Privatization Produces Gains in Philadelphia

by Lisa Snell

Competition between public and privately managed schools in Philadelphia over the past two years has allowed all public school students to benefit from best practices and has led to overall achievement gains for Philadelphia students that are dramatically above the state average. The average test-score gain in Pennsylvania on the 2004 Pennsylvania System of Schools Assessment (PSSA) was five points in

Chicago Plans to Replicate Charter Schools

by Paul H. Seibert and George A. Clowes

Although Illinois state law allows Chicago to issue no more than 30 charter school licenses, Chicago Schools CEO Arne Duncan plans to have more than 50 charter schools operating in Chicago by 2010 ... without having to ask the legislature to lift the 30-license cap. Duncan will create the extra charter schools using a feature of the city's 15 original charters that allows license holders to operate

Teach for America Shows Its Mettle

by Robert Holland

An independent evaluation of Teach for America (TFA) has confirmed the value of placing bright, liberal arts educated college graduates as teachers in some of the nation's most troubled elementary and secondary schools. The study, by the respected research

Appeals Court Strikes Down Florida Vouchers

Florida Governor Jeb Bush (R) said he was disappointed by the continuing efforts of the Florida Education Association, Americans United, and other groups to deny meaningful choice to predominantly poor and minority parents.

by George A. Clowes

Many of Florida’s citizens use public funds to purchase child care, health care, and higher education services from a range of providers that include religious institutions. Nevertheless, a new program designed to add K-12 education to that list of services was struck down by the First District Court of Appeals in August because it was seen as providing aid to religious schools, in violation of the state’s ban on public funds being used to aid any religious institution. More than 700 elementary school children are currently participating in the new program, called the Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP).

Florida Governor Jeb Bush (R), who initiated the program, said he was disappointed by the ruling and by the continuing efforts of plaintiffs to deny meaningful choice to predominantly poor and minority parents. He warned...

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AFT Attack on Charter Schools Meets Swift Response from Reformers

by Don Soifer

On one hot Tuesday in August, school reformers around the nation were greeted with unwelcome news as they sat down to their morning newspapers. An above-the-fold, front-page story in the New York Times proclaimed charter schools had failed at their one ostensible purpose: improving students’ academic performance.

The subject of the August 16 Times story was a new study by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), “Charter School Achievement on the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).” Its main finding seemed to indicate charter school students trailed students in other public schools by “about half a year of schooling.” Among the study’s other conclusions: Charter schools in states where charter laws provided them with greater autonomy (Michigan and Texas) did significantly worse than states with less-autonomous charter schools (California and Colorado).

The story’s author, Diana Jean Schemo, went on to say the AFT report’s findings “dealt a blow to supporters of the charter school movement, including the Bush Administration.”

But as the reform community downloaded the report and began to scour it in anticipation of the inevitable questions that would follow from reporters and others, problems with the study’s methodology quickly began to emerge. For one, as a flurry of email traffic between reformers noted, the study had not controlled for race.

Chester E. Finn, Jr., who was quoted—apparently out of context—in the Times article, pointed out a fundamental problem with the report.

“On key comparisons, especially by students’ race, there is no statistically significant difference between the performance of students in charter schools and those in traditional public schools,” he said. “This viewpoint was underscored in an article in the Wall Street Journal, Paul Peterson and two colleagues at Harvard University’s Program on Education Policy and Governance offered their own analysis of the AFT report.”

“Big deal,” they replied. “These results could easily indicate nothing other than the simple fact that charter schools are typically asked to solve problematic students in low-performing districts with many poor, minority children.”

This viewpoint was underscored in an open letter that appeared a week later in the Times, signed by 30 leading education researchers at many of the nation’s finest universities and research institutions. Because NAEP provides only limited family background information, and because the AFT study was based on only one year of information for charter schools, “it tells us nothing about whether charter schools are succeeding,” they said. The letter was organized by the Center for Education Reform, one of the nation’s leading charter school advocates and resources for information about charters.

Arizona’s Goldwater Institute has for years been a national leader in applying a longitudinal approach to measuring charter school success. One recent Goldwater study of Arizona charters found that the non-charter students initially enter schools with lower test scores than their traditional public school counterparts, but their annual achievement growth is roughly 3 points higher than their non-charter counterparts.

It came as little surprise to many observers that an AFT study would be critical of charter schools. As Rees was quick to point out, it was AFT founder and former president Albert Shanker who first introduced the charter concept to the general public in the late 1980s. But the AFT essentially declared war on charter schools at its 2000 national convention, and the union’s officials have been overtly hostile to the movement ever since.

“It is unfortunate, though entirely predictable, that the AFT, an organization on record for more than two years for the need for a moratorium on charter schools, would stoop so low as to brand schools guilty of little else than working with low-achieving students,” said John E. Chubb, a member of the Hoover Institution’s Koret Task Force on K-12 Education.

The AFT charges hold strong implications for President Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act, which recommends charter schools as a restructuring tool for districts where schools have been designated in need of improvement due to subpar academic performance.

House Education Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-Ohio) noted that, unlike regular public schools, charter schools can have their charter revoked and be closed down if they fail at their missions.

“Lobbying organizations such as the AFT and the so-called National Education Association are spending millions to fight President Bush’s efforts to make regular schools subject to similar accountability,” noted Boehner.

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Privatization

Continued from page 1

reading and six points in math, according to data released by the state Department of Education on August 24. The School District of Philadelphia exceeded those rates, posting average gains of 10 in reading and 10 in math.

The gains achieved in Philadelphia are among the highest of any of the nation’s largest school districts, according to the Council of Great City Schools. Moreover, the gains in student achievement occurred in contracted “partner” schools as well as traditional public schools, providing the first substantial evidence that the city’s public-private school management experiment, aimed at turning around the district’s lowest-performing schools, is working.

“Today’s announcement underscores the promise of the partnership management model, which only two years ago was viewed as controversial and potentially volatile,” said James E. Nevels, chairman of the School Reform Commission, which directs the Philadelphia school district. “The results show that each partner’s unique approach under the District’s managed instruction model has contributed to today’s success.”

In 2002, the state of Pennsylvania took over the School District of Philadelphia and appointed the School Reform Commission led by Nevels, who hired Paul Vallas as the District’s CEO. The commission’s most controversial reform targeted 64 of Philadelphia’s lowest-performing schools for special intervention. Forty-five of those schools were partnered with a for-profit or nonprofit education provider. Edison Schools was assigned 20 of those 45 schools, making it the district’s single largest partner with more than 12,000 students. The other 19 schools were partnered with the school district and received extra resources and special interventions.

Pennsylvania’s annual Adequate Yearly Progress report (AYP) showed 160 of Philadelphia’s 265 schools met AYP standards in the 2003-2004 school year, up almost three-fold from 58 schools the previous year. Outside management partners run 23 of the city schools making the AYP list.

Vallas gave considerable credit to Philadelphia’s education partners for the district’s success, saying they were “a key part of the school district’s dramatic turnaround.” Besides Edison Schools, the district’s partners are Foundations Inc., Victory Schools, Universal Companies, Temple University, and the University of Pennsylvania.

