

State plans vary in their scope. Some expand choice within a school district; others allow choice across certain district lines. Some states allow school boards to determine which options are available; others permit families to send children to "out-of-district" schools as long as certain conditions are met.

Finally, states have established different standards. Some require all schools to use certain tests, teach specific courses, and use particular books. Others delegate more responsibility. A brief summary of state actions follows.

- *Alaska* permits students to attend high school in their town or village or to attend a state-operated residential high school in Sitka.

- *Arizona* permits high school juniors to take courses for high school credit at

community colleges or vocational/technical schools.

- *California* permits elementary students (K-6) to attend public schools in districts in which their parents live or work, as long as moving from district to district does not have a negative impact on desegregation. The state provides funds to help school districts establish alternative programs and offers funds to private, nonsectarian "educational clinics" that work directly with teenagers who have not succeeded in school.

- *Colorado* allows students who have not succeeded in their public high school to attend another district's program if the two participating boards of education agree.

- *Florida* permits high school students to take courses at community colleges. Tax funds pay instructors' salaries. During the 1985-86 academic year, about 6,600 Florida high school students participated (a little less than 2% of those who were eligible). As a group they earned a higher grade-point average than other students in the same courses. Of the 3,300 courses taught at community colleges, 423 were taught in the high schools.⁵

- *Iowa* permits families to appeal to the state board of education if they believe that their children are not receiving an appropriate education; if the state board agrees, it may order the local board to make additional arrangements, including paying tuition to a neighboring district. In the first test of this law, the state board ordered a district to pay tuition to an adjacent district for several students.

- *Louisiana* supports a public, residential school for math, science, and the arts. It is a highly competitive school and enrolls about 500 students from around the state.

- *Massachusetts* allocates funds to help school districts assess the need for, develop, and support different kinds of schools within a single school district, in order to increase student achievement, empower educators, and more effectively integrate schools. The state has also provided funds to enable minority students who live in cities to attend schools in suburban districts.

- *Missouri* helps fund the development of and transportation to magnet schools in order to increase integration between St. Louis and its suburbs.

- *Minnesota* permits high school juniors and seniors to take nonsectarian

courses in public and private colleges and universities and in public vocational/technical schools. Tax funds follow students, who may earn high school or postsecondary credits.

- *New York* helped fund the development of magnet programs in a number of cities, in which the programs help increase racial integration.

- *North Carolina* supports a school of science and mathematics, a public residential high school for about 400 of the state's most talented 11th- and 12th-graders.

- *Virginia* supports several regional magnet public schools designed to experiment with new ideas and offer challenge to gifted students and other students dissatisfied with programs in their districts.

- *Washington* provides direct financial support to eight educational clinics, which are private, nonsectarian programs that work directly with teenagers who have not succeeded in the public schools.

- *Wisconsin* helped support the development of magnet programs in Milwaukee, and the state "double funds" education for students whose movement between Milwaukee and its suburbs increases integration.

RESULTS

Several states have evaluated the impact of their efforts to empower educators and parents. Three of the most comprehensive evaluations were conducted in Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Washington.

Massachusetts. Massachusetts spent about \$7 million during each of the last five years to help school districts develop distinctive schools from which families may choose. Reports from the state's Bureau of Equal Educational Opportunity document the development and impact of these programs. The director of the bureau, Charles Glenn, concludes:

It has become clear that choice can do much to promote equity. It does so by creating conditions which encourage schools to become more effective, it does so by allowing schools to specialize and thus to meet the needs of some students very well rather than all students at a level of minimum adequacy, and it does so by increasing the influence of parents over the education of their children in a way which is largely conflict free.⁶

One of the most comprehensive programs in Massachusetts was developed in Cambridge, where all neighborhood K-8 schools were eliminated. Instead, the district created a "controlled choice" program in which all families choose among distinctive schools that parents and educators worked together to develop. Michael Alves, an official at the bureau, reports that overall student achievement improved during the last several years and that "the achievement gap between whites and minorities in Cambridge has been closing each year that the policy has been in effect." Alves believes that allowing parents to choose their children's schools has been a major reason that test scores in the district have improved.

"The biggest impact is on school choice," says Alves. "The policy appears to be stimulating positive educational environments, and it clearly reinforces the theory that socioeconomic mixing enhances school achievement," Alves says. He also notes that "schools that need improvement can be identified under the plan, because the choice process acts as a referendum in which parents judge the relative effectiveness of each school. The district administration sent a new principal and substantially revised the curriculum of one school which [had] received the fewest parents' requests for admission. After several years, the school ranked first among the city's 13 elementary schools on the citywide test of basic skills and began to attract a number of parents."

Minnesota. In June 1985 the Minnesota legislature passed the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act, which permits public high school juniors and seniors to enroll part- or full-time in colleges, universities, or vocational/technical schools. Tax funds follow students, so that if, for example, a youngster spends half of his or her time at a college and half in a high school, each institution receives approximately half of the state money to which that student is entitled. Postsecondary institutions may not charge any additional fees for tuition, supplies, or books. Money to provide transportation for students from low-income families is available. Students may earn credits toward high school graduation from their postsecondary courses, and, if they later enter the postsecondary institution where they earned the credits, those credits are again counted toward graduation.

During its first year of operation, 3,000 students participated in the program. This figure represented 1.7% of all juniors and 4.7% of all seniors in the state. A random survey of 1,000 program participants found that:

- about 6% of the students participating had previously dropped out of high school. Thus the program brought back some students who had left high school without a diploma.

- 95% of the students participating were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the program. Only 1% of the participants were "dissatisfied."

- 90% of the participants said that they learned more by participating in this program than if they had taken only high school courses.

- about two-thirds of the participants reported that their high school grades were mostly B's (47.7%), C's (14.3%), or D's (1.8%). Thirty-six percent said that their grades were mostly A's. Thus most of the participants were not the highest-performing students in their high schools.

- 5% of participants were black, Hispanic, or native American, almost exactly matching the representation of these groups in the overall statewide public school junior senior student body.

- A majority of the students earned either A's or B's at the postsecondary institutions.

- 86% of the parents involved said their youngsters studied more for the postsecondary courses than for high school courses.

The program appears to benefit those who decide to take all their courses at the high school, as well as those who enroll in a postsecondary institution. A number of high schools responded to the new program by improving their course offerings. Many schools increased the number of Advanced Placement courses available, while others developed new, cooperative relationships with postsecondary institutions.

Not all educators support the program. The Minnesota Federation of Teachers has challenged the program because students may take nonsectarian courses at private, as well as public, college and universities. The suit is still pending.

Some educators have criticized the program because it takes money from their districts, or because they think some students and their families make unwise decisions. However, the finan-

cial impact of student movement on most districts is minor: one-tenth of 1% of districts' total operating budgets was transferred to postsecondary institutions.⁴ In 1986 the legislature modified the law so that students do not receive postsecondary credit (without paying for it) unless they actually enter the institution after graduation, and the law also required parents of participating students to sign an agreement with the high school recognizing that students might not graduate on time if they failed or withdrew from postsecondary courses.

It is not possible to be so precise about the quality of student decision making. But high school students overwhelmingly selected academic courses, earned grades at several institutions that were higher than the freshman class average, and reported that they studied harder than they had for high school courses. This suggests that the vast majority of participants took the opportunity seriously.

Washington. Since 1978 Washington has helped support "educational clinics" that work with students who have not succeeded in their high schools. The number of clinics has grown from two to eight, located around the state. All teachers in the clinics must be certified. (In fact, staff members at several of the clinics are former public school teachers, disgusted with the bureaucracy, who feel they are now freer to use their talent, creativity, and skills.) Six of the eight clinics are operated by nonprofit groups, such as antipoverty agencies and an Indian tribe; two of the clinics are operated on a for-profit basis. The clinics have not been popular with everyone; some public school educators believe that

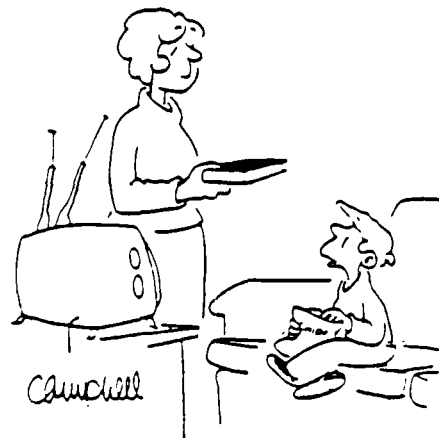
the state should give the money to their districts to establish alternative schools, rather than allocate it to programs operated by organizations in the private sector.

