

Civil Rights /
Public School
Choice

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From: Terry K. Peterson/Lidice Rivas

Subject:

NOTE FROM TERRY P, who is in South Carolina, regarding attached article in the SC Post Courier regarding "Suit Claims Magnets Discriminate":

- We may want to look at "coming out hard" for supporting the magnets and choice proposals. They are going to expand choice options even further unless this lawsuit is successful.

CONFIDENTIALITY NOTICE

- Terry

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Suit claims magnets discriminate

MAGNET

from Page 1-A

board spent more than \$1 million in the desegregation lawsuit proving that constituent boards have the power that they now say they don't have," Runyon said.

The plaintiffs are parents and constituents of the constituent school boards, Runyon said. They are Faye Y. Cowan, Bernard Maynard Forsythe, Katherine L. Gavin, Jennifer B. and Everett Robinson, and Cathy Coleman Thompson.

The lawsuit hurts parents who want the best school for their child, New said.

"This is not a battle between the county board and constituent boards, but a battle between parents and constituents board, and I think parents know what's best for their children," New said.

School district attorney Robert Rosen said he had not seen the lawsuit, but that litigation filed previously by Runyon smacks of being a political statement with no legal legal legs to stand on.

"It sounds like a political cause in search of a legal theory," Rosen said. "This is all politics. The constituent boards don't like choice. What they should do is run for the county school board and if the voters agree with them, they elect them," Rosen said.

Rosen also said the district is in complete compliance with U.S. District Judge Sol Blatt's court order ending the desegregation lawsuit. "We have not done anything different except create more choice schools and given parents more choice."

CHARLESTON COUNTY SCHOOLS: In the lawsuit, attorney Bill Runyon claimed the district's magnet schools are really "choice" schools that give preferential treatment to students.

By ARLIE PORTER
Of The Post and Courier staff

A federal lawsuit filed Wednesday claims Charleston County School District magnet schools deny equal treatment to more than 40,000 students.

The lawsuit, filed by attorney Bill Runyon on behalf of six parents, ratchets up the high-stakes power struggle between the county's multiple constituent school boards and its single consolidated school board.

In the lawsuit, Runyon — who also represents the constituent school boards in a state lawsuit against the county school board — claimed the district's magnet schools are really "choice" schools that give preferential treatment to students. That's because students can travel on their own to choice schools, Runyon said.

"The so-called 'choice' schools have rules and regulations which discriminate and eliminate a large segment of the 45,000 students in Charleston County from attending," Runyon said in the lawsuit.

The lawsuit does not name the schools it is targeting, but Runyon said they include Charlestown Academy, the Montessori Community School and Charleston Progressive Elementary. All three are parent-driven initiatives developed during the past year at the invitation of county Superintendent Chip Zullinger.

A federal judge "could declare that the student assignments to choice schools are illegal," Runyon said. "The long and short of it is that the so-called choice system may last no longer than the school year in its present form, and in the final analysis, it could mean a pile of money coming out of the school district's coffers."

Runyon said the federal lawsuit will not block student transfers this

More transfers denied ... 1-B

Robert New said the lawsuit was frivolous and could end up costing taxpayers tens of thousands of dollars — if not more.

"It's another Runyon filing that's clearly without merit and it will prove to be a waste of taxpayers' money defending it," New said.

"It's sad that there are people in the community who are opposed to parents having choices and options, opening the district to the educational reform it has needed for a quarter of a century. And now you have people insisting on the status quo. The status quo has failed," New said.

Runyon disagreed.

"This is a good middle ground which seeks to have the legal questions answered. No harm is done to the children," he said.

The parents' lawsuit claims the district has violated the 1990 federal court order that arose from the desegregation lawsuit that established the constituent school boards' authority to make student assignments.

The lawsuit names State Education Superintendent Barbara Neilson as a defendant and asks a federal judge to prohibit the state from funding magnet schools next year. That money should instead go to neighborhood schools, the lawsuit says.

The lawsuit also names the federal government as a defendant. That's to prevent the Justice Department from imposing massive student transfers by busing, Runyon said.

"These parents, both white and black, don't want their children bused away from neighborhood schools," he said.

Runyon also asks in the lawsuit that the school district pay his legal fees. "The consolidated school

One set of parents

New Jersey's New Law May Let Parents Choose Schools

By MELODY PETERSEN

By tucking a single sentence into the 72-page school financing bill that she signed this month, Gov. Christine Todd Whitman hopes that New Jersey parents will soon be sending their children to the public schools of their choice.

The sentence — which could significantly change how children are educated in New Jersey by allowing them to attend classes outside their home districts, with state aid covering the cost — apparently was overlooked by state legislators as they debated the school bill over several months.

Educators, school officials and politicians involved with the school legislation were trying over the weekend to understand the meaning of the change in the law and how it would work. Some were stunned by how

such a change could happen with no debate, and a few expressed concern that it would drain money and talented students from troubled school districts.

"It is a major policy change and it needs full review and discussion," said Lynne Strickland, executive director of the Garden State Coalition of Schools, which represents 122 school districts. "Unfortunately, it appears to be a way to get something controversial passed through the first gate."

