Public Education’s “Broken Promise”

Leaves graduates unprepared for college and work

by George A. Clowes

The underlying promise of the nation’s commitment to free K-12 education is to give everyone a shot at the American Dream by providing each child with the opportunity to acquire the skills and knowledge needed to meet the demands of the adult world. The award of a high school diploma long has been viewed as marking an American youth as “ready for college and work.”

That’s no longer the case, according to a two-year study by the American Diploma Project (ADP), a coalition of three education policy groups: Achieve, Inc., The Education Trust, and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation.

New Study First to Affirm Value of National Teacher Certification

by Robert Holland

For the first time since the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) came into being in 1987, a large-scale study has found teachers who win its certification “appear to be,” on average, more effective than

Denver Teachers Vote for Performance Pay

by Mike Antonucci

Members of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) on March 19 approved a plan that would replace the traditional salary schedule with one that pays teachers for performance, including the scores of their students on standardized tests.

The affirmative vote came after a four-year pilot project and will not go into effect unless Denver voters approve a $25 million property tax hike to pay for it in November 2005. The DCTA leadership

Study: Texas Must Focus on Productivity

by Krista Kafer

A new study by the Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF) challenges assertions that poor student achievement in Texas is the result of inadequate funding and that higher taxes are the best way to improve achievement.

The Texas legislature is considering proposals for changing the state’s education funding system. Any new system of taxation, the TPPF authors contend, should preserve local control and promote parental choice.

The education funding system in Texas is known as “Robin Hood” because it requires wealthier school districts to share property tax receipts with poorer districts. According to the February 2004 TPPF study, “Effective, Efficient, Fair: Paying for Public Education in Texas,” the adverse effects of most of the tax change proposals are unlikely to be outweighed by benefits from increased funding to education.

“The current tax system is sufficiently flexible and provides adequate revenue growth for public schools,” conclude the study’s authors, Ohio University economics professor Richard Vedder and Buckeye Institute Research Director Joshua Hall. “Education spending and education productivity are the real problems that challenge Texas.”

Some Texas districts already have relatively high productivity: They have higher than average achievement and lower than average spending. The study identifies the 15 most efficient districts in the state.

The Texhoma Independent School

Thousands Rally for School Choice in Florida

Story on page 10

A record 3,000 supporters of Florida’s Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program march through downtown Tallahassee to rally on the Capitol steps on March 9 to support educational opportunities for low-income families. Leading the marchers is Bishop Harold Ray, founder of Redemptive Life Academy in West Palm Beach.

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As DC Vouchers Move Ahead, More Rumblings and Grumblings on NCLB

by Don Soifer

A March 24 event, Washington DC Mayor Anthony Williams and U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige announced the selection of the Washington Scholarship Fund as the entity that would administer the new voucher program for the District of Columbia.

The DC Choice Incentive Project, approved by Congress and signed by President George W. Bush last year, is a five-year federally funded program to provide vouchers of up to $7,500 for approximately 2,000 low-income students in the District. With the vouchers, students will be able to attend the participating private school of their choice.

A grant also was awarded to undertake the first phase of the program evaluation, which will be conducted by Westat, working with Georgetown University researchers. As part of the grant, the team will assist in the lottery to assign scholarships randomly to eligible student applicants.

Paige Answers School Officials on NCLB

In a March 24 letter to Paige, 14 state school officials strongly criticized the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), proposing a major overhaul of the law’s accountability mechanisms. The officials represented Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Idaho, Louisiana, Maine, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Washington.

“We propose a set of broad guidelines that would at once address the need for statewide accountability and still accord states true flexibility in how they meet federal requirements,” the letter stated.

Congressional leaders who championed the law, including House Education Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-Ohio) and ranking Democrat George Miller (D-California), responded swiftly and with vigor.

“These changes would gut NCLB and make it easier for states to go back to hiding the fact that some children are being denied a quality education even as those states accept billions in increased federal funds,” Boehner told the New York Times.

“When we empower parents, we do good things for children. It is that beautifully simple.”

REPRESENTATIVE TRENT FRANKS (R-ARIZONA)

“They are always sort of arriving but they never get there,” said Miller in the same Times article. “We want all of our fourth-grade children to be proficient in reading and math and other subjects.”

A few days before the letter from the school chiefs was released, a memo from Paige to editorial writers addressed recent criticisms of the law. The memo discussed how federal officials have made it a priority to communicate regularly with state leaders and to maximize flexibility when it comes to compliance.

“Some states decided to use more elements of flexibility than others, but, consistent with the principles of federalism and flexibility that characterize NCLB, each state presented a unique plan and rationale for that plan,” Paige explained.

The memo also pointed out that numerous analyses, including studies by the General Accounting Office and Harvard University researchers, had concluded Congress had allocated ample funds to implement the law’s testing and accountability requirements.

Special Order Promotes Choice

Two of Congress’s leading school choice advocates took to the House floor March 18 with a Special Order promoting the benefits of choice. Representative Pete Hoekstra (R-Michigan), chairman of the House Select Education Subcommittee, joined Representative Trent Franks (R-Arizona) to discuss choice in general and Franks’ federal tuition tax credit proposal, called the Children’s Hope Act.

“A tax credit would begin to bring a little bit of balance,” Hoekstra explained, “that says, ‘rather than putting more money into empowering bureaucrats, we are going to put some money into empowering parents and rebranding that gap between parents and local schools and their children.’”

Added Franks, “When we empower parents, we do good things for children. It is that beautifully simple.”

Reaction to Secretary’s Remarks Linger

In late February, the wave of criticism over Paige’s comparison of the National Education Association (NEA) to a “terrorist organization” continued to linger. Despite apologies from the Secretary, at least two organizations known for their criticism of the Bush administration launched online positions encouraging Paige’s ouster.

In a Washington Post column shortly after the remarks, Paige was clear to point out that the NEA leadership, not teachers, was his intended target.

“As ill-considered as my words were, my disappointment was directed only—and I mean only—at the union heads in Washington who have been opposing any and all educational reforms, no matter what the consequence to our children,” Paige said in that article.

A February 24 editorial by the Wall Street Journal suggested Paige’s frustration at the NEA’s hardball legislative tactics, “to preserve their monopoly on public education,” was not altogether unfounded.

“So far as the NEA is concerned,” the editorial went on to say, “the real outrage is the Bush administration’s attempt to introduce accountability in public education through the No Child Left Behind Act.”

Don Soifer is executive vice president of the Lexington Institute. His email address is soifer@lexington institute.org.
Certification

Continued from page 1

their non-certified colleagues. The differences between nationally certified and non-certified teachers, based on "value-added" assessment of their impact on student achievement, were small, but statistically significant. NBPTS officials and advocates quickly claimed the results prove their national certification system works. Former Georgia Governor Roy Barnes, the current NBPTS chairman, said the study showed the National Board is "the gold standard" in assessing teachers. "The study provides state and national policymakers with proof that National Board Certification is a smart investment," he said.

But a host of analysts and critics—and even the study's authors—fall short of proving NBPTS is a cost-effective way of identifying excellent teachers. Moreover, they note NBPTS certification does nothing to ensure that the best teachers get into schools where they are most desperately needed, and stay there. Nor does the study show there is anything about the certification process itself that improves teachers.

Student Achievement Gains

Titled "Can Teacher Quality Be Effectively Assessed?" the Urban Institute study by Dan Goldhaber and Emily Anthony examined more than 690,000 achievement records of grades 3-5 pupils in North Carolina from 1996 to 1999. North Carolina has 6,641 NBPTS-certified teachers, the most in the nation. The state gives NBPTS-certified teachers a 12 percent premium above the base-salary scale, which amounts to an average $4,000 annual bonus.

With respect to student achievement, based on averages, the study found:

- Teachers who did not apply for NBPTS certification had student achievement gains of 9.75 points per year in math and 5.69 points in reading.
- Teachers who applied but were unsuccessful showed student achievement gains of 9.14 points in math and 5.83 points in reading.
- Teachers who applied for and won NBPTS approval recorded student achievement gains of 10.21 points in math and 6.18 points in reading.

