School Reform News

by Krista Kafer

Student discipline problems seriously obstruct teaching and learning in America’s public schools, according to a new report from the opinion research organization Public Agenda, which recently surveyed parents and children from Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio. They called on lawmakers to reform the public education system and make better options—including school vouchers—available for their children’s education.

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Establishing school choice in “education empowerment zones” would revitalize Ohio’s six largest cities—Akron, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, and Toledo—according to a new study by The Buckeye Institute, a public policy think tank in Columbus, Ohio. In the zones, parents would have access not only to a growing number of options—including school vouchers—available for their children’s education.

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Heartland’s Twentieth Anniversary Benefit Dinner

Thursday, September 23, 2004
Chicago Hilton Hotel

Robert Novak
Keynote Address

Illinois native Robert Novak will deliver the keynote address at Heartland’s twentieth anniversary benefit dinner on Thursday, September 23, 2004, at the Chicago Hilton Hotel.

Novak writes “Inside Report,” a syndicated column he launched with Rowland Evans in May 1963. Since 1966, the Chicago Sun-Times has been the column’s home newspaper; it is currently syndicated to more than 300 newspapers nationwide. Novak is also a contributing editor to Reader’s Digest. In 2001, Novak was awarded the National Press Club’s Fourth Estate Award for lifetime achievement in journalism.

Novak will be joined by Wall Street Journal editorial writer John Fund, Heartland Founder and Chairman Emeritus Dave Padden, and Heartland President Joseph Bast. Tickets and table reservations are now on sale.

For more information call The Heartland Institute at 312/377-4000 or visit Heartland’s website at www.heartland.org
Senate Approves IDEA Reforms, Greenspan Addresses Education Needs

by Don Soifer

B

Working bipartisan, the Senate on May 13 passed its version of reforms to the nation’s special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The House passed its version of IDEA reauthorization 12 months ago, with 54 Democrats voting in support of the bill. Since the House and Senate bills differ, Congressional leadership will appoint a conference committee to reconcile the two versions. The resulting plan would then need to be approved by both legislative bodies this year to be eligible for signature by President George W. Bush, or the entire IDEA reformation process would need to restart next year.

While the two versions differ in substantial ways, veteran staffers believe there is a good chance the reauthorization will become law in the current session.

“There are differences, but they are not insurmountable ones,” said House Education Committee spokesman Dave Schmitt. “The President deserves the chance to sign a bill into law this year and we’re going to make every conceivable effort to give him that opportunity.”

A similar down-to-the-wire scenario occurred in the mid-1990s, when closed-session negotiations between House and Senate conferees resulted in the 1997 IDEA reauthorization.

Representative Michael Castle (R-Delaware), the primary author of the House bill, was upbeat in his description of the Senate version.

“The [Senate] legislation includes crucial reforms to ensure that students across the country in special education programs are receiving a quality education and puts the federal government on a glide path to increasing funding for IDEA,” he said.

Prior to the Senate vote, an amendment for “mandatory full funding” for special education was defeated 56-41, four votes short of the 60 votes needed to carry the measure. Instead, the Senate approved the House-passed discretionary funding for the program by $2.3 billion.

While the Senate version omits some of the reforms passed by the House, it contains a number of other changes to IDEA, including the following:

- Language authored by Senator Rick Santorum (R-Pennsylvania) to reduce paperwork requirements for special education teachers.
- An optional three-year Individualized Education Program that parents and schools would review annually; the current system requires these long and complex plans to be redrafted from scratch every year.
- Definitions for “highly qualified teacher” that would require new special education teachers to obtain state special education certifications and to pass state subject knowledge tests in reading, writing, and math.
- An emphasis on early intervention strategies aimed at correcting reading deficiencies before children are identified as disabled. This reform, which also appears in the House bill, would grant flexibility to school districts to use up to 15 percent of their IDEA funds for these pre-referral services.

Greenspan Sees Education Needs

Experienced observers of the Federal Reserve have for nearly two decades scrutinized Chairman Alan Greenspan’s measured language and deliberate prose. But in his May remarks at the Chicago Fed, there was little nuance to the importance he placed on education.

“Your futures will depend on your conceptual abilities,” he told an audience that included many graduating high school seniors. Stressing the importance of a strong foundation in reading, writing, and math—“well below” the international average in science, those same students fall “well below” the international average by the end of high school.

“We appear to be graduating too few skilled workers to address the apparent imbalance between the supply of such workers and the burgeoning demand for them,” Greenspan told the House Education and the Workforce Committee on March 11.

“Societal changes have been numerous and profound, and our schools are being asked to do a great deal more than they have in the past,” he said.

“We need to be forward-looking in order to adapt our educational system to the evolving needs of the economy and the realities of our changing society.”

Don Soifer is executive vice president of the Lexington Institute. His email address is soifer@lexingtoninstitute.org.
Children Trapped in Poor Schools

Need Choice Now

by George A. Clowes

School choice is urgently needed to fulfill the promise of equal opportunity in education established by the Brown v. Board of Education decision and is “the civil rights issue of our generation,” declared longtime school choice advocate Clint Bolick at a National Press Club event on May 17, the 50th anniversary of the 1954 Supreme Court decision.

Formerly vice president of the Institute for Justice, Bolick now heads the new national policy group, the Alliance for School Choice. (See related article, “If Bolick Takes Helm at School Choice Alliance,” page 7.) Other panelists at the event included Virginia Walden Ford, executive director of D.C. Parents for School Choice, and Rebeca Nieves Huffman, president of the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options (CREO).

“Millions of low-income children, disproportionately black and Hispanic, are consigned to abysmal public schools where violence, inferior quality, and low expectations are the norm,” said Bolick. In the very institutions that are supposed to provide mechanisms for student advancement, “dreams and aspirations are not nourished, but systematically destroyed,” he added, noting reforms such as busing, massive spending, and reduced class size had not solved the problem.

According to Bolick, what is needed to improve schools for low-income families is the same solution that has made schools in more affluent communities responsive to parent concerns: school choice. School choice, he said, allows children to leave failing schools and attend good ones—now.

“Our children cannot afford to wait five years—much less another 50—to make the promise of educational opportunity a reality,” said Bolick. “To honor the spirit of Brown, we need to empower parents and do it with immediate speed.”

Ford agreed, saying African-Americans were once again “being condemned to limited educational choices.” “Before Brown,” she said, “many fought to keep us out of good schools. Today many fight to keep us trapped in bad schools.”

Another panelist, Heather Prigg, a Washington Scholarship Fund recipient, discussed how school choice has influenced her education. Huffman, when describing the work of Hispanic CREO, which will provide equal access to high-quality scholarship legislation which is before state and federal legislative bodies and the inability of the “current and antiquated education system” to produce well-educated Hispanics capable of becoming successful business owners and CEOs.

Giving a personal example of what President George W. Bush has called “the soft bigotry of low expectations,” Gonzales related to the crowd at the rally what educators in the Austin public schools had said when he signed up for college-bound classes in high school: They told him he had registered for the wrong classes.

Driving the Hispanic Chamber’s action is the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, whose president and CEO, J.R. Gonzales, spoke at the rally. Last November, the chamber unanimously passed a resolution declaring it “fully endorses the K-12 opportunity scholarship legislation which is before state and federal legislative bodies and which will provide equal access to high-quality education to low-income children and enable parents who are lacking in financial resources the right to send their children to the schools of their choice.”