“The partnerships afford our students the ability to take advantage of educational alternatives while the District maintains a level of instructional consistency, as the EMOs [Educational Management Organizations] understand and approve of our instructional model,” said Vallas. “The cooperative strategy allows the District to work with its partners to determine the best means to effect positive results for today and through the long term.”

Edison Schools

The case of Edison Schools demonstrates the usefulness of analyzing gains made by low-performing students, rather than just measuring absolute student proficiency rates.

Twelve of Edison’s 20 schools made AYP on this year’s report, up from just one school last year. However, on the 2004 PSSA tests, Edison’s Philadelphia schools posted an average annual gain of approximately 10.2 percentage points in fifth- and eighth-grade students scoring at proficient or above in reading, with a corresponding gain of approximately 9.6 percentage points in math. In the years prior to the Edison-District partnership, those same 20 schools had averaged annual gains of less than one-half of 1 percentage point.

Edison also had the largest increase in the percentage of students scoring at proficient or above, and the largest decrease in the percentage of students scoring “below basic.” In addition, the state Department of Education data show that:

- Of the 64 schools targeted by the District for extensive reforms, 21 made AYP for the first time in 2004. Edison produced more than half those 21 schools (11 of 21), even though it operates less than one-third of the targeted reform schools (20 of 64).
- In reading, the Edison-District partnership schools reduced the percentage of students at the below-basic level at four-and-a-half times the state rate.
- In math, Edison-District partnership schools reduced the percentage of students at the below-basic level at four-and-a-half times the state rate.

In addition, Edison helped raise student achievement for the entire School District of Philadelphia by prompting the district to adopt Edison’s comprehensive benchmarking system for increasing student achievement. Edison’s benchmark testing program, aligned with the state’s assessment system, has an instant feedback loop that allows teachers to immediately know their students’ academic weaknesses and tailor their lesson plans to meet student needs.

The School District of Philadelphia adopted a similar benchmarking program, implemented through a contract with Princeton Review and SchoolNet, to assess students every six weeks for their progress toward state grade-level standards.

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English Immersion Yields Gains in Arizona

by Robert Holland

Arizona’s Department of Education has released data showing that children in Structured (English Immersion) classes learn at a swifter pace than children assigned to bilingual education programs in which they receive instruction in their non-English native language.

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Horne, contends the data make clear bilingual education is a failed program.

The study compared students who were in English immersion with those in bilingual programs for the school year 2002-03, the year before the state began enforcing the requirement approved by voters in 2000 that all limited-English children be in English immersion classes.

Horne reported students in English immersion outperformed students in bilingual education by one to four months in grades 2-4, by six months in grade 5, and by more than a year from grade 6 onward.

“This means that for students in sixth grade and above, students in structured English immersion were over a year ahead of students in bilingual programs,” said Horne. He added, “These results hold for all grade levels and for all students tested: reading, language, and math.”

Now that Arizona has begun enforcing the voter-approved English-immersion requirement, “hopefully there are no additional students subjected to these educationally inferior bilingual programs,” Horne said.

Advocates of bilingual education contend it is fairer to children who do not know English to teach them in their native language while gradually introducing them to English. The executive director of the National Association for Bilingual Education, James Crawford, blasted the Arizona study. “It’s really a crapshoot for kids to subject them to a kind of approach that has no track record. It’s really a waste of taxpayer dollars.”

“We are relying on science,” Horne replied in the Arizona Republic. “And they’re stuck in ideology.”

NYC Parents Say: End Bilingual Ed

A report by the New York Times' Samuel G. Freedman on a meeting of Latino parents in Brooklyn in June indicated many of the supposed beneficiaries of bilingual education agree with Arizona officials that it should be ended.

Freedman reported, “one after the other, they condemned a system that consigned their children to a linguistic ghetto, cut off from the United States of integration and upward mobility.”

The July 14 Times story quoted Gregorio Ortega, whose son, Geraldo, born in New York City, was suddenly transferred into a bilingual education class even though he had been learning in English during his first four years of school. Another parent, Benefita Salsedo, complained that after four years in the bilingual track her son Alberto still had not been given any English instruction.

“I’m very angry,” Freedman quoted Salsedo (speaking in Spanish through an interpreter) as saying. “The school is supposed to do what’s best for the kids. The school puts my kids’ education in danger, because everything is in English here.”

Freedman recalled that only five years earlier, in the heart of a church only a few blocks away, another group of immigrant parents had expressed the same complaints about bilingual education.

The parents’ complaints make one thing clear, according to Freedman, “The fees of bilingual education, at least as practiced in New York, are not Eurocentric nativists but Spanish-speaking immigrants who struggled to reach the United States and struggle to stay here so that their children can acquire and rise with an American education, very much including fluency in English.”

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What’s More Important—Performance in Sports or in Academics?

by Will Fitzhugh

Students who do good academic work in high school and who are also good athletes get much more recognition for their sports achievements than they do for their academic work, even though they may have put forward the same high level of effort for both. I have seen a number of examples of this in my role as editor of The Concord Review, which over the past 17 years has published 649 history research papers by high school students from 43 states and 33 other countries.

Some years ago, I went to visit one of our authors, a high school senior from Connecticut whose essay on the Great Awakening won an Emerson Prize. She also was all-state soccer in Connecticut. Everyone in her school knew about her soccer accomplishments, but no one knew she had been published in The Concord Review. She went on to play on her college soccer team, at Dartmouth, but she also graduated summa cum laude in science and has since completed Harvard Medical School.

Another of our authors, Sophia Parker Snyder, from Glendale, Wisconsin, who is a sophomore at Harvard College now, wrote me to say how “absolutely wonderful” it was to know there was someone who appreciated the academic achievements of high school students.

“As a scholar-athlete, I am often shocked at the greater rewards I reap for my athletic achievements, regardless of the fact that these accomplishments are far less important than my intellectual ones,” she commented. “This approach to scholarship and athleticism seems to me completely backwards...”

The purpose of The Concord Review over the years has been to find exemplary academic work by high school students of history and to distribute it as widely as possible to show teachers and other students what some of their peers are doing. Fine essays have come in, but the number of schools and teachers who have wanted to put good examples of history research papers before students as an incentive has been quite small so far.

In fact, some Teaching American History programs have decided that showing teachers fine academic work might just discourage them or their students. In sports and athletics, outstanding performance is celebrated to encourage participants to try harder to excel. A similar celebration of outstanding academic work would give our young people an incentive to put forth their very best efforts on their most important work—their school work.

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multiple school sites under a single charter. “We know that [raising the cap] would be difficult and so that’s not part of our plans,” Duncan told a group of education entrepreneurs at EDVentures 2004, the annual conference of the Education Industry Association, held August 4-6 at Northwestern University’s Evanston, Illinois campus.

“We will look to ask people—the players who have already done a good job—to replicate their model,” he explained. “So rather than running three, four, five schools. We have one great charter school that wants to run eight schools over the next six years.”

Duncan was addressing the implementation of Chicago’s Renaissance 2010 school reform plan as part of a panel discussion on “Successful Public-Private Partnerships in K-12.”