Administration officials included the sentence in the original draft of the school financing bill. But several people involved in hearings on the bill said yesterday that administration officials had never pointed out the sentence, which appears in a section that provides definitions of the bill's terms. And even Republican legislators who helped

Mrs. Whitman get the bill passed said they had not known it was there.

"I don't remember any discussion about it whatsoever," Senator John H. Ewing, a Republican who is chairman of the Senate Education Committee, said in an interview with The Star-Ledger.

According to the Whitman administration, the sentence authorizes the state's education commissioner to set specific guidelines so that students can attend the public schools of their choice — a concept that Mrs. Whitman has supported since she ran for governor in 1993.

Students can already attend other schools outside their home district, but they must pay tuition, said Peter Peretzman, a spokes-

man for Education Commissioner Leo F. Klagholz. Under the new law, parents could send their children to another school for free, Mr. Peretzman said, because the state would pay instead. School districts would participate in the program on a voluntary basis, he said.

Becky Taylor, a spokeswoman for Governor Whitman, said Sunday that she did not know why there had been no public debate. "It was a very complicated bill," she said. "There were so many issues. I guess people just focused on other issues."

In 1993, Mrs. Whitman campaigned on a pledge to bring more choice to parents who send their children to public schools. After she won, she called for a voucher system that would provide parents with tax money to send their children to private or parochial schools, but she could not muster support from legislators.

"Governor Whitman really believes if more competition and more choice about where to send their children, our schools will ultimately be better for it," Ms. Taylor said. "It's really terrible to think parents would be faced with the prospect of having to sell their homes just to chase after the best schools."

Ms. Taylor said that Mr. Klagholz would probably test the concept in a pilot program involving a handful of districts around the state before making it available to all students. She said she did not recall whether Mrs. Whitman had spoken publicly about the sentence before it became law, but added that it had been part of the legislation since it was introduced more than a year ago.

"She has talked about school choice and competition for the last three years," Ms. Taylor said.

The sentence, which appears on page 6 of the 72-page bill, in a section that defines "resident enrollment," reads, "Beginning in 1997-98 and thereafter, resident enrollment shall also include those nonresident children who are permitted to enroll in the educational program without payment of tuition as part of a voluntary program of inter-district public school choice approved by the commissioner."

Legislators seem to have overlooked one sentence in a 72-page bill.

David G. Sciarra, executive director at the Education Law Center, questioned whether that sentence was enough to give Mr. Klagholz the power to enact a system of public school choice. "I'm not sure the commissioner has the legal authority to do this anyway," Mr. Sciarra said. "That's a major question."

And if the provision was legal, Mr. Sciarra said he feared the state's poorest performing districts could lose both money and their brightest students under the law.

But Mr. Peretzman said that would not happen. "We're in no way interested in harming school districts," he said.

year's reserve accounts.

"I guess it could distort the equity, since some districts have built up larger

reserves," he said. "But this is such an uncertain time for school districts. They

really don't know how it's all going to work and how it's going to affect them." ■

① charter school
② dealing minority admission
reserves

61. The Dallas Morning News

June 3, 1997

School choice leads education legislation

Bill permits more charter campuses, eases transfers

By Terrence Stutz / The Dallas Morning News

AUSTIN - Giving Texas parents and their children more freedom to select schools was the hallmark of the Legislature's education initiatives this year.

It took most of the session to hammer out a school choice proposal, which will expand the state's charter school program and enhance the right of students to transfer away from low-performing campuses.

Along the way, legislators also fine-tuned the state's 2-year-old zero-tolerance student discipline law and approved a pay raise for teachers who are at the bottom of the salary scale.

Higher education saw passage of measure aimed at mitigating a federal appeals court decision that banned affirmative action at state colleges and universities.

The bill would require that students graduating in the top 10 percent of their class automatically be admitted to any university with a selective admissions policy. Institutions could expand that figure to the top 25 percent.

Supporters said the measure should help minority students gain admission to the University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University and other top state schools, which have been forced to quit considering race in accepting students.

"The message is, 'We want you to come to our universities.' We care about our [minority] students, and the doors are still open to them," said House Higher Education Chairwoman Irma Rangel, D-Kingsville.

Other higher-education bills approved by the Legislature would require periodic reviews of professors with tenure and a standardized core curriculum for colleges and universities that would make it easier for students to transfer between institutions.

Legislative leaders had indicated there

would not be a large number of bills this year because of the massive education law passed in 1995.

The most intense debate centered on school choice proposals. One plan that would have allowed some students to attend private schools using state-backed vouchers to pay tuition was narrowly defeated on the House floor.

Lawmakers did pass a bill that would authorize at least 100 new independent charter schools across Texas and allow nearly 800,000 students to transfer to a better public school.

"This legislation gives tremendous choice to parents and students who are unhappy with the status quo to try something different and better, whether by moving to a different public school or starting their own charter school," said Gov. George W. Bush, who supported the measure.

Although lawmakers limited the number of "open enrollment" charter schools to 20 in the 1995 reform law, there has been intense interest in expanding the program. The Texas Education Agency recently reported that it has 370 applications for charters that cannot be acted on.

The schools are publicly funded, exempt from most state regulations - such as class-size limits - and may enroll students regardless of where they reside.