The group’s call for vouchers did not persuade Rep. Rene Oliveira (D-Brownsville), vice chairman of the House Public Education Committee, who told the Austin American-Statesman, “until we fully fund education,” vouchers are out of the question.

“I think the vast majority of Hispanic legislators, as well as the vast majority of Hispanic parents throughout Texas, do not agree with the idea that we should have vouchers for private schools,” Oliveira said.

One influential Hispanic group that does support vouchers is the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, whose president and CEO, J.R. Gonzales, spoke at the rally. Last November, the chamber unanimously passed a resolution declaring it “fully endorses the K-12 opportunity scholarship legislation which is before state and federal legislative bodies and which will provide equal access to high-quality education to low-income children and enable parents who are lacking in financial resources the right to send their children to the schools of their choice.”

The mission of Hispanic CREO is to improve educational outcomes for Hispanic children by empowering their families through parental choice in education. Currently focusing on four states—Colorado, Florida, New Jersey, and Texas—the group works at a grassroots level with local parent leaders and community organizations to help inform parents about the educational options available in their area.

“All studies show that students trapped in disadvantaged, violent schools are at a much greater risk of dropping out,” said Rosa Espinoza, parent organizer for Hispanic CREO in Houston. “Education reform can open the door to a brighter future for those students.”

Statistics cited by speakers at the rally made clear the need for reform. Granados pointed out that the dropout rate in the Dallas public schools is 57 percent, and only 9 percent of Hispanic graduates are academically prepared to attend college. Only 3 percent of Hispanic children earn college degrees, added Hispanic CREO President Rebeca Nieves Huffman, who was the first in her family to graduate college.

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REBECA NIEVES HUFFMAN

HISPANIC CREO

Texas

Continued from page 1

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Driving the Hispanic Chamber’s action were concerns about high dropout rates among Hispanics, the questionable quality of graduates produced by “this flawed education system,” and the inability of the “current and antiquated education system” to produce well-educated Hispanics capable of becoming successful business owners and CEOs.

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George A. Clowes is managing editor of School Reform News. His email address is clowes@heartland.org.
Dealing with Social Deficit Disorders

by George A. Clowes

Although written primarily for parents, The Unwritten Rules of Friendship is a book every elementary school teacher should read and have available to parents who are concerned their child is having a difficult time making friends.

As the book explains, whether a child is excessively shy, over-sensitive, a poor sport, prone to temper tantrums, or a bully, the problem often arises because the child is unaware of—and thus too often breaking—Unwritten Rules of social interaction. This book helps parents teach their children those rules and practice observing them.

“The key factor that determines how smoothly children (and adults) get along with others is whether or not they understand and can follow the Unwritten Rules that guide social relationships. Some children seem to pick these up automatically, naturally. Others seem oblivious of them,” write authors Natalie Madorsky Elman, director of the Summit Center for Adult Supervision and Structured by Age, and Eileen Kennedy-Moore, a Westfield, New Jersey psychotherapist.

Unwritten Rules are everywhere, not just in school, explain the authors. For example, there are Unwritten Rules involved in something as simple as riding an elevator. After we step in an elevator, we automatically turn around to face the door. If we stood with our back to the door, we would be regarded as “strange” by other people on the elevator. Similarly, a child who doesn’t follow the Unwritten Rules of Friendship will be regarded as “strange” by his or her peers—for example, a child who mimics everything, word-for-word, that another child says; a child who tells his or her peers when they are breaking school rules; a child who breaks into tears when the teacher corrects an error; or a child who yells and argues with other children until he gets his way. All these children are breaking one or more of the Unwritten Rules of Friendship. They want friends, but they don’t know how to behave.

“Unless they know the Unwritten Rules of social situations, children cannot possibly use social skills appropriately,” write Elman and Kennedy-Moore.

Elman and Kennedy-Moore introduce the rules in the context of nine prototypical children with friendship problems, including the Unassertive Child, the Born Leader, the Intimidating Child, and the Young Adult. As these children and their variants are introduced, the particular Unwritten Rules that each type of child needs to learn also are introduced.

For example, one of the most important rules the Unassertive Child—the “bully magnet”—needs to learn is that vulnerability body language attracts bullies. To help the Unassertive Child, the authors provide a description of how different body language signals confidence or vulnerability.

Throughout the book, they provide suggestions for teaching the rules, together with strategies for parents to help their children overcome the specific difficulties they encounter in making friends.

One important suggestion is for parents to help their child develop a group of friends outside of school, such as through a church or synagogue, or through a special interest/hobby group. Having a group of friends independent of school makes the child less vulnerable to fickle changes in popularity at school.

“At their core, the Unwritten Rules are about kindness and civility. They emphasize talking and listening to one another, respecting and caring about one another, and reaching out to help one another,” write the authors. "True friendship grows from a sense of connection.”

In previous generations, children learned how to behave with other children in largely unsupervised and spontaneous play groups in their neighborhoods, where the behavior of older children provided the role model. With children’s leisure activities now taking place under adult supervision and structured by age, children have fewer opportunities to recognize and learn the Unwritten Rules.

Two Principals Partner to Produce “Wonderful Miracles”

by M. Royce Van Tassell

More than 90 percent of the 972 students at Larry C. Kennedy Elementary School (LCK) in Phoenix, Arizona are Hispanic, black, or Native American. But 25 percent don’t speak English when they start school, and less than half in grades 3 through 5 make a full year’s progress in math each year. The school’s two computer labs still run on DOS.

Across the street, but worlds apart, sits St. Paul’s Preparatory Academy, a private, religious high school for boys. The school’s average ACT last year was in the 80th percentile. Each student in the mostly Hispanic student body gives an average of nearly 25 hours to community service per year, and 99 percent of the school’s graduates move on to college. St. Paul’s computer labs allow students to do computer animation.

When St. Paul’s moved into the neighborhood seven years ago, Johnny Chavez, the principal at LCK, introduced himself to the private school’s founder, Lowell Andrews. After touring the St. Paul’s facility and seeing the admissions criteria and uniforms—jacket, shirt, and tie—Chavez commented, “So this is how the other half lives.”

Andrews replied with a rather unusual question: “Do you have any students that would do well here?”

Of course we do, said Chavez, but they can’t afford $12,000 in tuition.

Two years later, St. Paul’s created the Arizona Episcopal Schools Foundation (AESF). Formed after Arizona began its tuition tax credit program, AESF collects private donations and distributes them as scholarships to students based on family financial need.

Where would St. Paul’s find scholarship students? Right across the street, as it turned out. Unsure of how Chavez and his deputy principal would react to a proposal from his elite private school, St. Paul’s principal Hal Elliott suggested Chavez recommend students from LCK who could succeed at St. Paul’s.

He needn’t have worried. Over the past four years Chavez and Elliott have become firm partners. Chavez knows that students who are receiving scholarships to LCK are students who have the attitude, need, family support, and ability to take advantage of St. Paul’s opportunities. AESF awards scholarships to LCK students so they can afford the tuition at St. Paul’s.

On average, one to three LCK students cross the street to St. Paul’s each year. Today St. Paul’s has seven former LCK students.

One will be valedictorian this year. Another was St. Paul’s starting point guard on the basketball team, and a third will most likely be the top student of next year’s graduating class.

Elliott makes sure St. Paul’s give something back, too. St. Paul students spend countless hours teaching LCK students soccer and helping out at after-school family fun nights. They raise more than $2,000 per year for Christmas gifts for LCK students. Elliott personally donates to LCK’s after-school activity fund.