Chicago’s Renaissance plan calls for opening 100 new schools over the next six years, split roughly one-third each between charter schools, contract schools, and small schools run by Chicago Public Schools. (See “Competition and Partnerships Are Keys to Chicago Renaissance Plan.”)

“I’m a big, believer in choice, I’m a big believer in competition,” said Duncan, adding that students are better served when parents and school communities are given a wide variety of high-quality options and then the marketplace push each option to get better.

Duncan noted the public schools in Chicago were once known as the worst in the country. However, since Mayor Richard M. Daley took over the schools almost 10 years ago, he said, the district has improved significantly—with still a long way to go—and is now often cited as a model of urban school reform. Part of the success of that model is the district’s engagement in public-private educational partnerships.

“We’re really trying to push the idea of innovation, we’re really trying to push the idea of entrepreneurship, and how we can bring in the best and brightest players from around the country to help us improve and provide great education to students in every neighborhood in Chicago,” said Duncan.

“Anyone who can bring an idea that helps us improve, anyone who can bring an idea that will help our students learn, we’d be silly not to take it,” said Duncan.

The need for school districts to be open to new ideas was echoed by another panelist, H. Douglas Williams, superintendent of Perry Township Schools in Marion County, Indiana, on the south side of Indianapolis. The district has partnered with Edison Schools in the opening of two new schools to alleviate overcrowding in a rapidly growing district.

Since the existing schools were populated through school choice, the district wanted two new schools that would offer enhanced opportunities to parents. Edison provided that with its longer school day, advanced technology, and foreign language options.

Create your motivation in partnering with Edison was to learn from the for-profit company. As a result, the district has adopted Edison’s benchmark assessment approach and Edison’s model for professional development, with teacher-leaders and teacher-coaches.

According to Williams, the partnership with Edison has been everything the district hoped for: Achievement at the two new Edison schools is high, the schools are well accepted by the community, and both have waiting lists.

“We need to partner with people who can help us do better, and Edison has clearly been that for us,” said Williams.

Other panelists were Nancy Lavelle, of Total Education Solutions, and Jeff Cohen of Catapult Learning, the institutional arm of the Sylvan group.

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Chicago
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the new schools strictly accountable for student educational outcomes. “This model will generate competition and allow for innovation,” said Daley. “It will bring in outside partners who want to get into the business of education. It offers the opportunity to break the mold. It gives parents more options and will shake up the system.”

The new schools will be half elementary and half secondary, with enrollment limited to about 500 students. Most will be neighborhood schools, designed to serve their surrounding communities. The 2010 plan calls for opening new schools at the rate of approximately 20 per year, twice the pace the city has achieved since 1997 with charter schools, contract schools, and new or replacement schools.

“Chicago is taking the lead across the nation in remaking urban education,” said Civic Committee Chairman Andrew J. McKenna. “No other major city has launched such an ambitious public school choice agenda.”

The “Renaissance” model for turning around underperforming schools was developed two years ago, when Williams and Dodge elementary schools were closed for a year. Reopened last fall with new leadership, new staff, and new outside partners, both schools have achieved dramatic gains in test scores this year.

“We must face the reality that, for schools that have consistently under-performed, it’s time to start over,” said the Mayor, who cautioned the city and CPS could not make the initiative a success without the assistance of the private sector.

That assistance, in the form of financial and technical support, will be provided through a new organization called New Schools for Chicago, created by the Civic Committee in partnership with national and local foundations, the Chicago Public Education Fund, and others. The Civic Committee’s members are leaders of 75 of the Chicago area’s largest corporations.

“We believe that New Schools for Chicago will provide families with educational options and create a more competitive environment—which will lead to higher academic standards and greater accountability in all public schools,” said Civic Committee President R. Eden Martin. “For over 10 years we have been working together with our affiliate Leadership for Quality Education to introduce and then support independent public schools in Chicago.”

Daley’s plan represents a major advance for the Civic Committee’s efforts to improve the quality of Chicago’s public schools. A sobering report from the Civic Committee in July 2003 said significant gains in student achievement in Chicago’s public schools were unlikely to occur without “increasingly large doses” of competition. Their recommendation: Create at least 100 new charter or contract schools.

George A. Clowes (clowes@heartland.org) is managing editor of School Reform News.
Polls Show Vouchers Are Popular and Would Be Widely Used

But negative wording results in under-reporting of voucher support
by George A. Clowes

Only 42 percent of Americans polled in the latest Phi Delta Kappa International/Gallup Poll say they are in favor of vouchers. Yet the same poll reports 57 percent of Americans say they would use full-tuition vouchers, if they were available, to enroll their children in private schools.

A new national study conducted by leading research firm WirthlinWorldwide suggests an explanation for the discrepancy: The use of negative wording in a key poll question reduces the reported support for vouchers by more than 20 percentage points.

PDK/Gallup Poll
The 36th annual “PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Towards the Public Schools,” released in August, reports three of five parents with children in public schools (57 percent) would transfer them to private schools if full-tuition vouchers were available. Only 38 percent would choose to keep their children in a public school, down from 39 percent a year ago. Similar preferences prevail among all Americans, with 56 percent choosing a private school and 37 percent choosing a public school in this year’s poll.

The question posed by the Gallup pollsters asked respondents to suppose they had a school-age child and a full-tuition voucher for use at any public, private, or church-related school. Which kind of school would they choose?

Parents with children in public schools would choose a church-related private school over a secular private school by more than a two-to-one margin (40:17). This represents a shift from last year, when the margin was less than two-to-one (38:21) in favor of a church-related private school. Among all Americans, the margin in this year’s poll was less than two-to-one (36:20) in favor of a church-related school.

As well as posing the full voucher/school preference question for the past two years, The 36th annual “PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Towards the Public Schools,” released in August, reports three of five parents with children in public schools (57 percent) would transfer them to private schools if full-tuition vouchers were available. Only 38 percent would choose to keep their children in a public school, down from 39 percent a year ago. Similar preferences prevail among all Americans, with 56 percent choosing a private school and 37 percent choosing a public school in this year’s poll.

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As well as posing the full voucher/school preference question for the past two years, the annual PDK/Gallup Poll since 1985 has posed the following question to report on public support for the idea of vouchers: “Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?” This year’s poll reports 42 percent of Americans favor vouchers while 54 percent oppose them, close to the 40:56 favor:oppose averages the poll has reported over the past decade.

The PDK/Gallup Poll was conducted in late May and early June using a sample of 1,003 adults. The margin of error is approximately 4 percent for responses involving the whole sample and somewhat larger for subgroups.

Skewed Questions?
Critics, such as Terry Moe of the Hoover Institution, have alleged the PDK/Gallup Poll has skewed its questions and reporting against vouchers. Moe’s own opinion survey, conducted in the mid-1990s, found 60 percent of Americans favor a universal voucher system, a figure some 20 percentage points higher than the 40 percent average reported by PDK/Gallup over the past decade.

To determine if the wording used in the annual PDK/Gallup Poll could artificially lower support for voucher programs, WirthlinWorldwide conducted a split sampling study sponsored by the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation. A sample of 1,901 respondents was surveyed for the study in early August. The margin of error on the results from the split sample is approximately 4 percent.