Washington's Legislative Budget Committee has evaluated the clinics several times. In one evaluation, the clinics were compared with public alternative schools: "Each type of approach appears to be valid and effective in its own way. Furthermore, each program produces outcomes which the Legislature has recognized as legitimate and desirable. On the basis of costs, outcomes, and educational gains, the clinics make a good showing."⁵

Two years later, another evaluation found that the clinics had helped students gain academic and social skills, as well as the ability to obtain and keep a job. The 1985 report noted, "While there is some dropout, educational clinics appear to have a lasting positive effect on a significant percentage of their students."⁶

RESTRUCTURING OF SCHOOLS

To increase academic achievement while attracting and retaining excellent teachers, several recent reports have urged the development of restructured or reorganized schools.¹¹ The nation's governors and the major teacher organizations are recommending this step, and it is likely to be considered carefully. Although it is used frequently, the term *restructured* has not been completely defined. It seems to mean a school in which educators have more authority to make decisions about how the institution operates and how funds allocated to it are



"It's summer, Mother. I don't read during the off season."

spent. A restructured school might employ different instructional approaches and innovative staffing patterns.

Several authorities who have recommended restructured schools strongly endorse choice as a necessary component. Linda Darling-Hammond of the Rand Corporation recently noted that "if we are to provide considerable autonomy to teachers, we must permit families to select among the public schools which are developed. Otherwise there will be

The trend toward more support among policy makers for expanding parental choice in education will grow.

a strong push back toward the standardization which is so deadening."¹²

Another strong supporter of empowering teachers and families is TheodoreSizer of Brown University. Sizer points to New York City's District 4, located in Spanish Harlem, as an outstanding example of empowering educators, who then create distinctive programs from which families may choose.¹³ Sizer calls the movement for more choice among public schools "highly promising."¹⁴ These views are supported by research showing that educators who are allowed to create nontraditional schools as part of choice plans have higher morale than other educators.¹⁴

FEATURES OF A DESIRABLE CHOICE PLAN

Not all plans to expand choice have the same impact. Nearly all policy makers would like to reduce the number of dropouts, increase overall student achievement, and provide more opportunities for educators to use their skills, talents, and creativity. They may also

wish to offer more challenge for students and encourage more positive contact between students of different racial and economic groups. A carefully designed public choice plan is one of the most efficient and effective ways to help achieve these goals. However, the details are critical. Policy makers who wish to accomplish the goals mentioned above should insist that:

- a list of skills and knowledge that all students are expected to develop is created. All students must know certain things to function successfully in a democratic society, and educators must know what is expected of them.

- transportation is provided, especially for children from low-income families. If transportation is not made available, opportunities for these youngsters to participate will not truly expand.

- student assignments and transfer policies are fair, widely understood, and legally sound. Desegregation must be a consideration, which means that unlimited choice generally will not be possible in metropolitan areas. Selection should not be on a first-come, first-served basis, which favors the most informed, aggressive families.

- an effective system of parent information and counseling is established.

- families are allowed to enroll their children in schools in neighboring districts that have room as long as this movement does not harm desegregation efforts. School boards in districts in which families reside should not have the power to veto this movement.

- in states with small, rural districts, a financial cushion is available for such districts during the program's first several years. For a limited time, these districts would continue to receive partial state funding for any net loss of students. This idea, first proposed by the Minnesota Parent/Teacher Association, was endorsed by the nation's governors, who agreed that it would help small districts decide how to respond to the new policy while protecting students who decided to remain in the district.

- states should move to equalize funding among districts and reduce reliance on local property taxes.

- planning, inservice training, and program development funds should be available to teachers to allow them to create and improve programs in response to state guidelines and parent priorities.

- surveys of parent priorities and assessment of what the system is provid-

ing are used to help develop program and monitor progress.

- provisions exist for continuing oversight and correction, so that choice does not produce unintended problems.

THE POLITICS OF EXPANDING CHOICE

Where will the push come from for more choice among schools? Experience in several states suggests that the impetus will come from a coalition of groups, with innovative educators joining community activists, business people, and parents. The experience in Minnesota is an example of one combination of groups that supported or opposed more parental choice among public schools.

In January 1985 Minnesota Gov. Rudy Perpich proposed a significant expansion of choice among public schools, along with extra funds to help all districts improve their programs, a reduction in state mandates, and a larger role for the state in funding education (with decreased reliance on local property taxes to fund schools). Perpich suggested that, beginning in September 1986, families of 11th- and 12th-graders be allowed to send their children to public schools outside the district in which they lived, as long as the receiving district had room and the movement of students did not harm desegregation efforts. Beginning in September 1988, students in all grades of the public schools would have the same opportunities. Perpich also recommended that high school juniors and seniors be allowed to attend public colleges, universities, and vocational/technical schools.

The ensuing debate on this issue split political parties and divided education groups. The governor's proposals were supported by the League of Women Voters, the Minnesota Parent/Teacher Association, the Minnesota Business Partnership, the Directors of the Community Action Programs (antipoverty agencies), and several other education reform groups, as well as by both Minnesota principals' associations. The proposals were vigorously opposed by the Minnesota Education Association, the Minnesota Federation of Teachers, the Minnesota School Boards Association, and the Minnesota Association of School Administrators.

Democrats and Republicans found themselves on both sides of the issue, with proponents led by House Majority

¹²See Deborah Meier's article, "Central Park East: An Alternative Story," page 753 of this issue.

Leader Connie Levi (a Republican) and the chairman of the Senate Education Aids Subcommittee, Tom Nelson (a Democrat). After six months of intense debate, the legislature agreed to a portion of the governor's program (the Postsecondary Options Program described above). Tim Mazzoni, a professor at the University of Minnesota, says that this educational policy debate attracted more public attention than any other in the last 20 years. Other commentators have covered the political struggle in Minnesota more extensively than I have space for here.¹⁶

Attempts by several education groups to eliminate or significantly alter the law were defeated in the 1986 legislative session. A few modifications were made, however. Early in 1987 the governor brought together a discussion group that included representatives of major education, business, and community groups; this group agreed to a broad program of reform, including continuation of the Postsecondary Options Program and an expansion of public school choice for students who have not succeeded in their current schools. The legislature is reviewing these proposals.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

It is easy to make some predictions about the next decade; other things are more difficult to foresee. Three trends are clear: 1) policy makers will show more interest in expanding choice among public schools; 2) regardless of what legislatures do, educational options will increase for affluent families; and 3) part of the pressure for expanding options will come from parents, businesspeople, and others outside education. It is not clear what leadership and response professional educators will offer, or exactly what kind of public policy will be developed.

During the next decade, the trend toward more support among policy makers for expanding parental choice in education will continue to grow. Shortly after the National Governors' Association released its report endorsing more choice among public schools, governors in Indiana, Vermont, and Minnesota announced legislative recommendations that included some variation of increased choice. Private conversations I have had with legislative staff members in other states indicate that support for the idea of choice is growing.

There is a growing market for educational options among middle- and upper-income families.