The legislation also would allow an unlimited number of charter schools for students at risk of dropping out.

The other major school choice initiative would allow nearly 800,000 students at an estimated 1,150 low-performing campuses to transfer to a better school under the Public Education Grant program.

The student transfer program was created two years ago by the Legislature, but it faltered because of lack of publicity and resistance by school districts in

accepting the students.

To boost participation, the bill would require that parents be notified several months before the new school year that their children are eligible for the program. School districts also would for the first time receive financial incentives to accept the students.

On another issue, the Legislature adopted a bill that would allow the expulsion of students for all misdemeanor drug and alcohol offenses. The measure also is designed to ensure due process for students removed from class for misbehavior.

Legislators also considered an overhaul of the state's share-the-wealth school finance plan, which requires high-wealth districts to share their property tax revenues to equalize funding.

Those plans died when the House and Senate could not agree on legislation to cut school property taxes and boost the state's share of funding for education.

The Legislature did agree to end the long-running debate about where state funds from the Texas Lottery should go.

A bill slightly reducing school property taxes for homeowners contains a provision that would dedicate all future state revenues from the lottery to education. Supporters of the move cited public opinion polls showing that most Texans want the lottery to help pay for schools.

Even sponsors acknowledged the shift will not mean any extra dollars for public schools. Education already receives nearly 60 percent of lottery revenue because it gets that much of the state's general revenue fund, into which all lottery money now goes.

State budget writers say that if all lottery earnings are shifted to education, they simply will transfer the same amount of general revenue away. The net result is the same level of funding for education. ■

testing, said Monday.

The corrected count bumped East Detroit up to 17.1 percent — not as good as school officials had hoped, but better than the earlier report. Now the district is scrambling to update seniors' records before Saturday's graduation ceremony.

At Chelsea High School, the correction meant 55.9 percent of the students earned writing endorsements — a big improvement from the 35.6 percent first reported. Last year, almost 50 percent of the students earned the endorsements, said Principal Ron Mead.

The problem was caused when a computer programming error double-counted two of the three sections of the writing test, Peggy Dutcher, assessment consultant for the Michigan Department of Education testing office, said Monday. It was unclear Monday why only some schools' scores were counted in error.

The error was discovered after several school districts questioned big drops in writing scores despite increases in the three other subjects tested — reading, mathematics and science. Only writing scores were affected by the error.

The company scoring the tests will pay the cost of correcting the problem, Dutcher said.

Representatives of National Computer Systems of Iowa City, Iowa, which computes the scores for the high school proficiency and Michigan Educational Assessment Program tests, did not return several telephone calls seeking comment Monday. It is in its second year of a three-year contract, worth \$4 million this year, with the Department of Education. There were no reported problems with scoring last year's tests.

All students in each affected high school will get a new report on the writing portion of the 1997 test, but there was no word on when the corrected student reports will be sent.

The state will not revoke the endorsements from any students erroneously awarded the endorsement as a result of the scoring error, Department of Education officials said.

This is the second computer problem affecting this year's test. Late last month, the state canceled its report on how many students earned endorsements by retaking the tests after the wrong formula was used

to calculate percentages, resulting in students being counted more than once, Dutcher said.

This is the second year for the proficiency test. Students are scored proficient, novice or not-yet-novice. Only those who earn a proficient score receive state endorsements on their diplomas.

Students have complained about the length of the test — it takes 11 hours over several days to administer — and its value beyond the school system. School officials have complained about not getting enough feedback to help them improve student scores. Parents have worried about how less-than-proficient scores would affect their child's chances at entering college or landing a job.

The state Legislature recently placed a moratorium on using the "novice" designation on diplomas.

State officials said writing reports will also change in these metro Detroit districts: Clawson, Detroit, Fraser, Fowlerville, Howell, Huron Valley, Lake Orion, L'Anse Creuse, Livonia, Richmond, South Lake, South Redford, Taylor, Trenton, Warren Woods and Wayne Westland. ■

60. Associated Press

06-03 1:17a.

Price tag for education grows as special session progresses

By E.N. SMITH Associated Press Writer
CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) - The price tag for education continues to grow, as legislators in the Wyoming House continue to add amendments to a plan to overhaul the way the state finances education.

Both the House and Senate have been debating mirror versions of the reform bill during a special session convened to fulfill a state Supreme Court order to offer uniform, high-quality education. Both chambers advanced the bill to third and final reading, which could come as early as today.

Under the formula proposed by the bill, 18 of the state's 49 school districts would lose funding compared to the 1995-96 school year.

The formula would require the state to spend about \$42.6 million more per year on education than current levels. The anticipated cost stood at \$44.8 million before Monday's amendments.

Rep. Eli Bebout, R-Riverton, was able to convince lawmakers to adopt a \$1

million-plan to ensure that districts won't lose state funding in the next two years.

Bebout also succeeded in adding an amendment designed to allow schools to keep 50 percent of its interest earnings.

Both successful amendments were scaled-back versions of amendments that failed Saturday.

He also succeeded in adding an amendment that would allow counties and cities to keep recreational fees currently being levied.