This unusual partnership stems from an understanding of the two principals of how their schools complement, rather than compete with, each other. They recognize not all of Chavez’s students can live up to St. Paul’s demanding expectations. In fact, a couple of students he’s referred to St. Paul’s decided not to go, and one student didn’t work out.

But for those students who can make use of the opportunity, “St. Paul’s is changing generations,” Chavez said. He sees them moving on to higher education and creating the same opportunities for their children that St. Paul’s created for them.

“They’re working wonderful miracles with my kids,” he said.

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choice school reformers in the U.S. not only should take heart from the burgeoning worldwide movement for choice, but also draw lessons about how to avoid the harmful side effect of government "micromanagement" of participating private schools.

Keynote speaker Charles Glenn, a Boston University professor who has authored major works on international school choice, said that up to now Americans have been "remarkably unwilling to look at the experience of other countries for things to learn."—

Dr. Joan Davis Ratteray (1948-2004)

"Independent schools represent the power of parental choice. They exist because quality education is not just a luxury for the well-to-do. They challenge public schools to be competitive without the infusion of larger and larger sums of tax dollars. They are islands of excellence, and some of them are models for innovations in public institutions."

Serving the Poor

Glenn lauded the sense of community that often coalesces when schools can develop distinctive programs to respond to particular interests of their patrons. Too often, he observed, American public schools resemble "the bland leading the bland." In Holland, Finland, and Hungary, schools that have developed distinctive programs may propose an alternative set of standards to which they would be held accountable.

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Serving the Poor

The Cato conferees heard of an altogether different kind of school choice being exercised in China, Ghana, India, Kenya, and Nigeria. James Tooley, a professor of education policy at the University of Newcastle (England), told of research he has done locating private schools that serve the poorest of families in those countries.

Although the governments often have tried to deny their existence or close them down, these private schools—which are illegal in some of the countries involved—often are more numerous than the government schools serving the urban slums.

Tooley found that these schools, run by what he termed "educreneurs," have satisfied parents, delivered instructional results, offered better facilities than the public schools, and even turned a profit. They are able to do this by charging small fees, although they also offer scholarships when they are needed.

The private sector is serving a majority of the poor and providing better educational opportunity than the public schools," he noted, suggesting that the message for school reformers is: "Think private." Real accountability comes from people "just doing for themselves" instead of government taking from them and then giving back just a little through parent-education benefits.

Increase in Private Schools

Chile and Sweden are two countries that have experienced vast increases in private (independent) schools as a result of voucher systems launched within the past two decades.

In Chile, only 10 percent of students were in private schools prior to the start of vouchers in the early 1980s, but now the private/public split in enrollment is about 50/50. Chilean professor Claudio Sapelli said an analysis of test scores in private schools have shown about 10 percent more effective than the public schools, a significant but "not dramatic" difference.

One of the regulatory problems in Chile is that the government provides direct incentives for needy children to leave the public schools. If they take a voucher, they lose an array of special services, such as a free breakfast.

John Merrifield, an economics professor at the University of Texas/San Antonio and school choice author, suggested that were it not for extensive central regulation, Chile’s private schools could be considerably more than 10 percent better than the public schools. He suggested price controls imposed on voucher schools are a common factor making the beneficial impact of educational freedom far less than it could be.

Sweden More Open to Choice than U.S.

In Sweden—a nation long known as the most socialist in the free world—the advent of school choice over the past decade has led to a five-fold increase in independent schools, according to F. Mikael Sandstrom, a political adviser to the Moderate Party in the Swedish Parliament.

The system is much more open than in the limited U.S. voucher experiments: All Swedes, not just the poor, are allowed a choice between independent and municipal schools, and it is relatively easy to start a private school and receive subsidies. Such schools may be for-profit—which is the fastest-growing segment—or religious.

School choice, which has generated positive academic results, is "immensely popular," according to Sandstrom. Among the political parties, "only the old Communist Party opposes school choice." The Social Democrats have talked about instituting tighter regulation, but currently "I don’t think there is a great danger of re-regulation," he said.

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.
**IJ’s Bolick Takes Helm at School Choice Alliance**

by George A. Clowes

Clint Bolick, who as vice president and co-founder of the Institute for Justice (IJ) was instrumental in establishing the public interest law firm as the nation’s premier defender of school choice programs, assumed a new role in April when he became president and general counsel of the newly formed School Choice Alliance and its companion organization, School Choice Advocates.

The new organizations will complement the legal defense work of IJ with efforts aimed at expanding parental choice across the nation by organizing grassroots support and securing passage of new school choice programs.

At IJ, Bolick’s efforts to advance school choice, economic liberty, private property rights, and free speech made him one of the country’s leading advocates for individual liberty. The most notable of these often long, drawn-out efforts was *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (2002), where the U.S. Supreme Court ultimately upheld the constitutionality of the school voucher program in Cleveland.

Bolick will continue to be affiliated with IJ as its counsel for strategic litigation. He also will appear of counsel on IJ’s school choice cases, although he will not be involved in litigating.

“This is a huge opportunity not only for Clint, but for the school choice movement,” said IJ President and General Counsel Chip Mellor, who co-founded the organization with Bolick. “IJ and Clint will continue to work closely together, school choice parents and children get the help they need, and our adversaries remain relentless in their opposition.”

**Fighting for School Choice in the Courts**

by George A. Clowes

Having traveled across the country and the world, Bolick’s efforts to advance school choice have included state-based and city-based school choice programs, the Institute for Justice (IJ) expects soon to be defending choice legislation in its home town of Washington, D.C. on behalf of approved D.C. School Choice Incentive Act.

The public interest law firm is currently assisting the Washington Scholarship Fund and D.C. Parents for School Choice in implementing the new program, scheduled to take effect when school starts later this year.

As well as supporting school choice implementation work in Washington, IJ’s attorneys also are supporting efforts on behalf of proposed school choice legislation in Kansas, Missouri, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah. Those efforts involve legal analysis, advice on working with the media, and public testimony.

“The school choice movement continues to make vital progress,” noted IJ President William “Chip” Mellor, “though our adversaries remain relentless in their opposition.”

IJ’s attorneys come face-to-face with those adversaries as they defend the following school choice programs in court on behalf of students and parents in Arizona, Colorado, and Florida.

**Scholarship Tax Credits in Arizona**

More than five years after the Arizona Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the state’s 1997 scholarship tax credit law in state court, the American Civil Liberties Union is making a second attack on the law, this time in federal court on First Amendment grounds. The district court dismissed the lawsuit and the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the district court ruling. The U.S. Supreme Court was expected to issue a decision in June but had not done so when this newspaper went to press.

Opportunity Contract Program in Colorado

Approved last year, Colorado’s Opportunity Contract Program was quickly challenged by the teacher unions and their allies on six points of law, just two of which were addressed by the trial court last December. The court ruled the program does not constitute special legislation but does violate the local control provision of Colorado’s constitution because educating children in private schools interferes with the district school board’s control of instruction.

When the trial court judge also barred the state from implementing the program, IJ and the state quickly appealed to the Colorado Supreme Court, which granted expedited review. During the oral arguments on May 25, attorneys for Colorado Governor Bill Owens (R) argued lawmakers should have the power to try innovative educational programs so long as the programs do not substantially impair the authority of local districts to educate most of their students. The attorney for the plaintiffs argued school districts should not be required to fund schools they do not control.

Even if the Colorado Supreme Court upholds the program on the two points at issue, opponents of the program have said they will return to trial court to argue the remaining four points.