Nor is this interest limited to state activity. The interest of the Reagan Administration in this issue is well known. But recently another voice has joined the national discussion. Former senator and now Presidential candidate Gary Hart, in a January 1987 speech describing his proposals to improve education, endorsed increasing choice among public schools:

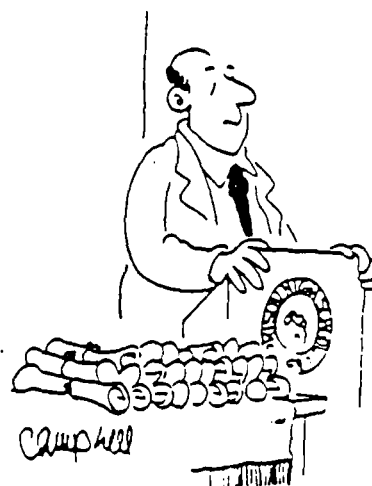
As individual schools gain more flexibility, parents should be given greater freedom to choose among different public schools. Greater diversity in educational philosophies and strategies — such as options for schools based on Montessori systems or those imposing more rigorous discipline — increases school quality, parental satisfaction, and student achievement.¹⁷

A second predictable trend involves options for affluent parents. "In a free society, choice *cannot* be eliminated, except for the poor," reported Charles Glenn of the Massachusetts Bureau of Equal Educational Opportunity.¹⁸ Between 1970 and 1985 the enrollment of K-8 private and parochial schools increased 6%, while public school enrollment declined 17%.¹⁹ There is a growing market for educational options — including private schools and remedial assistance — among middle- and upper-income families. Some of the parents who are choosing these options are public school teachers. One study cited by the National Governors' Association found that, in a number of cities, up to twice as many public school teachers sent their children to private and parochial schools as the general population.

Private remedial programs, such as the Sylvan Learning Centers Corporation, respond to parental concerns about their children's education. Founded by W. Berry Fowler, a former public school teacher, Sylvan operates nearly 300 centers around the country. The Sylvan Centers offer after-school assistance to students for \$20 to \$25 per hour. They employ experienced, fully certified teachers who earn as much as \$45,000 per year.²⁰ Parents who can pay will have many educational opportunities during the next decade.

How will public school educators respond to these pressures and concerns? So far the response from major national education organizations has ranged from mild support to strong opposition. Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, began his written testimony to the NGA Parent Involvement and Choice task force by saying, "I believe we in the teacher union movement ought to support the greatest possible choice among public schools by parents, students, and teachers."²¹ However, his oral testimony and subsequent comments at the NGA annual meeting were more cautious.

Mary Futrell, president of the National Education Association, showed considerable ambivalence in her written and oral testimony to the governors. Futrell strongly opposed any tax support for private schools and offered 11 criteria against which any program for expanding choice among public schools should be judged. The official NEA response to the final NGA report praised portions of



"You'll never forget your high school experience, though your grades indicate that you've tried. . . ."

the NGA report that cited these criteria (and adopted many of them).² Nevertheless, the NEA press release also expressed "concern" over and "disagreement" with portions of the report that called for more choice among public schools. The National School Boards Association pointed out that public schools already offer many choices and urged governors to let school boards decide what to offer to families.³

Some educators strongly support legislative policies that provide more opportunities for them to develop distinctive public schools from which families may choose. Perhaps some state and national organizations will begin to reflect this view. If so, expanding choice among public schools will proceed more rapidly — and more effectively.

Several polls show increased interest in the idea. The 1986 Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools included, for the first time, a question about choice among public schools: 68% of public school parents endorsed the idea.⁴

Some people worry that providing more choice among public schools will cause an exodus of the most talented students from some schools to other schools. But the Gallup poll found that, among parents who would consider moving their children to a different school if given a choice, more would move youngsters who were *not* doing well. This commonsense attitude is reflected in Minnesota's experience with the Postsecondary Options Program, in which most of the participants did not have outstanding high school records.

Take Dan Evans, for example. No one would have described Dan Evans as outstanding in his high school. One day, a teacher warned Dan to take off his hat (the school prohibited hats on males). Dan just smiled, and the teacher ordered him to remove it or he would knock it off. Dan refused; the teacher knocked the hat off Dan's head; Dan knocked the teacher to the ground. He was subsequently found guilty of assault, removed from the school, and told to select from among several others in the district.

Dan's family picked a public school with a different philosophy, one less concerned about the wearing of hats. Dan excelled in the new program, improving his attitude along with his reading, writing, and math skills. He eagerly joined tutoring and consumer-action pro-

grams in his new school. Dan helped solve a number of consumer problems as part of his work in one class, and he was selected to be one of several students interviewed and photographed for a newspaper article. Several months later Dan told one of his teachers, "I often thought that I would be in the newspaper, and I even thought that I might have my picture in the newspaper. But I never thought it would be for something good."⁵

Expanding choice, if done well, will enable some students like Dan to succeed who won't make it in conventional schools. Expanding choice among public schools, if done skillfully, will improve the achievement of average and already successful students. Expanding choice, if done correctly, will provide the kind of professional opportunities for creativity and decision making that many teachers and their leaders are requesting. People who have worked in these programs, and an increasing number of legislators and governors, know that it can happen. I hope that it will.

1. In these two anecdotes, the names of both the student and the teacher have been changed.

2. Evans Clinchy, "It's Just Like One Big Family," *Enquiry and Choice*, Winter 1986, pp. 77-78.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 69-77.

4. National Governors' Association, *Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education* (Washington, D.C.: NGA, 1986).

5. Frederick Ahterton, "Dual Credit Evaluation Summary," Florida Department of Education, Tallahassee, mimeo, 1987.

6. Charles Glenn, "Looking Back, Looking Ahead," in *Enquiry, Choice, and Effective Urban Education: A Focus on Schools* (Quincy, Mass.: Massachusetts Department of Education, April 1985), p. 10.

7. William Snider, "Massachusetts District Backs Plan to Integrate Its Students on Basis of Language, Not Race," *Education Week*, 11 February 1987, pp. 1, 15; and a phone interview with Michael Alves in February 1987.

8. Minnesota Department of Education, *Post-Secondary Enrollment Options Program, Final Report* (St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Education, January 1987).

9. Washington Legislative Budget Committee, *Report on Educational Clinics Program, Years 1980-82* (Olympia: Washington Legislative Budget Committee, March 1983).

10. Washington Legislative Budget Committee, *Report on Educational Clinics Program, Years 1982-84* (Olympia: Washington Legislative Budget Committee, August 1985).

11. Carnegie Corporation, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986); National Governors' Association, *Time for Results*, . . . American Federation of Teachers Task Force on the Future of Education, *The Revolution That Is Overdue* (Washington, D.C.,

American Federation of Teachers, 1986); and Mary Harwood Furell, "Soundness That Limits Learning," *Education Week*, 13 February 1987, p. 9 (advertisement).

12. Conversation with Linda Darling-Hammond, February 1987.

13. Conversation with Theodore Sizer, February 1987.

14. See Douglas Arnould and John Wier, "Metropolitan Milwaukee Secondary Schools and Programs," staff report to the Study Commission on the Quality of Education in the Metropolitan Milwaukee Public Schools, Milwaukee, Wis., mimeo, 1985; and Mary Anne Raywid, "Synthesis of Research on Schools of Choice," *Educational Leadership*, April 1984, pp. 71-73.

15. This list relies in great part on one developed by Charles Glenn in his book, *Practical Problems Involved in Implementing Choice Plans in Education* (Sacramento, Calif.: Sequoia Institute, forthcoming). Linda Darling-Hammond and Mary Anne Raywid also helped me develop this list, though they do not necessarily agree with all of my conclusions. See also Ann Bassian, Norman Fruchter, Marilyn Gidycz, Colin Greer, and Kenneth Hassins, *Choosing Equality: The Case for Democratic Schooling* (New York: The World Foundation, 1985), pp. 24-77.

16. For a fuller discussion of the Minnesota experience, see Tim Mazzoni, "The Public School Choice Issue in State Educational Politics," paper prepared for the annual research conference of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, mimeo, October 1986; Tim Mazzoni, "Slipping Through: How Postsecondary Options for Minnesota High School Students Were Legislated," *CURJ Reporter*, December 1986; Joyce E. Krupar and Daniel Lurie, "The Post-Secondary Enrollment Options Program," *Hamilton Journal of Public Law and Policy*, in press; and Mary Anne Raywid, "View from a Distance," *MESP: A Principal*, January 1987, pp. 17-19.

17. Gary Hart, "Education Speech," 23 January 1987.

18. Charles Glenn, "Pinning Choice to Work for Public Education," in *Family Choice and Public Schools: A Report to the State Board of Education* (Quincy, Mass.: Massachusetts Department of Education, January 1986).

19. Glenn, *Practical Problems*, . . . p. 5.

20. Jack McCurdy, *Choices in Schools: What's Ahead and What to Do* (Arlington, Va.: National School Public Relations Association, 1985), p. 35.

