NYC Study Hails Catholic Schools

NAEP Reading Scores Tell a Grim Tale
Nothing to show for $125b Title I spending spree

Soaring Spending Fails to Lift Achievement
After 30 years, time for a different approach?

A voucher program would create “enormous” benefits, says public school advocate

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Do as DoEd Says, Not as DoEd Does

Will Dept. of Education be held accountable for spending, too?

BY LARRY PARKER

I

n his ambitious education reform package, President George W. Bush has proposed holding schools more accountable for the way they spend federal tax dollars, including a reduction in funding for those that don’t meet performance standards.

The Bush plan would increase spending at and through the U.S. Department of Education, which in turn would send more money to schools that succeed, and less to some that fail.

"The approach raises some interesting questions: Will the department itself be held to meaningful standards of accountability for the way it spends its allocation of federal tax dollars? How will the department’s performance be measured, and what will be the rewards for doing a good job and the penalties for doing a bad job?

The questions are far from academic, as was made clear when Department of Education officials recently admitted to Congress that approximately $450 million in education spending, sought in audits over the last three fiscal years, is in fact "missing." Congress has conducted hearings on the department’s casual approach to bookkeeping for several years.

As Congressman Pete Hoekstra (R-Michigan) confided to an Alexis de Tocqueville Institution researcher last year after one of the audit hearings, “they just tell us they can’t find the money and give us a smug smile—because there doesn’t seem to be any way to discipline the department when it doesn’t perform, no matter how brazenly.”

The Bush proposal doesn’t seem any more inclined to discipline the department. An estimate from the President’s Office of Management and Budget, provided to Teacher Choice, a research program of the Alexis de Tocqueville Institution, shows the department adding “approximately $150 million” in new money on education per year, an expansion of more than 20 percent.

The President’s budget proposal calls for the Department of Education’s budget to nearly double from 2000 through 2006, and virtually triple in a decade, from $23 billion in 1996 to $60.1 billion in 2006 if Bush is reelected. Not only would Bush give the department a huge increase in absolute dollar terms, but he would increase the department’s budget by a higher percentage per year than the combined average of Presidents Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Bill Clinton.

Congress dealt the President’s spending plan a blow in early April, but not because the plan was too extravagant. Many members faulted the plan for not increasing the department’s budget enough, saying education spending rises only about 6 percent in the current year’s budget. Senate Democrats complaining about the President’s plan were joined by a key Republican, Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Chairman Jim Jeffords of Vermont.

Jeffords, cooperating with his committee’s ranking member, Massachusetts Democrat Edward Kennedy, wants far more for education than the President has proposed. For example, where the President’s plan asked for an 8 percent increase in federal funds for K-12 education, Jeffords’ committee reported a bill that would increase federal education funding by 52 percent, to a record $27.7 billion.

Teachers’ Perspective

One question that hasn’t been raised during this jockeying to spend more money on education is whether classroom teachers—who produce the education—want more federal money. New money is likely to come with rules and regulations to combat the waste and lack of accountability uncovered in U.S. Department of Education audits. It’s not clear teachers would welcome money wrapped in red tape.

A 1997 poll, for example, found that more than half of Washington, DC teachers cited the high cost and complexity of school administration as the main cause of public education woes in the nation’s capital. A 1999 poll of 30 award-winning teachers attending the Tocqueville’s National Teachers Summit said teachers’ top frustration was “too many rules and restrictions on the ability to teach effectively.”

An informal survey of teachers from Maine to California, conducted in March, found teachers supporting the principles of “accountability” in the Bush education plan—but fretting about the strings it might put on them. Those teachers seem to regard federal and even state education bureaucracies warily.

“If schools are going to be held accountable,” as a Teacher Choice member from Illinois put it, “maybe the federal department should be, too.”

Larry Parker is the senior reporter for Teacher Choice at the Alexis de Tocqueville Institution in Washington, DC. He can be reached by email at lparker@adti.net.
Reading Problem Becomes Opportunity for Scholastic

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

In a refreshingly quick and direct response to the latest U.S. Department of Education report on the nation’s reading problems, Scholastic, Inc. launched on April 30 two new programs to improve the reading skills of America’s students.

Summer School Program

The Scholastic Summer School Reading Program™ is research-based and provides a daily schedule of skills-specific activities and components to support reading success through the use of high-interest literature and direct instruction, where lessons are practiced and reinforced with the whole class and in small groups. The program provides a daily schedule of skills-specific activities and components to support reading success, and follows a recognized instructional cycle of Teach—Practice—Apply. Measured program outcomes include reading comprehension, reading fluency, vocabulary, grammar and writing skills, and listening and speaking skills.

“This year, thousands of children will be heading to summer school in great need of mastering basic reading skills within a short period of time,” said Julie McGee, executive vice president of Scholastic Educational Publishing. “Scholastic Summer School Reading Program™ effectively addresses the issues facing struggling readers and provides much-needed support to summer school teachers and school districts across the country who are urgently seeking motivating programs that help to build skills and raise test scores to close the achievement gap.”

Components of the new six-week program include Student Workbooks, Fluency Cards, Reading Skills Cards, and Phonics Instruction; a comprehensive, accessible Teacher Edition with minute-by-minute schedule options; Classroom Libraries of instructional, independent, and read-aloud books; and an Assessment Guide that provides weekly and pre/post tests.

Reading Assessment via the Internet

Scholastic also announced the launch of iReAch™, an Internet-based reading assessment program aimed at building reading comprehension and vocabulary skills for students in grades 2-8 and prepares them for state and national standardized testing.

Using this literature-based assessment program, educators can monitor individual student performance and receive instructional support materials that directly address student reading needs.

iReAch™ first has students read full-length books selected from hundreds of well-known and award-winning titles, and then has them take multiple choice tests based on their grade level. The test questions have been correlated to every statewide assessment of reading curriculum and to the five major standardized tests: Metropolitan Achievement Test, California Achievement Test, Stanford Achievement Test, Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the CTBSS Terra Nova.

The resulting iReAch™ reports inform educators and administrators about how students are performing on every tested reading and vocabulary skill, and can be used as an indicator of how students will score on grade-level standardized tests. Delivered through a Web-based subscription service available at http://www.scholastic.com/ireach, the program can be accessed via the Internet in the classroom, in a library, or at home setting. iReAch™ can produce individual, group, class, grade level, and school-wide progress reports.

Plan, President George W. Bush has proposed to allow parents with children stuck in chronically failing public schools to take up to $1,500 of Title I aid and apply it toward a range of private educational options, including tuition in private schools. At this writing, Capitol Hill negotiators want to limit that option to paying private tutors.

Robert Holland is a senior fellow at the Lexington Institute, a public policy think tank in Arlington, Virginia. His e-mail address is rholl1176@yahoo.com.
Voucher “Lies and Distortions” Stymie Choice for Poor

Misinformation campaign jeopardizes children’s future

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

A campaign of misinformation about school vouchers is keeping the benefits of parental choice out of the hands of low-income families, while middle-income and upper-income families continue to take such benefits for granted simply by changing their residence, according to a new report issued by the Office of Research at the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

The un-American result, the report concludes, may be to jeopardize the ability of millions of children to prosper in a free society.

Organized opponents of tax-supported school vouchers purposely issue inaccurate statements about parental choice in order to contaminate discussion of this important public policy issue, contend the report’s authors, Howard Fuller and Kaleem Caire. Fuller is a former superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools and currently a distinguished professor of education at Marquette. Caire, who was chief education consultant to Milwaukee Public Schools the last year claimed residence of students, is now assistant professor of education at Marquette.

The report, “Lies and Distortions: The Campaign Against School Vouchers,” describes the three elements of the misinformation campaign against school vouchers: the “Big Lie Strategy” of organized voucher opponents; media reporting of claims that vouchers pose a threat to basic American institutions; and poor reporting and editorial decisions.

For example, American Federation of Teachers President Sandra Feldman earlier this year claimed that suburban schools would not take Milwaukee voucher students. In fact, the law allows only private schools in the city to take voucher students.

Among many other “Big Lies” documented by Fuller and Caire is a recent statement by Howard Fuller that the road to school choice was a long one, with the fight to put programs in place being only the first stage of a multi-phase battle against relentless “protectors of the status quo [who] are not just going to go quietly into the night.”