"That money would have been offset against their revenues (by the bill), so we took it and left it the way it is (currently)," Bebout said. "It's working and I think it's something that we should leave like that until we get further down the road, maybe never change it."

Another amendment that passed once it was watered-down would add \$7 million dollars to the reform plan in an attempt to encourage smaller class sizes.

A similar amendment that failed during the first day of the special session attempted to mandate minimum and

maximum class sizes, which the majority said would infringe on local control.

But Monday, "a kinder, gentler approach" to reducing class sizes passed on a 31-29 roll call vote.

Opponent Rep. Tom Rardin, R-Laramie, said simply encouraging schools to reduce class size will not ensure "we're getting any bang for our buck."

Rep. Rick Tempest, R-Casper, also spoke against the proposal, saying it would not result in smaller classes and makes no provision for generating an additional \$7 million dollars in associated costs.

Another measure added was intended to benefit schools with reserve accounts.

Rep. Jim Hageman, R-Fort Laramie, said schools that have been careful with their money can use those accounts for innovative programs outside the core curriculum.

As the bill was written, schools would have had to report reserve holdings to the state so it could be counted against state funding. But Hageman convinced legislators to allow schools to keep this

produced by failing public schools.

So a successful Superintendent Zacarias will have to reject conventional wisdom and promote realistic standards of achievement for L.A.'s schoolchildren—standards neither so low as not to challenge the best of them, nor so high as to ignore the socioeconomic

context of education in our city.

Every institution needs reform, and Zacarias should root out whatever incompetence, corruption or self-satisfaction he can find. He should preach that schools can always do better. But, most important, he needs to rebuild

the system's self-confidence. When his term is completed, we should have learned not to snicker when L.A. teachers brag: "We work for the most successful institution of assimilation and mobility anywhere in the world—American urban public education." ■

89. The New York Times

05/10/97; Edition: Late Edition - Final; Section: Section 1; Editorial Desk; Page 19, Column 3

What's Fairer Than a Test?

By Micah C. Lasher

Schools Chancellor Rudy Crew has been pushing for more diversity in New York's gifted and specialized schools. He has attacked schools for not informing more parents about gifted programs, and he has criticized school districts for charging a fee for admissions exams. Both are valid complaints.

But some critics of gifted programs have gone further. Acorn, a community group that has just issued a report on the low number of minority students in gifted programs, has advocated suspending entrance exams to these high schools. The group has suggested replacing them with more subjective measures like teacher recommendations and interviews.

But this is the wrong way to go. The problem is not the admissions policies of the specialized high schools, but the poor preparation of students.

Stuyvesant High School, the specialized math and science public school in Manhattan, admits students based only on their performance on a free S.A.T.-like exam. The top colleges accept more students from Stuyvesant

than from any other high school in the country. From the class of 1996, 36 students were accepted at Columbia, 28 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and 20 at Harvard.

But Stuyvesant is hardly diverse. This year there were only 38 black students in the freshman class, 5.5 percent of the student body. These figures are actually up slightly from last year, when only 31 black students entered the freshman class. That's because the school recently started two programs — the Math and Science Institute and the Bridge Program. The Math and Science Institute is a free two-year program for students from poor neighborhoods that prepares them for the Stuyvesant admissions exam. The Bridge Program helps students from poor neighborhoods who already have taken the admissions test but did not quite achieve the cut-off score. Participants take classes over the summer, and then start school in the fall. These programs aid disadvantaged students, while maintaining fairness and objectivity.

Basing admission on teacher recommendations and interviews may be easy for smaller schools, but for larger

schools like Stuyvesant, it would be a logistical nightmare.

More important, judging students in this way introduces subjectivity, and "who you know" becomes important. This can be a serious problem in gifted and specialized schools, where seats are coveted and sometimes bitterly fought over. Further, students with already limited resources would have to rely on overworked teachers for recommendations, not to mention general encouragement and support.

Ending the admissions tests at gifted and specialized high schools will not help disadvantaged students. All students deserve an equal chance to attend schools like Stuyvesant. But rather than change the admissions process, the Chancellor should be encouraged to improve the city's primary schools, and programs like the Math and Science Institute should be expanded citywide. This would truly encourage diversity at gifted schools.

About the Author: Micah C. Lasher is a sophomore at Stuyvesant High School.

04:34 EDT May 10, 1997 ■

90. Hartford Courant, May 12, 1997

May 12, 1997

To see school choice at work, head north

By LAURENCE D. COHEN This column ran in The Courant May 11, 1997

The Connecticut General Assembly's Education Committee members are offended at and huffy about the notion that legislators aren't enthusiastic about school choice.

The wimpy, toothless thing that emerged was gutted by the Appropriations Committee, but have no

fear, the Education Committee promises. The money is still there, hiding in some desk drawer, and the issue will be "addressed" later on in the session.

In the meantime, those folks more openly hostile to the idea of giving parents freedom to pick schools for their children are circling the carcass. We have

no room, the suburban schools whine. The thousands of dollars that the transferring children would bring with them to their new schools aren't enough. Only the rich kids, only the white kids, only the motivated kids, only the smart kids, will escape to where the grass is greener.