"These differences, nonetheless, are relatively small; the largest differential is in math between certified and non-certified teacher applicants, at just over a point on the exam or roughly 14 percent of a standard deviation in the growth in math scores," the study explained.

Schools May Be Worse Off

While documenting this small positive result, Goldhaber and Anthony acknowledged the large expense of NBPTS: some $350 million in subsidies, excluding the bonuses North Carolina and many other states pay teachers who win the certification after a process largely consisting of self-documenting their teaching style. Is that level of investment worthwhile? The authors said it depends on the subsequent career paths of the National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs), as well as the impact of teachers using so much time to try to gain the certification.

"Our findings suggest that schools with many unsuccessful applicants or those with successful applicants that leave follow- ing their certification may actually be worse off for having had their teachers apply to the program, since NBCTs are no more (or less) effective than non-applicants in the year of application. Teaching assignment also matters, as schools with NBCTs receive substantially more educational benefits from having their NBCTs teach low-income students in earlier grades."

Because the study did not show that anything about the certification process itself makes teachers more effective, any economic benefit of identifying NBCTs would depend partly on whether the certification prolongs their stay in teaching, which is unknown. Even assuming that winning the status did lengthen the stay of NBCTs, the cost-effectiveness of identifying them would be less than another vaunted educational intervention that also carries a high price tag, and the net results of which are in dispute: reducing class size.

The National Education Association, the nation's largest teacher union, joined NBPTS in hailing the results, despite the Urban Institute study's use of student test scores as a measure of teacher effectiveness. Both the NEA and NBPTS have steadfastly argued against the use of standardized test results as an indicator of teacher quality.

Professor John Stone, the Education Consumers Clearinghouse founder whose 2002 study of Tennessee's NBPTS-certified teachers found no evidence they are "exceptionally effective," said "what the Urban Institute study really demonstrated is that 'value-added' statistical analysis can identify the highest-performing teachers with far more accuracy and far less cost than the NBPTS certification process."

North Carolina could save $35 million by omitting the costly and time-consuming NBPTS assessment and simply rewarding teachers on the basis of a value-added analysis of their student test scores, [Professor John] Stone contended.

"North Carolina could save $35 million by omitting the costly and time-consuming NBPTS assessment and simply rewarding teachers on the basis of a value-added analysis of their student test scores," [Professor John] Stone contended.

"The differences between nationally certified and non-certified teachers, based on 'value-added' assessment of their impact on student achievement, were small, but statistically significant." Several states are re-evaluating whether giving bonuses for NBPTS certification is a wise use of taxpayer money.

Robert Holland is a senior fellow at the Lexington Institute, a public policy think tank in Arlington, Virginia. His email address is holland@lexingtoninstitute.org.

**INTERNET INFO**

The March 5, 2004 Urban Institute study by Dan Goldhaber and Emily Anthony, "Can Teacher Quality Be Effectively Assessed?" is available online at http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/410958_NBPTSOutcomes.pdf.

Arizona Charter School Students Start Lower but Finish Higher

by Vicki Murray

One might describe the national charter school movement as one step forward, two steps back.

One step forward: Washington state just became the 41st state to enact charter legislation. (Washington DC has such legislation as well.)

Two steps back: Opponents in Massachusetts—where 13,000 children are on waiting lists to enroll in charter schools—nevertheless want a moratorium on charters. Alabama recently defeated charter legislation, claiming charter schools are “unproven experiments.”

In Arizona, however, a steady pace is winning the race. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the state’s charter school law. Today, 491 charter schools educate nearly 158,000 students attending 873 charter and traditional public schools.

A new study by the Goldwater Institute suggests those grades are well deserved. The study finds charter school students typically begin with lower test scores than their counterparts in traditional public schools, showing charters don’t simply “cream” the better students. Despite this initial deficit, charter school students show higher overall annual achievement growth. Charter students who completed the 12th grade surpass traditional public school students on SAT-9 Reading tests.

Arizona charter schools do more with less, since they receive only 80 percent of traditional public school per-pupil funds. The Goldwater study, “Comparison of Traditional Public Schools and Charter Schools on Retention, School Switching, and Achievement Growth,” examines nearly 158,000 SAT-9 Reading test scores of more than 80,000 students attending 873 charter and traditional public schools statewide over a three-year period.

The study also finds achievement growth varies by grade level. In the elementary grades, charter school students exhibited faster achievement growth than traditional public school students. Achievement growth in the middle grades is similar for both kinds of students, while high school achievement growth is higher for traditional public school students.

The authors of the study, Lewis C. Soloman of Human Resources Policy Corporation and Pete Goldschmidt of UCLA’s Center for the Study of Evaluation, suggest the faster achievement growth in the early years is because elementary charters are more likely to focus on academics. Middle and high school charters, by contrast, generally serve students seeking vocational training, who have been out of school, who are struggling with learning or behavioral problems, or who have been in the juvenile justice system. That means charters are reaching at-risk students “who might otherwise have slipped through the cracks,” explain the authors.

Arizona’s charter law encourages such educational options. Arizona does not cap the number of charter schools that can open, and it allows multiple charter authorizers: local school districts, the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools, and the Arizona Department of Education.

Having multiple authorizers helps prevent the process from becoming politicized and prevents any one group from becoming too powerful. With a simple application process that is easy to navigate, educators are free to start schools in their communities where the need is greatest. Parents, teachers, and school personnel open roughly 70 percent of Arizona’s charter schools.

Even Penny Kotterman, president of the Arizona Education Association, admits charter schools have excelled at serving “niche groups,” students in alternative education, or those at risk of dropping out.

“I think we’ve come to a peaceful coexistence in most cases,” she said.

How do traditional public schools respond to charter school competition? Recent findings from Harvard University economist Caroline Hoxby show “charter competition induced [Arizona’s] public schools to improve their productivity and achievement...relative to the schools’ own past performance and relative to gains made, over the same period, by schools that were not subjected to charter competition.”

Overall, traditional public schools facing even modest charter competition raised their annual improvement on NAEP scores by 1.4 percentile points in fourth-grade reading and math, without spending a penny more.

Vicki Murray, Ph.D., is an education analyst at the Goldwater Institute in Phoenix, Arizona. Her email address is vmurray@goldwaterinstitute.org.

INTERNET INFO


Other Charter School News

3,000 Charters Proves a Hard Nut to Crack

In the fall of 1998, when he signed a bill to encourage states to open more charter schools, then-President Bill Clinton confidently predicted the U.S. would have 3,000 charter schools by the year 2000. But it’s 2004 already, and the U.S. still doesn’t have 3,000 charter schools.

According to figures reported by the Center for Education Reform, there are 2,996 charter schools operating in the 2003-04 school year, up 297 from the previous year’s figure of 2,699. As shown in the accompanying figure, the annual increase in the number of charter schools has been dropping since 1999-2000, and this year’s annual increase is the lowest since 1996-97.

In February, the Center for Education Reform published the 2004 edition of “Charter School Laws Across the States,” which provides a comparative analysis and ranking of each state’s charter school law. The report is available for purchase through the Center’s Web site at http://www.edreform.com.

Washington Finally Gets a Charter School Law

After a decade of effort by citizens and legislators, Governor Gary Locke on March 18 signed into law a charter school bill for Washington State that would permit the creation of 45 charter schools over the next six years. The bill was passed by a vote of 651-46 in the Democrat-controlled House and 27-22 in the Republican-controlled Senate.

“Even though it’s only a modest bill and will create only a handful of new charter schools, some of these schools will prove that you can do it better with any amount of money by giving educators more freedom,” charter school advocate Jim Spady told the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. Spady and his wife Fawn are co-directors of the Education Excellence Coalition, which has campaigned for charters since 1994.