21. Albert Shanker, "Remarks to NGA Education Task Force on Parent Involvement and Choice," Washington, D.C., mimeo, 16 December 1985.

22. Mary Harwood Furell, "Statement of the National Education Association on Parent Involvement and Choice Before the National Governors' Association Task Force on Parental Involvement and Choice," Washington, D.C., mimeo, 16 December 1985; and "NEA Agrees with State Governors: It's Time to See Some Reform Results," NEA news release, 23 August 1986.

23. Alec M. Gallup, "13th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 1986, pp. 43-59.

24. For more information about this case, as well as examples of educators and parents who have struggled with attempts by school systems to discourage efforts to establish distinctive programs, see Joe Nathan, *Free to Teach: Achieving Equity and Excellence in Schools* (Minneapolis, Harper & Row/Winston Press, 1984).

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THE PUBLIC INTEREST (ISSN-0033-3557) is published quarterly by National Affairs, Inc., and appears in Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall issues. Its office of publication is located at 1112 16th Street, N.W., Suite 530, Washington, D.C. 20036. Subscription price: \$21 for one year, \$38 for two years, \$54 for three years. Add \$3 annually for Canadian and foreign subscriptions. Unsolicited material cannot be returned unless accompanied by sufficient return postage. Second-class postage is paid at Washington, D.C., and at additional mailing offices. ©1990 by National Affairs, Inc. Postmaster: Please send all changes of address to The Public Interest Subscription Office, Dept. P1, P.O. Box 3000, Donville, NJ 07834. Articles appearing in this journal are abstracted and indexed in P.A.J.S., Historical Abstracts, Social Science Index, and America: History, and Life, and are available on microfilm from University Microfilms International.

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of equity, fairness, and the like that is the root of the bureaucratic problem, in fact. For instance, the bilingual programs that an Hispanic lobby might want can't be implemented without rules, regulations, and bureaucratic control. (The example is mine; Chubb and Moe play it safe and stick to the abstract.) But bureaucratic control is inevitably at odds with the sort of school autonomy that effective education requires. Hence the only solution is to place education outside the democratic framework. The general public must be kept at bay, through the creation of a market system in which schools serve only those who choose to attend them.

What might such a system look like? The authors propose nothing less than "revolutionary reform"—the free use of public money by schools run by any interested organization or group. The schools could not of course be housed in fire traps; and they might have to guarantee some minimum graduation requirements. But no other bureaucratic controls would be imposed. These publicly funded schools would thus be free to peddle almost any educational wares, although those without takers would fold.

School choice is a genuine panacea, Chubb and Moe claim. "It has the capacity *all of itself* to bring about the kind of transformation that, for years, reformers have been seeking to engineer in myriad other ways [Chubb and Moe's emphasis]." Few readers will be convinced of that on the basis of the authors' analysis alone. The argument is too tidy. Chubb and Moe can be serenely confident that they (alone) have discovered the key to better schools only because they have chosen to ignore all the questions that blur the picture.

It's not clear, for instance, precisely why they believe that schools will improve in a market system. Parents will be making choices. Schools with too few customers won't survive. But are Chubb and Moe convinced that parents will gravitate toward the academically excellent schools and reject the flakes? They don't say, although the question is central to any discussion of choice.

Perhaps they seek only a more comfortable match between students and schools, but even that is not guaranteed. The parents, after all, will be making the choices, and what's comfortable for them may not sit well with their kids. It is hard, moreover, for a family to know what it's getting when it selects a school. Parent information centers—Chubb and Moe's solution—may not help much. Unless a school has a totally distinctive atmosphere that permeates every classroom (unlikely even in a market system), listening to an assignment officer describing a school's "commitment to diversity" and its "positive learning environment" is not going to tell a parent much. Nor will visits be very informative. A parent

may like the personal warmth of a particular first-grade teacher, but their child may not get that teacher. The social class and racial composition of the school will be apparent, but is that the basis on which Chubb and Moe want schools selected? For many parents, visits will be difficult to arrange. In general, middle-class parents will probably make the process work better for them, but that suggests another problem that Chubb and Moe ignore: class bias.

In addition, educational "fit" and quality may be two quite separate questions. All the evidence from existing choice programs suggests that academic excellence is seldom what parents chiefly value in a school. A convenient location, a particular social atmosphere, good sports facilities: these are the sorts of considerations that govern. Yet if parents aren't concerned first and foremost about academic performance, the schools won't be either. And American education will remain the disaster that it is.

The point can, in fact, be put more strongly. A true market system will cause unpopular schools to close. But good schools may be unpopular, and popular schools may be educational duds—equivalent to the twenty brands of soda pop, all junk, sustained by clever advertising. Today the bureaucrats and professionals may have too much power to set educational policy, but tomorrow we may want to insulate those in charge from the short-term pressures that parental choice can generate.

ALL CHOICE PROPONENTS seem to agree that kids with different needs need different schools. Chubb and Moe celebrate the educational "diversity" that can be found in East Harlem, where junior high students can choose their schools. Autonomous schools, the reasoning generally goes, will inevitably be distinctive. When parents are free to select their children's schools, schools are pressured to offer something special. And distinctive schools find teachers with distinctive talents.

The assumption is that only the heavy hand of a centralized bureaucracy stops principals and their teachers from creating imaginative, distinctive schools. But many teachers and principals like to be told what to do. A 1988 U.S. Department of Education survey found that many principals don't want decision-making autonomy if it would make them accountable for the results. And in Rochester, New York, American Federation of Teachers vice-president Adam Urbansky has found that only a slight majority of the city's teachers want the additional responsibility that comes with new authority. In East Harlem, the innovative schools that Chubb and Moe salute were the result of top-down management; the good guys were in the central office that they would abolish.

people like Chubb and Moe) that a large percentage of parents get one of their desired schools.

The coercive nature of the assignment process under controlled choice is not a Boston problem alone. In other Massachusetts cities that have adopted such choice plans, the situation is much the same. In some, it's worse. Overcrowding in Lowell and Lawrence, for instance, means that no parents coming into the system with children beyond kindergarten will do much choosing. An Hispanic kid in Lawrence goes to the school that has not filled its Hispanic quota and can somehow fit him in.

This sort of information would not have been difficult for Chubb and Moe to obtain. But it would have muddied their pristine picture. Hence they leave the question of quotas to a footnote, citing one obscure article on choice and racial balance. They are otherwise silent on the race issue—an amazing fact in itself. To write a whole book on education that contains no discussion of racial differences in achievement, racial tensions, and the like is to write on a contemporary public-policy problem, disengaged from the world. In Chubb and Moe's portrait, there are no drugged parents who won't and probably can't make informed choices for their children; angry, underachieving kids who risk becoming rejects left behind in schools abandoned by others; teachers and principals devoid of creative ideas; and ethnic or religious activists eager to run very dubious schools.

This is not to say that vouchers are a bad idea. They're not. There is much to recommend in small-scale voucher experiments. And there are good answers to those who oppose them. But Chubb and Moe don't give them; they did only part of their job.

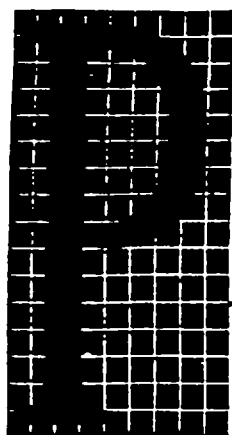
MYRON LIEBERMAN, on the other hand, has been thinking about education for a long time. His books are not easy to read. If Chubb and Moe's work is too tidy, his has too many loose ends. They let repetition fill the pages; he crams in too much detail. And he never ties the bundle up for the reader; it takes work to understand the main point. But everything that is wrong with the Chubb-and-Moe volume is right with Lieberman's books, which are works of unusual intellectual integrity. Lieberman believes strongly in public money for private schools, but advocacy never drives his scholarship. He doesn't flinch from the truth about the imperfect world of parents, kids, teachers, and markets.