**Opportunity Scholarships Program in Florida**

The challenge by the teacher unions and their allies to Florida’s Opportunity Scholarships Program is based on the state’s Blaine Amendment, which in general bars the use of public funds by religious schools. Florida’s First District Court of Appeal heard oral arguments on the case more than a year ago, in March 2003.

While a decision is awaited from the appellate court, IJ’s Mellor points out “choice in Florida flourishes,” with nearly 25,000 students exercising choice statewide. Only about 600 students receive Opportunity Scholarships, but another 12,000 receive McKay Scholarships for children with disabilities, and yet another 12,000 receive scholarships funded through corporate income tax credits.

While few students participate, the Opportunity Scholarships Program is prompting statewide improvements in Florida’s public schools, according to analyses conducted by Manhattan Institute researchers Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters. (See “Students Benefit When Schools Compete,” *School Reform News*, November 2003.)

In addition, the Pensacola News-Journal reported in December 2003, “On average, the 34 students attending Escambia County Catholic schools on state-funded Opportunity Scholarships have jumped more than one grade level for each year they’ve attended, and many are working beyond their grade level now.”

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

**INTERNET INFO**


Ohio

Continued from page 1

Community Schools (Ohio's charter schools) but also to a voucher worth $5,250 to attend a private school. According to Buckeye, the education benefit would bring middle-income families into the cities and reverse decades of urban flight to the suburbs.

Of Ohio's six largest cities, only Columbus has not experienced population declines over the past few decades. One of the impediments to encouraging middle-income families to live within the city limits is the poor quality of city schools. Families with children are unwilling to consider urban living. “All too often, attempts to encourage urban renewal and get families to move back into cities fail to address one of the largest stumbling blocks: a lack of access to good schools,” said Hall.

The study proposes the establishment of “education empowerment zones” to provide education alternatives to families through school vouchers, the opening of new Community Schools, and the conversion of existing public schools to Community Schools. As well as providing more educational options for parents, competition among those schools would prompt traditional public schools to improve. Quality education options also would reduce neighborhood income segregation as wealthier families would be attracted into low-income neighborhoods by high-quality schools.

Using estimates from an earlier study by Duke University economist Thomas Nechyba, the authors conclude the offer of a voucher would mean total private school attendance in all six cities would rise from 60,000 to 94,000.

To ease the initial costs of the voucher program, the Buckeye authors recommend phasing it in over six years, with the voucher amount increasing $500 annually from a $2,250 base until it met the target amount of $5,250. The phase-in would reduce the first-year total program cost from more than $300 million to roughly $100 million. The maximum short-term cost of implementing EEZs (Education Empowerment Zones) is insufficient.

To offset the cost of the proposal, Buckeye identified almost two dozen programs administered by the Ohio Department of Education that could be eliminated or reduced “without an appreciable change in student outcomes.”

Krista Kafer is senior policy analyst for education at The Heritage Foundation. Her email address is krista.kafer@heritage.org.

INTERNET INFO

Hundreds Gather in Harrisburg to Celebrate Pennsylvania Tax Credit

By third year, business donations top $100 million

More than 500 parents, children, legislators, and public school officials converged on Pennsylvania’s Capitol in Harrisburg on May 11 to celebrate the third anniversary of the state’s landmark Educational Improvement Tax Credit Program (EITC).

Since the program’s inception in 2001, Pennsylvania’s business community has contributed more than $100 million toward nonpublic school scholarships and to help establish innovative public school programs. The EITC program, which allows businesses in Pennsylvania to receive up to a 90 percent tax credit for donations to nonprofit scholarship or educational improvement organizations, has funded more than 20,000 scholarships and countless programs in the state’s public schools in 2003-2004. To date, more than 1,900 businesses have participated in the EITC program.

For the first two years, the EITC was capped at $30 million—$20 million for scholarships and $10 million for public school programs. But faced with overwhelming demand for scholarships and programs, the Pennsylvania General Assembly raised the cap by $10 million and doubled the maximum tax credit from $100,000 to $200,000. Lawmakers also created a similar program exclusively for pre-K scholarships.

Joining the hundreds of children and families of scholarship recipients in the state capital was Dr. Jerry Kohn, superintendent of the Harrisburg public schools. The Harrisburg Public Schools Foundation has used tax credit contributions for its early childhood program and alternative education program. An appreciative Kohn explained that more than 500 Harrisburg public school children have benefited from the EITC program.

The program boasts bipartisan support from all across Pennsylvania. One of its leading advocates is State Senator and President Pro Tempore Bob Jubelirer (R-Blair County).

“Our assignment in the General Assembly is simple—to keep this program going,” Jubelirer told the enthusiastic crowd. “And we need to build on it so that more kids and more families have the chance to make a choice about their education.”

Jubelirer commented that the so-called “education advocates” ought to be at the celebration, too, but said they fail to see the good in this program and claim the state cannot afford it.

“What I see here today clearly underlines the opposite—we cannot afford to forgo this approach,” he declared.

The EITC anniversary celebration was sponsored by the REACH Foundation, Pennsylvania’s statewide grassroots coalition for school choice. Paul Henkels, chairman of REACH’s advocacy arm, the REACH Alliance, was particularly proud of the results of a long, difficult battle for educational freedom in Pennsylvania.

“For so many years we fought to empower parents and came excruciatingly close. To finally get over the goal line and see children going to good schools is very satisfying,” noted Henkels. “The business community’s investment in the EITC has enabled tens of thousands of children to receive a quality education and to have a chance for productive and fulfilling lives.”

A new round of funding for EITC and pre-K EITC scholarships begins with Pennsylvania’s fiscal year, July 1, 2004.

Dennis A. Giorno is executive director of the REACH Alliance and REACH Foundation, Pennsylvania’s grassroots coalitions dedicated to ensuring parental choice in education. His email address is dennis@paschoolchoice.org.

INTERNET INFO

REACH—Road to Educational Achievement Through Choice—represents business, religious, civic, taxpayer, and nonprofit organizations committed to educational achievement through choice. Additional information about its work is available online at http://www.paschoolchoice.org.
An Idea Has Consequences

“... FIFTY YEARS ON, IT’S increasingly clear that the dream offered in Brown v. Board of Education will never be realized without an injection of Milton Friedman’s ideas about school choice...

... Next to prevailing in the war on terror, it’s hard to think of an issue of more fundamental importance to our nation than a public education system that gives all children a real crack at the American Dream. And in a seminal essay in 1955, Mr. Friedman provided the key. The title was ‘The Role of Government in Education,’ and the operative sentence was this: ‘Governments could require a minimum level of education which they could finance by giving parents vouchers redeemable for a specified maximum sum per child per year if spent on “approved educational services.”’

... Today, amid the wreckage of the unaccountable and unresponsive public school monopolies we see in our great cities, we can recognize these words for what they were: the intellectual equivalent of the shot heard round the world. After decades of dormancy and half-hearted attempts to try them out, Milwaukee became the first city to institute a real voucher program—and the public schools responded by improving...

[W]e’re seeing more and more experiments. Earlier this year the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation rated 13 state programs...

[The] march toward choice has about it today the aura of inevitability. As Mr. Friedman tells us, ‘What Brown ordered was an end to “separate but equal.” But you can’t end “separate but equal” without ending compulsory assignment to a public school.’ From the vantage point of Brown we can now see that vouchers have become the cornerstone for a fundamental civil right.”