The campaign for charters still isn’t over. A week after Locke signed the bill, the state’s largest teacher union committed itself to overturning the new law. The Washington Education Association voted to collect almost 100,000 signatures for a November ballot initiative to reject charter schools. If the signatures are collected by June 9, the creation of charter schools will be put on hold until after the November vote.

Weir Agent Charta Skuls

Apparently encouraged by school officials, public high school students in Marlboro, Massachusetts wrote to state Board of Education members to doing an adequate job in teaching “English language arts,” board members Dan Schaefer told the Boston Herald.

The charter school application was awarded a Charter School Law by the Goldwater Institute in Phoenix, Arizona. Her email address is vmurray@goldwaterinstitute.org.
“People who grouse about high-school exit tests are voicing the wrong objection. What should spark real dismay is the gap between what states expect of graduates and what the real world demands for their success.”

CHESTER E. FINN, JR.

requirements, the report suggests. Most states require high school students to take a certain number of English and mathematics courses, rather than specifying content to be covered, such as algebra I, algebra II, and geometry. As a result, there’s no incentive for students to take challenging courses. Even high school exit exams provide little added incentive for students to take more rigorous courses. At best, the exit tests assess only eighth- or ninth-grade content.

“People who grouse about high-school exit tests are voicing the wrong objection.”

CHESTER E. FINN, JR.
school of education at Harvard University, was troubled by evidence reported in 2002 by another researcher, University of Maryland economics professor Sean P. Corcoran, that the percentage of high-aptitude women in teaching had declined significantly. Corcoran found the likelihood that a female College graduates whose SAT and ACT scores are in the bottom quartile are more than twice as likely as those in the top quartile to major in education.

The commission report argues that the nation must increase base pay for teachers and that teachers must be measured and compensated based on their classroom performance, with substantial increases for teachers who raise student achievement. (See “Gerstner Commission Endorses Teacher Merit Pay,” School Reform News, April 2004.) A specific example of The Teaching Commission’s influence can be seen in Schools Chancellor Joel Klein’s recent call for changing the way teachers are paid in New York City. Klein proposed teacher bonuses based on student achievement and higher salaries for teachers who work in troubled schools or difficult-to-staff fields like math and science. “Lockstep pay, seniority, and life tenure are the heart of the problem,” said Klein in a January 2004 speech, sponsored by Crain’s New York. “Together they act as handcuffs and prevent us from making the changes that will encourage and support excellence.”

Lisa Snell is director of the education program for the Reason Foundation in Los Angeles. Her email address is lsnell@reason.org.

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The seven-page ruling of the Michigan Court of Appeals in the Battaglieri case is available for downloading from the Appeals Court Web site as a Zip file dated March 19, 2004:
http://courtofappeals.mijud.net/resources/asp/zipfiles.asp

Landmark Legal Foundation’s 2002 complaint regarding NEA’s alleged failure to properly report its spending on political activities, is available online at:

NEA’s most recent LM-2 reports may be accessed through the Department of Labor’s disclosure Web site at:

Other Teacher Union News

Mike Antonucci is director of the Education Intelligence Agency, which conducts public education research, analysis, and investigations. He also publishes a weekly Communiqué on teacher union activities. His email address is EducationInte@aol.com. The weekly Communiqué is available online at http://www.eiaonline.com.

Denver

Continued from page 1

supported the plan, despite the fact that NEA’s national policy, adopted in 2000, declares performance pay systems to be “inappropriate.”

NEA’s stance didn’t deter DCTA.

“I don’t open my NEA book every morning to see what I can and cannot do,” said DCTA President Becky Wissink.

Whether the plan succeeds or fails may depend less on the plan itself and more on its method of adoption. There are approximately 4,500 teachers in Denver, but only 3,200 who belong to the union. Only union members were allowed to vote. Of those 3,200, only 2,718 cast a ballot. Of those votes, only 59 percent endorsed the plan. So, about 1,600 of Denver’s 4,500 teachers thought highly of the current system to the new one. But equally interesting will be the effect of an available performance pay schedule district on the teacher labor market and, by extension, the effect on DCTA membership. Since Denver teachers are not compelled to join the union, will teachers drawn to the performance pay be more union-friendly, or less? The ripple effects will be worth watching.

That changes the whole dynamic. By having teachers in 2004 vote on a plan that will not apply to everyone until 2012, the Denver performance pay plan is now an experiment in recruitment and retention. What kinds of teachers will now apply for jobs in Denver? Which teachers will remain in the district and which will transfer to a district with a traditional salary schedule? Which teachers in other districts will want to transfer in?

Should the voters approve funding for the plan, many will be watching and analyzing student achievement in Denver for years to come. But equally interesting will be the effect of an available performance pay schedule district on the teacher labor market and, by extension, the effect on DCTA membership. Since Denver teachers are not compelled to join the union, will teachers drawn to the performance pay be more union-friendly, or less? The ripple effects will be worth watching.

Mackinac had “misappropriated” his name for commercial purposes. The organization that will be able to use “falls squarely within the protection of the First Amendment for discourse on matters of public interest.”

Michigan Education Association Lawsuit Dismissed

On March 18, the Michigan Court of Appeals dismissed a Michigan Education Association (MEA) lawsuit against the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. The MEA complaint arose from a Mackinac fundraising letter that quoted MEA President Lu Battaglieri as saying in 2001, referring to Mackinac, “… quite frankly, I admire what they’ve done over the last couple of years…”

Battaglieri did not dispute the accuracy of the quote, but claimed Mackinac had “misappropriated” his name for commercial purposes. The organization that will be able to use “falls squarely within the protection of the First Amendment for discourse on matters of public interest.”

NEA Acknowledges Labor Department Probe ...

Not only are the National Education Association (NEA) and California Teachers Association (CTA) undergoing IRS audits, but NEA is also under investigation by the U.S. Department of Labor. On March 4, the Associated Press received public confirmation from NEA that the Labor Department is investigating whether the union had reported all its expenditures on its annual form LM-2.

“The general statement was, it’s a review of the report and they wanted to see backup material,” said NEA General Counsel Bob Chanin. “It was anything but focused. We’ll keep giving them data and they’ll keep asking questions.”

The probe seems to have been prompted by a complaint filed by the Landmark Legal Foundation in 2002.

Most Philadelphia Teachers Can’t Pass Content Tests

In March, more than half of Philadelphia’s middle school teachers failed their content exams for certification as “highly qualified” teachers. Nearly two of every three teachers who took the math exam failed it, though one teacher who achieved a perfect score said the test “mostly included seventh- and eighth-grade math and touched on high school math.”

“Content sometimes is really over-rated,” said Philadelphia middle school teacher Nick Perry, commenting on the news to the Philadelphia Inquirer. “A teacher is like an artist, a coach. He has to be able to inspire children.”

— M.A.

Continued from page 1

Although the Denver performance pay plan is now an experiment in recruitment and retention, the effect of the plan could be interesting to watch.
An Oasis in Satan’s Backyard

by M. Royce Van Tassell

When Tim McNeill held a neighborhood meeting in Milwaukee’s Metcalf Park to discuss his proposed Hope Christian School, one parent warned him against it. “This is Satan’s backyard,” she said. “You don’t want to do that here.” True to his upper Midwest Lutheran roots, that parent’s despair only steered McNeill’s resolve.

McNeill had been teaching in the Milwaukee Public Schools since 1980 and had seen the district’s fiscal crisis firsthand. In 1995, the district eliminated grades one to four. In 1997, the district eliminated second-language classes. In 1998, the district started making preparations with the district’s raises. Nevertheless, he was determined to open Hope Christian in Milwaukee’s Metcalf Park. Hope Christian School was a big, bold venture: McNeill was determined to open Hope Christian in 2002. Several hurdles still loomed: He didn’t have teachers, students, or a building. Most Metcalf Park buildings were built around the turn of the twentieth century; getting them up to code would cost thousands of dollars the Lutheran schools just didn’t have.