Thus, on the subject of vouchers in *Privatization and Educational Choice*, he readily admits that existing private institutions may not be able to absorb more students and that the prospects for constructing new schools are not good. The demand

might be there, in other words, but not the supply to meet it. Existing schools between which parents choose, moreover, often do not truly compete with one another. Most Catholic parents who choose parochial education are not sending a get-better message to the public system, Lieberman points out; they don't want the secular education that those schools provide, whatever its quality. Even secular schools, seemingly in competition, are often seen as apples and oranges—not simply different grades of fruit. Thus market proponents—of which he is one—cannot promise to raise the quality of education. "Voucher supporters see only the good effects of competition," he notes, while opponents see only its negative impact. "The actual outcome will undoubtedly lie between these extremes—but precisely where will depend on the specifics of the voucher plan adopted."

Lieberman is the rare writer on school choice who resists polemics. *Public School Choice* is a focused discussion of the inadequacy of options confined to the public sector. But *Privatization and Educational Choice* contemplates the many ways in which educational services provided by public employees can be transferred to the private sector. A school board, for instance, can hire a for-profit company to educate students with special needs. Or a district short of math and science teachers can rely on a company to supply instruction. Unlike vouchers, such contracting out, Lieberman notes, happily requires the passage of no new and controversial legislation. But again, his is no starry-eyed discussion. "Studies indicate that contracting out is utilized most effectively when the service involved can be readily identified, measured and evaluated," he notes. Anyone can judge whether a private trash collector is doing the job; "[w]ith education, however, it is more difficult to know what the outcomes should be, what they are, and how much weight to give them." Lieberman's arguments for the "privatization" of education are almost understated; that's their strength.

He has in common with Chubb and Moe, however, one trait: a disdain for the democratic processes that now govern public school systems. Political scientists, Chubb and Moe claim, understand with special insight the cost of democratic politics. Lieberman doesn't disagree. It doesn't work, they say, to get education all entangled with beliefs about right and wrong. Such convictions create bureaucratic controls and undermine the school autonomy that all reformers now want. But that is precisely what educational debates are mostly about: values. Choice advocates want the impossible: educational policy removed from the normative context in which it is inextricably embedded.



PARADIGMS

Innovations In Public Policy

The Issue... Educational Choice

Around The Nation

Wisconsin...

Called "the most important educational breakthrough for low-income youngsters since Brown vs. Board of Education" the Wisconsin Circuit Court upheld the constitutionality of the Milwaukee parental choice program on August 6th.

The County Circuit Court ruled that Superintendent of Education, Herbert Grover, had over-stepped his bounds by trying to regulate the participating private schools. The Landmark Legal Foundation, which defended the plan in court, said, "This precedent is a major breakthrough for choice in education that could open the door for expanded education opportunities across the country."

Four hundred poor children in Milwaukee have begun attending the private non-sectarian school of their parent's choice. They can afford to do so because of the \$2,500 voucher they have received from the state of Wisconsin. Over 1,100 low-income families applied for the 1,000 available vouchers, but the court battle created enormous uncertainty and so there are not enough participating private schools to take all the applicants.

Michigan...

The Citizens Committee on Long Range Planning, an arm of the Lansing School District Board of Education, recently called for giving parents a more active role in their children's education, including a schools of choice plan.

Indiana...

H. Dean Evans, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, has asked the 1991 Indiana General Assembly to fund five to ten pilot programs to test parental school choice.

One of the most exciting new innovations in public policy is that of educational choice. Educational choice offers hope for America's system of education by restructuring the antiquated and monopolistic system that currently exists in the United States and replacing it with a system of market-driven competition.

Educational choice reform efforts by Republicans and Democrats, liberals and conservatives, Blacks and Hispanics, are sweeping the country and even in other parts of the world.

As Texas moves into the last decade of the 20th century, it has a rare and unique opportunity to make significant changes in its system of educating its citizens. In this first issue of "Paradigm", the Texas Public Policy Foundation reports on developments and progress being made in many states around the country in making educational choice a reality.

What Others Say

MALCOLM FORBES, JR.

A badly needed revolution in American education is in the making. The old public school system as we know it will be gone by the turn of the century, broken up as a self-serving monopoly should be. The only way we can make our schools really better is to make them accountable to the consumer, i.e. parents. That means giving them the power of the purse through vouchers, substantial tax credits, or other means. They should have a choice to which school their children will attend. They have the ultimate authority on the management of that school.

Research shows that a good school is one that is run with a maximum of local control. And with administration and faculty dedicated to creating an atmosphere of learning. States should set minimum standards and then get out of the way. Such a decentralized system with parents setting the agenda horrifies politicians, unions, and the educational establishments. Effective reform will be hard political slog, but slog we must.

The revolution is starting: experiments giving parents a choice of where their kids are schooled are popping up in Minnesota, Milwaukee, and if a state referendum is passed next month, in Oregon. Socialism fails where ever it has been tried. It is time to rid it from our public schools.

*Forbes Magazine
October 29, 1990*

COLUMNIST WILLIAM RASPBERRY

If the parents really did have a choice, might they not seek out better schools for their children? Not just the schools that happen to be at the end bus routes, the plaintiffs would have the school board reinstitute, but the schools that meet their preferences for curriculum, teaching style, and discipline.

Why haven't those who claim to care about education of poor black children climbed aboard the "choice bandwagon"? The reason, aside from the vested interest of the school bureaucracy, seems to be that vouchers and choice are conservative causes.

Well, in the first place, there is nothing particularly conservative about the notion of choice and in the second, so what? What does the fact that conservatives like school choice make it a bad idea? Does it make people like Polly Williams, the black Democratic state representative from inner-city Milwaukee who fought to implement the Milwaukee plan, traders to the black liberal cause?

Paradigm: greek root "paradigma" meaning model or pattern; a shared set of assumptions; the way in which we perceive the world; a framework of thought; a grid or filter.

COMMENTARY

Bankrolling Educational Entrepreneurs

By Dale Mann

One look at a line graph charting national trends in reading or mathematics proficiency since 1971 would show that American schools have made little progress over the past two decades, including the post-1983 "Nation at Risk" reform years. If those lines were an electrocardiogram, the doctor would try something aggressive.

But education's response has been to deny the evidence—"My school is different," "The tests measure the wrong things," "What can you expect given (choose one): (a) divorce; (b) TV; (c) my salary." While the public demands action, educators offer explanations. George Bush, Albert Shanker, and Chicago parents probably don't agree on much, but they do seem to agree that reform has not happened.

Business involvement in the schools, meanwhile, has gone in two directions, both welcome, but both short of system reform. In some companies, individuals have committed themselves—one-on-one—to working with specific groups of kids. Behind those lucky few, though, are another 10 to 20 million needy children. Rescuing survivors while the boat sinks is tough triage.

Other corporations are putting new sails on the same leaky hull, helping with staff development for a high school and all its feeder schools, for example, or rewriting a whole sector of the curriculum.

Public schools are already awash in such projects, tiny tests in isolated places, parachuted onto schools in the belief that America's 2 million teachers are avid to replace their



Francis Washington

and disadvantaged people in that | have now been integrated into a class-

Ways To Bankroll Educational Entrepreneurs

Continued from Page 32

thing happens, usually to management, sometimes to the whole enterprise.

In the private sector, people trade hard work and risk for bigger rewards. Who pushes the envelope of new knowledge harder? Biology teachers in Chelsea, Mass., or the biotechnology entrepreneurs on nearby Route 128? Educators have convinced their new business "partners" to stop being business when it comes to the public school. Schools continue to be risk-free (especially for teachers), one-size-fits-all, take-it-or-leave-it (if you can afford private tuition) enterprises.

An investment bank for education would pool venture capital for ideas that return private and public dividends. Both debt and equity would be available. People with better ideas than those now being used would have a new reason to find their way through the Bermuda Triangle of education research, development, and dissemination. The profit motive would augment, not replace altruism. Private money would lever what public funds have not—systemic innovation.

The availability of such a capital fund would attract two sorts of re-

sources: school people with good ideas that can be refined and moved with market forces, and for-profit organizations that would move into the school market because of the lowered capital costs.

An example of this type of engagement might perhaps be found in the area of educational software. It is known, for example, that



Francis Washington

about 85 percent of at-risk students are visual learners. But schools do not act effectively on that knowledge because no one has developed breakthrough products that combine the power of MTV with the purpose of public schools. Software producers complain about the lack of hardware, and vice versa. Without a critical mass of "must

have" software, schools do not buy equipment and are thus confirmed in their stolid indifference to anything but textbooks and "teacher talk" instruction.