Wall Street Journal
May 17, 2004

SCHOOL CHOICE ROUNDUP

by Robert Fanger and George Clowes

ARIZONA

Arizona House Rejects Voucher Bill

With a vote of 30-27, the Arizona House of Representatives on May 25 rejected Senate Bill 1109, which would have established a Statewide Educational Choice Scholarship Program to provide vouchers for children to attend a private school chosen by their parents. While proponents of the bill argued the resulting competition would prompt the public schools to improve, opponents raised concerns about the public schools getting less money.

The measure would have capped the voucher value at 80 percent of the average statewide per-pupil expenditure in the state’s public schools, with the program phased in by grade level over a period of five years. Eligibility would have been limited to families with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level. If the voucher did not cover the full amount of tuition and fees, schools could charge additional amounts to parents.

Tucson Citizen
May 25, 2004
House Bill Summary for SB 1109

CALIFORNIA

Fresno, Calif. Mayor Endorses Vouchers

During his annual State of the City address in May, Fresno, California Mayor Alan Autry announced his support for school vouchers. While praising city accomplishments in other areas, he focused his speech on education, saying, “to fail in the education of our children is to forfeit the future of our city.”

Saying he would pursue state and federal legislation to provide vouchers for the most at-risk children, Autry told the audience of more than 700 that he would hold school administrators accountable if they did not devote their time to educating kids. “If I retreat from my commitment to educating our kids and standing for and fighting for a quality education of every child, I would be in violation of that oath and should be removed from office,” he said, according to The Fresno Bee.

Fresno County Schools Superintendent Pete Mehas told The Fresno Bee he disagrees with Autry’s desire for school vouchers, noting voters across the state and in Fresno County had rejected a voucher initiative at the polls in 2000.

The Fresno Bee
May 21, 2004

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

D.C. Public Schools Can’t Spend Extra Federal Money

The D.C. Public School system (DCPS) was allotted an extra $13 million as part of the package assembled by lawmakers to win passage of a pilot voucher plan for the District. The additional funds were to be used for improving student achievement, developing a more effective teaching staff, and promoting public school choice within the District.

But now Congressional leaders won’t allow DCPS to spend the extra money because they say school administrators haven’t come up with a spending plan that directs the funds to their intended uses.

“DCPS did not provide sufficient justification concerning the allocation of these funds,” said Sen. Mike DeWine (R-Ohio), chairman of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on the District, in a written statement. DeWine told the Washington Post he intends to withhold the $13 million until a new school superintendent is hired.

D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams supported DeWine’s stand, noting he and his staff had requested more specific plans from the schools but had been told to “bug out.” Williams has been pushing for the creation of a mayorally appointed schools chancellor in the District, citing DCPS’s lack of accountability.

“It’s astounding that it’s so hard to give the school system $13 million,” Williams’s deputy chief of staff, Gregory M. McCarthy, told the Post. “After we make enormous pleas for overall support for the city and support from Congress, it really is a black eye when the schools can’t get a plan up there that can pass muster.”

Washington Post
May 20, 2004

FLORIDA

Vouchers Improve Public School Performance in Fla.

Public schools in Florida that were forced to compete for students because of vouchers made extraordinary gains on the state’s standardized tests compared with other public schools, according to a new peer-reviewed study conducted by Manhattan Institute researchers Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters.

Florida grades its public schools A-F,
Students Gain When Schools Compete

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Percentage Increase in Competitions</th>
<th>No Imminent Threat</th>
<th>Potentially Threatened</th>
<th>Threatened by Vouchers</th>
<th>Eligible for Vouchers</th>
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Milton and Rose D. Friedman

LOUISIANA

Louisiana House Committee Defeats Voucher Proposal

In a decisive 12-1 rejection of House Bill 1288 on May 20, the Louisiana House Education Committee killed any remaining hope the Archdiocese of New Orleans may have had for putting the nonpublic scholars to students from families with incomes less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. In addition, one-third of the students receiving scholarships at each school must be students who did not attend a private school in the year before first receiving the scholarship.

“As long as our public school system needs resources, priorities dictate that incentives to encourage support for private schools should not be encouraged,” said Vilsack, “particularly when they reduce future available resources.”

Sara Eide, executive director of the Iowa Catholic Conference pointed out to School Reform News that the program would provide a net gain for the state treasury by the end of the first year. She also noted Catholic schools already save the state more than $250 million every year.

Governor’s Veto Message
May 14, 2004
Iowa Catholic Conference

MINNESOTA

Expansion of Minnesota Tax Credit Fails by Two Votes

In April, Minnesota State Senator Juliannne Ortman (R-Chanhassen) introduced a bill to expand the state’s Education Tax Credit/Deduction Program, known as “Take Credit for Learning.” The existing program allows families with annual incomes of up to $37,500 to take a dollar-for-dollar tax credit on their state income taxes for a range of educational expenses—but not for tuition. As well as allowing educational expenses to include tuition, Ortman’s bill, Senate File 2702, would remove the current $2,000 cap on the credit and dispense with the requirement to itemize expenses by child. That would allow parents to claim $1,000 for each child in grades K-12, with no limit. A total of $480,000 was earmarked in the bill to cover the cost of expanding the program in 2005.

“Our tax code should reflect [a] family’s choice and assist them if private schools or home schooling better meets their children’s needs,” argued Ortman, saying the credit assists families whose needs are not met by the public school system. However, when the Ortman amendment was taken up for adoption on April 29, it failed by two votes, with senators voting along party lines.

Partnership for Choice in Education
Minnesota Senate Floor Coverage
April 29, 2004

Yecke Rejected as Minn. Education Commissioner

Despite pledges of support from several Democrat-Farmer-Labor (DFL) senators and a promise from Senate Majority Leader Dean Johnsen (DFL-Willmar) not to bring her nomination up for a floor vote unless it would pass, Cheri Pierson Yecke found her nomination as Minnesota’s Education Commissioner rejected in a 35-31 party-line vote of the DFL-controlled Senate in the early hours of May 16.

Yecke, Virginia’s former education commissioner and the choice of Governor Tim Pawlenty (R) for the position in Minnesota, had helped rewrite the state’s curriculum standards in language arts, math, science, and social studies. It was her stand on the social studies standards that generated controversy among educators.

“The majority of parents and the public want to see history standards that reflect the greatness of the country,” Yecke had said, according to The Washington Times. “I accept the responsibility of the position and I would be appropriates to have that agenda in our standards.”

After the rejection vote, Yecke told the Pioneer Press she was “shocked” that “people who gave their word” had voted against her. Pawlenty condemned the DFL senators, saying they had done “a grave disservice to our state.”

“By rejecting Commissioner Yecke on a party-line vote, they have rejected innovation and accountability for our state,” he said in a statement.

Twin Cities Pioneer Press
May 17, 2004
Washington Times
May 20, 2004

NEW HAMPSHIRE

New Hampshire Won’t Get Vouchers This Year

In May, after several failed attempts to pass a voucher bill this year, New Hampshire legislators were left with only House Bill 727, which proposed creating a committee to study school choice. Still hoping to pass a voucher bill this year, House negotiators came to a House-Senate conference committee meeting on May 17 with a proposal to add a voucher amendment to HB 727. Even those hopes were dashed when their Senate counterparts informed them a voucher amendment would be defeated in the Senate.

“As we sit here today I don’t think we have the votes in the Senate to pass this,” said Sen. Dick Green (R-Rochester), according to Foster’s Daily Democrat. “I want to see this go forward, but the political reality is if we bring this to the Senate, we will not have the votes.”