In February 2002, they found a suitable building, but zoning ordinances prohibited them from using it. Over the next four months, McNeill negotiated with the realty company and the city, and on July 15 the city endorsed the deal with a change to the building’s zoning. By leasing the building, Hope Christian would get a school, the realty company would have an occupant, and the city would continue receiving property taxes.

In May 2002—while negotiations with the city and the realty company continued—McNeill started recruiting students and teachers. He hoped to have 60 students in three classes: first grade, second grade, and a combined third/fourth grade. He walked the streets, going door to door, talking with families and distributing leaflets. When interested parents called, he personally visited them. Ironically, his biggest obstacle was being able to offer only grades one to four.

With all the drugs and crime in Metcalf Park, McNeill looked for several qualities in his teachers. They needed to be emotionally well centered, and they needed to be stable in their own lives. Complicating his teacher recruitment, he could offer starting salaries above the starting salaries in the Milwaukee public schools, but he couldn’t keep pace with the district’s raises. Nevertheless, he was able to hire three teachers and three teachers’ aides. Two administrators rounded out the school’s staff.

In August 2002, Hope Christian School opened its doors to 54 students—52 with vouchers and two former charter school students for free, because a state snafu made charter students ineligible for the voucher. This year three of the school’s 126 students are in the same situation.

Without prompting from him, McNeill’s teachers are at school by 6:45 a.m. and often stay until 5:00 p.m. On the weekends, they take their students to museums, the zoo, and other field trips. Those extra efforts illustrate McNeill’s educational philosophy: “If the kids fail, it’s the teacher’s fault.”

When asked why he’s put himself through this wringer, McNeill admits to moments of doubt. But he remembers times in his own life when someone was there to extend a helping hand.

“I get the feeling that the people in Metcalf Park don’t want a handout, they just want a hand up,” he says. “Someone needs to offer them opportunity and hope.” And Tim McNeill is determined to do just that.

Royce Van Tassell is executive director of Education Excellence Utah. His email address is royce@edexutah.org.

DC Voucher Program Moving into High Gear

by George A. Clowes

Moving quickly so students can make advantage of the program in the school year starting this fall, the U.S. Department of Education and the Office of DC Mayor Anthony A. Williams in late March announced the selection of the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF) and Westat to administer and evaluate the first phase of the newly authorized DC Choice Incentive Program.

The program is the first federal, fully funded program in the nation to provide “equal opportunity scholarships” to low-income students to attend parochial or private schools.

“I’m glad to see that this effort to expand school choice is moving ahead at full speed,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige.

Working as the lead organization in a partnership with other local non-profit groups, WSF will begin an immediate campaign to make all eligible families in the District of Columbia aware of the voucher program. The effort will involve advertisements, mailings, door-to-door visits, and public meetings to provide information on eligibility, options, and application procedures. Local partner groups include Capital Partners for Education, DC Parents for School Choice, the Greater Washington Urban League, and the Parent Group.

“Our organization was founded just over a decade ago with the goal of expanding educational opportunities for District students. The new DC scholarship program perfectly aligns with our mission to enable families to have greater choice in where they send their children to elementary, middle, and high school,” said Joseph E. Robert, Jr., chairman and CEO of J.E. Robert Companies and chairman of the WSF Board of Trustees.

WSF was chosen to operate the program through a competitive application process overseen by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Innovation and Improvement, in partnership with the office of Mayor Williams. Together with the non-profit organization Fight For Children, Inc., the Mayor’s office already had launched an advertising campaign and started making preparations with private schools to enroll scholarship recipients in the fall.

Westat was awarded a 10-month contract by the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES) to provide technical support to the program operator of the DC Choice Incentive Program. In collaboration with Georgetown University and Chesapeake Research Associates, Westat will assist WSF on the design and execution of the lottery that will be used to randomly assign scholarships to eligible student applicants.

A second contract will be awarded by the IES to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the program. IES expects to conduct the competition for the evaluation this spring and award the contract in June.

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. His email address is clowes@heartland.org.
13-year-old Boy Could Lay Groundwork for Vouchers

A mother who is paying $9,000 a year in tuition for her 13-year-old son to attend the University of California at Los Angeles is suing California for failing to provide him with a free education.

Levi Clancy began reading high school books at age 7, and began attending classes at UCLA in February. Clancy passed the California High School Proficiency exam when he was 9 but California law mandates he must attend school until age 16.

His mother, Leila Levi, a single parent, says she cannot afford the tuition at UCLA. Her lawsuit argues her son should be provided with a free college education since the state has a compulsory attendance law and the state constitution requires he be provided a free education.

“You can’t send him back to public school, because they don’t have the means to educate a kid this gifted,” Leila Levi’s attorney, Richard Ackerman, told WorldNetDaily. “The only way his intellectual needs can be met is if he goes to a high-level, four-year college.”

California school districts receive a minimum of $7,200 per student from the state. Ackerman believes they don’t have the means to educate a kid this gifted, “You can’t send him back to public school, because they don’t have the means to educate a kid this gifted,” the editors noted. “Never see a high school diploma,” the editors noted.

While it was embarrassing to have a scholarship operator under criminal investigation for looting $268,000 from one of the state’s school choice programs, “[f]or small beer compared to the glaring scandal of a public school system in which more than half of the state’s African-American and Latino teens will never see a high school diploma,” the editors noted.

FLOIDA

School Choice Supporters Rally at State Capitol

Florida Governor Jeb Bush joined several thousand children, parents, and teachers who rallied at the state capitol in Tallahassee on March 9 to demonstrate their support for the state’s voucher programs.

“As long as I’m governor, we will have school choice in this state,” Bush told the rally, saying he was “very proud” that Florida has the largest school choice program in the country.” The editors viewed the push to bring “accountability” to the state’s voucher programs as “really aimed at regulating them to death.”

While it was embarrassing to have a scholarship operator under criminal investigation for looting $268,000 from one of the state’s school choice programs, “[f]or small beer compared to the glaring scandal of a public school system in which more than half of the state’s African-American and Latino teens will never see a high school diploma,” the editors noted.

Voucher Bill Introduced in House

On February 23, House Bill 2906, “The Opportunity Scholarship Program for At-Risk Students,” was introduced in the Kansas legislature, with hearings scheduled for March 16. The bill is patterned after the voucher bill approved last year in Colorado.

At the same time, the Flint Hills Center for Public Policy released a study by education analyst Dan Lips that outlines the reasons why Kansas should implement a voucher program. The study is titled “An Opportunity Scholarship Proposal for Kansas: Providing Families a Choice and Taxpayers a Break.”

HB 2906 would create a voucher program for at-risk students in elementary and secondary public schools so they could attend participating nonpublic schools. Some 130,000 at-risk children would be eligible to participate in the program.

Step Up for Students

http://www.stepupforstudents.org

Rally participants speak with Representative Eleanor Sobel (D-Broward County) to try to persuade her to support Florida’s Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program.

http://www.flinthills.org

http://www.kslegislature.org

http://www.flinthills.org
**LOUISIANA**

**Archdiocese Again Pushing for School Vouchers**

In the upcoming legislative session, the Archdiocese of New Orleans will again work for passage of voucher programs designed to benefit children in failing public schools in New Orleans. Although Louisiana lawmakers defeated similar bills introduced last year by then-Governor Mike Foster, at least three voucher bills are expected to be introduced in the 2004 session.

The least controversial bill, Senate Bill 220, would simply bring the state’s existing preschool voucher program under state law. The program, which pays for 1,500 four-year-olds to attend private preschool facilities, is supported with $8.5 million in this year’s proposed budget and sponsored by Sen. Jay Dardeenie (R-Baton Rouge).

The second bill, SB 50, sponsored by Sen. John Hainkel (R-New Orleans), would allow the preschoolers who receive vouchers under SB 220 to continue in the same school until third grade. Senate Education Committee member Paulette Irons (D-New Orleans) said she is considering supporting the proposal because she did not want to force the voucher students into low-performing public schools.

“I’m giving serious consideration only because the school system is in such disarray,” she told The Times-Picayune.