P.S. Chow

Even those who pretend to sound balanced and rational about injecting a tiny bit of competition into the mix are in intellectual retreat. This school choice business is a good idea, they grudgingly concede, but of course it's not as important as spending a billion trillion more dollars on preschool baby-sitting and teacher training and bilingual education and champagne fountains in every school lobby.

It's pathetic. It's dishonest.

The hostility to freedom, to choice, to liberating parents and students from failing schools, is a typical status quo reaction from monopoly players. As you stare in wonder at the new school czars who march into Hartford to save the day, prepare yourself for disappointment. Until that terrible school system is subjected to the test of the marketplace, the expensive, frustrating spiral toward failure will continue.

Connecticut isn't alone in its numbing failure to reform. Texas, for instance, has had public school choice on the books since 1995, but the lousy districts wouldn't promote the program, and the better schools ran away from their obligation.

Last week, in the face of this overt sabotage of a school choice initiative, Texas legislators crafted perhaps the most clever voucher legislation in the country. If a student in a failing school applied to any other public school in the

state and was rejected, that student would be funded to attend any school in Texas — public, private or religious. That's in-your-face reform. That's putting the question to the test.

Minutes after a tie vote in the Texas House of Representatives to table the bill, the bill's sponsor pulled it, in the face of last-minute weak knees from gutless legislators.

For an example of a state that isn't afraid of its teacher unions and isn't in bed with its education bureaucrats, drive north across the border to Massachusetts. An open enrollment law that passed in 1991 has, as of the last school year, almost 7,000 students participating, with 206 districts sending students out and 89 districts accepting new students in.

A study of the Massachusetts program by Harvard University not only dispelled the myths about school choice offered up by critics, but confirmed the value of market forces in education.

The Harvard study found "no significant effects" on the racial balance or financial health of the districts that lost students. These findings are remarkable, because Massachusetts practiced "tough love" in its choice program. There were no racial restrictions on the freedom to move; in theory, every white student in a minority district could have escaped. Also, the districts losing students have to pay the bill at the new school out of existing funds; no state bailout or

assistance was available to reward failure.

The financial bite wasn't crippling, the Harvard study concluded, because the urban districts are large enough to handle the relatively small percentage of students who actually decided to leave.

More important, the Harvard researchers confirmed the importance of competition. "Those sending districts most severely affected by student losses responded by improving policies and programs in order to win back students or attract replacements from other districts...

Most important, those districts that made programmatic changes slowed or reversed their choice losses, while those that did not continued to lose students at the same rate."

That's choice. That's reform. That's competition at work. Compare it to the dismal effort in Connecticut.

Addendum: If your home straddles two town lines, a new Connecticut statute allows you to choose which school system your children will attend. School choice! One step at a time.

Laurence D. Cohen is executive director of the Yankee Institute for Public Policy Studies in Glastonbury and a public-relations consultant. His column appears every Sunday and every other Thursday. To leave him a comment, please call (on a touch-tone phone) Courant Source at 246-1000 or (800) 246-8070; Source No. 3643.■

EDITORIAL

91. New York Post

May 12, 1997

Don't wreck top city schools

It speaks volumes about the activist organization ACORN that it's working overtime to deconstruct precisely the part of New York's public school system that functions best.

ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) is a left-leaning '60s-era outfit that continues to push collectivist ideals, like organizing workfare recipients into labor unions. In New York, it focuses on leveling attacks on quality public education.

In March, the group zeroed in on the public school system's programs for the gifted and talented. The problem? Too

many Asian and white students and not enough Hispanics.

Now the organization has turned its attention to the city's three most prestigious public high schools — Stuyvesant, Bronx Science and Brooklyn Tech. Admission to these top-notch institutions is highly competitive, and based solely on academic merit.

A study released by ACORN last week alleges that blacks and Hispanics are under-represented in these schools relative to their numbers in the public school system at large. As is its wont, the group attributes the alleged enrollment disparities to "de facto Jim Crow

policies" in admissions.

Of course, representation statistics can't legally or logically prove actual discrimination. But in any case, it's an odd kind of racism the ACORN study found, a racism in which Asian students are favored above all others. Asian-Americans constitute half of Stuyvesant's student body.

Is New York to believe that a sinister Asian conspiracy is rigging entrance exams to benefit Asians at the expense of Latinos? Or that the white powers-that-be are doing their all to give Asian children a leg up over white children, whose enrollment at the top schools is

86. The Indianapolis Star/The Indianapolis News

05/29/97; Edition: CITY:HOME; Section: METRO NORTH; Page N02

Board says its hands are tied on grad prayer

By DAN MCFEELY;
CORRESPONDENT

NOBLESVILLE, Ind. - The divisive issue of prayer in student graduation ceremonies has the Noblesville School Board in a predicament and some students in an uproar.

School attorney Jack Hittle told about a dozen angry parents Tuesday night that the School Board's hands are tied by court rulings that prevent an organized prayer at graduation.

"We are not anti-prayer, but we are stuck in the middle," said Hittle. "We're going to be sued no matter what we decide."

Meanwhile, one high school student wants the matter settled quickly so this year's graduation isn't marred with controversy.

"Most of us seniors don't really care about this," said Amy Trauernicht, one of three seniors who will speak this year. "We are sick of the issue. We just all want to graduate and put the whole thing

to rest."