In his keynote address to the National Catholic Educational Association members at the Milwaukee Auditorium, Fuller described the five-part strategy used by opponents to defeat any parental choice initiative:

• First, try to make sure it never gets into law;
• Second, if it’s likely to become law, add limitations to weaken its impact;
• Third, after it becomes law, challenge it in court;
• Fourth, if it wins in the courts, call for additional regulations to improve “accountability”;
• And at all stages, put forward lies and distortions about school choice.

Fuller warned against looking to parental choice as a panacea to single-handedly transform American education. Transformation will come from school choice coupled with other strategies, he said, including action from parents willing to stand up and call for school choice. “But American education will never be transformed without parental choice,” declared Fuller, emphasizing the importance of giving poor parents the option of taking their children—and their education dollars—out of schools that aren’t working for them and putting them in other schools. “It’s not about whether it’s a religious school,” Fuller said. “It’s about whether parents choose to send their children there.”

Parents Must Demand Choice

“There is no Christian math, Christian reading, or Christian social studies,” noted another conference speaker, Roberta Kitchen, a voucher parent from Cleveland. “I wanted [my children] to go to a place where what I was teaching at home would be encouraged.”

For more Information...

WWW

The 45-page report by Howard Fuller and Kaleem Caire, “Lies and Distortions: The Campaign Against School Vouchers,” is available from the Office of Research, Institute for the Transformation of Learning, 205 North Summit Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53202, phone 414/765-0691.


Long Choice Struggle Ahead, Catholics Warned

Catholic teachers and administrators meeting in Milwaukee in April were warned by parental choice advocate Howard Fuller that the road to school choice was a long one, with the fight to put programs in place being only the first stage of a multi-phase battle against relentless “protectors of the status quo [who] are not just going to go quietly into the night.”

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Advocacy on behalf of parental choice is still needed, outgoing NCEA President Leonard F. DeFiore reminded the educators, even though the U.S. Supreme Court had recognized the right of all parents to school choice in its 1925 Pierce decision. Under the present system, parents lose their sovereignty when their child reaches the age of five and enroll in a public school.

A parent who exercises choice should not be taxed for that decision over and above the rest of the population, argued Archbishop Rembert G. Weakland. Noting about half of all Catholic children attend public schools rather than Catholic schools, he also urged Catholics to work “to make our public schools the best schools possible.”

“In this instance, the consequences of deception are measured by millions of children whose ability to prosper in a free society may be jeopardized.”

“In the meantime, Fullers newest book, ‘American education will never be transformed without parental choice,’ says Howard Fuller.

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“American education will never be transformed without parental choice.”

Howard Fuller

“In the meantime, Fullers newest book, ‘American education will never be transformed without parental choice,’ says Howard Fuller.
Vouchers or Tax Credits for Full School Choice?

Which is the better vehicle?

BY MATTHEW J. BROUILLETTE AND JOSEPH P. OVERTON

Which is the better vehicle for implementing full school choice for children: vouchers or universal education tax credits? A recent Cato Institute policy paper, “Toward Market Education: Are Vouchers or Tax Credits the Better Path?” informs the debate on this question.

Researcher and author Andrew J. Coulson, best known for his 1999 opus Market Education: The Unknown History, analyzes which school choice policy proposal would best serve both individual needs and communal goals for education. In Market Education, Coulson identified six key conditions present where educational excellence and opportunity have flourished in the last 2,500 years: parental choice, direct parental financial responsibility, freedom for educators, competition among schools, the profit motive for educators, and universal access to the education marketplace. In “Toward Market Education,” Coulson assesses how well both vouchers and universal education credits meet these criteria, and concludes tax credits are the superior option.

Tax Credit Advantages

The tax credit Coulson assesses is a universal education tax credit, whereby any taxpayer can claim a dollar-for-dollar tax credit for K-12 tuition, within certain limits. Parents can claim the credit against their own tax liability, and all other taxpayers, including corporations, can claim a credit for contributions to private scholarship-making organizations. This differs from a traditional tax credit in which only parents may claim a credit for tuition paid for their own children.

Since the universal credit is dollar-for-dollar, an individual or corporation can make tuition contributions at no cost. This provides a powerful incentive to do so, especially when both the educational value and public relations value are considered.

Voucher Disadvantages

Coulson finds both advantages and disadvantages with vouchers.

Vouchers successfully meet the criteria for effective education in many ways, including parental choice and student access to schools, as well as freedom, competition, and the profit motive for educators. However, the key element of direct parental financial responsibility is absent when the government pools tax money and redistributes funds to parents via vouchers. Coulson notes this is particularly problematic because historically the interests of parents who have not paid for their children’s education have been ignored.

Policy experts identify additional problems with vouchers that go beyond the scope of Coulson’s consideration in “Toward Market Education.” Most troubling is the potential impact of government regulation on independent schools. It may fear that once government funding is widespread, private schools could become almost indistinguishable from their government school counterparts, or could be forced to close due to loss of students. The process could occur as follows.

First, even though participation in a voucher program may be voluntary, the vast majority of private schools would, in effect, be forced to accept them. Parents would demand the immediate and significant financial relief vouchers provide from unsubsidized tuition payments for one or more of their children. It would be extremely difficult for a private school to pass up the allure of “free” money and the opportunity to make schooling less expensive for its families. Private schools would therefore become increasingly dependent on voucher revenue.

Second, as private schools increasingly accepted government funding, legislatures would respond to increasing calls for state oversight. Many people believe that if the state is transferring public funds to a person or organization, the state should have strict oversight of how that money is used. As the saying goes, “Government shackles follow government shekels.” New regulations would challenge the operation and autonomy of previously independent schools. With schools dependent on voucher revenue, few would be able to weaken themselves when government regulation becomes invasive.

Finally, the regulatory ratchet effect would decrease the autonomy and diversity of private schools and could force many to close. Regulations would force schools to conform to government-established curricula, teaching and testing methods, religious practices, employment policies, and so on. The initial benefit of competition between schools due to vouchers would then diminish as government regulation forced private schools to become one-size-fits-all institutions as it has traditional government schools.

Most private schools, however, exist to be unique, and many will avoid regulations by refusing to accept vouchers where that option is permitted. Few, however, would be able to do so and remain financially sound as parents succumb to the lower effective cost of voucher-accepting schools.

In comparing universal education credits to the six criteria for effective education, Coulson concludes they “appear on the balance of evidence to offer the best hope for bringing educational excellence within reach of all families.” The key advantage of universal education credits is that they restore to the family the responsibility of educating children.

Coulson notes that in addition to including direct parental financial responsibility, universal education credit programs avoid the use of public money.

For more information...


“Since all the money involved in these programs is privately and voluntarily spent, issues of church-state entanglement and necessary public oversight of public spending are rendered moot,” he writes. “Because of the greater resistance to regulation that follows from the absence of state funding under tax-credit programs, those programs do a better job of protecting all the criteria for effective markets from regulatory encroachment.”

Universal Access?

Coulson notes that vouchers, by their nature, easily provide sufficient funding for all students. He is convinced, however, that universal credits also would provide universal access to good schools. Current universal education credit proposals, such as the Universal Tuition Tax Credit crafted by the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in 1997, have been designed explicitly to provide scholarship funds for children from families that have little or no tax liability.

Coulson recommends reformers embrace school choice proposals that best meet the conditions necessary for effective education in both the short-term and long-term. The failure to adopt sound school choice policies could plunge our public schools, as well as our public schools, into the same conundrum tomorrow that we find ourselves in today.

Matthew J. Bruillette and Joseph P. Overtton are director of education policy and senior vice president, respectively, of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy.
Tax Credits Would Boost Private Schooling in New Jersey

But only 7% of students would benefit

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

Total private school enrollment in New Jersey would increase by 40 percent, and the state treasury would realize net annual savings of almost a half billion dollars, if the Garden State legislature enacted two proposed tuition tax credit plans being championed by gubernatorial candidate Brett Schundler.

The two plans—a tuition tax credit and a scholarship tax credit—would significantly enlarge the menu of choices available to parents for the education of their children outside of the public schools.

While illustrating the promise of the proposed measures, the tax credit plan also reveals limitations that hamper tax credits. For example, the state income tax liability for most families is much less than the cost of tuition at private schools. In addition, the scholarship credit as proposed would most likely not raise sufficient funds to pay the tuition of every child who wants to attend a private school.

The two tuition tax credit bills were introduced by New Jersey Assemblyman Guy Gregg, working with Jersey City mayor and gubernatorial candidate Brett Schundler. One bill is the Parental Control and Involvement Act (PCIA); the other, the Educational Options Act (EOA).