Half of the respondents were asked this question used by PDK/Gallup: “Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at public expense?” Respondents asked this question favored vouchers by 41 percent, a result similar to the 42 percent reported in the PDK/Gallup Poll using the same question.

The other half of the respondents were asked the same question using neutral language. “Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose any school, public or private, to attend using public funds?” [emphasis added] Respondents asked this question favored vouchers by 63 percent, a result similar to the 60 percent support for vouchers reported by Moe.

“These results demonstrate the powerful difference that a few words can make when measuring public opinion,” said Dee Alsep, chairman and CEO of WirthlinWorldwide. “Americans are less likely to support school choice when more prejudiced wording such as ‘public expense’ is used and it is implied that such funds would be used for ‘private schools’ only. Using more neutral descriptions reveals the overwhelming public support for school choice options that exist in America.”

Other findings of the WirthlinWorldwide study include:

• Most Americans (64 percent) support using a school district’s current allocation of tax dollars to pay for educating children at schools of choice.

• Nearly 70 percent of African-American Democrats surveyed would be more likely to vote for a candidate supporting school choice.

• The total share of African-Americans surveyed who favor school choice reaches 80 percent.

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firm Mathematica Policy Research, was among several recent contributions to the continuing debate over whether teacher quality is more likely to result from conventional school-of-education training or from opening the profession’s doors to a wider variety of talent and experience. Mathematics used random assignment to gauge the relative performance of TFA and regular teachers in 17 of the lowest-performing schools in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New Orleans, and the Mississippi Delta. At these sites, 95 percent of the approximately 2,000 children qualified for free or reduced-priced lunch, and achievement was at the 14th percentile when they entered the teachers’ classrooms.

The result in a nutshell: TFA teachers were as effective as the general population of teachers at teaching reading in these impoverished districts, and they were more effective at teaching math. The TFA advantage was not huge—3 percentile points in math—but the results flew in the face of contentions that only conventionally trained and certified teachers could help disadvantaged students. Critics pointed out that some of the teachers in the control group were themselves uncertified novices, as is often the case in poor communities where teacher recruitment is difficult. However, the study also showed TFA outperformed certified and veteran teachers.

“TFA teachers not only had more success than other novice teachers, but they had more success than teachers with an average of six years of experience in the classroom,” noted lead researcher Paul Decker.

Teach for America asks some of America’s “best and brightest” to give something back to the country by committing to teach at least two years in the neediest urban and rural schools. About 60 percent of TFA participants remain in education after the two-year stint, and many others work as policy advocates on behalf of low-income and minority families.

American Board Certification
While TFA has a track record showing the value of broadening the intellectual mix of the teaching corps, it is not an alternative route to certification. Such a program at the national level, the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence, recently gained momentum when a state known as a leader in educational choice, decided to accept ABCTE’s Passport to Teaching as a new route to full certification for public school teachers. ABCTE offers certification to mid-career switchers, recent college graduates, and current teachers. To gain certification, candidates must hold a bachelor’s degree, pass a criminal background check, and meet American Board standards demonstrating their subject matter knowledge as well as grasp of teaching methods.

ABCTE exams use innovative computer technology that enables candidates to respond to a variety of simulated classroom situations. Candidates for certification must also complete an essay showing they can communicate well with parents and other educators. Recently, American Board candidates won Passports to Teaching in Pennsylvania and Idaho, the first two states to offer the ABCTE alternative to conventional teacher training. Secretary of Education Rod Paige has recognized ABCTE as a viable option for localities to use in meeting the No Child Left Behind requirement that there be a “highly qualified” teacher in every classroom.

ABCTE and other forms of alternative certification that bypass the schools of education have met resistance from defenders of the status quo, among them David G. Imig, president of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. Last year, Imig publicly distributed questions he had obtained from a preliminary draft of an ABCTE test. Proponents of the alternative certification charged Imig was trying to sabotage the competition. Imig, 64, has since announced he will be retiring from his work at the 800-member association. He plans to seek a post-retirement position with the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in Palo Alto, California.

Teacher College Math
In Michigan, the Grand Rapids Press recently reported that teacher training institutions routinely boast on their Web sites that 100 percent of their graduates pass mandatory academic tests. However, those training institutions were defining graduates as those who passed the tests, thereby guaranteeing a perfect pass rate simply by defining out those who failed. In reality, pass rates were as low as 66 percent at one school, and as high as 97 percent at another.

Teachers Agree: Too Many Incompetent Teachers
At The Washington Post, education writer Jay Mathews expected an outpouring of criticism when his first-ever guest columnist, California chemistry teacher Richard Chapleau, penned a piece, “If I Were Emperor of Education,” advocating that up to one-third of public school teachers be dismissed for incompetence. Chapleau also argued teachers should have to be evaluated by other teachers who know them well, and parents should take more responsibility for instilling in their children a love of reading.

Chapleau, too, braced for the criticism. To the surprise of both men, they received an overwhelmingly positive response from teachers across the country who agreed there are too many classroom incompetents as well as too many irresponsible parents.

Robert Holland (holland@lexingtoninstitute.org) is a senior fellow at the Lexington Institute, a think tank in Arlington, Virginia.
Colorado Teacher Unions Revise PAC Deduction Policies

by Ben DeGrow

Prompted by recommendations from a recent Independence Institute study, two of the largest local affiliates of the Colorado Education Association (CEA) have enacted procedural changes relating to the deduction of fees from teachers’ paychecks.

In Jefferson County, the largest school district in the state, the Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA) has added language to its online membership form to advise teachers that $48 of their fees is earmarked for political purposes. The form also now explains how members can receive a refund of those political contributions.

The change was triggered by the January 2004 publication of the Independence Institute’s Issue Paper, “Should Colorado School Districts Stop Collecting Political Funds?” by education policy director Pamela Benigno and research associate Mark Salley. The Golden-based think tank distributed nearly 2,000 copies of the study to Colorado policymakers and other key observers. In addition, Benigno presented the report’s findings in a number of forums, including television and radio.

Benigno and Salley’s in-depth report revealed many local CEA affiliates were providing less than full disclosure about payroll deductions for political activities. Most membership authorization forms did not inform teachers that a portion of the membership fee was designated for partisan political campaigns, nor were members informed they could request refunds of fees designated for political activities.

As well as prompting changes by JCEA, the report also prompted the Colorado Springs Education Association (CSEA) to enact procedural changes relating to the deduction of fees from teachers’ paychecks.

An article by Ben DeGrow (ben@i2i.org) is an education policy research associate with the Independence Institute in Golden, Colorado.

Redeeming Moses

by M. Royce Van Tassell

Few people have fallen as low as Ruth Holland and her 13-year-old son Moses Dillehay.

When Ruth’s first husband died several years ago, her older son Pharaoh didn’t have any good male role models in their Queens neighborhood, so she let him move in with a friend, a former coach, on Long Island.

Pharaoh’s move, though, meant Ruth had to support two households, since she had to pay part of Pharaoh’s living expenses on Long Island. With only her deceased husband’s Social Security benefits as income, in April 1999 her budget broke. She and her younger son Moses were evicted, and they moved into a mouse-infested shelter in Harlem.