The logjam could be broken, a lot of good could be done, and some money could be made by bankrolling educational entrepreneurs.

David T. Kearns, chairman of the board of Xerox, and the educational analyst Denis P. Doyle have proposed a federally financed and government-run "venture capital fund" advised by principals and teachers. But why government? Several years into both school reform and business partnerships, no American business has thought to add the expertise and entrepreneurial leverage that an investment bank, dedicated to education, would provide.

One way to think about the impact of such a new capability is to ask, what has improved public schooling more? The clouds of quarter-million-dollar grants made to nonprofit organizations for one-time, one-site demonstrations? Or, two guys named Jobs and Wozniak fooling around in a Cupertino, California garage trying to bread-board a "home computer." The energy is there: to tap it, we must add entrepreneurial incentives. ■

60

They're wasting their time, but they can spend hours doing homework that's worthwhile."

Teacher style — How does he or she relate to students? "Do they do creative things, or are they strictly into a workbook?"

Competition — "Is there grading on curves, which makes for competition in the classroom? Or is it 'whatever you get, you get,' so you're competing with yourself rather than against your neighbor? I tend to like the non-competitive, where they're challenged to do the best they can. Some competition is good. Too much is stressful. Not enough is not good."

Expectations — Do schools expect high achievement? They'd better, though not to the point of undue pressure, Roth said.

Extracurricular — "Do they offer music, gym, art? They might say, 'Sure, we have an art program.' Well it's only once a week for 20 minutes...."

"You need to go in understanding your own priorities," Roth advised. "No school will match your priorities exactly, but it should come close to meeting your philosophy."

Step Three: Step Inside

The big moment has arrived. You're walking in the door to learn firsthand about a school. What now?

"First of all, your eyes will tell you a lot," said Linda Klarer, a 16-year teaching veteran now at the Brown School. "Watch the relationship between a teacher and a student. Watch the communication that's flowing between children."

But be cautious in making some quick assumptions, she warned. "Just because students aren't sitting down furiously writing something that's on the board doesn't mean they're not on task."

Klarer has done a lot of observing, choosing schools for her son and daughter and moving her daughter as circumstances changed.

Her son is now bused to first grade at Lincoln Elementary.

Her daughter was bused to Lincoln for first grade, attended the Advance Program at Field Elementary in second grade and now is in third grade at the Brown, an optional school.

"We liked the school and teachers," Klarer said of the Advance

What's available in the Jefferson public schools

Even if you're already sold on the Jefferson County Public Schools, prepare to be overwhelmed by an array of possibilities:

Magnets are schools in which all students take specialized courses and enrollment is open countywide.

Options are special programs open to a limited number of students, typically from that school's attendance zone.

Learning Choice Options are like the other options but can accept some students from elsewhere in the county as a means of achieving voluntary integration. However, parents of those volunteering students must arrange for transportation.

The **Advance Program**, now housed at 37 school "centers," is for students who show the ability to meet higher academic standards.

There also are eight "technical centers" — the new name for vocational education. Students in grades 11 and 12 can learn entry-level skills in more than 40 types of jobs, from auto mechanics to welding.

Admission rules and requirements differ among the choices.

Many students interested in the Advance Program were tested earlier this month. Additional testing will be scheduled in the spring. Contact your local school.

For information on applying to a vocational-technical center, call 473-3320.

Entry into an optional program or magnet school is determined by varying standards — grades, essays and letters of recommendation.

To receive an application for those programs, call the Office of Options and Magnets at 473-3323.

Each child may apply for up to three programs, not counting the Advance Program and technical centers.

Applying for two options at one school counts as two choices.

If you turn in another application later with more choices, your earlier picks will be erased and only your last three will be considered.

It's also important to give careful consideration to your No. 1 choice. That's the school and program that first receives your name. Your second and third choices won't even be notified of your interest unless the first program rejects you — and that might not occur until late spring.

(If you change your mind about your order of preference, call your top choice and ask to be released from consideration.)

Timing your application also is important.

Only two programs currently have

See WHAT'S
PAGE 4, col. 4, this section

Ten Ways to Turn D.C. Around

Good government doesn't have to be a contradiction in terms. But incoming mayor Sharon Pratt Dixon faces a huge challenge as well as a golden opportunity. So we asked David Osborne, a student of successful innovation in government, to highlight some ways she can make the city work again

To: Sharon Pratt Dixon
From: David Osborne
Re: How to really make the city work

CONGRATULATIONS. You promised to clean out the D.C. bureaucracy, fire 2,000 managers and hold the line on taxes. The good news is that you have a mandate. The bad news is that people expect you to deliver.

You're not the first candidate to make such promises, of course. Many a politician has swept into office on the same basic platform, then departed 4 or 8 or 12 years later with little changed. The problem is hardly limited to mayors. Ronald Reagan ran a campaign much like yours in 1980. Michael Dukakis was elected governor of Massachusetts in 1974 on a pledge to clean up state government and hold the line on taxes. Sixteen years later, as the battered Dukakis made his exit, William Weld was elected on the same pledge.

Politicians come and go, in other words, but the bureaucracy remains.

We all know that the D.C. government is bloated. We know that it could shed 2,000 managers without skipping a beat. But firing 2,000 middle managers is not going to solve the District's problems. In fact, it could make them

ernments act more as catalysts, brokers and facilitators than traditional governments do.

Nobody embodied this philosophy more than George Latimer, mayor of St. Paul, Minn., from 1976 through 1989. Latimer cut the city's staff by 12 percent, kept budget and property tax growth below the rate of inflation and reduced the city's debt—but he dramatically *increased* the activism of St. Paul government. He did it by catalyzing private sector activity: He used nonprofit, voluntary organizations to manage parks and perform energy audits and operate recycling programs; he set up nonprofit corporations to redevelop downtown, invest in low-income housing and organize the nation's first downtown-wide hot water heating system; and he created more partnerships with foundations than any mayor in American history.

E.S. Savas, a veteran of the Lindsay administration in New York City and the Reagan administration in Washington, introduced the metaphor of steering versus rowing. The word "govern," he pointed out, comes from a Greek word that means "to steer." Most of us understand that government's primary role is to steer. What we fail to understand is that when government also rows, it can lose the flexibility it needs to steer effectively, particularly in times of rapid change.

To vary the metaphor: If policy makers can "buy" services only from their own bureaucracy, they become captives of sole-source, monopoly suppliers. This becomes a problem as soon as they decide to change their strategies. When they want to move their welfare departments into the business of training, educating and placing people in jobs, for instance, they are stuck with caseworkers who have the wrong skills. The solution is to keep policy decisions within public hands but contract with or empower separate organizations (public, private, nonprofit or voluntary) to deliver services, depending on who can best do the job.

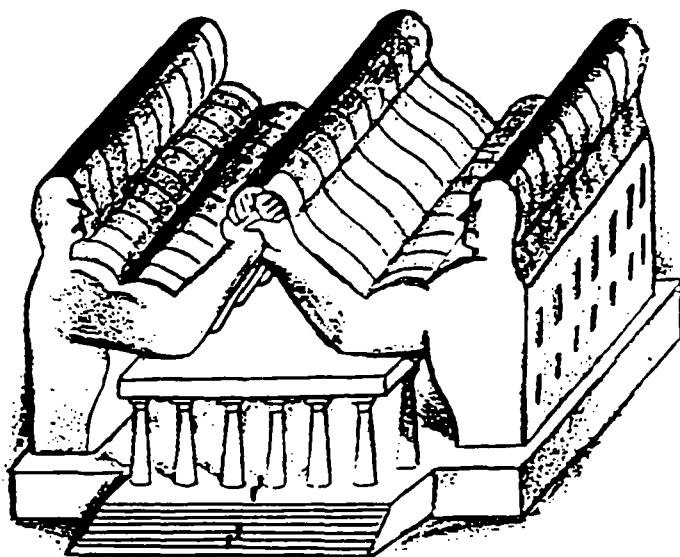
*Whenever possible,
inject competition into
public service.*

2 During your campaign you suggested that you wanted to see more competitive bidding on existing city contracts. Think bigger: Think about injecting competition into *every* city service. Entrepreneurial governments have discovered that when organizations must compete for funding, they keep their costs down, respond quickly to changing demands and strive mightily to satisfy their customers. This is particularly important in cities where contracting has been a seedbed for cor-

ruption. True competition makes it very hard to award contracts to political cronies.