The PCIA is a parental tax credit proposal that would give parents credits against their state income tax liability equal to 50 percent of qualified educational expenses, up to a maximum total credit of $500 per dependent child. All parents of school-age children also would be eligible to receive a 100 percent tax credit for up to $150 per household for spending on computer hardware and software related to curriculum or instruction.

The EOA is a scholarship tax credit proposal that would give individuals and corporations tax credits of 75 percent of the amount they contribute to nonprofit organizations that give scholarships to children attending non-public schools. For individuals, estates, and trusts, the credit is limited to $10,000; for companies, it is limited to 10 percent of the company’s annual corporate income tax liability.

The supporters of the family tax credit bill, the EOA, assert in its preamble: “It is possible for low-income children to attend privately managed schools while simultaneously saving State taxpayers many hundreds of millions of dollars annually.” An analysis by The Heartland Institute cautiously confirms that assertion.

“The New Jersey tax credit proposals are well-designed, will help tens of thousands of children find a better education, and would save taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars to boot,” commented Heartland President Joseph L. Bast, author of the April 19, 2001 study, “Fiscal Impact of Proposed Tuition Tax Credits for the State of New Jersey.”

Bast also noted, however, that the plans would encourage only 7 percent of students currently enrolled in public schools to shift to private schools, “hardly the kind of sweeping privatization hoped for by many market advocates.”

According to Bast’s analysis, the plans together would reduce the after-tax price of private school tuition by between 32 percent and 95 percent, depending on family income, grade level, and choice of school. That would have the effect of increasing the demand for private schools; economists estimate a 10 percent decrease in the price of private schooling increases the probability of a family choosing a private school by 4.8 percent. Overall, the lowered price of tuition would likely increase total private school enrollment by 40 percent, or from 207,275 students currently to 290,958. The tax credits would lower state tax revenues by some $385 million. However, the transfer of 83,683 students from public to private schools would generate avoided costs of $1.065 billion. Net annual savings to the state treasury would be $480 million.

Limitations of Tax Credits

Although the parental tax credit, PCIA, allows tax credits of up to $500 per dependent child, many families wouldn’t qualify for the entire amount. For example, families earning less than $40,000 a year would “zero out” their entire state income tax liability before reaching the cap for just one child. Running different scenarios with less-restrictive tax credit rules produces relatively few additional student transfers out of public schools, which seems to indicate an inherent limitation in the tax credit approach. For example, Bast told School Reform News that doubling the parental tax credit benefit to 100 percent and increasing the dollar cap ten-fold to $5,000 would increase the total percentage of public school students switching to private school from 7 percent to just 7.6 percent.

“Could the proposed scholarship tax credit generate sufficient funds to make a significant difference? Using what appear to be reasonable assumptions about participation in the program, Bast’s study suggests the EOA measure would raise between $340 million and $530 million a year, enough in the view of the proposals to between 57 percent and 89 percent of students wishing to attend private schools. While a half-billion dollars in charitable donations appears impressive, it pales against the $15.6 billion New Jersey state and local governments spend each year on K-12 public schooling.

The scholarship-granting entities created under the EOA measure would fund up to 226,414 full-tuition scholarships or 259,344 partial-tuition scholarships. Those numbers appear impressive until it is recognized that 207,000 students already attend private schools. Thus, under the assumptions used in the study, the scholarship measure would generate only 19,414 to 52,344 new private school students.

The New Jersey tax credits, like other tax credit plans, do not defund public schools. A dollar donated to a scholarship-granting entity, or deducted from one’s personal income taxes, does not result in a dollar less being spent on public schools. There is no provision for returning to taxpayers any of the $480 million in savings that the tax credit plan makes possible.

According to Bast, “It is difficult to see, in this philanthropy-driven model, where any pressure would arise to force governments to spend less on public schools as their enrollments decline. By leaving tax dollars in the public school system each time a parent chooses private schools, tax credits reward public sector incompetence and make the status quo even harder to change.

“In light of the limited impact of even ambitious tax credit programs,” Bast concludes, “advocates of privatization who think they have found an approach superior to vouchers would do well to reconsider.”

Types of K-12 Education Tax Credits

Education Tax Credits. Taxpaying parents receive a direct tax credit for all or part of the expenses they have incurred in privately educating their child. Illinois, Iowa, and Minnesota have this type of credit.

Credits to Benefit Parents Who Don’t Pay Taxes. Refundable Tax Credits. Non-taxpaying parents receive a direct refund from the state for all or part of the expenses they have incurred in privately educating their child. Unlike other credits, this “credit” does involve the spending of public funds. Minnesota has this type of credit.

Scholarship Tax Credits. Taxpayers receive a credit for donating to organizations that indirectly benefit non-taxpaying parents by providing them with scholarships to send their children to non-public schools. Arizona has this type of credit.

Universal Tax Credits. These combine the Education Tax Credit, for parents who pay taxes, with the Scholarship Tax Credit, for parents who do not pay taxes. To date, no Universal Tax Credit program has been enacted.
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has spent $80 billion to close the achieve-
ment gap . . . only to see a widening of the gap in fourth-grade reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress test, and no increase in reading scores nationwide.

“A new approach to educating America’s children is needed,” says Krista Kafer, education policy analyst at The Heritage Foundation, pointing to the Leave No Children Behind Act of 2001 (H.R. 1) as a new prescription for raising student achievement. Kafer’s analysis of the Senate effort, which has spent $80 billion to close the achievement gap . . . only to see a widening of the gap in fourth-grade reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress test, and no increase in reading scores nationwide.

“Two new studies, from The Heritage Foundation and American Legislative Exchange Council, question the wisdom of opening the spending spigot for public education.”

H.R. 1. “B+ for H.R. 1’s Education Reforms,” was released on April 23.

“Unlike other education legislation now before Congress, H.R. 1 includes more measures to promote academic excel-

The last reform, which has attracted the most opposition from public school advo-
cates, is the most significant accountabil-
ity mechanism in H.R. 1. If enrolled at a Title I school that had failed to improve for three years, students could take their Title I per-pupil dollars to another school, either public or private. Victims of school violence would also be eligible to attend other schools. Even the National Education Association’s own survey recently found strong support for such a choice program.

House Education and the Workforce Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-Ohio) welcomed the Heritage Foundation analysis of H.R. 1 and urged his col-
leagues to read it. The Heritage Foundation is a research and educational institute whose goal is to formulate and promote conservative public policies. In a companion analysis of the Senate version of the President’s education pro-
posal, entitled “A Failing Grade for S.1, the Senate Education Committee Bill,” Kafer reports that the Senate effort “represents current law far more than it does the Bush reform plan,” containing more money but little accountability and no choice.

ALEC Report Card

After examining a broader range of data by state, a new study from the American Legislative Exchange Council arrived at the same conclusion as Kafer’s Heritage Foundation analysis: Spending more on education doesn’t mean students learn more.

Over the past 20 years, expenditures per pupil have increased by 22.9 per-
cent in constant dollars, while stan-
dardized test scores have remained rel-
atively constant.

“There is no evident correlation between increasing conventional measures of educational inputs and improving student achievement,” said Tennessee State Representative Steve McDaniel, ALEC’s 2001 National Chairman.

“We cannot keep looking to past prac-
tices as a roadmap to future success,” said McDaniel. “There’s an old saying that goes, ‘Don’t throw good money after bad.’

The data underlying the ALEC analysis were released on April 17 in the eighth edition of the Council’s Report Card on American Education: A State by State Analysis, 1976-2000. Authored by Andrew T. LeFevre and Rea S. Hederman Jr., the Report Card grades each state using over one hundred measures of educational resources and achievement, from school enrollment and expenditures per pupil to teacher salaries and SAT scores. The comprehensive col-
lection of data is intended to help local, state, and federal policy makers under-
stand how changes in educational inputs are likely to change educational outputs.

Although reducing class size is a top priority for the teacher unions, a series of charts in the ALEC study show no rela-
tionship between spending per student and student achievement levels. There’s also no clear relationship between higher teacher salaries—another teacher union priority—and student achievement.

“It is clear that states cannot improve student performance over time simply by tweaking pupil-to-teacher ratios, building more schools, or adjusting the level of federal assistance they receive,” write the Report Card’s authors.

Nevertheless, legislators are under pressure from parents to do something to improve the education system. With two-thirds of America’s eighth-graders reading below the “proficient” level, the need for reform clearly extends beyond the troubled school systems in most major cities.