For the next month or so they traveled back to their old apartment to check for mail, where one day they found a letter from the Children’s Scholarship Fund (CSF). A few months earlier they had seen a commercial advertising the opportunity to receive a private scholarship at the school of their choice. Ruth applied, but with all of the others who had applied, she knew Moses’ chances were slim at best.

Moses, she now learned, had been selected in the CSF lottery. CSF would pay up to 75 percent of Moses’ tuition at the school of his choice.

Still living in the shelter, she filled out the paperwork and began shopping for a school. Their eviction had been especially hard on Moses, who knew only Queens as home, so she sent him to St. Peter Claver School, a nonsectarian school in Queens. With an eye on eventually getting a college degree, he began taking GED classes.

St. Peter Claver was a tremendous change of environment for Moses, who was in third grade at the time. He traded his sneakers and t-shirt for dress shoes and a shirt and tie. Moral instruction was a daily part of his classes. At St. Peter Claver he couldn’t get away with ignoring the rules.

By this time, Ruth and Moses were living in a shelter in midtown Manhattan. For a year they got up at 5:30 a.m. so they could take the R train to school. Moses struggled to keep up with the schedule and living in a shelter, and he wound up having to repeat third grade.

After moving to a Bronx apartment in 2001, Ruth transferred her son to St. Martin of Tours School, a Catholic school in the Bronx. Moses attended there, continuing to struggle, until Ruth transferred him to Grace Lutheran Elementary School, another religious school in the Bronx. Moses will be in seventh grade, but he’s going to spend the first quarter reviewing the material from sixth grade to make sure he’s up to speed.

These past five years have been a real roller coaster for Ruth and Moses. Letting her son Pharaoh go live with his coach was tough. Getting evicted was even tougher—she’d never before lived with mice or waterbugs. And private school has not been the silver bullet she expected.

Despite all these hardships, Ruth doesn’t regret any of it. In her view, Moses’ scholarship has given him—and her, too—“an opportunity to do something with yourself.” It’s too soon to tell if Moses will succeed in his dream of becoming a veterinarian, or if Ruth will finish her college degree. They both have more mountains to climb, but now they have hope, and a fighting chance.

M. Royce Van Tassell (royce@edexutah.org) is executive director of Education Excellence Utah.
Pell Grants Worked for Colleges, Why Not K-12?

“A key difference between schooling from 1630-1830 and schooling that arose in the period from 1830-1920 is one of delivery mechanisms. The early republic emphasized the importance of education for a stable society and provided some public funding for schooling, all the while allowing parents greater autonomy and enabling a wide array of private and religious schools to receive public funds. The common school movement simply destroyed parental autonomy and choice, linking in a dear way the government financing of education through tax dollars with the government administration and operation of schools.

“What happened in the period after 1920 is a testament to the folly of this idea. Rapid centralization ensued, with schooling becoming increasingly bureaucratic and uniform. Education moved from a parent/child customer-centered format to a school/state education provider-centered focus...”

“The program enacted for Milwaukee [in 1995] sparked a revolution. Since 1995, we have seen an explosion in the number of school choice programs introduced at the state level. In fact, in 2003, more than 20 states introduced voucher or tax credit legislation. Moreover ... we have seen, on average, one new school choice program enacted every year since 1996.

“Voucher programs have been enacted in Florida, Colorado and the District of Columbia. Minnesota and Illinois have enacted individual tax credit programs to offset the cost of private education. Arizona, Florida, and Pennsylvania have created scholarship tax credit programs that allow individuals or corporations to claim a tax credit for contributions made to nonprofit organizations that distribute scholarships. This trend will likely continue in 2005. Not only have we witnessed a significant growth in actual programs enacted, we are seeing a dramatic increase in the types of school choice legislation offered.”

Robert C. Enlow, Executive Director
Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation Testimony on “Pell Grants for Kids” before the Subcommittee on Children and Families of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions July 15, 2004

But Not Unfit for Teaching

“Wayne Nadeau, forced to resign his seat on the National Education Association Executive Committee after a sex scandal was made public, was reinstated to his teaching position at a Vermont high school by an arbiter and awarded about $46,000 in back pay and benefits.

Nadeau’s teaching license was temporarily suspended in 2002 after he admitted to having more than one sexual encounter in his classroom after school hours with a teacher’s aide...

“What should give everyone pause is that Nadeau could be forced out of his NEA Executive Committee seat—a seat for which a large number of powerful union officials deemed him unfit—but he could not be forced out of his teaching job.”

Mike Antonucci
Education Intelligence Agency Communiqué August 2, 2004

Leaving Kids Behind

New York City

“A matter of consistency “If no public dollars can be used to support religious institutions, voucher opponents essentially are saying that your house of worship should not be given police, fire, or EMS protection.

“Voucher money goes to the parents. Sometimes they give the money to religious institutions so their children can be educated. Since voucher opponents claim that violates the separation of church and state, they also must oppose giving public funds to senior citizens, welfare recipients and others if they, too, give public dollars to religious institutions.

“Until voucher opponents publicly support every separation of church and state, they are hypocrites who inadvertently expose their hidden agenda.”

Dimitra Vassilaros
Pittsburgh Tribune-Review August 23, 2004

Demand for School Choice Evident in Nation’s Capital

Despite a short registration period of just 17 days in the spring, more than 1,000 students will be attending private schools this fall in the District of Columbia under the country’s first federally funded voucher program.

Officials from the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF), which is administering the program, told the Associated Press 74 percent of eligible voucher applicants are enrolled in a private or parochial school.

During the registration period, more than 8,500 families inquired about the program. More than 1,800 met the program income requirements, under which

More than 1 Million Students in U.S. Are Homeschooled

About 1.1 million students were being homeschooled in the United States in 2003, up 29 percent from the previous estimate of 850,000 in 1999, according to a survey published by the National Center for Education Statistics in July. The increased total represents 2.2 percent of school-age children in the U.S., up from 1.7 percent in 1999.

When asked about the most important reason for homeschooling, almost half (47 percent) of survey respondents cited dissatisfaction with other schools, a combination of concern about the school environment (31 percent) and dissatisfaction with academic instruction (16 percent). Less than one-third (30 percent) said their main reason for homeschooling was to provide religious or moral instruction to their children. Fourteen percent homeschooled because their child had a physical or mental health problem or other special needs.

Interviews for the report were conducted with the parents of 11,994 students, 229 of whom were homeschooled. When weighted appropriately, the data represent approximately 50 million students ages 5-17 with a grade equivalent of K-12 in the United States during the 2003 school year.

NCES Issue Brief 2004-115 July 2004

SCHOOL CHOICE ROUNDS

by Robert Fanger and George Clowes

NATIONAL

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a family of four could not earn more than $34,400 per year.

“The fact that so many families applied for and accepted these scholarships shows the demand for educational options,” Mayor Anthony Williams told the Associated Press.

WSP officials report hundreds of families have expressed interest in applying for the 2005–2006 scholarship year. The group will begin accepting applications this fall.

New York Newsday
September 1, 2004

FLORIDA

In Polk County, Hundreds Take Advantage of School Choice

The Florida Department of Education reported in August that 281 McKay scholarships and 331 Corporate Tax Credit (CTC) scholarships were used in Polk County last year.