The third bill, House Bill 366, sponsored by Rep. Steve Scalise (R-Jefferson), would establish a four-year pilot program to allow students in the 14 failing public schools in Orleans Parish to use state funds to attend a private school.

*The Times Picayune*  
March 19, 2004

**NEW HAMPSHIRE**

**Despite One-Vote Loss, Voucher Advocates Press on**

Although the New Hampshire House rejected a voucher bill in early January, the House Education Committee voted on January 15 to recommend a similar bill, House Bill 1353, to the state House when it met on February 5. When this bill missed passage by a single vote, 172-171, voucher advocates said they would continue educating the public on the benefits of school choice.

“Until New Hampshire makes positive steps towards a parental choice program we will be trapped in a fund-of-school choice. This is a new movement ... targeting a certain population of students who really need to have this help,” said Metcalfe.

“Voucher Advocates Press on”  
*Foster’s Daily Citizen*  
February 22, 2004

**UTAH**

**Governor Vetoes Scholarships for Disabled Children**

On March 23, Utah Governor Olene Walker vetoed a measure that would have allowed 56,000 disabled children to receive a scholarship to cover tuition at any Utah private school of their choice. In response to the veto, seven of Walker’s primary opponents held a press conference to call on legislators to override her decision.

The “Carson Smith Special Needs Scholarships” program, embodied in HB 119, would have provided parents with a voucher worth up to $5,400 to use for tuition at a private school. To qualify, disabled children would have to be enrolled in a Utah public school in the prior year and have an Individual Education Plan.

Financially, it would really help a lot of families and mine included,” Brenda Hanchett-Roach, a parent of an autistic child, told KSL-TV. “My husband works two jobs and we just have done a lot of things, have made some sacrifices.”

In a statement read at the news conference, primary candidate Jon Huntsman, Jr. said Walker was wrong to veto the bill and urged the Utah legislature to overturn the veto. A veto override would require a positive vote from two-thirds of the entire state legislature.

“We should be providing relief for those with the greatest of needs,” said Huntsman.

*Deseret Morning News*  
March 24, 2004

**Pennsylvania**

**Lawmakers Consider Special-Ed Vouchers**

Legislation to implement a voucher program for special-needs and gifted students was introduced in the Pennsylvania House on March 16.

Sponsored by Rep. Daryl Metcalfe (R-Butler), the bill would create a voucher whose value would be equal to the school district’s cost to send a special-education student to a charter school. In explaining his proposal at a news conference, Metcalfe noted the success of a similar program in Florida.

“This is a new movement ... targeting a certain population of students who really need to have this help,” said Metcalfe.

*The Patriot News*  
March 17, 2004

**South Carolina**

**Governor’s Tax Credit Plan Involves Income and Property Taxes**

On February 26, South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford announced details of his “Put Parents in Charge Act,” an education plan that would provide tax credits of up to $4,600 to offset private school tuition for families making less than $75,000 a year.

The status quo is not working, he said.

“Financially, it would really help a lot of families and mine included,” Brenda Hanchett-Roach, a parent of an autistic child, told KSL-TV. “My husband works two jobs and we just have done a lot of things, have made some sacrifices.”

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*Deseret Morning News*  
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**Wisconsin**

**Increased Oversight of Voucher Schools**

On March 16, Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle signed legislation that gives state education officials greater oversight authority for voucher school finances.

The bill requires voucher schools annually to provide evidence they are exerting sound fiscal policies, while also requiring schools that want to join the program to first prove they are financially viable. Schools that fail to meet the new standards can be kicked out of the program or have voucher payments to them withheld by the Department of Public Instruction.

“It comes none too soon as news reports on voucher schools ... tell of overdue rent, unpaid teachers, idle students, and possible criminal activity,” Doyle said at the bill-signing ceremony in Milwaukee.

Some questioned the state’s apparent double standard with regard to its response to wrongdoing at public versus private schools.

“When things happen with [voucher schools], the whole program is thrown into question,” school choice advocate Howard Fuller told CBS 5 News. “When there’s a problem in a public school that doesn’t happen.”

*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*  
March 17, 2004

*Green Bay CBS 5 News*  
March 20, 2004
Teaching Teachers
To Teach Reading

by George A. Clowes

“When I was a teacher, I knew I was not as prepared as I should have been to teach certain subjects. Take reading, for example. Even with a degree in education and practices as a student teacher, I didn’t know how to teach a child to read. … I realized that some of my students were having trouble learning—not because of a problem on their part, but because I needed to know more about the concepts.”

Laura Bush, March 2002 Remarks to the House Education and Workforce Committee

When schools of education fail to keep abreast of scientific research on the teaching of reading, their graduates become new elementary school teachers who find themselves in situations similar to the one described by the First Lady: producing children who are having trouble learning because of the instructional methods their teachers are using.

How can teachers learn the most effective methods for teaching children to read? Scholastic Corporation provides one readily accessible solution.

Last fall, Scholastic added individual teacher enrollment to its online professional development program for improving reading instruction, Scholastic Red®. The program remains available for district purchase for groups of teachers within schools, but this extension provides individual teachers with access to the program’s leading reading researchers, interactive training, and resources for implementing reading strategies in the classroom. Scholastic Red® is currently in use in urban districts such as Atlanta, Georgia; Clark County in Las Vegas, Nevada; and El Paso, Texas.

“New federal standards requiring schools and teachers to show growth in academic achievement and adequate yearly progress for each student have increased the need for every teacher to know how to help their students master key reading skills,” said John Lent, vice president of Scholastic Education.

Scholastic Red® provides teachers with self-paced instruction and training resources available 24/7. The professional development program provides resources and techniques for teaching the five key components of early reading identified in the No Child Left Behind Act:

• phonemic awareness
• phrasing
• fluency
• vocabulary, and
• comprehension.

Among the resources Scholastic Red® offers individual teachers are:

■ interactive simulations and video modeling of research-based practices and lessons by master teachers in real classrooms.
■ opportunities to practice new strategies in a safe, virtual environment, and
■ feedback from expert reading educators.

Scholastic Red®’s faculty and national advisors include leading reading specialists Louisa Cook Moats, former director of the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development’s Early Intervention Project; and Phyllis Hunter, national reading consultant.

Scholastic Corporation is the world’s largest publisher and distributor of a wide range of educational materials, such as the Fluency Formula program to increase reading comprehension, is available at http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/product_info.

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By Herbert J. Walberg

Because learning in most subjects depends on reading skills, reading proficiency can be considered the most important goal in the early grades. Yet, the National Assessment of Educational Progress survey shows only 29 percent of fourth-graders are proficient in reading. Children who fall substantially behind in reading in the early grades are unlikely to catch up—meaning the process of dropping out of high school often starts in the early years.

The problem is worse for children who live in poverty. By age four, poor children are exposed to about thirteen million words used by their parents, mostly in simple sentences. The affluent child, by contrast, is exposed to about forty-five million words, often in more complex sentences.

Researchers have synthesized a great number of control-group studies that reveal scientific principles for effectively encouraging and teaching reading. Preschoolers, for example, benefit greatly from talking with and receiving coaching from their parents, from whom they learn vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and a general knowledge of the world. Their parents and teachers can also foster sound and letter recognition, knowledge of how letters combine to form sounds, and “decoding,” or sounding out words.

After mastering these elements, students need sufficient practice to gain fluency and meaningful oral reading. If fourth-graders are still struggling with sounding out words, they need a tongue between their teeth to remember the sound blend of “th,” they are unlikely to enjoy reading and academically thrive. The more students read out loud and to themselves, the more they build a vocabulary, familiarity with the syllary and the knowledge to understand new texts.

As readers progress, they learn “comprehension strategy”—the identification of key reading skills,” said John Lent, vice president of Scholastic Education.

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Brown Decision Got the Law Right, But Not the Facts

By Lee H. Walker

This month marks the 50th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in Brown v. Board of Education. The decision gets its name from a black family in Topeka, Kansas, who thought their young daughter Linda should be able to attend a public school closer to their home. Although her application was denied because the school was for whites only, the Supreme Court subsequently ruled public education must be made available to all children on equal terms.