The issue came alive recently when Noblesville High School Principal Jack Ford reportedly guaranteed there would be no prayer at the June 8 ceremony. It was unclear whether he meant there would be no prayer listed on the program, or if prayer was being banished entirely from the graduation.

Ford's office was contacted for clarification by the Metro North bureau, but a representative said he would have no comment.

Some parents say a vast majority of students want some kind of prayer at graduation.

"They have been very clear and very vocal about this," said Dan Lavengood, whose son, Nick, will graduate. "The School Board needs to allow students to say what they want."

Lavengood has hired Indianapolis attorney John Price to represent him.

"We will carry this as far as we have to," Lavengood said.

Hittle said the parents misunderstood what Ford told the students.

He said the School Board will not object if one of the three scheduled speakers wants to mention God in his or her remarks, but if another student tried to initiate a separate prayer, that student would be causing a disturbance and could be removed from the ceremonies.

"We just can't force people to sit and listen to a graduation prayer," Hittle said.

One parent suggested the matter be put to a vote, but Hittle rejected that idea as well, saying such a vote would never hold up to a constitutional challenge.

"The point is, some people do object," Hittle said. "Even though 99 percent of the students want it, the courts will tell us no."

As for the three scheduled speakers, they will face no punishment if they offer a short prayer or moment of silence.

"We told them that nothing was going to happen to them," Hittle said. "We're not going to pull them off the podium." ■

COMMENTARY

87. The Washington Post

05/30/97; Edition: FINAL; Section: OP-ED; Page A25

A Reluctant Convert to School Choice

By William Raspberry

Poor children desperately need better education. Yet the schools they attend — particularly in America's overwhelmingly black and brown inner cities — may be the least successful of all public schools. What can be done to improve these schools and, thereby, the prospects of the children?

It is an obvious question. It has been asked by thousands of anxious citizens and responded to by thousands of amateur and professional observers of our education system. And yet the answer seems as elusive as ever.

Let me put it more plainly and more personally. I have followed education issues for most of my journalistic career, and I don't know what to do about our failing schools. I cannot give you a list of three or four things which, if

accomplished, would bring dramatic improvement to these schools. I cannot even tell you what the No. 1 priority ought to be. Why should such an obvious question be so hard to answer?

Curiously, most people seem to think the answers are pretty obvious — until they get inside a school and try to improve it. Take Julius Becton, the retired Army general who heads the District of Columbia's Emergency Transitional Education Board of Trustees — he's a sort of super-superintendent, installed by the financial control board President Clinton appointed to rectify the city's disastrous finances.

Becton, who is smart and energetic, thought he knew the answer. And in truth he already has instituted a number of needed reforms, ranging from the on-time delivery of books and supplies to

getting an accurate count of the school system's personnel and fiscal resources to firing superfluous or incompetent employees.

But, as I think he'd agree, none of it has done anything to improve learning in the worst of the city's schools. Nothing he now proposes seems likely to do much better.

Think of a broken, nearly abandoned car that doesn't work. It takes no particular gifts to point out the shattered windshield, the flattened tires and the peeling paint — and to declare that all need to be replaced. Any of us could note the obvious need for an oil change and lube job, new headlights, and new, more accurate, gauges to measure performance. And while we're at it, we could also call for better streets, more rationally funded and with fewer potholes.

the school board to plead for more diversity in hiring teachers.

A hearing has been scheduled for June 10 (at 2 p.m. in Hennepin County courtroom 1251-C) to decide whether to extend the temporary court order for two years. Morrison said she will represent herself because she's unwilling to pay the \$3,000 that one attorney wanted as a fee.

Morrison volunteered her family connection to Lawson Software, adding that she has used it to explain her case to St. Paul Mayor Norm Coleman. Asked how he reacted, she said: "He has his kids in private school."

An excerpt

Here is text taken from a note left by

Greta Lawson Morrison on Lawson Software notepaper March 19 for Steven DeLapp, principal of Barton Open Elementary School. Word had just emerged of a high failure rate among Minneapolis students on statewide tests of basic skills:

Principal DeLapp,

Congratulations on the District's high test scores. I think they could improve even more if we taught more multi-cultural topics, earlier sex-ed, and most importantly keep that "read to kids" program going. I luv th cratve spelin th mos.

Can't wait to see how Barton does. Have you started "Eubonics {sic}

classes" yet.

Anyway your {sic} doing a great job for the next century...

{Asks for copy of leadership council bylaws, which her attorney will check to see if they are consistent with "our Godly constitution."}

I did file a police report on the co-chair and you. My attorney will also respond to the District's attempt to intimidate me and my rights as yes - even a citizen of the People's Republic of Mn. So please feel free to call the police if you feel I'm stalking etc etc etc. You educrats are hysterically incompetent...

Source: Hennepin County District Court■

85. The Chicago Sun-Times

May 30, 1997

Disabled student faces a graduation roadblock

BY PHILIP FRANCHINE

Suburban Reporter

Sumer Smotherman hopes to show she's overcoming paralysis by walking across the stage to receive her junior high diploma Monday.

The problem is getting to the stage.