In the McKay program, disabled public school students are allowed to use their special education funds as a tuition voucher to enroll in a private school or another public school. For example, Daryl Johnson used a McKay voucher to take his son, who has Down syndrome, out of public school and place him in Lakeland Christian School so he could get a Christian education.

“We wanted him to have available the same kind of education that his brothers had available to them,” Johnson told the Lakeland Ledger.

The CTC scholarships allow low-income students to transfer from public schools to a private school of their choice. The scholarships are funded by donations from businesses, which take a credit for the donation against their state income taxes. Michael Sligh, principal at Lakeland Christian School, speaks highly of the CTC scholarship program.

“It’s been a great help to the families,” he told the Lakeland Ledger. “It’s been very suited to their needs.”

A third type of scholarship, the Opportunity Scholarship, is available to students who attend public schools that have been rated as failing twice in a four-year period. Students at the Academic Research Charter School at Lake Gibson High in Lakeland are the first in Polk County to qualify for Opportunity vouchers.

Lakeland Ledger
August 6, 2004

MAINE

Maine Families Want Wider Use of Tuitioning Funds

Families from three Maine towns are challenging a state law that prohibits money from the “town-tuitioning” program to be spent at religious schools.

The tuitioning law permits towns without high schools to pay tuition for students to attend private schools. However, since 1981, the state has maintained that spending public money at religious schools violates the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and so has permitted only secular private schools and other public schools to participate.

The families, who live in Durham, Raymond, and Minot, claim they are being discriminated against because the tuitioning law pays tuition for their neighbors’ children—who attend public and private schools—but does not pay for their children, who attend schools with religious affiliations. For example, Jerilyn Ward of Raymond, who is not Catholic, sends two of her three sons to a Catholic school in Lewiston.

“I felt it was the best school for them,” she told the Portland Press Herald. “It should be about what is the best education for the child.”

On September 3, Superior Court Justice Robert Crowley heard arguments from lawyers representing the families and from the state Attorney General’s office, which is defending the tuition ban. Although this is the third challenge to the tuitioning law in the past seven years, this marks the first time the program has been challenged since a 2002 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court permitted school vouchers in Cleveland to be used at religious schools.

Portland Press Herald
September 4, 2004

SOUTH CAROLINA

South Carolina Receives Lowest SAT Scores

South Carolina’s SAT scores dropped three points for the class of 2004, making the state score the worst in the nation. The drop in test scores, the first since 1999, has prompted many to call for revising the state’s education system.

“Bouncing back and forth between next-to-last and now dead-last in the entire country again isn’t progress—it’s a sad reminder for many that our state isn’t giving parents the choices they need in the education marketplace,” said Gov. Mark Sanford (R) in a statement. “Whether it’s charter school reform or our ‘Put Parents in Charge’ proposal, this administration is going to continue pushing for fundamental reforms.”

Education Superintendent Inez Tenenbaum announced at a press conference on August 27 that nearly 23,000 high school seniors who took the college entrance exam scored an average of 986 of a possible 1,600, down three points from last year.

U.S. Rep. Jim DeMint (R-South Carolina) told the Associated Press the state’s education system is in trouble and needs some new ideas.

“I’m not going to blame [Tenenbaum] for the problems,” he said. “The only thing I’d blame her for is being very slow to listen to new ideas that give students more choices of learning environments and different learning styles of students,” he said.

Greenville News
August 27, 2004

WISCONSIN

A Record 120 Schools Accept Milwaukee Vouchers

The number of schools participating in Milwaukee’s state-funded voucher program increased by 14 this fall, growing to a new high of 120 schools. The increase in the number of participating schools occurred despite the fact that 21 schools were denied entrance into the program because they failed to meet a more stringent set of requirements established by Wisconsin’s Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

The new requirements include submitting a budget to DPI and attending financial training workshops. Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
August 13, 2004

Wisconsin Governor Willing to Deal on Voucher Expansion

In an unexpected move, Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle (D) told editors of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel he is open to negotiating an expansion of the city’s school voucher program as a tradeoff for getting more aid to public schools. The program currently is capped at 15 percent of enrollment in the Milwaukee Public Schools. The growing program is expected to hit that limit—about 15,000 students—soon.

Last fall, Doyle vetoed a bill that would have eliminated the enrollment cap. Earlier this year, he issued a plan that would have imposed standardized testing on voucher schools and halted the creation of charter schools.

Doyle told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel he recognizes voucher schools are an important part of education in Milwaukee. However, he also made it clear that, “as long as I’m governor, this is going to be a Milwaukee program, it’s not going to expand beyond Milwaukee.”

Twin Cities Pioneer Press
July 22, 2004
Education Entrepreneurs Gather in Evanston

by Paul H. Seibert

W ith a theme of “Education for Tomorrow: Entrepreneurs Transforming K-16 Education,” the 14th annual EDVentures Conference of the Education Industry Association (EIA) was held on the Northwestern University campus in Evanston, Illinois on August 4-6, 2004. A range of general session speakers included top education policymakers, leaders in school reform, and advocates for tutoring practitioners.

Dr. Gene Hickok, deputy secretary of education for the U.S. Department of Education, who spoke at last year’s conference in Boston, was welcomed back as the keynote speaker. Hickok is a long- time advocate of education reform and a strong supporter of education entrepreneurs. He brought accolades and encouragement for EIA from Education Secretary Rod Paige and President George W. Bush.

“The principles behind No Child Left Behind are beginning to challenge the education industry as we have known it,” said Hickok, noting the law “makes it difficult to close your eyes to a problem.”

The school board in St. Louis knew they had a problem but didn’t know how big it was when they brought in corporate turnaround specialist William Roberti from Alvarez and Marsal, Inc. to act as CEO of the district’s operations. As Roberti recounted to the conference audience, he quickly found the district was on the verge of bankruptcy, facing a $75 million year-end deficit and a near-term cash shortfall of $89 million out of a $450 million budget.

Roberti spent a year leading a team of private managers in reforming the management systems of the St. Louis Public Schools, saving the district from bankruptcy, putting it on a sound financial footing, rationalizing operations in its 113 schools, and creating a framework for long-term success for its 37,000 students. The turn-around effort may well be the most dramatic example to date of a public-private partnership in American education.

“While St. Louis may be somewhat unique in terms of the severity of the crisis, there are ... hundreds of school districts across the country that are struggling to cope with many of the same issues,” said Roberti.

A subsequent general session speaker, Dr. Michael Bakalis, agreed with Roberti’s assessment, saying, “This kind of mismanagement is rampant in public education.

Bakalis is president and CEO of American Quality Schools, a nonprofit organization that operates charter schools in Chicago. He is also a professor at the Keller School of Business Management at Northwestern University and a former Illinois state superintendent of education.

Steve Cony, president of Communications Counselors LLC, brought a change of pace to the conference with a humor-laced presentation on promoting educational services. If you want to be a successful educational entrepreneur, he noted, you need clients. He then gave an account of “How to Get Heard, How to Get Believed, and How to Get Chosen,” delivering thousands of dollars’ worth of promotional consultation in a 45-minute session.