The original HB 727 had contained a voucher plan proposed by Green. It called for vouchers for low-income K-8 students to use at religious and secular private schools. The program would be phased in over seven years, with the number of participants increasing from 1,200 in the first year to 14,000 by the seventh year. The voucher would be worth up to $3,600.

Foster’s Daily Democrat
May 20, 2004

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE
Black Clergy Group Endorses Vouchers for New Jersey

Polls show some 60 percent of African-Americans nationwide support school choice, and in New Jersey’s poorest districts, 72 percent of parents support vouchers. Yet these impressive support levels have not led to the implementation of voucher programs. A coalition of black clergy leaders in New Jersey wants to change that and on May 24 in Trenton announced plans for organizing a grassroots movement to push for school choice.

The minister, led by the Rev. Reginald T. Jackson, executive director of the Black Ministers Council, called on state lawmakers to approve a school voucher plan where funds follow the child to the school of his or her parents’ choice. Jackson also called for reform of the teacher tenure system and decried the persistently poor performance of urban public schools.

“For the 26 years I have been in New Jersey, there have been a host of public school reform proposals, a multitude of major state supreme court rulings, and billions of dollars spent to achieve parity and improve test scores,” said Jackson, according to a Trenton Star-Ledger report. “Yet, the fact remains, that with few exceptions, urban schools and most minority students still do not meet minimum state standards or receive a quality education.”

Conditions are at a crisis level in urban public schools, said the Rev. Clenard Childress, senior pastor of New Calvary Church in Montclair. Childress is also chaplain at the Essex County Juvenile Detention Center.

“If something is not done in the next two years, we will lose a whole generation,” said Childress, according to the Star-Ledger. “It’s time to admit the public schools are failing our children and to look for solutions.”

Trenton Star-Ledger
May 25, 2004

New York Tax Credits Would Generate $500 Million A Year

An Educational Tax Incentives bill under consideration by the New York Senate Finance Committee could generate $500 million a year in donations benefitting public and private schools, according to the New York State Department of Taxation. The lion’s share, $400 million, would go to public schools, with the balance going to private schools.

The bill, S 1665, was introduced by Senator Serphin R. Maltese (R-Queens) last year and has 18 cosponsors. After being passed by the Investigations Committee on April 27, 2004, the bill was reported to the Finance Committee, which is headed by Senator Owen H. Johnson (R-Babylon). Passage by the Finance Committee would send the bill to a full vote of the Senate.

The bill provides a 50 percent tax credit for donations to any public school, public school education fund, or private school scholarship fund. It also covers homeschooling expenses. For individuals, eligible expenses and/or donations are capped at $500; for corporations, eligible donations are capped at $50,000.

“The legislation would ... help support an increased number of parents who would choose to educate their children either at home or in an independent or religious school,” according to a statement from the New York State Catholic Conference. “Supporting these parents would help the already over-burdened public schools by lowering their class size and lessening the demand on limited public funding.”

New York State Catholic Conference
April 26, 2004 Statement
Citizens for Educational Freedom

Oklahoma Poll Shows Strong Support for Vouchers

Less than half (45 percent) of Oklahoma parents would choose to send their child to a private school if they were given a voucher or tax credit to cover the tuition at a private school, according to a new poll of 400 Oklahoma registered voters. Half (50 percent) would choose to send their child to a private school if offered a voucher or tax credit, with 34 percent choosing a church-affiliated private school and 16 percent choosing a secular private school.

Six percent were undecided. (Figures do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.)

When asked whether they favored or opposed providing tax credits to compared with the government’s or individuals for donations to fund private school scholarships; more than half the respondents (52 percent) said they favored the idea, while 43 percent were opposed.

When asked which action they believed was more important to improve public education in Oklahoma, 58 percent of respondents said “raising standards and accountability,” while only 35 percent said “increase funding.”

The survey, which has a margin of error of about 4.9 percent, was conducted on May 10-12, 2004 for the Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs by Cole, Hargrave, Snodgrass & Associates.

Oklahoma Council of Public Affairs
May 26, 2004

Wis. Activists Push to Lift Enrollment Cap on Vouchers

On April 29, the Alliance for Choices in Education (ACE) and School Choice Wisconsin kicked off a “Lift the Cap” campaign to persuade Governor Jim Doyle (R) to support eliminating or raising the statutory limit on enrollment in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP).

Last year, Doyle vetoed legislation to eliminate the cap, which limits enrollment in the voucher program to 15 percent of student enrollment in the Milwaukee Public Schools, or about 14,800 students. With the number of voucher students growing by more than 1,000 a year, the Department of Public Instruction estimates MPCP enrollment will reach the cap by the 2005-06 school year. At that point, seats in voucher schools would have to be rationed.

Rationing will hurt public schools and families as well as private schools, according to Howard Fuller, chairman of ACE.

“Rationing will deprive thousands of low-income families from choosing where their children attend school,” he said. “Rationing will cause uncertainty for more than 100 schools that need to know enrollment to plan, and rationing also will complicate budgeting and enrollment planning at the Milwaukee Public Schools.”

The goal of the “Lift the Cap” campaign is to educate people in Milwaukee about the impact of the cap and to demonstrate that limiting parental choice hurts the city. Within 10 days of the campaign’s kick-off, more than 3,000 yard signs, 3,600 window signs, and 45 large banners have distributed in neighborhoods throughout Milwaukee.

Alliance for Choices in Education
May 11, 2004
SCHOOL REFORM NEWS    I    JULY 2004

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INNOVATION AND PROFIT: What Education Needs Most

BY GEORGE A. CLOWES

Clowes: How did you become involved in education reform?

Brennan: When we began automating our manufacturing plants in the early 1980s, we discovered our employees were insufficiently educated to do the necessary transactions on the factory floor, so our company went into the education business. Every single employee, depending upon level of education and achievement, was in our classroom for one or two hours a week, using computer-aided instruction.

We had great success with that program—which still continues in our factories—and I recognized that technology has a major place in education reform. But when I tried to carry this message back to the public schools, they weren’t interested. It didn’t fit their pre-conception of how education should be carried out. Then I recognized that the problem we had in public education was a total inability to effect innovation. That only comes in a market economy, where there are choices.

Computer-aided instruction is the teaching of mathematics, reading skills, language arts, history, social sciences, and so on, by computer. All academic subjects are now deliverable by computer. It’s a segment of our education world where a number of companies are aggressively pursuing the continued development of more sophisticated computer-delivered curriculum. Our education company now has a fully supported homeschooling network with high school curriculum delivered over the Internet. We have a very large center of master teachers serving a student population of about 2,500 here in Ohio and we’re opening in Pennsylvania.

Whatever approach you take, Internet delivery or regular schooling, it’s a unique challenge. What works for K-8 doesn’t always work for 9-12, and what works for K-5 begins to not work in sixth grade.

Clowes: Is that because children have acquired the fundamental learning skills by sixth grade and are then applying them to learn about new areas?

Brennan: It’s both sides—they either have the skills or they don’t. If they don’t have the skills, then the curricula for sixth grade and up don’t work. In the traditional public schools, K-5 is where a lot of intensive remedial and catch-up work is done, but that begins to go away after fifth grade even though many students are still behind. What you get is a whole bunch of undereducated children floundering in sixth grade and up. That’s where the dropouts come from.