The decision was a pivotal moment in American history, for Southern blacks in particular. After ending slavery and seeing the collapse of Reconstruction, the United States was now taking its first step toward dismantling legalized segregation in its public education system. Up to this point, the Southern states had sponsored a two-tiered public school system, one for blacks and one for whites. That two-tier system was ruled unconstitutional in a unanimous decision by the 1954 Brown court.

I was in the ninth grade on May 17, 1954, when the ruling was issued. I remember it well. After growing up in the segregated society of Troy and Montgomery, Alabama, with separate “white” and “colored” water fountains in all the downtown stores, I paid attention when the news on the radio reported the Court’s decision.

“We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place,” the Court declared. “Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.”

The Brown case was the major topic of discussion for the remaining 17 days of school that year. As students, we thought we would at last get the chance to compete head-to-head with white students, with all students reading from the same books.

Until then, we had only one chance a year to read from the same book: whites. When our high school marching band paraded through town, there was only one way to play John Philip Sousa.

The black teachers were concerned about losing their jobs. They knew white parents would not allow them to teach their children. In fact, many did lose their jobs.

Court Missed the Inequality

In Brown v. Board of Education, the Court overturned the precedent of the 1896 Plessy v. Ferguson decision, where the court had ruled that states requiring separate but equal accommodations for blacks and whites did not violate the equal protection guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

In formulating their decision, the 1954 Supreme Court justices saw conditions in public schools for blacks and whites as essentially equal but separate. They reported as fact that “the Negro and white schools involved have been equalized, or are being equalized, with respect to buildings, curricula, qualifications and salaries of teachers, and other ‘tangible factors.’”

In reality, the facts were different. The reality of life in the South was not “equal but separate” between the two races, but always unequal and separate. For example, U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige recently referred to the stark inequalities he experienced growing up in Monticello, Mississippi.

“They had a gym. We played on dirt courts,” he told U.S. News and World Report. “They had new textbooks. Our textbooks had the covers torn off.”

Despite the reality, the Court declared educational facilities for blacks and whites were equal. The problem, the justices concluded, was not unequal public school facilities but public school segregation, which produced “a sense of inferiority” among black children and deprived them of “equal educational opportunities.” Legally sanctioned segregation, they stated, “has a tendency to [retard] the educational and mental development of Negro children and to deprive them of some of the benefits they would receive in a racially integrated school system.”

On May 31, 1955, the High Court revisited Brown to consider remedies, including whether “Negro children should forthwith be admitted to schools of their choice.” The Court ruled schools must be desegregated “with all deliberate speed.” That phrase allowed my home state of Alabama to avoid implementing Brown until 1963. In fact, “deliberate speed” ended up being virtually no speed at all, as the Court itself admitted when it began to fashion a more forceful remedy in the 1960s.

Gap Remains

Entering the twenty-first century and looking back on the past 50 years of Brown, it is clear there still is segregation, but for different reasons than in 1954. More important, there is a persistently wide gap in educational achievement between black and white children. For example, ongoing national tests show the average 17-year-old black student has about the same reading and math before being allowed to move up to the next grade. That’s a tough-love approach—and it may be difficult to enforce over the long term. The Chicago Public School system, for example, recently kicked off its tough promotion standards for third, sixth, and eighth grades.

Today, as in 1954, education is the most important function of state and local governments. It is the number one civil rights issue among younger blacks, who are fighting with older black leaders about educational choices as a viable strategy for addressing the problem of persistently failing public schools. Low-income parents in particular need better choices.

How different would the last half-century have been if the Brown decision had been focused less on the segregation of blacks and whites achieving a quality education? Or less on sociology and more on fact?
A School Reformer’s Journey:
FROM PARENT TO JOURNALIST TO POLICY ANALYST

City Journal senior editor Sol Stern just wants New York City’s public school system to provide today’s children with the same solid foundation of knowledge and skills it gave to him during the 1940s as a non-English-speaking child from Israel.

With that foundation, Stern graduated from one of the city’s selective-enrollment high schools and from the City College of New York, continuing with an M.A. in political science from the State University of Iowa and further graduate work at the University of California at Berkeley.

But most children who attend public schools in New York City today aren’t being prepared even for high school, let alone college or the job market. In March this year, 306,087 of the city’s 1 million public school students—30 percent—were warned they were in danger of being held back because they could not meet the academic requirements for promotion to the next grade. Last December, results from the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed only 21 percent of the city’s fourth-graders were proficient or above in reading. A full third (33 percent) were classed as “Below Basic”—they could not demonstrate even partial mastery of the knowledge and skills required for fourth-grade work. By eighth grade, the percentage of students reading “Below Basic” balloons to 46 percent.

Stern discovered how much New York City’s public schools had changed when his own two children began their education in them in the early 1990s. What he experienced as a parent, what he found as an investigative journalist, and what he concluded as a policy analyst are detailed in his latest book, Breaking Free: Public School Lessons and the Imperative of School Choice (Encounter Books, 2003). Stern’s views on education reform appear regularly in City Journal and also in a range of other publications, including the Wall Street Journal, New York Post, New York Daily News, New York Sun, and Newsday.

After graduating from college, Stern was an editor and staff writer for Ramparts magazine from 1966-72 and a freelance writer until 1984. From 1985-94, he served as press secretary and senior policy advisor in the Office of the City Council President of New York. He subsequently served for a year as executive director of a New York State Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform before returning to journalism and a position as senior fellow with the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. Stern recently spoke with School Reform News Managing Editor George Clowes.

Clowes: During the past year, your focus has been on progressive education and pedagogy.

Stern: In the elementary school that both of my children attended, I was struck by the change in pedagogy and found myself becoming a critic of progressive education.

Clowes: How did you come to be involved in school reform?

Stern: I was sort of a late bloomer. I began as a public education consumer.

Clowes: During the past year, your focus has been on progressive education and pedagogy.

Stern: I was sort of a late bloomer. I began as a public education consumer. I had my children in the public schools in New York City about 15 years ago. I was a parent concerned about his children’s education. Then, as I began to observe some of the strange things that were happening in the schools, my reporter’s instincts took over and I started investigating further.

Clowes: I started writing about what I saw, generalizing and drawing conclusions from my own experience. I had my children in the public schools in New York City about 15 years ago. I was a parents concerned about his children’s education. Then, as I began to observe some of the strange things that were going on in their schools, my reporter’s instincts took over and I started investigating further.

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Stern: I started writing about what I saw, generalizing and drawing conclusions from my own experience. I had my children in the public schools in New York City about 15 years ago. I was a parent concerned about his children’s education. Then, as I began to observe some of the strange things that were going on in their schools, my reporter’s instincts took over and I started investigating further.
“If you have a school that is horrendous, that is destroying children, then it’s morally incumbent on us as a society to provide an opportunity for those children to get out and find a school that works for them, even with taxpayer money.”

I was initially a very strong supporter of what Mayor Bloomberg was doing. He brought in as his new chancellor Joel Klein, who was head of the Justice Department’s Anti-Trust Division. The mayor said all the right things in a speech on Martin Luther King Day in 2003, when he spoke about all the reforms that he was going to unveil. He said students would be doing phonics. It really seemed that we were going to go back to the basics in terms of classroom instruction, pedagogy, and curriculum.

I praised that speech in an article in City Journal, but within a few months, I felt that I had been had. Chancellor Klein brought in Diane Lam as his chief instructional supervisor and basically turned over all the instruction issues to her. She is a progressive education ideologue, and she came into town with her guns blazing. She got rid of anyone with a more traditional bent and installed the most ideological of the progressives in all the key regions of power.

She then picked reading and math programs that were the essence of the whole progressive approach: Teachers should not be figures of authority and children should learn by “constructing” their own knowledge. Since we had given the mayor such a total power to impose this approach top-down on every single school—what we got was the most thor-ough-going progressive education revolution in the country.