A pre-conference session also provided four hours of free legal advice from Fisher and Phillips LLC, one of the country’s foremost legal firms specializing in school and business law. Attorneys Suzanne Bogdan and Jane McPetrice reviewed the “Ten Major Legal Concerns for the Education Executive.”

EIA was founded by Chris Yelich, Wayne Jennings, Senn Brown, and the late James Boyle in 1990 as the American Association of Education Practitioners and Providers. The group’s mission was “private ventures for the public good,” and its aim was for members “to put the needs of students at the center of the business plan.” The first EDVentures Conference was in 1991, when 16 people attended. This year, there were 350 attendees.

With more than 800 corporate and individual members, EIA is now the leading professional association for private providers of education services, suppliers, and other private organizations who are stakeholders in education. While about 10 percent of EIA members are large, multi-national corporations like Edison Schools, most are small business owners, with some 60 percent operating local tutoring services.

The growth and transformation of EIA over the past 15 years has been due in no small measure to its executive director during that period, Chris Yelich. This year’s conference marked a transition of leadership for EIA as he stepped down and ceremonially delivered the “keys to the office” to Steve Pines, who was named executive director-elect in January after a national search for Yelich’s replacement. Another transition for EIA is the move of its headquarters from Watertown, Wisconsin to the Washington, DC area.

“Help for today and hope for tomorrow,” Aspen now operates 25 programs in 12 states, offering a variety of learning/therapeutic environments: day schools, boarding schools, and outdoor experiential programs.

Based in Cerritos, California, Aspen has annual revenues of almost $100 million. In 2003, the company assisted more than 10,000 clients.

— G.C.
A Vision Realized: Atlanta’s Tech High Charter School

by Holly Robinson

More than three years after the Georgia Public Policy Foundation (GPPF) first began laying the groundwork for an innovative math, science, and technology charter high school in the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) system, Tech High Charter School started its first classes in August with 150 Atlanta ninth-graders who had applied for admission on a first-come, first-served basis in June and attended a mandatory three-week preparatory summer math camp in July.

In an innovative partnership, Tech High occupies 17,000 square feet on the campus of Atlanta’s SciTrek museum. The hands-on science and technology museum for young people closed in August and is in the process of transitioning into a science education center to serve as a resource for teachers and students.

The critical need to develop local talent in science, math, and technology has long been a priority on the agenda of metro Atlanta’s business leaders. In the Atlanta Public Schools system, test scores show how great that need is: ■ Atlanta’s 2002-03 SAT scores averaged 862, compared with 980 for the state and 1016 for the nation; ■ 17 percent of Atlanta students failed the math portion of the High School Graduation Test, compared with 9 percent statewide; and ■ 43 percent of APS students failed the science portion, compared with 31 percent statewide.

It was no surprise, then, that the business and technology community leaped on board when GPPF proposed a charter school that would help bridge that yawning achievement gap.

Tech High, which will add a grade per year, follows on the heels of similar successful schools in Chicago, New York, and San Diego. The curriculum includes strong programs in math, science, and technology in addition to traditional academic coursework. Graduates will be prepared to pursue several different paths including college, technical school, or technology-focused employment. Tech High’s goal is to be the national model for the integration of academics and technical training needed to succeed in the new economy, and for the seamless integration of post-secondary instruction into the secondary setting.

Three years of intense planning for Tech High have produced a rigorous college prep curriculum integrating project-based learning. Real-world connections and experiences will involve internships and mentors. Math and science are taught in a double period by a teacher certified in both subjects. English and Social Studies teachers do likewise, and all students learn Spanish. “Ramp-up” programs will be offered, including summer camps for math and reading and Saturday and after-school programs. Acceleration will be available for all students.

While the school hopes its focus on accelerated math, science, and technology will draw Atlanta students motivated toward high achievement in those areas, it is reinforcing those higher expectations by becoming a leader in implementing the tougher standards of Georgia’s new curriculum, the Georgia Performance Standards, which are to be phased in statewide over seven years.

Graduation requirements include internship experience in the Upper Academy—11th and 12th grades—and earning the Triple Crown Diploma, which certifies that students: ■ have met state graduation requirements; ■ are ready for college as evidenced by the appropriate placement exam; and ■ have earned advanced academic or technical credentials.

“It’s incredibly rewarding to see our vision become reality,” said Kelly McCutchen, GPPF’s executive vice president and chairman of the charter school’s Governing Board. “The talents and ideas of so many committed colleagues and leaders went into this project. I’m honored to continue my involvement.”

An Atlanta resident, McCutchen has been involved since the school’s conceptualization. He said choice for Atlanta and Georgia’s students is fundamental to GPPF’s Education Initiative.

With developing leadership qualities in students a critical component of the charter school’s mission, a Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program was included in the school’s plans from conception. Backing that up are clear expectations of parents and students, covering dress code, attendance, behavior, and a strong work ethic.

The school’s Governing Board—comprising parents, teachers, and business leaders—manages school operations. Tech High CEO Barbara Christmas will work closely with the Governing Board as well as with the Atlanta Public Schools, the Georgia Department of Education, business leaders, the Department of Technical and Adult Education, postsecondary institutions, and other state and local agencies. The school’s principal, Dr. Byron White, brings to the table career experience in the military, private sector, and public education.

“With the leadership of CEO Barbara Christmas and a very impressive faculty, the business and community role and a host of innovative ideas, there’s no question this will be a national model for public education,” said Governing Board member Craig Lesser, who also is director of Georgia’s Department of Economic Development.

Dr. Holly Robinson (hrobinson@gppf.org) is senior vice president of the Georgia Public Policy Foundation.

“With the leadership of CEO Barbara Christmas and a very impressive faculty, the business and community role and a host of innovative ideas, there’s no question this will be a national model for public education.”

CRAIG LESSER, DIRECTOR
GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
Finding Effective Lessons for Teachers

an interview with James W. Stigler
by George A. Clowes

For the most part, teaching in this country has not been based on a knowledge base. If a teacher develops a new method for teaching some subject, there’s no mechanism for sharing that method with other practitioners and improving practices in the field as a whole.

There is no shortage of ideas to solve the problem of low student achievement in U.S. public schools. Smaller class sizes, more talented teachers, more well-rounded teachers recruited from other careers, and better pay for teachers are just a few of the prescriptions offered. But in a 1999 book titled The Teaching Gap (Free Press), UCLA psychology professor James W. Stigler and coauthor James Hiebert suggested student achievement may be stunted by a much larger cause: ineffective teaching methods.

“We have watched many examples of good teachers employing limited methods that, no matter how competently they are executed, could not lead to high levels of student achievement,” noted the two authors after studying actual teaching practices in the classroom.

Their observations were made possible through the Video Studies component of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), where teaching practices in more than one thousand classrooms in various countries were videotaped and analyzed. To facilitate the analysis, Stigler, who also is director of the TIMSS Video Studies, pioneered the development of an interactive database system to organize the lessons and make them readily accessible for further review and analysis by teachers for professional development purposes.