“We cannot simply spend our way to higher grades,” said McDaniel, calling for reforms such as charter schools, tax cred-
its, and vouchers, which would bring edu-
cational choice and freedom to parents and students.

The American Legislative Exchange Council, with over 2,400 legislative mem-
bers nationwide, is dedicated to the prin-
ciples of free markets, individual liberty, and limited government.
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Colorado Charters Get Construction Funds

Per-pupil capital stipend frees funds for instruction

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

I
n April, Colorado Governor Bill Owens signed into law a school funding bill that includes a provision for the creation of a capital construction fund for charter schools. Allocated to charter schools as a per-pupil stipend of $322 each, the funds may be used for construction, demolition, remodeling, financing, purchasing, or leasing of land, buildings, or facilities used to educate charter school students. Although a few other states provide some form of capital assistance to charter schools, Colorado’s new law is the most expansive. The Republican governor had called for such a provision in his January 11 State of the State Address, in which he highlighted the inequality in funding between children who attend traditional public schools and those who attend public charter schools. Unlike public neighborhood schools, public charter schools in Colorado have had to pay for their school buildings out of their operating funds, which meant less money to pay teachers, buy textbooks, and operate the school.

“It is simply wrong that children who attend public charter schools must have their buildings paid for out of their school’s operating funds, while children in public neighborhood schools have their school paid for out of additional, separate, capital funding,” said Owens after signing the School Finance Act. “Charter schools will now not erode their instruction budgets for capital needs.”

Although the $322 stipend will be a great help to charter schools, it is only about 55 percent of the state’s average per-pupil bond redemption amount per year. Even so, when the original bill to create the stipend was introduced by House Speaker Doug Dean, it was bitterly opposed by Democrats, who now control the State Senate for the first time in 40 years. The provision won final approval only as an amendment to the School Finance Act.

BY MARK HOWARD

ew charter school operators are interested in finding a facility that will house their school in its initial years. The search for that facility should begin at the same time the school’s founders begin to fill out their charter school application, roughly twelve months prior to opening.

Facilities & Finance

Starting a New School

Estimating the number of students who will be enrolled in the first, second, and third years of operation is vital. It is important to plan for expansion after the school’s initial year. More than two-thirds (70 percent) of all charter schools are over-enrolled from the day they open.

Expansion space can be secured upfront, or school officials can obtain an option from the landlord to expand according to the school’s projected growth.

The basic formula for estimating the size of the needed facility is:

Number of students x 90 = Gross square footage required

This formula will include space for your classrooms, administrative area, assembly, media, and cafeteria/food service.

“Our vision is really the minimum for a good comparison. The best possible situation would be to lease existing school space. Private and public schools that may have closed or are currently not operating profitably are good prospects. Obtaining an existing facility already built out for educational purposes will save a substantial amount of time and money.

Alternatively, recently shuttered supermarkets, variety stores, or drug stores make good conversions to schools. In most cases, the initial rent for such facilities will be under $5.00 per square foot; in some cases, the previous tenant may still be paying rent. This can be a plus for a new charter school: The existing landlord or the previous tenant will have an interest in having the space in use, operating and creating a revenue stream. Community development incentive programs may provide the landlord with a tax advantage for leasing and investing in a school. And in most states, facilities used for public education do not pay real estate taxes.

Charter school officials are urged to take advantage of the experience and market knowledge offered by a local commercial real estate agent. Agents are well-informed on what space is available in the marketplace. . . . and, best of all, it is the landlord who pays the agent.

More than two-thirds (70 percent) of all charter schools are over-enrolled from the day they open.”

Location

Charter school officials seeking a location for their facility are the consumers of a product, and they should act like consumers, comparing different products to find the best deal. Three potential sites is really the minimum for a good comparison.

The best possible situation would be to lease existing school space. Private and public schools that may have closed or are currently not operating profitably are good prospects. Obtaining an existing facility already built out for educational purposes will save a substantial amount of time and money.

Although charter schools cannot have a religious affiliation, that does not prevent a church from acting as landlord for a charter school. Many churches have Sunday school space that can be leased to a charter school during the week. Alternatively, they may own property that could be converted to charter school use by locating leased modular units on the property.

In a nutshell, charter school officials need to be creative when searching for an appropriate facility for their school, and they shouldn’t hesitate to use the services of a local real estate professional.

Mark Howard has specialized in the development of commercial properties since 1980. He owns and operates M.H. Realty Associates, Inc. in Tamarac, Florida. Readers with questions on facilities and finances are encouraged to contact him directly at mgfl@aol.com. The most frequent questions about common problems will be addressed in future columns.

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For more information...
Schools USA Become Partners

Haskell, Charter

Classwell Acquires Expeditionary Learning Provider

On April 10, Classwell Learning Group, a provider of e-learning solutions for the pre-K-12 market, announced it had acquired GlobalLearn, an online curriculum provider that facilitates expeditionary learning. GlobalLearn produces K-12 language arts and social studies activities, including Expedition, lesson plans and student activities on regions of the world. Financial details of the transaction were not disclosed.

www.classwell.com

Haskell Education Services, a design and construction company for pre-K-12 schools, and Charter Schools USA, a K-12 charter school management company, announced a partnership on April 4. Under the terms of the agreement, Haskell will provide design, financial, and auxiliary services to schools managed by Charter Schools USA. Charter Schools USA will provide management services to schools co-developed by the two companies.

www.chartersschoolsusa.com / www.thehaskello.com

Software How-Tos Available for Kids

For over 15 years, Children’s Software Press has reviewed and evaluated products in its Children’s Software newsletter. Thousands of parents and teachers turn to the company—not only for information about what’s new on the market, but also for ideas on how to help children get the most out of technology.

Five years ago, Children’s Software Press launched an inexpensive brochure series (most titles are $4). Starting with a much-needed guide for students on how to cite electronic sources, the most recent edition in the series tackles the question of how to write a “Paperless Paper”—a concise look at how the computer can be a helmpate to students in the research process from conception to final product. Other booklets in the series explore how to use digital cameras in the classroom, computer craft projects, detecting misinformation on the Web, and Internet safety. Upcoming topics in the series include student guides to writing a book report with the help of a computer, making a presentation with technology aids, and tackling current events assignments using the Web.

www.children'ssoftwarepress.com

Scholastic to Focus on Reading Improvement

Scholastic Corporation, publisher and distributor of children’s books, announced on April 17 it will not update its basal textbook reading program for future state adoptions but instead will focus the company’s educational publishing efforts on research-based reading improvement programs.

The company’s instructional materials in this area consist of intervention, technology, phonics, early childhood, extended learning, and summer school programs, which help students overcome reading problems and achieve higher test scores.

Launched in 1999, Scholastic’s reading improvement programs cost less to produce and have rapidly grown into a profitable, $50 million business.

“We are committed to teaching children how to read and we intend to maintain a significant presence in reading curriculum,” said Richard Robinson, chairman, president, and CEO of Scholastic. “Because the textbook market has changed, our resources will be better applied to our reading improvement programs focused on helping the more than 8 million children who are reading below grade level. We can have more impact by helping children at risk with innovative products such as Read 180”—where we have already established our expertise—”than by continuing to produce basal textbooks.”

www.scholastic.com

SchoolNet Receives Additional Financing

SchoolNet, an application service provider for K-12 schools, announced on March 26 it had secured an additional $1 million round of financing from its original investors, including Alley Capital, Quad Ventures, The Princeton Review, and SeaVest. The company will use the funding to expand its product development and sales efforts.

www.schoolnet.com

Plato’s Courseware and Tests Will Serve ETS

Plato Learning, Inc., a provider of computer and Web-based instruction, and Educational Testing Service (ETS), an educational testing and research company, announced a partnership on April 11. Plato’s Courseware and its new Simulated Test System, which includes updated teacher assessment tests and Internet delivery, will replace ETS’ LearningPlus program, delivering online instruction and placement tests in reading, writing, and math.

www.plato.com / www.ets.org

Internet Improves Quality of Education, Teachers Say

An April 9 NetDay report on the integration of the Internet in the classroom, which surveyed 600 public and private school teachers across the United States, found 84 percent of the teachers surveyed believe computers and the Internet can improve the quality of education. However, two-thirds also believe the Internet is not currently well-integrated into classrooms.