Officials in Sauk Village District 168 say they won't erect a ramp to help her get up to the stage in her wheelchair at Rickover Junior High School, the girl's mother, Rickie Smotherman, said Thursday.

Smotherman said officials have told the 13-year-old honors student she either climbs the four or so steps or she must be carried onstage.

"I won't be carried," said Sumer, who has been partially paralyzed by illness since last November. "It's like I'm helpless and can't do anything, and I know I can."

"I'd be out of place. I want to be pretty much like everybody else."

The district already has found itself in controversy twice this year, once over a ban on corn-row hairstyles and again over the suspension of a

second-grader for bringing a squirt toy to school.

The backup plan of using a ramp is crucial, Sumer said, because Thursday was the first time in her six-month rehabilitation she was able to climb full-sized steps.

"I'm thrilled to death she could do it," her mother said. "But I'm afraid if Monday night comes and she's too nervous, she should have the option of the ramp."

"She can get up on stage by herself if there is a ramp available for her. Common sense says if she needs to wheel herself up onstage, she should have that right," Smotherman said.

There is another reason to have a ramp, Sumer said.

"I'm not the only kid going to that school who will ever be in a wheelchair. [Others] shouldn't have to go through the same things we had to go through," Sumer said.

District Supt. Thomas E. Ryan could

not be reached for comment.

Sumer came down with transverse myelitis, an inflammation of the spinal cord, in November, and at first was completely paralyzed, her mother said. After working with a therapist she recently has been able to walk short distances with a leg brace.

After a story appeared in a local newspaper Thursday, carpenters from a Chicago Heights local volunteered to build a ramp, Smotherman said. In addition, a local hardware store offered to donate lumber, but after Sumer climbed the stairs and crossed the stage successfully three times, principal Gwendolyn de Vries told the carpenters the ramp was not needed, Smotherman said.

In nearly all situations, federal law bars public schools from demanding that disabled students be carried, said Rodger Murphey, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights.■

Nothing on the list would qualify as a wasteful frill. And yet acting on the entire list might leave you with a car that still didn't run.

That, I think, is a fair analogy of where Becton is with the D.C. school system. He doesn't know how to fix it because he (like most of us) is very unclear as to why it stopped working in the first place.

We all have our pet answers, of course. For some it's inadequate funding, perhaps exacerbated by waste and fraud. For others it's incompetent, undereducated or uninterested teachers operating under dictatorial central administrations using outdated and ineffectual curricula. For still others, it's the poverty (of money and other

resources) of the homes the children come from. (And what can we do about that?)

Many parents, in Washington and elsewhere, are so pessimistic about these failing schools that they're ready to give up on them. Bring on vouchers or tuition tax credits or "choice," they say. If well-off parents see value in the ability to choose their children's schooling, how can you deny similar choices to poor kids and then insist that they keep up? Bring on charter schools, say others. Let parents come together and decide what sort of education they want for their children and then establish schools to provide it — with the funding, the buildings and most of the teachers drawn from existing public school inventories.

I am a reluctant convert to choice: a convert because it seems as obvious for poor children as for rich ones that one-size-fits-all education doesn't make sense; reluctant because choice, in many of its manifestations, could become just one more exercise in skimming the public schools of their most concerned, most active parents. How could the remainder not be worse off than ever?

And there is this: Some schools (public, parochial and private) serving poor, minority children continue to do very well. What do they know — what do they do — that the failing schools don't?

It's such an obvious question. Why don't we know the answer?■

88. Christian Science Monitor

May 30, 1997

Adults: the Forgotten Illiterates

Edward B. Fiske

Widespread basic education has long been a prerequisite for national development. This was the case for the United States, which achieved an 80 percent literacy rate by the mid-19th century, and it has been true for newly developed countries such as South Korea and Singapore, which reached near-universal primary-school enrollment by 1965.

With the emergence of today's "knowledge society," it goes without saying that nations that hope to compete in the global marketplace must do so from a base of well-educated workers and citizens.

Given these facts, data from UNESCO on adult literacy rates around the world are both encouraging and disturbing. The good news: The absolute number of literate adults in the world is rising — from 2 billion in 1980 to 3 billion in '95. That total is projected to reach 5 billion by 2010.

The bad news: Although literacy appears to be keeping pace with world population growth, virtually no progress has been made in reducing the ranks of adults who can't read and write. In 1995 there were an estimated 885 million illiterate adults worldwide, slightly more than the estimated 877 million in 1980. There are no signs that this number is likely to shrink in the foreseeable future.

Most adult illiterates fall into two predictable categories. The overwhelming majority live in developing countries, especially in rural areas, and two-thirds are women. But it would be a mistake to assume that inadequate basic education is only a third-world problem. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates that there are 9 million illiterate persons in Europe, and millions more lack the skills needed to participate in a sophisticated industrial economy.

A recent OECD study shows that even some of the world's richest countries contain significant proportions of literate people whose reading skills fall below the primary-school level — 21 percent in the US, 14 percent in Germany, and 11 percent in the Netherlands.

Illiterate adults in industrialized nations clearly are living at the margins, and such countries have an obvious stake in bringing these people into the economic and social mainstream. Most OECD countries are trying to do this within their own borders, but they have an enormous stake in helping developing countries do the same.