Phoenix, a city of almost a million people, is a compelling model. The city government there uses competitive bidding in garbage collection, street repair, landfill operation, custodial services, security in city buildings and a variety of other areas.

Phoenix first decided to contract out garbage collection in 1978, during a fiscal crisis. It divided the city into five districts and bid out one district at a time, on a long-term contract. Surprisingly, the Public Works Department—the agency then collecting the garbage—decided to compete. Three times it submitted bids, and three times it lost a district. But the losses forced its managers and employees to get serious about improving their operations. Manage-



ment let the drivers redesign their own routes and work schedules. Together they refined their trucks and became a technology leader in the industry. Together they created labor-management committees to work out better ways to do things. And gradually they got their costs down.

In 1984, Public Works finally won a contract. By 1988, it had won back all the districts. "Over a 10-year period you see the costs for all the other city programs going up," says Ron Jensen, who runs the department. "Solid waste costs have gone down by 4.5 percent a year, in real, inflation-adjusted dollars."

Charles Fanniel, president of the union local, would prefer the comfort of guaranteed jobs for his employees. But he acknowledges that working conditions, pay and morale are all better than they were before 1978. "What happens with this bidding system," he says, "is you cut out all the fat."

To make sure the bidders are all competing on a

performance contracts it signs with these community organizations. The In Rem program is one of the city's most successful.

4

Let people choose among many service providers.

The best way to tie funding to performance is to think of citizens as customers of government. Most businesses get their revenues directly from their customers: If they please the customers, sales increase; if someone else pleases the customers more, sales decline. So businesses in competitive environments learn very quickly to pay enormous attention to their customers. But city agencies get most of their funding from taxpayers, via city councils. And most of their "customers" are captive: Short of moving, they have few alternatives to city services. So managers in the public sector learn very quickly to ignore them. Instead, the managers respond to the mayor and city council—because that's where they get their funding.

The most entrepreneurial governments understand that the best way to force a bureaucracy to get close to its customers is to make it dependent on them for its very livelihood. This takes competition a step further: Rather than government managers choosing service providers in a competitive bidding process, it lets each citizen choose his or her service provider.

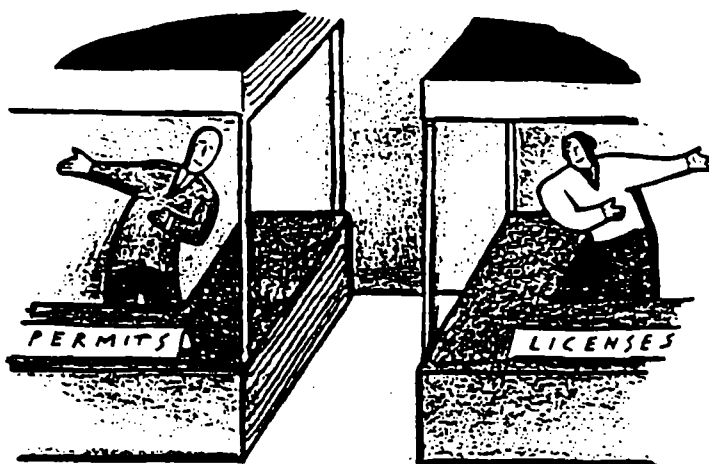
How does it work? Consider Community School District 4, in East Harlem. New York City has 32 school districts. Twenty years ago District 4 was at the bottom of the barrel: 32nd out of 32 in test scores.

"It was totally out of control," says Michael Friedman, a teacher who now directs a junior high. "The schools were chaotic, they were overcrowded. There was a lot of violence, gangs roaming the streets. It was sink or swim as a classroom teacher. They closed the door: 'That's your class, do what you can.' And it seemed like nobody could or would try to do anything about it. You had a lot of people who had been there a long time, and they were just punching that clock."

In 1974, out of sheer desperation, district leaders decided they had to get the worst kids out of the schools so other kids could learn. So they created an alternative junior high for troubled students. The task was so daunting, they told the teachers to do

whatever it took to get results. Not surprisingly, the result was a very nontraditional school. It worked, so they created another one. Soon teachers began proposing alternative schools for other children: a performing arts school, a traditional school in which children wore uniforms, a marine sciences school, a school that specialized in creative expression, a career preparation school. Each provided a basic core of instruction in math, English and social sciences, but each also had a distinct focus.

Today District 4 boasts 23 junior high schools, all of them schools of choice. (Six grade schools are also schools of choice.) Rather than being assigned to a school and offered the same kind of education as every other child, students are allowed to choose the style of education they prefer. (In other words, they are treated as customers.) They can choose traditional schools or open classrooms; reading institutes for those behind grade level or advanced schools for gifted students; a computer-oriented school; or a school run in conjunction with the Big



Apple Circus. Schools are small—from 50 to 300 students.

"Kids need to be dealt with personally, not impersonally," says John Falco, who administers the choice program. "They need to be recognized for what they are, what they could do and what they could accomplish—and then you need to figure out how to help them accomplish that."

Obviously, Falco is not describing the normal attitude of an inner city teacher or administrator. Why do people in East Harlem think that way? Because they have to. "If you're not operating a program that

continued on page 38

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funding outcomes—which gives it far more genuine control.) Second, it lets managers keep part or all of any money they can save, to use on new priorities. This gets them acting like they're spending their own money, rather than someone else's.

Say the police department is spending \$500,000 a year on new squad cars but really needs a new computer system. Normally the chief would not risk asking the city council to shift the money, because he might lose the squad car line item but never get the computer funds. Under a mission-driven budget, he could save \$200,000 a year on cars for three years running, then use the \$600,000 to buy the computer system.

Fairfield's police department dramatically illustrates the contrast between the two budget systems. Its city budget is set up the new way, but it still hustles a fair number of federal grants, which are set up the old way. "It's amazing," says Chuck Huchel, chief of public safety. "The same people behave differently with the two streams of money. With the federal grants, we prepare a budget in advance, and we put on all the bells and whistles, all the frills—we try to anticipate everything we might need. When we get an authorization, we spend everything that's on the list, whether we need to or not. People don't say, 'Oh, I can save some money here, or I can use it another way now.' Because it's in the plan. You don't have incentives to make the cost savings, because if you don't spend it, you give it back."

"With the city money, they know that any savings they make can be applied to other programs or other equipment. So you say, 'Hey, I don't actually need this to make the program work, so I'm not going to spend it.' Plus they get creative about saving money. We needed a weather covering over a gas pump, to protect people from the rain when they were gassing up their vehicles. The architectural design to make it like a gas station came to around \$30,000. We thought that was outrageous. So somebody said, 'What about these bus stop covers—the glass-enclosed ones?' We checked, and they cost \$2,500. We put one of those up, and it works fine."

The District's budget deficit gives a new mayor the perfect opening to change the budget system. Normally the D.C. Council would hesitate to let go of its power to control line items. But if you take responsibility for cutting spending (and thereby inflicting pain) off its hands, it might go along. Bruce Babbitt cut a deal like this when he governed Arizona, and his managers loved it. Once they're rid of their line-item straitjackets, most managers will have no trouble finding ways to cut their spending by 5 or 10 percent.

Decentralize authority.

7 You campaigned for "decentralized school-based management initiatives," and you were right. Now apply that thinking to the rest of government. Once you have tied spending to outcomes, you can give your mid-level employees a lot more authority to innovate.

The Ford Foundation and the Kennedy School of Government, at Harvard, co-sponsor a series of annual "Innovation Awards" for state and local governments. The biggest surprise, to participants at the Kennedy school, has been the discovery that innovation rarely happens because someone at the top has a good blueprint. It happens because good ideas bubble up from employees who actually do the work and deal with the customers.