Forty-eight percent of teachers responding to the survey said that, over the last two years, the Internet has become an important tool for teaching—but half or more use the Internet for less than 30 minutes a day at school. The study found the majority of teachers see the Internet mainly as a research tool, and only 26 percent of teachers say they use it in learning activities.

www.netday.org

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‘Easy to use and educational’
“If the Children Aren’t Learning, We’re Not Teaching”

AN INTERVIEW WITH
SIEGFRIED E. ENGELMANN
BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

One of the most vigorous continuing debates in elementary education is over which teaching method produces the best results.

Is it teacher-directed learning, where the teacher conveys knowledge to his or her students? Or is it student-directed learning, where the teacher encourages students to construct meaning from their own individual learning experiences?

Although a considerable body of research shows student-directed learning is ineffective, the debate rages on because many educators—and especially teachers of educators—choose to ignore the research.

Siegfried Engelmann has been one of the key participants in this debate over the years, and a major contributor to its resolution. He first became interested in how children acquire knowledge when he was research director for an advertising agency trying to understand more about the learning process.

Pursuing this interest, Engelmann quit the advertising business in 1964 and became senior educational specialist at the Institute for Research on Exceptional Children at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana. There, his research into the effectiveness of different teaching methods in the education of underprivileged children led him to develop the Direct Instruction method of teaching.

The Direct Instruction method involves teaching from a tightly scripted curriculum delivered via direct instruction to the class; i.e., giving children small pieces of information and immediately asking them questions based on that information. While Direct Instruction is teacher-directed instruction, it does not encompass all the possible varieties of teacher-directed instruction, including the common situation where a teacher delivers a content-rich curriculum to students but decides exactly “what” will be taught.

Engelmann’s research in the 1960s into the effectiveness of different teaching methods was subsequently confirmed by the massive federal Follow Through project in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1999, the American Institute of Research looked at 24 education reform programs and concluded Direct Instruction was one of only two that had solid research vouching for its effectiveness. But despite all the research findings, Direct Instruction is used at only 150 of the nation’s more than 114,000 schools.

After developing the Direct Instruction method, Engelmann became a professor of special education at the University of Oregon, in Eugene, Oregon, where he established the National Institute for Direct Instruction. He recently spoke with School Reform News Managing Editor George Clowes.

Clowes: What approach did you first take to understanding the mechanics of the learning process?

Engelmann: I studied philosophy when I was in college, and I was much influenced by the British analytical approach that required very careful parceling out of what caused what, and also what kind of conclusions you could draw from what kind of premises. That had a big impact on how I viewed this process initially, particularly the notion that we are responsible for whatever children learn. We can’t just take credit for what they did learn; we have to take credit for what they didn’t learn, or mis-learned, also.

We assumed that children were logical, reasonable beings in terms of how they responded to our teaching, and that their behavior was the ultimate judge of the effectiveness of whatever went into our teaching. If the way we taught didn’t induce the desired learning, we hadn’t taught it. But if children learned stuff that was wrong, we were responsible for that, too, and it meant we had to revise what we were doing and try it out again. That’s the formula we used from the beginning.

Just because you covered the material doesn’t mean the children learned the material. That tells about what you did. It doesn’t tell about what you taught. If you want to know what you taught, you have to look at what the children learned.

Clowes: Which means you have to test the children.

Engelmann: It means you would not want to test the children. You would design the instruction so that you were testing them all the time. You would design the instruction so that you received feedback on what they were learning at a very high rate. You would present instructions so that the children’s responses carried implications for what they were learning. And you would design the instruction to be efficient, so that you’re not working with just one child.

All of this means that, for young children, you would use procedures involving oral responses where the children can respond together, and you get information about what they’re learning from their responses. That’s the test.

For very simple responses, the paradigm that we use is: Model, Lead, and
Test. You first show them what the task is and how they're supposed to respond to it. Then you test to see if they can respond properly. It all happens very quickly.

It's important to note: What am I doing? Standing up. Your turn: What am I doing?” It's a model and then a test. But if they can't produce the response, then you do a model and lead the test. For example, “My turn: What am I doing? Standing up. Your turn: What am I doing? Standing up. Say it with me: ‘Standing up.’ Once more: ‘Standing up.’ Your turn: What am I doing?” So “your turn” is the test.

Engelmann: Initially, we took programs people were using or were being talked about and evaluated them according to our criterion: If the children aren’t learning, we’re not teaching.

For the most part, the children we were working with were disadvantaged preschoolers. They represented a particular challenge because they didn’t come in with very high levels of knowledge and they didn’t learn things very well. Their performance on the programs that were available led to the conclusion these programs just didn’t work—the language experience program, the sight-word approach—none of them worked. They were horrible.

The sight-word, look-say, approach is particularly bad because there is no method for correcting mistakes. If a child reads a word incorrectly, what do they tell them with the sight-word approach? “Look at the unique shape of the word,” or “Look at the beginning letter and ask yourself what that word could be.” That’s it. They’re not taught that the word is a function of the arrangement of specific letters. It’s like taking average people off the street and trying to teach them calculus by showing them different curves with different answers. “What’s this one? 03. And this one? .05. Good.” It’s that stupid.

With sight-word, children develop all kinds of misconceptions about what reading really is. They think reading means looking at pictures and guessing what the words are, because that’s what they’ve learned to do. The misconceptions are induced because the children are given highly predictable text for reading practice, which then reinforces for guessing on the basis of context. But when they’re given text that’s not predictable, they can’t make out what the words on the paper say because they really don’t know how to read.

The only programs that showed any promise were the ones based on the International Teaching Alphabet, where you taught children to read using the phonetic pronunciation. You could teach disadvantaged kids to read that way, but then you had a terrible time transitioning them out because they were absolutely unprepared to deal with the high rate of irregular pronunciations among the most common words. The reading strategies they had developed with the phonetic alphabet weren’t any help to them and a great deal of re-teaching was necessary.

But what they had learned was a function of what we had taught. We were responsible for so seriously mis-teaching these children that they could not easily transition and learn the irregular side of the reading game. So that meant we had to introduce some version of phonics very early, so that children get the idea not everything is perfectly regular, and b) keep the sounding-out, but treat it more as a sop for spelling the word. You don’t want them to spell the word for initial reading. You want them to be able to sound out the word. But if you do it rigorously, they can easily understand that a particular sound means a particular letter.

The notion that you somehow recognize the word as a lump has been thoroughly discredited by research. When words are presented on a screen at the rate of about four or five hundred words a minute, experienced readers still can identify misspelled words. They can’t do that without understanding the arrangement of letters in the word, and that each word is composed of a unique arrangement of letters. They’re not looking at the shape of words.

Clowes: When did you decide to publish your findings?

Engelmann: When we were working with the children, our objective was to teach them reading, math, and language. We wanted to make sure we taught them well, and so we made up sequences that compensated for what was lacking in other programs.

“With sight-word [reading instruction], children . . . think reading means looking at pictures and guessing what the words are, because that’s what they’ve learned to do.”

Pretty soon we had prototype versions of the reading program, the math program, and the language program. Our rule was that we would not submit anything for publication until we were sure that if the script was followed and presented as specified, it would work. We never submitted anything for publication, while Direct Instruction is not. Why?

Engelmann: The answer is really simple, but it’s very difficult for most people to accept: Outcomes have never been a priority in public education, from its inception. That’s the way the public education system is. The system is more concerned with the experience of the child: “Let the child explore,” “Let the child be his or her self,” “Don’t interfere with the natural learning process,” and so on.

The rhetoric is wonderful, but the test is: Does it work? Quite clearly, it doesn’t. The ones who are victimized the most by this are children from poor families.