For our K-5 instruction, we have a teacher who is the contact point for all subjects for a given child. Then, starting in...
sixth grade, each student has a team of three to five teachers that do science, mathematics, and social studies. These specialty persuasions are dealt with quite intensively at the high school level.

Throughout our evolution as a company, we’ve discovered there are three basic elements that are key to success in education: Empowerment, getting attention when you need it, and individualized learning plans. Our basic framework has a number of components that are set up to ensure that students will receive individual attention when they need it. When the student wants it.

In a typical traditional classroom, a student is given individual attention when the teacher is ready to give it. In everything we do with computer-aided instruction, the student receives individual attention when the student wants it.

When a student wants help, they want help now, not when the teacher is ready to talk. In a typical classroom with a large number of students, that’s very difficult to do. That’s why we have teams of teachers. In our biggest traditional-looking schools—our Life Skills Centers—a typical classroom has 55-50 students, with three teachers and two aides. No student goes unattended when they want attention.

The third element is that learning plans are individualized to suit the student. I go at my own pace. I may be a fast reader and a very slow math student, but I can take all the time I need with computer-aided instruction. Each student has his or her own computer. Students come in, choose the subject matter they’re going to work on, and proceed at their own speed. It’s 100 percent individualized learning plans.

Suddenly, students who were totally disenchanted with traditional schools are in charge of their own education, and they have a different attitude towards learning.

We are developing education programs for a population that does not fit well into the traditional public education mold. We have a third-grade student with a large number of years, who has a semi-dropout. They’re dropped out, but they’re still being educated.

Cloves: Could you tell our readers about your Life Skills Centers?

Brennan: As much as America prides itself on giving people a second chance, if you drop out of high school in our society, you have no second chance. Our Life Skills Centers provide that second chance. We get funding from the state that is about two-thirds of what the public schools get. We have waiting lists at all of our Centers. Some states—not Ohio—have limited the number of students we’re allowed to take.

The students who come to the Life Skills Centers receive a regular diploma. They earn all the academic credits that a regular high school student has to earn before graduation. Since we’re a vocational school, in Ohio a few of those credits are vocational credits. Eighty-five percent of our students are employed. Students are in school for four hours a day if they don’t have a job, and for three hours a day if they do have a job.

Students earn their credit by testing out, not by seat time. In addition, the state of Ohio and most other states we’re in now have some sort of achievement or proficiency test that students must pass before getting a high school diploma. Our students also have to pass that, so it’s the same requirements as regular high schools.

Cloves: There are three basic elements that are key to success in education: Empowerment, getting attention when you need it, and individualized learning plans.

Brennan: To do any school voucher program takes money and, from a state budget perspective, we’ve had three very tough years when very little money was available. No matter how you slice it, the early cash flow in a voucher program will be negative because the public schools never look back as fast as they should when they lose students to voucher schools. The Cleveland Public Schools are now finally laying off 10 percent of their employees because they have 15 percent fewer students than they had a few years back. They should have done it sooner, but they didn’t.

You’re only going to have an expansion of school choice on existing revenues. But I think the ground has been well-set for that in quite a few states, including Ohio. As our budget fortunes improve, there are three or four measures that I think will come to pass in Ohio. I predict the next wave of vouchers will be what they call McKay Scholarships in Florida, vouchers for special education students. Of all the school choice programs, that one has been the most constructive.

The McKay Scholarships are worth about $15,000 per student in Florida. Parents are ecstatic about them because they see their children getting help and they see results, even though some parents have to come up with additional funds themselves. Word about the program is slowly getting out, and I predict that will be where the next big movement comes.

We’re assessing current prospects for enacting new programs.
Kerry Retreats on “Pay for Performance”

by Mike Antonucci

A confidential memo from National Education Association President Reg Weaver to union officials detailed a meeting he had in mid-May with U.S. Senator John Kerry (D-Massachusetts) in which Kerry backed away from the “pay for performance” language in his proposed education plan.

On May 6 at a California high school, Kerry gave an education policy speech that expressed support for higher pay for math and science teachers and for those who work in difficult-to-staff schools. He also stated the need “to find ways to reward teachers for excellence, and to reward the students’ teachers who obviously show tremendous success.” Kerry said that greater achievement “ought to be able to command greater pay just the way it does in every other sector of professional employment in the United States of America.”

After the speech, Kerry’s campaign released a press statement declaring the candidate “will establish new systems that reward teachers for excellence in the classroom, including pay based on improvement in student achievement.” Many elements of Kerry’s plan caused consternation at NEA headquarters, but 82 percent of teachers surveyed (52 percent) say today’s teachers are softer on discipline because they can’t rely on parents or the school administration to back them up.

Teachers Leave When Offenders Stay

A third of teachers (34 percent) say they know colleagues who have left because of student misbehavior and difficulties in maintaining discipline. A third (34 percent) also had considered leaving themselves.

Three-quarters of teachers (78 percent) say they believe effective discipline and good student behavior are essential to a successful school.

Just a Few Cause Most Problems

A large majority of teachers (97 percent) believe just a few perpetual offenders are harming the experience of the whole student body. Seventy-seven percent of teachers say dealing with disruptive students detracts from effective teaching. Roughly half of respondents (52 percent) of teachers and 43 percent of parents say they report their armed police officer on their campuses.

Parents Are Part of the Problem

Most respondents (82 percent of teachers and 89 percent of parents) support “zero tolerance” policies so students know they face expulsion for serious offenses.

A Litigious Culture

A large majority of teachers (97 percent) believe effective discipline and good student behavior are essential to a successful school.

The survey’s findings point to a rising problem of distracting and disrespectful student behavior that interferes with the classroom environment and compels many teachers to leave the profession. “Rowdiness, disrespect, bullying, talking out, lateness, and loudness—these misbehaviors are poisoning the learning atmosphere of our public schools,” said Public Agenda President Ruth A. Wooden. At a time when officials are recommending that students and parents to threaten a lawsuit is a prime cause of the problem. Half of the teachers surveyed (52 percent) say today’s teachers are softer on discipline because they can’t rely on parents or the school administration to back them up.

A Litigious Culture

Teachers are frequently frustrated by today’s litigious culture. A majority of teachers (78 percent) say students remind them the students have rights and their parents can lodge a lawsuit. Half of the teachers (49 percent) say they have been accused by parents of unfairly disciplining their child. Just over half (55 percent) say discipline is undermined when school districts back down from aggressive parents.

Proposed Reforms

Respondents supported several reforms, including alternative placements, stricter enforcement of rules, special education reform, and limits on lawsuits. A large majority of respondents (91 percent of teachers and 88 percent of parents) think by strictly enforcing small rules, schools set a tone of civility that averts larger problems. A similar large percentage (93 percent of teachers and 89 percent of parents) support “zero tolerance” policies so students know they face expulsion for serious offenses.

Eighty-seven percent of teachers and 75 percent of parents think alternative schools for persistent offenders would help. More teachers than parents see litigiousness as a problem. Eighty-two percent of teachers and 78 percent of parents would limit lawsuits to major disciplinary actions such as expulsion. A similar gap in support exists over eliminating monetary rewards for parents who sue regarding disciplinary actions, a proposal supported by 82 percent of teachers but only 69 percent of parents.

The present legal environment undermines order in schools by enabling students and parents to threaten a lawsuit over virtually anything,” commented Philip K. Howard, chairman of Common Good. “The legal system must strike a better balance between the claimed rights of individuals and the legitimate interests of society as a whole.”