For one thing, access to basic education has been recognized by the community of nations as a fundamental human right. This was reaffirmed as

recently as 1990 when the World Conference on Education for All, meeting in Jomtien, Thailand, proclaimed that "basic education should be provided to all children, youth, and adults." It is perhaps ironic that amid all the justifiable talk of human rights violations in China, that nation has been vigorous in pushing basic literacy.

There are pragmatic reasons as well to be concerned about global illiteracy. Reading skills are just as important to the farmer struggling to understand the directions on a fertilizer label as they are to workers in highly automated factories. There is a real danger that the "education gap" between developed and developing countries will exacerbate the economic polarization that exists between these nations and further threaten the global political order.

Recent years also have seen the spread of democratic institutions around the world, most conspicuously in Latin America and the nations of the former Soviet Union. Such institutions have given millions of people their first opportunity to exercise control over their lives. Yet, to function effectively, they must have access to the information needed to make informed choices. Inadequate basic education is incompatible with the political and social order that the Western nations are

seeking to promote.

The benefits of promoting basic education are well documented. Studies by the World Bank and others have shown the correlation between investment in education and economic productivity. The economic payoffs of such investments are greatest in low-income agricultural economies and those still in the early stages of development.

The benefits that accrue from investing in girls' basic education are particularly striking. Women with only a few years of schooling are better agricultural producers and generate more income for their families. Their families eat more nutritious meals. Educated mothers are more likely to engage in family planning, and the children that they do bear are more likely to survive infancy, avoid illness, and do well in school. Best of all, such women pass these benefits on to their children,

especially their daughters.

Most efforts in recent years to promote literacy have focused on increasing access to formal schooling at the primary-school level, and gains are being made. Primary-school enrollment rose by 50 million from 1990 to '95. Such developments should be celebrated and efforts redoubled. Unfortunately, there is evidence that the focus on children has led international donor agencies like the World Bank to let programs targeted at adults fall by the wayside.

Such policies are short-sighted. The primary-school dropout and repetition rates in developing countries are notoriously high. In Cambodia, only 320 of every 1,000 students who start out in primary school graduate. These figures don't reflect students who never get to school to begin with. Even as enrollment rates increase, such countries continue to produce large numbers of children who

will grow up to be illiterate adults.

We can't afford to wait until literate children grow up to be literate adults. Today's adults are the workers needed to promote economic development and establish democratic institutions. They need help, now.

The continuing presence of nearly 1 billion illiterate adults in the world is a concern for everyone. No nation can feel secure in a world where large masses of people, even whole nations, see themselves as having no stake in the economic and other business of the world community. A world sharply divided between haves and have nots is neither just, stable, sustainable, nor safe.

Edward B. Fiske, formerly education editor of The New York Times, writes frequently on education issues in developing countries. He is editor of "The Fiske Guide to Colleges," published annually by Times Books. ■

89. Houston Chronicle

May 30, 1997

Texas can lead in bringing computers to classrooms

By BRETT A. PERLMAN

Texas is well positioned to become the leader in bringing computer technology to its public schools. The state may fail to capitalize on this opportunity if complex challenges in bringing computers to the classroom are not addressed.

Two years ago, the Legislature established the Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund, a \$1.5 billion effort to bring technology to the classroom. The fund will make grants and loans of \$150 million per year to purchase computer hardware and software, wire schools and train teachers.

This program represents the largest commitment by any state to provide computers for classrooms and could have an enormous impact on our education system. Pilot work has shown that computer technology helps students improve achievement and boost test scores. Studies also demonstrate that technology has the potential to improve education by allowing students the flexibility to learn and discover on their own.

While such studies show technology's promise, history suggests that it may fail

to have this profound influence if the state fails to plan carefully.

The chalkboard may remain the most used teaching tool in Texas classrooms if new technologies are too difficult to use or not well integrated into the learning process.

In fact, more than 15 years after the introduction of the personal computer, most Texas students do not benefit from computer technology. Less than 5 percent of Texas schools are effectively using technology and two-thirds are at very low levels of technology use.

To be effective, Texas must design a program which uses the fund to address several problems.

First, the program must deal with the wide variety of uses and needs for technology in Texas schools. Some schools may want to provide access through video or the Internet to subjects not offered in their districts. Other schools may want to use technology to have students collaborate between classrooms.

In each instance, schools would benefit from sharing their experiences with other schools and with universities, colleges, libraries and others in their

communities. Consequently, schools must be networked with other institutions across the state in order to gain full advantage from the technology.

Even if schools receive the computer and network equipment they need, they may not have the resources required to implement the technology or train teachers to use it.

Few Texas schools have updated implementation plans that account for the rapid changes in the computer industry. Thoughtful planning will be required both to meet the purely technical challenge of installing computers and to assure that there is broad community support for using technology.

Nor do schools have the resources required to train teachers to use computers in the classroom. A majority of Texas teachers today are ill-equipped to use the technology in teaching. Teachers will need intensive training in order to better understand how new technology can improve teaching and student performance.

In order to address these problems, Texas must develop a comprehensive strategy for successfully integrating technology into the classroom. Such a