But anyone who does not view the child in this way is portrayed as some kind of redneck Republican with no real human concern.
parents are dissatisfied with the child's public school. The  
any disabled student to attend private school if his or her  
certain to become law.
not be permitted to select which children receive scholar-
income tax liability to these organizations, but they would  
a year scholarships to children in low-income families.
Companies could divert up to 75 percent of their state  
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quality public education, A lengthy discovery period is  
and the state constitutional mandate of a uniform and high-
reasons.
The case now returns to Leon County Circuit Court for  
consideration of other issues, including whether the Florida  
Opportunity Scholarship Program violates the First  
Amendment, the state religious establishment provision,  
the state constitutional mandate of a uniform and high-
quality public education. A lengthy discovery period is  
anticipated before the case goes to trial.  
Institute for Justice  
April 26, 2001

More School Choices for Floridians  
Two new school choice programs for Florida families  
appear likely to be signed into law later this year by  
Governor Jeb Bush.
On April 12, the Florida Senate voted 25-14 to approve  
CS-HB271, a $50 million plan to give corporations a dol-
lar-for-dollar credit for their donations to nonprofit scholar-
ship organizations that would use the funds to offer $3,500  
year scholarships to children in low-income families.
Companies could divert up to 75 percent of their state  
income tax liability to these organizations, but they would  
not be permitted to select which children receive scholar-
ships. In March, House legislators passed the bill with  
Scholarships of $4,000, but a reconciled version is almost  
certain to become law.
Senate President John McKay (R-Bradenton) also  
recently pushed a bill through the Senate that would allow  
any disabled student to attend private school if his or her  
parents are dissatisfied with the child's public school. The  

The appeals court had held it is permissible for the state  
to use public funds for student tuition in private schools.  
The Florida Supreme Court vote not to review the decision  
was 4-1, with two justices not participating for unknown  
reasons.
The case now returns to Leon County Circuit Court for  
consideration of other issues, including whether the Florida  
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Institute for Justice  
April 26, 2001

Illinois

Appellate Court Upholds Tuition Tax Credit
On April 4, a three-judge panel of the Appellate Court of  
Illinois for the Fifth Judicial District unanimously  
upheld the constitutionality of the Illinois educational  
expenses tax credit law, affirming a December 1999 rul-
ing by Judge Loren P. Lewis of the Franklin County  
Circuit Court, which also found the tax credit to be fully  
constitutional.
Although the constitutionality of the Illinois tax cred-

t law is under attack in two separate lawsuits, all four  
courts and eight judges that have looked at the law to  
date have concluded it is constitutional.
In this case, the Illinois Federation of Teachers had  
argued that the law, which provides a credit against  
state income taxes for 25 percent of tuition, book fees,  
or lab fees incurred by K-12 students at public or pri-


mary schools up to a maximum of $500 per family, vio-

lated two provisions of the Illinois Constitution, dealing  
with the establishment of religion. The appellate court,  
however, emphatically rejected that argument.
The opinion written by Justice Philip J. Rarick empha-
sized two key points. First, the court concluded "[t]he cred-
it at issue here does not involve any appropriation or use of  
public funds." Rather, the court pointed out the credit  
"allows Illinois parents to keep more of their own money  
to spend on the education of their children as they see fit."
And second, the court concluded the credit did not have  
the primary effect of advancing religion because it is  
"equally available to all parents of public or nonpublic  
school children" and "[f]unds become available to schools  
only as the result of private choices made by individual  
parents."
Institute for Justice  
April 4, 2001

Indiana

Hoosier State Forges Strong Charter Bill
On May 2, Indiana joined 37 other states that support  
charter schools when Democrat Governor Frank O'Bannon  
signed into law SB 165, authored by Senator Teresa Lubbers  
(R-30), a long-time advocate of charter schools.
The law, seven years in the making, is ranked the sev-
enth strongest in the country by the Center for  
Education Reform. It does not limit the number of char-
ter schools in the state; it allows state universities,  
school boards, and the mayor of Indianapolis to author-
ize charter schools; and teachers in charter schools do  
not have to participate in collective bargaining. All per-
pupil funds follow the child to the charter school, with  
the exception of capital expenses, which stay with the  
district from which the student leaves.
The provision allowing a mayor to authorize charter  
schools is the second of its kind in the country, the first  
being established for Milwaukee. The mayor of  
Indianapolis, currently Democrat Bart Peterson, is  
allowed to authorize five charters per year and to bank  
the number of charters not authorized in any given year for later use. Many mayors want this  
power, but state legislators have been reluctant to  
grant them the authority.
Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation  
May 3, 2001

Maryland

Glendening Wins Funds for Private Schools
Although charter schools did not win approval in  
Maryland's 90-day General Assembly session that  
adjourned on April 9, Democrat Governor Parris B.
Glendening did win his hard-fought battle to secure a $5  
million budget item to help buy textbooks for secular and  
religious private schools.
The Friedman Report  
April 2001

Michigan

Poll: Money Grab Behind Schools Takeover
Only one-third of 1992 Detroit high school freshmen  
graduated four years later, and fewer than one in ten of  
those graduates was able to read at grade level. Tests  
conducted just before the 1999 state takeover revealed  
that a scant 6 percent of high school juniors in the  
Detroit Public Schools met state standards in reading,  
writing, mathematics, and science. And a Detroit News  
investigation in 1999 concluded, “Incompetence, mis-
management and cronyism by Detroit school officials,  
employees and contractors, and a system with inade-
quate safeguards, have devastated a $1.5 billion school  
construction project” approved by voters in 1994.

For more information...

WWW  
Court Ruling #5-99-0829 is avail-
able on the Illinois Court System  
Web site at http://www.state.il.us/court under  
Opinions for the Fifth District Appellate Court.
Yet a March poll of Detroit residents conducted by EPIC/ERA found that only one-third of respondents say the state takeover was necessary for the city’s school system to improve. More than half of the respondents, 51 percent, say the takeover was simply a money grab by Lansing lawmakers and their suburban supporters to gain control of $1.5 billion in school bond money—even though state lawmakers have no say over how this money is spent.

**New Hampshire**

**House Passes Voucher Bill**

On April 5, House lawmakers in New Hampshire voted 182-173 in favor of a voucher bill that would help low-income parents get their children out of low-scoring schools and send them to private non-religious schools or to public schools in other communities. The help would come in the form of a voucher worth between 20 and 80 percent of their children’s state education aid grant.

“It’s an attempt to provide assistance in the most needy cases,” Representative Russell Cox (R-New Castle) told Foster’s. But critics said there was a lack of private schools and that the voucher might not provide enough money for the poorest families.

Foster’s Daily Democrat
April 5, 2001

**Texas**

**Declining Teacher Morale Linked to Student Behavior**

A survey of Texas teachers published late last year found more than 61 percent of teachers in public schools, and only 36 percent of teachers in private schools, believed teacher morale was becoming worse.

When asked to select the main teacher morale problem at their school, only 14.4 percent of public school teachers cited “insufficient financial compensation,” while 40 percent picked “student attitudes and behaviors” and 31 percent picked “treatment by administrators.” Less than 6 percent cited “lack of parental support.” For teachers in private schools, the numbers cited these same three factors were 29, 33, 23, and 3 percent respectively.

While one-third of private school teachers (35 percent) stated the trend of their school discipline programs was improving, one-third of public school teachers (35 percent) saw their school discipline programs worsening. Less than 11 percent of private school teachers saw student conflict increasing, compared to almost 30 percent of public school teachers.

“The survey supports the conclusion that the environments our public school teachers work in have important deficiencies,” said John Pisciotta, author of the study and associate professor of economics at Baylor University. “The results show that increases in salaries and benefits will not solve the shortage of teachers in Texas,” he continued, noting the main responsibility for improving school environments lay with local school districts and communities.

The study, “Teacher Attitudes in Texas Public and Private High Schools,” was published by the Texas Public Policy Foundation and is available at http://www.tppf.org.

Texas Public Policy Foundation
December 2000

**South Carolina**

**House Passes Tax Credit Bill**

On a voice vote, the South Carolina House approved HB3172, a bill providing tax credits for donations to private organizations that award private tuition scholarships. The bill is pending in the Senate.

A Voice for Choice
April 20, 2001

**Ohio**

**More School Choice Options Proposed**

In April, Ohio Republicans proposed several bills that would expand school choice options for Ohio families. Vouchers in more cities: Senator Bryan Williams (R-Akron) said he would introduce a bill to expand vouchers beyond Cleveland to 35 additional districts where schools have the lowest districtwide scores on state proficiency tests.

Higher voucher value: Under a proposal from Representative James Trakas (R-Independence) and Senator Ronald Amstutz (R-Wooster), the voucher value would be more than doubled by setting it at the minimum amount and accepted for public school students.

Private vouchers: Williams told The Beacon Journal there would also be a proposal for an income tax credit of up to $1,000 for donations to organizations that provide scholarships for children to attend private schools.

The Beacon Journal
April 4, 2001

**Wisconsin**

**New Governor Pushes School Choice**

Wisconsin Governor Scott McCallum’s first state budget demonstrated his support of the Milwaukee school choice program by proposing an increase in funding from $49 million for 9,638 students to $68 million for 11,850 students. McCallum also proposed two changes that would expand eligibility for the program:

- aligning the voucher program with the federal free or reduced price lunch program, which would increase the income limits from 175 percent of the poverty level to 185 percent; and
- permitting children to stay in the program even if their family income rises above the 185 percent limit.