One of the first Innovation Award winners was a Minnesota program that finds innovators deep within the bureaucracy and gives them the authority they need. It's called STEP ("Strive Toward Excellence in Performance"). Every year employees who have innovative ideas compete to have them designated as STEP projects. The STEP board is co-chaired by the governor and a leading business executive. Its seal of approval does three things: It gives people permission to innovate; it offers them technical assistance; and it forces their bosses to sit up and listen.

One STEP team persuaded the Department of Natural Resources to change its entire attitude toward its customers. During the mid-1980s, use of the state's 64 parks was declining and budget problems were nibbling away at the parks. A group of people within the department decided that they needed a marketing program. They applied for STEP status and won. First they asked park managers to brainstorm about what they could do to make their customers happier; soon the managers were putting in children's play equipment in parks and electric hookups at campsites. Then they created a "Passport Club"—a kind of frequent flier program for park users, to lure them to outlying parks that were not heavily used. Next they began accepting credit cards, running advertising and promoting park permits as Christmas gifts. Sales jumped 300 percent. Then they brought in a private company to improve their gift shops, and gift sales increased by 50 percent. Finally they conducted a customer survey of 1,300 park users.

During the first year after the marketing strategy took effect, the number of park visitors jumped by 10 percent. Numbers like these got the department managers' attention; in 1987 they created

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quadruple if nothing is done. If the council is deciding whether to buy land for a park, the budget shows what it will cost to staff and maintain the park for 10 years.

This process makes the long-term costs of decisions painfully clear to the press and the public. It has changed the behavior of the council. "In the right environment, all of the myths about how elected officials behave have come falling down for me," says City Manager Tom Lewcock. "They don't have to be short-range thinkers, they can be long-range thinkers. They don't have to be people who say, 'I know this is more important than that, but we're going to spend our time on that, because I've got constituents on my back.' They don't have to be any of those things."

Whenever possible, use market mechanisms rather than administrative mechanisms.

IO By changing private investment patterns, government can have a hundred times the impact it has when it uses normal administrative programs. Markets are not perfect, and they cannot solve every problem. But they are extremely powerful—and when governments reshape them to serve a public purpose, they can have a tremendous impact.

In 1985, the year before Sandy Freeman became mayor of Tampa, almost a third of the city's housing units needed some degree of rehabilitation. That year the city's Community Redevelopment Agency, a traditional administrative bureaucracy with 41 employees, rehabilitated 37 units.

Freeman and her redevelopment director, Fernando Noriega, decided to use the marketplace to attack the problem. By guaranteeing loans for the first five years, they persuaded several of the city's banks to lend at low interest rates to owners who wanted to renovate their buildings. Last year the program rehabilitated 778 units.

Meanwhile, the Community Redevelopment Agency is down to 22 employees—but according to Noriega, they are "happier, more productive and better paid employees." Obviously, they have a far greater impact than they did five years ago.

What Tampa did was simple: It used a market mechanism to achieve a public purpose. "We put the market together," Noriega says, "and presented it to the private lenders." You have talked about doing something quite similar with the \$100 million "Capital Growth Fund"

you want to create. Stick to your guns.

If your opponents question your approach, tell them the story of the 30-year mortgage. In 1930, Americans who wanted to buy homes had to make a 50 percent down payment and repay the mortgage in five years. That's how banks did business. Using the new Federal Housing Administration, the Roosevelt administration pioneered mortgages requiring only 20 percent down and repayment over 30 years. Other government corporations created a secondary market, so banks could resell these loans. And the banking industry converted. Today we take our 30-year, 20 percent down payment loans for granted, because the federal government changed the marketplace. Ask your opponents: Would we be better off if FDR had created half a dozen low- and moderate-income housing programs?

A FINAL POINT: MANY OF THESE LESSONS could be summed up as a shift from administrative mechanisms to market mechanisms. Competition, funding tied to results, customer choice, investment—all are characteristics of functioning markets. In a complex and rapidly changing world, in which our ability to access information is almost unlimited, markets are often more efficient and effective than administrative processes.

But market mechanisms are only half the equation. Markets are impersonal. Markets are unforgiving. Even the most carefully structured markets tend to create inequitable outcomes. That is why we need the other half of the equation: the empowerment of communities. To complement the efficiency and effectiveness of market mechanisms, we need the warmth and caring of families and neighborhoods and other social groupings. As we move away from administrative bureaucracies, we should embrace both markets and community.

Washington is an intensely political town, and in Washington people would call this moving right and left at the same time. They would label you a conservative for embracing markets and a liberal for empowering communities. But these ideas are not liberal or conservative. They can be used to implement any agenda. They can help you expand social programs if you choose, or shrink social spending and lower taxes if you choose. They dictate how government should work, not what government should do.

And regardless of what you want it to do, wouldn't it be nice if government worked again? ■

David Osborne is the author of a forthcoming book tentatively titled Reinventing Government: In Search of Excellence in the Public Sector.

before overhauling school system

the success of any educational system. What impact will a choice system have on educational achievement? So far, there is little reliable research on the impact of choice on student achievement.

The Alum Rock experiment showed no difference in the academic achievement of those who exercised choice among a variety of alternatives within the district and those who did not. The absence of a state testing program in Minnesota has thwarted assessment of its statewide interdistrict choice system.

Impressive gains have been evident in one urban school district in New York City where a public school choice program was instituted after everything else had failed. But this heavily minority district in depressed Harlem is atypical of the mainstream of school districts.

If private schools are included in a choice system, how will their status change? In return for receiving public money, will they be required to recognize the constitutional and federal statutory rights of their students and teachers just as public schools are? Will they be subject to the same legal requirements set forth in the Texas Education Code for handling such matters as student discipline and teacher contract non-renewal and termination? If so, private schools become quasi-public in character, thus blurring their distinctiveness. If not, they will operate outside of the large body of state and federal law built up over the years to assure that schools operate in socially desirable ways.

In addition, since most private schools are religiously affiliated, the issue of separation of church and state under the establishments clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution may represent a bar to their participation.

Educational choice is not a simple panacean reform. Choice is a concept whose operational dimensions can be radically affected by legislation. Minne-

sota has avoided the complexities and controversies involving private schools by limiting choice to the public school arena and including a public post-secondary option for upper-level students who wish to broaden their learning experiences through college classes. Private schools are included in the Milwaukee choice system, but only low-income parents can participate.

Failure to address the complex issues before implementing a choice system will likely result in disappointment and failure to improve the delivery of educational services. Texas would be well advised to implement a few pilot programs involving different forms of school choice before embarking on this latest reform. These programs should be thoroughly assessed, while at the same time the host of reforms recently enacted by the Texas Legislature should be carefully monitored.

To assist policy-makers and educators in addressing the issues implicated in educational choice, the Texas Center for the Study of Educational Choice in the College of Education has been organized at the University of North Texas. The purposes of the center include serving as an information clearinghouse, conducting research on choice systems, disseminating information and research findings about choice, and assisting school districts in developing choice systems.

Choice holds significant promise for improving education. It also has the potential to further weaken and divide our troubled schooling system. My hope is that Texas will approach the latest proposal for reforming education by basing decisions on merit and not on what will best advance either the liberal or conservative political agenda.

Frank Kemmerer is a regents professor at the education college at the University of North Texas, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary this weekend.

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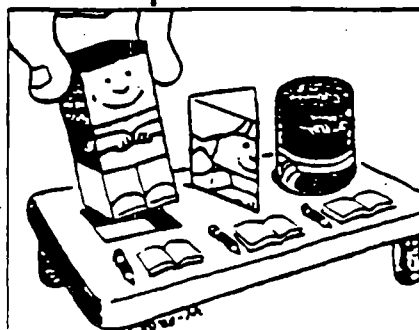
VOL 63, NO. 3

How Does Your Child's School Stack Up?

If you're unhappy with your child's current school and would like to know what else around you might be available or if you're moving to a new locale or if you just want to know how your child's school stacks up to other schools in the area, call School Match.

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It works like this: you either fill out a detailed questionnaire or call School Match and give your answers directly to trained personnel who help you through the process. You then receive a printout of possible schools in response to your answers. Of course, this will not mean your work is over: it's up to



you to make personal contact with the schools that seem best for you and to judge certain factors, such as after-school programs, that cannot be included in computerized data. But the printout will provide you with an invaluable base of information on which to act.

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