Clowes: Yet the reforms sounded as if they had the right components in them—Month-by-Month Phonics, for example.

Stern: There’s no such thing in Month-by-Month Phonics. I have it in my own son’s third-grade reading program. It’s a “balanced literacy program,” which is the term used by progressives so as not to fly directly in the face of parents and elected officials. Finally, in the new system, it’s protecting the children and protecting their right to an equal education.

The current approach is that children learn by themselves. The authors of the Month-by-Month Phonics Handbook actually de-emphasize phonics. For example, they write, “Teaching all children to read is essential and can be done, but it will never happen with a just-teaching-phonics curriculum.” Everyone, in a while they have a little extra drill in some phonemic awareness, but it’s very inadequate. In fact, it was deemed inadequate by the best reading experts in the country—the people who were involved in the National Reading Panel.

These same reading experts are consultants for the U.S. Department of Education in administering the Reading First program as part of the No Child Left Behind Act. It’s one of the best parts of No Child Left Behind—the idea that the federal government is going to hand out money only on the basis of reading programs that are proven to work based on scientific research. What an innovation!

The Month-by-Month Phonics program did not qualify for Reading First funds because it did not involve systematic and explicit phonics. So what the district did was to ask for $40 million for another program—Harcourt, an explicit phonics-based curriculum. Even though Diane Lam is how great at teaching phonics curriculum,” everybody in a while they have a little extra drill in some phonemic awareness, but it’s very inadequate. In fact, it was deemed inadequate by the best reading experts in the country—the people who were involved in the National Reading Panel.

Stern: As an education reformer, and as a traditionalist, normally I would be completely on the mayor’s side on this. A system that pushes students up through the grades regardless of whether they have mastered even the most minimal reading and math skills doesn’t expect very much from kids or from their teachers and principals. But there’s a corollary to that: If you’re pushing kids to get to high school graduation, then you’re going to get rid of this evil of social promotion, then the system’s leadership has a moral obligation to make sure that the children are part of a monopoly system that pushes students up through the grades regardless of whether they have mastered even the most minimal reading and math skills doesn’t expect very much from kids or from their teachers and principals.

Phonics Handbook to get rid of this evil of social promotion, then the system’s leadership has a moral obligation to make sure that the children are part of a monopoly system that pushes students up through the grades regardless of whether they have mastered even the most minimal reading and math skills doesn’t expect very much from kids or from their teachers and principals.

It’s not the money, it’s the way we do things. It’s the rules and the regulations we impose upon the public school system. It’s the lack of competition.

We could accomplish far more in our schools if we just applied some common sense and allowed public schools to run by some of the same principles that just about every other enterprise in the country runs by: Support for excellence, competition, getting rid of slackers, and empowering and encouraging people who work hard. Those seem like very simple things, but they are the keys to getting our schools to work.

“One of the advantages to a system with choice is that it breaks down the walls between the two systems [public schools and private] and makes us realize there are different approaches that could be tried.”

Still, there are hopeful signs. We are getting a voucher program in the country in the nation’s capital, and I hope that some New York City and New York State politicians take a look at that program. If the President of the United States is willing to expend some of his political capital to do the right thing and give children in Washington a chance to get out of their terrible schools, it can be done here, too. It’s not going to destroy the Republic.

The first lesson of education in America should be: “Do no harm.” There’s no way a voucher program could do harm. On the other hand, the programs we are using now are doing harm.

I saw that in Milwaukee. The voucher schools and the public schools began to cooperate and learn from each other. Public schools were forced by the competition to adopt some of the voucher schools’ approaches. Once vouchers had broken through the wall of political capital, we’re not getting very much for it.

The debate, unfortunately, is dominated by the interest groups and the politicians who have convinced the public that the answer is more money and more resources. It’s not the money, it’s the way we do things. It’s the rules and the regulations we impose upon the public school system. It’s the lack of competition.

We could accomplish far more in our schools if we just applied some common sense and allowed public schools to run by some of the same principles that just about every other enterprise in the country runs by: Support for excellence, competition, getting rid of slackers, and empowering and encouraging people who work hard. Those seem like very simple things, but they are the keys to getting our schools to work.
Thumbnail Sketch of Texas Education

Texas spends more than $30 billion a year in taxpayer funds on education; half of that amount is raised locally. Average per-pupil spending in 2002-03 was just more than $8,000, with the lowest-spending district at $4,358 per student and the highest at $72,000 per student. A little over half of the funding, on average, is used on instruction. The student-teacher ratio is 12.5 to one.

The state categorizes more than half of its students as economically disadvantaged. The average school district is approximately 4,000 students, but given the wide variability of district sizes the median district size is 907 students. The average district had 68 percent of its students in grades 3-11 pass all Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills tests in the 2002-2003 school year. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, Texas students score slightly above the national average. The state has a slightly higher average than average dropout rate.

Measured in 2003 dollars, real current spending per pupil more than tripled over the past 30 years, from $2,197 in 1969-70 to $6,713 in 1999-2000. The rise in spending per pupil far outpaced the growth of income per person in the state. The number of days of income it takes a typical Texan to pay for one student's public education each year jumped almost 50 percent, from 63 days in 1969-70 to 90 days in 1999-2000.

— K.K.

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On February 10 in Washington DC, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation awarded the second annual Fordham Prizes for Excellence in Education to Howard L. Fuller and Eric A. Hanushek, for valor and for distinguished scholarship respectively. The prizes are for $25,000 each.

The Prize for Valor is awarded to a leader who has made major contributions to education reform through noteworthy accomplishments at the national, state, local, and/or school levels. Fuller is distinguished professor of education and founder/director of the Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University in Milwaukee. Over the past two decades, he has become one of the nation’s most outspoken and effective advocates of educational choice. His efforts have helped bring a wide range of educational choices to parents in Milwaukee, and his work in establishing the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) promises to do the same for parents nationwide.

The Prize for Distinguished Scholarship is given to a scholar who has made major contributions to education reform via research, analysis, and successful engagement in the war of ideas. Hanushek is the Paul & Jean Hanna Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Although he was dismissed as a “misled” economist in his early career for applying economic principles to education research, his findings have repeatedly refuted the education establishment’s belief that government can invest its way out of the education achievement problem. His analysis of education through the lens of econometrics is now an accepted approach in education reform.

Further information about this year’s prizewinners, together with the procedure for nominating candidates for next year’s prizes, is available online at the Fordham Foundation’s Web site at http://www.edexcellence.net/foundation/global/page.cfm?id=199.

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How Teachers Are Paid: The Salary Grid

One size fits all

by George A. Clowes

Although teacher pay varies by state and by school district, virtually all public schools in the U.S. employ a rigid salary grid to determine the teacher salaries paid in a specific district. This single, unified salary schedule recognizes only years of service and amount of education as inputs in determining the pay of individual teachers. It treats all teachers equally, regardless of where they were earned or in what subject, and it takes no account of a teacher’s effect on student achievement or the grade level taught.

The salary schedule is simply a grid of rows and columns, with the rows down the side being increasing years of service, called “steps,” and the columns across the top being increasing education credentials—bachelor’s degree, master’s degree, and doctorate, with intermediate steps to recognize the accumulation of continuing education credits from professional development.

A typical teacher salary schedule is shown below in Table 1. Table 2 shows all the salaries in the grid indexed to the starting salary in step 1 for a teacher with a bachelor’s degree.

A new teacher with a bachelor’s degree would start at the salary provided in step 1 under BA, or $33,722 for the nine-month school year, including a 4 percent contribution to the Teachers Retirement System. In the second year, the teacher would move into step 2 and be paid a salary of $33,357, or 1.019 times the starting salary.

As additional years of service are accumulated, the teacher moves into higher and higher steps, each of which brings an automatic annual pay increase of approximately 3 percent. However, for a teacher with just a bachelor’s degree, this particular district’s salary schedule caps teacher pay in step 12 to 1.373 times the starting salary, or $44,916 per school year.