Choice schools also could opt to give the state standardized tests under another McCallum proposal.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
March 27, 2001

**Oregon**

**College Voucher Proposed for High School Students**

Senator Avi Goldy (D-Portland) has teamed up with Associated Oregon Industries, a business lobbying group, to push Senate Bill 783, a measure that would allow high school juniors and seniors to take college classes with the tuition covered by their high school. Goldy and the business group do not regard their proposal as a voucher; they say it’s about “expanding options” for high school students and could keep some from dropping out of school.

Critics disagree. “The bill as it stands is a voucher and we’re opposed to it,” Oregon School Employees Association lobbyist Tricia Smith told The Statesman Journal. “We’re opposed to taking public money and sending it to private religious institutions.”

John Marshall, lobbyist for the Oregon School Boards Association, agreed, saying “any time when a student can make a unilateral decision to leave the public school system and take the money that comes to the public school...that’s a voucher.”

Statesman Journal
April 10, 2001

**National**

**Teacher Morale Getting Worse in TX Public Schools**

It’s student behavior, and it’s getting worse

Source: Texas Public Policy Foundation

**Utah**

**Leavitt Signs Paycheck Protection into Law**

In March, Governor Mike Leavitt signed into law the “Voluntary Contributions Act,” which restricts public employee labor unions from using the taxpayer funded payroll system to collect funds for use by political action committees (PACs). In the future, government union PACs would have to collect political action funds from their members by personal checks. The bill, House Bill 179, was authored by Representative Chad Bennion. Support for the measure was 42-33 in the House and 17-12 in the Senate.

The Utah Education Association had warned Leavitt to veto the bill or face an expensive constitutional battle. However, Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff expressed confidence that HB 179 is defensible in court and said his office will vigorously defend the bill.

The Sutherland Institute
March 21, 2001

**Union-Backed Candidates Make Gains**

Two years ago, all five candidates for the Milwaukee School Board who were backed by the Milwaukee teacher union were defeated. On April 3 this year, the union backed four candidates and all four won, including incumbents Charlene Hardin, a frequent board critic, and Lawrence O’Neil, an independently supported candidate.

The biggest upset was the defeat of board president Bruce Thompson by Jennifer Morales, director of two education research centers at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Peter Blewett, assistant coordinator of the competitive writing program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, also defeated an incumbent. Both Morales and Blewett oppose the city’s voucher program.

In the race for state school superintendent, Madison West High School principal Elizabeth Burmaster, who was strongly backed by the Wisconsin Education Association Council, defeated Hortonville English teacher Linda Cross by a 60-40 margin. Cross raised less than $55,000 for the race compared to Burmaster’s $321,000, which was supplemented by independent WEAC ad spending of at least $276,000 on her behalf.

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
April 3-4, 2001
Domanico is senior education advisor to the Metro New York Industrial Areas Foundation, a network of community organizers working with parents of public school students on issues of public school improvement.

Because of the limited number of seats available in Catholic schools, Domanico admits it is not possible to completely solve the achievement problem in the city’s public schools by transferring students to Catholic schools. However, he notes, the benefits to the students who could transfer would be “enormous.”

A “True Public Benefit”

Those who wish to hold the line against tuition vouchers or tax credits need to own up to the very real human cost of that opposition,” Domanico writes, noting Catholic schools face “ongoing financial and operational crises.”

“The City of New York and its poor and working class families cannot afford to lose these Catholic schools,” says Domanico, “[A] reasonable case can be made.” He continues, “for tax-payer support of the poor families that are already enrolling youngsters in the Catholic schools.

According to Domanico, Catholic schools in poor and minority neighborhoods already are providing “a true public benefit” by educating some 30,000 students to higher levels of achievement than their peers in the overcrowded neighborhood public schools. Domanico’s analysis strongly suggests that cutbacks in the city’s Catholic school system would harm the public interest, and that the schools and the families they serve are deserving of public support.

Studying Student Performance

Domanico’s March 2001 study, “Catholic Schools in New York City,” was commissioned by Joseph P. Viteritti, who heads the Program on Education and Civil Society at New York University. Viteritti is the author of Choosing Equality: School Choice, the Constitution, and Civil Society (Brookings Institution Press, 1999), in which he favors a school choice system designed specifically to benefit the poor.

Domanico’s comparison of public and private school performance in New York was made possible by the decision of the Archdiocese of New York and the Archdiocese of Brooklyn to have all their schools participate in the state’s fourth- and eighth-grade English language arts and math exams. Since 1998, the New York Education Department has required all students in public schools to take these exams, but private schools participated only on a voluntary basis.

Catholic schools, according to Domanico, reported higher average scores than public schools in both subjects at both grade levels, with differences widening in the eighth grade. Specifically, Domanico found:

- In English language arts, a 9.8 point advantage for Catholic schools in grade 4 almost doubled to a 17.0 point edge by grade 8.
- In math, a 6.9 point advantage for Catholic schools in grade 4 almost tripled to a 20.0 point edge by grade 8.

Students in Catholic schools pass the state tests at a higher rate than their counterparts in public schools, with that difference again widening in the eighth grade:

- In English language arts, Catholic schools enjoyed an 8.0 percentage point advantage in pass rate over public schools in grade 4, with that edge more than doubling to 18.9 percentage points by grade 8.
- In math, Catholic schools enjoyed a 7.3 percentage point advantage in pass rate over public schools in grade 4, with that edge increasing to 12.6 percentage points by grade 8.

Best for Low-Achieving Students

The difference between the Catholic and public school systems in New York City is most marked when measured by the percentage of students who fall into the lowest-scoring category:

- In English language arts, 23.2 percent of public school eighth-graders fall into this category, compared to only 6.0 percent of Catholic school eighth-graders.
- In math, 43.6 percent of public school eighth-graders fall into this category, compared to 18.6 percent of Catholic school eighth-graders.

Although teacher union president Randi Weingarten, head of the United Federation of Teachers, told The New York Times the study failed to take adequate account of the smaller number of special education students served by Catholic schools, that issue was in fact addressed by Domanico.

State test data for 1999 indicate that including special education students in a regular student test population would change the study’s three test measures by about 5 points. That potential adjustment is too small to account for the reported differences between Catholic and public schools at eighth grade, which are at least double that figure.

Catholic Schools Serve Low-Income Children in LA

Los Angeles Catholic schools serving low-income and minority children have a much lower dropout rate (3 percent) than the city’s public schools (22 percent) and send a greater proportion of their students to college. According to a new study from the San Francisco-based Pacific Research Institute.

Although public school advocates argue the public schools could achieve the same results if taxpayers would give them more money, the study reveals that Los Angeles public schools, on average, already spend nearly twice as much per pupil ($9,029) as do Catholic high schools ($5,300), and nearly three times as much as Catholic elementary schools ($2,200).

Teacher union officials have attributed the high failure rate of low-income and minority students in public schools to the lack of credentialed teachers. But the low proportion of fully credentialed teachers at Catholic schools (56 percent) does not appear to prevent those schools from serving students better than they are served in the Los Angeles Unified School District, where 73 percent of the teachers are fully credentialed.

For the study, “Helping Hand: How Private Philanthropy and Catholic Schools Serve Low-Income Children in Los Angeles,” a survey was conducted on some 13,000 Los Angeles families whose children attend Catholic schools, as well as Catholic school principals. In particular, the study examined children receiving scholarships from the Catholic Education Foundation, which provides a means for low-income children in Los Angeles to attend Catholic school.

Almost half of the scholarship recipients were Hispanic, according to the study, with a majority coming from minority families. Children receiving scholarships are more likely to have parents who are separated, have not completed high school, or have other children. Children from families in the neighborhood public schools, which on average rank below district and state performance averages, said coauthors Thomas Dawson, fellow in education studies at the Institute, and Professor Eric Helland, of Claremont McKenna College.

“Without the scholarships, these children would still be trapped in some of the worst schools in L.A. Unified.”

The study examines the possible reasons for the success of the Catholic schools and attributes it to management practices at Catholic schools, including allowing principals to control staff hiring and firing.

For more information...

The U.S.'s 16,288 Catholic schools and 167,000 teachers represent the largest non-government school system in the country, serving 2.6 million students, or about 5 percent of the nation’s K-12 population. But more than 3,000 Catholic grade schools and half of all Catholic high schools have closed since the 1960s, when the system’s share of students was 12.6 percent.