The survey’s findings point to a rising problem of distracting and disrespectful student behavior that interferes with the classroom environment and compels many teachers to leave the profession. “Rowdiness, disrespect, bullying, talking out, lateness, and loudness—these misbehaviors are poisoning the learning atmosphere of our public schools,” said Public Agenda President Ruth A. Wooden. At a time when officials are recommending that students and parents to threaten a lawsuit is a prime cause of the problem. Half of the teachers surveyed (52 percent) say today’s teachers are softer on discipline because they can’t rely on parents or the school administration to back them up.

A Litigious Culture

Teachers are frequently frustrated by today’s litigious culture. A majority of teachers (78 percent) say students remind them the students have rights and their parents can lodge a lawsuit. Half of the teachers (49 percent) say they have been accused by parents of unfairly disciplining their child. Just over half (55 percent) say discipline is undermined when school districts back down from aggressive parents.

Proposed Reforms

Respondents supported several reforms, including alternative placements, stricter enforcement of rules, special education reform, and limits on lawsuits. A large majority of respondents (91 percent of teachers and 88 percent of parents) think by strictly enforcing small rules, schools set a tone of civility that averts larger problems. A similar large percentage (93 percent of teachers and 89 percent of parents) support “zero tolerance” policies so students know they face expulsion for serious offenses.

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The Public Agenda report was based on a mail-in survey of teachers, a telephone survey of parents, and focus groups. It has a margin of error of plus or minus 4 percentage points. It was underwritten by Common Good, a bipartisan coalition committed to legal reform.

Krista Kafer is senior policy analyst for education at The Heritage Foundation. Her email address is krista.kafer@heritage.org.
Only 70% of all students in public high schools graduate. Of those, less than 50% are qualified to attend four-year college.

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Exit Exams Don’t Increase Dropouts, Study Finds

by Robert Holland

Critics of high-stakes testing have charged that public high school exit exams cause many students, particularly minority-group members, to drop out in frustration without gaining a diploma that would be valuable to them in the job market.

However, a new study by Manhattan Institute scholars finds the exit exams administered by 24 states have had no net effect on graduation rates. “Our findings should provide optimism to those who wish to use exit exams to provide quality control for high school diplomas,” concluded scholars Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters. “The results of our analysis show that exit exams may allow states to distribute more meaningful diplomas to the same percentage of students as before.”

Greene and Winters used two respected methods of calculating graduation rates for each state from 1991 to 2001. In addition to finding required graduation testing had no impact, their analysis indicated neither class-size reduction in secondary schools nor increased per-pupil spending resulted in higher graduation rates.

The scholars acknowledged many news media stories about individual students who completed their class work but were denied a diploma because they couldn’t pass a state test. However, they noted many factors contribute to the tests having essentially zero effect on graduation rates. One factor is that such tests typically require very low levels of proficiency. A 2004 Fordham Foundation study of 30 states’ accountability systems rated as “poor” the rigor of state-required standardized tests. In addition, states give exams to seniors in instruction and multiple chances to clear this low hurdle before actually denying them diplomas.

“Most students who are serious about graduating high school should be able to pass such an exam if given enough tries, even if only by chance,” the researchers concluded.

The relatively few students who do give up may well be cancelled out statistically by a like number of students who did graduate but the tests gave their schools an incentive to improve and to address the needs of at-risk students, they added.

As for critics’ counter-argument that recently adopted exit exams are more difficult than those of 1990s vintage and therefore may cause more dropouts, Greene and Winters analyzed the data and found current tests are having the same lack of impact on graduation rates as the old tests.

If exit exams convince employers of the worth of the high school diploma as an indicator of basic proficiency, that could boost the prospects of job-seeking students. The Manhattan study indicates Hispanic youth might benefit in particular.

U.S. Department of Labor data have shown recent Hispanic high school graduates are just as likely as recent Hispanic dropouts to be unemployed. Passing an exit exam might give the Hispanic graduate an edge.

The states with high school exit exams are Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Mississippi, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

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

INTERNET INFO

Colorado Now Sends Aid to Colleges Via Vouchers

by George A. Clowes

Starting in the fall of 2005, state subsidies for Colorado’s public colleges and universities—totaling almost $800 million a year—will be distributed directly to students in the form of vouchers worth up to $2,400 a year.

Previously, the funds were distributed as block grants to the state’s higher education institutions, which then used the money to subsidize tuition. Colorado is the first state in the nation to allocate its college funding via the decisions of individual students.

Rep. Keith King (R-Colorado Springs), who sponsored the final bill, hopes changing the fund distribution to vouchers will encourage more low-income students to go to college. The $2,400 voucher would cover the full tuition cost at most community colleges, but students would need to come up with additional funds to pay the full tuition at four-year colleges.

Colorado lawmakers approved the higher education voucher plan at the end of April, after two years of discussions on the issue, and Governor Bill Owens (R) signed the bill into law on May 10.

“Under the old system, many Coloradans—particularly our minority and low-income residents—were unaware that the state stood ready and willing to help with their tuition,” explained Owens. “The new system enables parents, teachers, and others to show students the money: to tell them that there are funds earmarked just for them, waiting to be put toward a college education.”

Under a voucher system, the colleges must recruit students to get the state funds, which makes them more attuned to their customers. At the same time, students become more discriminating consumers of higher education when they have to decide where to spend their voucher, added the governor.

“If the state is going to invest in human capital, a sound investment by any measure, it should do so directly, by placing money directly into the hands of the beneficiaries,” said Owens.

The vouchers are available to all Colorado college students who are eligible for in-state tuition. A $2,400 voucher could go to eligible students attending a state institution and a $1,200 voucher would go to eligible low-income students enrolled at three private institutions: the University of Denver, Colorado College, and Regis University, which is a Catholic school. Vouchers may be applied to a maximum of 140 academic credits.

Other states are discussing higher education vouchers, too. In January, Utah State Rep. Ron Bigelow (R-Salt Lake City) began to investigate how college-level vouchers might be used in the Beehive State. In Washington state, Governor Gary Locke (D) and Sen. Don Carlson (R-Vancouver) were receptive to a recommendation from the Washington Competitiveness Council in January for the state to provide vouchers for students to make better use of private college capacity.

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

Total expenditures on U.S. K-12 public education and other related programs in the 2000-2001 school year was $411.5 billion, up $28.6 billion, or 7.8 percent, from 1999-2000. Total revenues for the same period were 97.4 percent of total expenditures, or $106.0 billion lower at $400.9 billion.

Current expenditures, the most common way of reporting public school expenditures, were 84.6 percent of total expenditures, or $63.3 billion lower at $348.2 billion. Total expenditures per student in 2000-2001 were up $567 from 1999-2000 to $5,718, or 7.0 percent higher.

If per-pupil expenditures continue to increase at 6 percent a year, average U.S. spending for K-12 education for the school year starting this fall would be about $11,000 per student, with total expenditures exceeding a half a trillion dollars.

Where the Money Comes From

Almost half (49.7 percent) of the $400.9 billion in revenues came from state sources. Another 43.1 percent came from local and intermediate sources, and the federal government providing just 7.3 percent, or $29.1 billion.

Among states with more than one school district, the state share of revenues varied from just 29.6 percent in Nevada to 71.1 percent in New Mexico and 70.7 percent in Vermont. Federal revenues ranged from 3.9 percent in New Jersey to 15.8 percent in Alaska.

Where the Money Goes

Of the $411.5 billion in total expenditures, the vast majority (84.6 percent) went to current expenditures for school operations, with the current expenditur...
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