If the teacher earns a master’s degree by the 12th year of service, that added education credential shifts the teacher to another salary step ladder with higher pay. With a master’s degree instead of a bachelor’s degree, a teacher in step 12 would be paid 1.564 times the starting salary, or $79,318, or 2.424 times the starting salary.

The grid makes teacher salary administration quite simple: A teacher’s pay is not a matter of merit but simply a matter of where the teacher is in the grid. Budget projections are quite simple, too, since they involve simply adding up what the grid says the existing teaching staff will be paid in each of the next few years. It’s also simple to compute the cost of raising starting salaries, since all salaries must be raised by the same percentage as the starting salary.

However, as University of Idaho economics professor John T. Wenders points out, the use of a unified salary schedule to determine the pay of teachers—regardless of how well or what they teach—has a number of serious disincentive effects. The most important effect is on teacher quality.

“Dolts get paid the same as superior teachers, and PE teachers are paid the same as physics teachers.”

university of idaho economics professor John T. wenders

The result of this one-size-fits-all pay structure, he points out, is an artificial shortage of math and science teachers, whose expertise is in demand in the overall economy. It also results in a surplus of phys ed and social science teachers, who often end up teaching math and science. Not surprisingly, the performance of U.S. students in math and science is among the lowest in the world.

Research on teacher quality, notes Wenders, shows student performance is overwhelmingly a function of three factors: teacher cognitive ability, or brains; experience for the first few years of teaching; and, at the secondary level, possession of a master’s degree in one’s teaching subject.

Rather than rewarding teacher quality, the salary grid simply rewards teacher experience and education—in effect, telling teachers not to be concerned about student performance but to acquire additional educational credits for higher pay.

“One could not consciously design a policy with worse incentives for attracting and keeping good talent and performance,” concludes Wenders.

He suggests the salary grid remains popular for three reasons:

- For teachers, the grid provides automatic annual salary increases with no performance reviews, no salary negotiations, and no newspaper headlines reporting increased teacher pay;
- For union leaders and school administrators, the grid is easy to administer and relieves them of the burden of justifying salary differentials based on merit and subject taught;
- For school boards, the grid allows them to give almost all teachers automatic annual salary increases out of sight of the public and the media.

“Unlike in the marketplace,” notes Wenders, “the taxpayers who are paying the bill, and the parents whose children are being educated, are out of this loop.”

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. His email address is clowes@heartland.org.

INTERNET INFO


EXAMPLE OF A K-8 TEACHER SALARY SCHEDULE

| TABLE 1: 2002-03 SALARY GRID FOR A SUBURBAN ILLINOIS SCHOOL DISTRICT |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| **Step** | **BA** | **BA+15** | **BA+30** | **MA** |
| 1 | $32,722 | $33,256 | $34,916 | $37,712 |
| 2 | $33,357 | $34,072 | $35,617 | $38,653 |
| 3 | $34,441 | $34,976 | $36,329 | $39,621 |
| 4 | $35,561 | $36,375 | $37,237 | $40,612 |
| 5 | $37,339 | $37,793 | $38,168 | $41,627 |
| 6 | $38,739 | $39,155 | $39,965 | $42,668 |
| 7 | $40,192 | $40,623 | $41,184 | $43,734 |
| 8 | $41,297 | $41,462 | $42,728 | $44,828 |
| 9 | $42,432 | $43,727 | $44,330 | $46,509 |
| 10 | $42,929 | $44,299 | $45,993 | $48,732 |
| 11 | $44,471 | $46,165 | $47,717 | $49,581 |
| 12 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $49,268 | $51,192 |
| 13 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $50,623 | $52,856 |
| 14 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $52,012 | $54,079 |
| 15 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $52,012 | $55,750 |
| 16 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $52,012 | $56,574 |
| 17 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $52,012 | $57,443 |
| 18 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $52,012 | $58,351 |
| 19 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $52,012 | $59,283 |
| 20 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $52,012 | $60,247 |
| 21 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $52,012 | $61,236 |
| 22 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $52,012 | $62,249 |
| 23 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $52,012 | $63,334 |
| 24 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $52,012 | $64,441 |
| 25 | $44,916 | $47,434 | $52,012 | $65,567 |

| TABLE 2: SALARY INDEX |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| **Step** | **BA** | **BA+15** | **BA+30** | **MA** |
| 1 | 1 | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| 2 | 101 | 101 | 101 | 101 |
| 3 | 102 | 102 | 102 | 102 |
| 4 | 103 | 103 | 103 | 103 |
| 5 | 104 | 104 | 104 | 104 |
| 6 | 105 | 105 | 105 | 105 |
| 7 | 106 | 106 | 106 | 106 |
| 8 | 107 | 107 | 107 | 107 |
| 9 | 108 | 108 | 108 | 108 |
| 10 | 109 | 109 | 109 | 109 |
| 11 | 110 | 110 | 110 | 110 |
| 12 | 111 | 111 | 111 | 111 |
| 13 | 112 | 112 | 112 | 112 |
| 14 | 113 | 113 | 113 | 113 |
| 15 | 114 | 114 | 114 | 114 |
| 16 | 115 | 115 | 115 | 115 |
| 17 | 116 | 116 | 116 | 116 |
| 18 | 117 | 117 | 117 | 117 |
| 19 | 118 | 118 | 118 | 118 |
| 20 | 119 | 119 | 119 | 119 |
| 21 | 120 | 120 | 120 | 120 |
| 22 | 121 | 121 | 121 | 121 |
| 23 | 122 | 122 | 122 | 122 |
| 24 | 123 | 123 | 123 | 123 |
| 25 | 124 | 124 | 124 | 124 |
JUST THE FACTS:

Teacher Salaries and Education Spending

by George A. Clowes

Total spending on public K-12 education reached a record $437 billion in the 2002-03 school year—more than $9,100 per pupil nationwide. Less than a third of this money ended up in the paychecks of teachers, whose average salary was $45,930, up 3.2 percent from the average salary of $44,999 reported last year for 2001-02. With spending of $16,740 per pupil, the District of Columbia had the nation’s most expensive public school system.

These and other data on public schools are derived from the latest update to the “Ranking and Estimates” report published annually by the Research Department of the National Education Association (NEA). A much-quoted source of national and state-level data on teacher salaries, the report also provides statistics on state-by-state student enrollments, student-teacher ratios, and total expenditures on public K-12 education.

According to the NEA supplemental report for the school year 2002-03, published last fall, public school enrollments were up less than 1 percent to 47,789,062, while the number of teachers rose about 2 percent to 3,039,831. The student-teacher ratio fell about 2 percent from 15.7 in 2002-03. Total expenditures on education, including capital and interest, rose by about 3 percent from the $413 billion reported in the 2002 supplement.

While NEA Research reports teacher salaries and other statistics in rank order by state, in the table on this page School Reform News puts these data in context by reporting them as percentages of the national average. For example, California teachers are paid 123 percent of the national average, while South Dakota teachers are paid 71 percent of the national average.

To place spending on teacher salaries in the context of total expenditures, each state’s teacher salaries were multiplied by the number of teachers to produce an estimate of state-level expenditures on teachers. When reported as a percentage of total expenditures, those figures show how much states spend less than a third of education funds on teachers, with only Virginia (48 percent), North Dakota (47 percent), and Rhode Island (42 percent) being notable exceptions. By contrast, in the District of Columbia, only one out of five education dollars (21 percent) is spent on teacher salaries.

George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. His email address is clowes@heartland.org.

INTERNET INFO

The Fall 2003 Update of the National Education Association’s “Rankings and Estimates” report is available online at http://www.nea.org/edstats/03rankingsupdate.html. The previous full report is available at http://www.nea.org/edstats/images/03rankings.pdf.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS 2002-03: Teacher Salaries, Student-Teacher Ratios, and Per-Pupil Spending

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FOOTNOTES:

Computed from NEA Research, Estimates databank.

Isn’t it time you joined a think tank?

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<th>Please send me information about advertising in Heartland publications.</th>
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