That’s because Catholic parents have become less likely to send their children to Catholic schools for their education, explains DePaul University economics professor William Sander in his new book, Catholic Schools: Private and Social Effects. While almost 60 percent of Catholic children born in the 1950s would spend at least one year in a Catholic school, only 20 percent of Catholic children of grade school age attended Catholic schools in 1991.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>127,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>117,640</td>
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<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>113,182</td>
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<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>57,269</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>56,398</td>
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</table>

### Fewer Catholics Attending Parochial Schools

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attended school for at least one year</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended school for at least nine years</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
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</table>

### More Catholic Schools to Close

As part of Cardinal Edward M. Egan’s efforts to control spending, the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York in February announced the closing of John A. Coleman High School in Hurley, the first school the archdiocese had closed since 1994.

In March, the archdiocese announced cutbacks that would likely lead to the closing of six low-enrollment elementary schools in Manhattan and surrounding counties. Although an anonymous benefactor subsequently promised $150 million to save the schools from closure, the funds have yet to be received.

Catholic schools in Philadelphia are facing a double whammy: Catholics joining the flight of families from the city, and charter schools draining the remaining pool of non-Catholic students looking for an alternative to the public schools. Enrollment in the city’s Catholic elementary schools has dropped by 25,000 in the last 20 years, and at least 15 schools have closed or consolidated in the last 10 years, according to a recent review by Philadelphia Daily News writer Earni Young. Enrollment in the city’s diocesan high schools for the 2000-2001 school year fell by 2,700 students compared to the previous year.

According to Young, two parish schools were closed in 2000 but no closures are planned this year. However, roughly 27 of the remaining 89 parish schools have enrollments below 250, which makes them prime candidates for closure next year if further enrollment erosion occurs. Nearly half of the students in the city’s Catholic schools are non-Catholic, but these students are increasingly drawn to the city’s new charter schools, which free parents from the Catholic schools’ tuition bills.

Declining enrollments were cited as the reason for the March 5 closure announcement of three Roman Catholic elementary schools in Chicago, where enrollments had fallen below the viable level of 150 to 175 students. One of the schools, St. Simon’s, had 1,987 students in 1967 and was the largest Catholic elementary school in North America, according to a Chicago Sun-Times report. Earlier this year, four Chicago-area Catholic high schools announced they would close by the end of the school year. Unable to attract a sufficient number of students, St. Thomas Aquinas High School in New Britain, Connecticut, closed its doors two years ago. In April, the city’s last remaining Catholic high school, Mary Immaculate Academy, announced it will close in June for the same reason, according to The Hartford Courant.

Many suburban Catholic schools face a different problem: Not enough seats. A recent Washington Post story told of a Catholic family with three children who found all of the parochial schools filled to capacity when they searched within a 40-minute drive of their home in Fairfax County, Virginia. Although eight new elementary schools have been built in the area since 1990, demand still outstrips supply.

While Catholic schools in Chicago struggle to keep their doors open, schools in the suburban region of the Archdiocese of Chicago are in the midst of expansion projects totaling more than $55 million, according to a Daily Herald report earlier this year. Although enrollment in the Archdiocese is down overall, enrollment in suburban Catholic schools has been rising steadily.

Schools must raise the expansion funds from their own parishioners: $7 million for classroom and gym additions at St. Hubert in Hoffman Estates, $5.2 million for room additions at St. Theresa in Palatine, and $5 million for classrooms and a cafeteria at St. Mary in Buffalo Grove.

### No Boost Yet from Vouchers

Parish schools of the Cleveland Archdiocese experienced a decline in enrollment in 2000-2001, which is notable given that the opponents of school vouchers have made much of the supposed “benefits” religious schools reap from publicly funded vouchers in that city. Similarly, Catholic schools in the Milwaukee Archdiocese have seen enrollments declining since the 1999-2000 school year, even though almost 10,000 students now participate in the city’s voucher program.

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Where School Reformers Go Wrong

Have we forgotten that the goal is to create a competitive education industry?

BY JOSEPH L. BAST

John Merrifield’s The School Choice Wars (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press Inc., 2001) is my early favorite for Best School Reform Book of 2001. It is a courageous call for proponents of competition and parental choice to put behind them the frustrations and compromises of the 1990s and embrace once again the case for universal nondiscriminatory school choice.

Along the way, Merrifield criticizes a veritable Who’s Who of the school choice movement, including Alan Bonsteel, John Chubb and Terry Moe, John Coons, Denis Doyle, Chester Finn, John Hood, Nina Shokraei Rees, Herbert Walberg, and many lesser lights (including this writer and the managing editor of this newspaper). Our sins include mischaracterizing pilot voucher programs as genuine experiments, endorsing plans that fail to create the minimum requirements for a competitive market, accusing teachers rather than their union leaders of opposing reform (my mistake), and wasting time and resources on charter schools, heavily regulated pilot voucher programs, tax credits, and private scholarships programs.

Choice advocates talk about major reforms, but nearly all of their proposals assume key elements of the status quo,” Merrifield writes. “They celebrate every new option for anyone, even when the proposals would delay or derail more meaningful reforms.”

Merrifield believes many of the current leaders of the movement for competition and choice in education have lost sight of the true goal—creating a competitive education industry—and are now as much a hindrance as a help to the reform cause. He sets forth the key conditions necessary for real competition in a series of seven “essential policies.”

Effective advocates of a competitive education industry, according to Merrifield, should critique rather than praise reform proposals that exclude some children, fail to provide true funding equity, and keep participating schools with heavy regulations. They should aggressively tackle the pervasive myth that public school failure is a problem only of urban school systems and not of suburban ones as well. He calls for further efforts to divide the opposition by appealing to teachers and minorities, and documenting the futility of reforms that don’t foster genuine competition.

While every school reformer will find valuable information and advice in this book, not all will agree with Merrifield’s ideas on strategy. His criticism of incrementalist approaches—“implement a determinate outcome in stages if necessary, but do not seek it in stages”—seems to ignore the success of anti-market groups who pursue the incrementalist approach and the political realities facing reform advocates. Criticizing elected officials who advocate less than ideal school choice proposals, for example, seems to be a sure way to get disinvited from all but the most marginal school reform coalitions.

The claim that a free-market education system is most likely to be achieved in a single bound, rather than in small steps, is a familiar cliche coming from anti-voucher libertarians, but it is less commonly heard from voucher proponents such as Merrifield. The notion is weak regardless of who is making it.

Merrifield makes a few assertions in this area but provides little evidence. At one point he claims as an example of incrementalism the failure of many former communist nations to make successful transitions from socialism to capitalism. But the considered opinion of such experts as Richard Pipes and Mancur Olson is the opposite. They found such countries failed because no one thought to build institutions that encourage the growth of capitalist values before ambitious privatization programs were launched.

The lesson for school reformers, then, is to keep pushing for programs—no matter how modest—that introduce parents, educators, elected officials, and journalists to the possibility of competition and choice in education.

The experience gained and institutions created by even limited choice initiatives can help overcome the ignorance and fear of markets that Merrifield correctly observes is at the root of public opposition to market-based reforms. Even school reformers committed to an incrementalist approach will benefit from Merrifield’s instructions on the proper use of rhetoric and the importance of communicating the goal of creating a true competitive education industry.

Joseph L. Bast is president of The Heartland Institute and founding publisher of School Reform News. He can be contacted by email at jbast@heartland.org.

7 Essential Policies for a Competitive Education Industry

1 State and local public funding of K-12 instruction must be entirely child based so that parents’ school choices exclusively decide each school’s share of state and local government funding.

2 Each child’s share of state and local K-12 instruction spending is the same, whether the child attends government-owned, private nonprofit, or private for-profit schools.

3 There must be no restrictions on private spending on K-12 instruction. Families must have the right to use private funds to help buy more instruction than the public funds will buy.

4 Child-based state and local public funding of K-12 must begin at the current K-12 funding level.

5 As required by existing federal law, federal K-12 funding must provide supplemental public support to special needs children on a case-by-case basis.

6 There must be a minimum enrollment to qualify an educator to receive public funding to educate children. This will deter fraud and extremist schools, and stop families from earning income by educating their own children.

7 There must be a way to verify the enrollment of each school.


“John Merrifield’s The School Choice Wars is my early favorite for Best School Reform Book of 2001.”

JOSEPH L. BAST
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—Harry Wong

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