To further that effort, in 1998 Stigler founded LessonLab, a firm with the mission of understanding and improving classroom teaching and learning. LessonLab’s customers include school districts, state education departments, and the U.S. Department of Education. In 2003, the firm became part of Pearson Education.

Stigler is also coauthor, with Harold Stevenson, of The Learning Gap (Simon & Schuster, 1992). He has published research studies on various aspects of learning and classroom instruction, and his research has earned him numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1989 and the QuEST award from the American Federation of Teachers in 1995.

Stigler received his A.B. from Brown University in 1976, a Masters in Education from the University of Pennsylvania in 1977, and a Ph.D. in Developmental Psychology from the University of Michigan in 1982. He spoke recently with School Reform News Managing Editor George Clowes.

Clowes: How did you become involved in the issue of improving teaching?

Stigler: I have been interested in teaching as far back as I can remember, but I first started researching teaching in the late 1970s when I was a graduate student working with Harold Stevenson, doing large comparative studies of Asian-American students and their achievement. I became interested in both mathematics and teaching because the mathematics achievement among the Asian children was just so superior, and the teaching was just so different from anything I’d ever seen.

Clowes: Teachers frequently complain they aren’t treated as professionals. What is it that characterizes a profession?

Stigler: It’s really all about knowledge. A profession has a knowledge base that serves as a way for the field to improve its own practices. The knowledge base is a body of specialized knowledge that is generated both by researchers and practitioners in the field. People contribute to it, it grows over time, and new practitioners draw on it to define the standard practices in the field. That’s what makes it a profession.

For example, what makes medicine a profession is that there’s a knowledge base where improved techniques are shared among the members of the medical community. If somebody invents a new way to do surgery, they are expected to put it into the knowledge base to inform other members of the profession. As a result of that process, practices within the profession are improved over time.

Without a professional knowledge base, one surgeon might develop several improved techniques but there would be no way to share that knowledge with other surgeons. Under those circumstances, you would have one very clever surgeon, but surgery wouldn’t be a profession. I think it’s a very analogous situation in teaching.

For the most part, teaching in this country has not been based on a knowledge base. If a teacher develops a new method for teaching some subject, there’s no mechanism for sharing that method with other practitioners and improving practices in the field as a whole.

Clowes: I understand you formed a company, LessonLab, to start creating a knowledge base for teaching.

Stigler: LessonLab is based on the vision that teaching practices—effective classroom lessons—need to be made public and organized into a knowledge base that can be accessed by all teachers. In the medical field, there’s a whole tradition of shared understanding that comes from people looking over each other’s shoulders. In teaching, there’s a tradition of not looking over people’s shoulders and so there’s little shared understanding.

We built a technology platform for doing this, where you learn by studying examples of other people doing what it is you’re trying to improve. It’s a very simple idea. If you want to improve a process, go examine the process, and see if you can think of ways to improve it. That’s really the fundamental idea behind what we’re doing at LessonLab: Trying to find effective lessons.
The way we present these lessons is on videotape. With a profession like teaching, where there's not a lot of looking over each other's shoulders, it's practically impossible to communicate about practices in the classroom by using words.

For instance, two teachers might agree that they both use problem-solving in their classrooms, but they could still have completely different images of what “problem-solving” is. Video provides concrete images of “problem-solving” to discuss. If you look at actual examples, you find the issue is not whether you use a specific technique, it's how that technique is used. And that's generally the case with most everything we study with teaching: It's all about implementation.

The technology we built is simply a platform for managing the creation of this knowledge base, and the building of communities and learning programs based on interacting with the knowledge base. If someone was interested in, say, teaching a particular part of the math curriculum, they'd have different approaches to teaching. In Hong Kong, it's very teacher-directed. The teacher is in front of the room, lecturing, with less student talk than any of the other countries we studied. In Japan, it's completely different. Students spend lots of time working on their own, struggling with hard problems, sharing their solution methods, and so on.

So the message here is that a lot of the things we spend time arguing about probably make no difference. If you're more comfortable with a classroom where you put the teacher at the front and the potential to engage the students in constructing relationships among core math concepts.

What we found is that the percentage of time spent on the different types of problems varied all over the place, with the United States right in the middle. In Japan, they did more “Making Connections” problems than in any other country. In Hong Kong, they did the least. So it didn't seem to matter how much time was spent on the different types of problems.

But here was the real finding: When we looked at the type of problem that was presented, but at how it was implemented—that is, where we saw a huge difference between the U.S. and other countries. The way it worked was this: You may have a very rich, “Making Connections” problem, but the teacher can reduce it to a “Routine Procedure” problem when posing it in a lesson. What we found was that, in higher-achieving countries, teachers were able to implement the “Making Connections” problem at a conceptual level. Whereas, in the U.S., every example of a “Making Connections” problem that we observed was transformed into a lower-level problem, even medicine.

What is encouraging about this new study is that it shows you can get high achievement from different teaching systems. What that means for a teacher who's been exposed to three different methods used by successful teachers, is that the teacher can choose the one that best fits his or her personal teaching system. That's the one that's going to be sustainable. If you tell teachers to do something that doesn't fit within their cultural system, that's not sustainable.

Here's a real example. After reading our book, The Teaching Gap, a teacher wrote to us saying it very interesting—estimating that the Japanese teachers have students struggle with a problem before they teach them how to solve it. We never do that. They teach them how to solve it first, and then let them work on examples.

She said, “I'm a very traditional teacher—I just get up and lecture—but I decided to try something after reading your book. I now start my lessons by letting students try to solve it on their own, and then give my lecture.” She said this small change had worked brilliantly for her. She saw a huge change in motivation and engagement in her students.

That's an example of how cultural change can work. You don't go to this teacher and say, “Stop teaching the way you're teaching.” She can't do that. But if you go to her with an idea, and she sees how to fit it into her cultural script, then it will be sustainable. It's a small change but it's the kind of change that will improve teaching over time—provided you also have a way to capture that change and share it with other teachers.

“if you want to improve a process, go examine the videotape. With a profession like teaching, where there's not a lot of looking over each other's shoulders, it's practically impossible to communicate about practices in the classroom by using words.”

The mathematics teachers in the U.S. really don't know what it means to teach a concept. We know how to teach procedures, but we don't seem to have a tradition for teaching actual concepts and engaging students in thinking about concepts.

Clowes: What are the implications of your findings with regard to improving the quality of teaching?

Stigler: There are three ways to improve the quality of teaching that students experience.

1. get better teachers;
2. improve the competence of existing teachers; and,
3. improve the teaching methods that teachers use.

The first way, getting better teachers or getting different people to teach, is the most common policy recommendation today, and yet I think it should be the least important. If there's no mechanism for improving the methods of teaching, just getting better teachers in the classroom may give us a bump in achievement in the short run but it can't possibly lead to long-term improvement of the sort you have in medicine, for example.

Medicine has improved over the past 100 years, but it's not because you have smarter people deciding to become doctors. What is important there is the growth of the professional knowledge base in medicine. I'm not against having smarter people teaching—that would be good—but I don't see how that gets us into a gradual improvement of teaching.

The second way of improving teaching is to improve the competence of the teachers who are in the classroom now. The problem with that is, when we look through our videotapes, we see many examples of teachers very competently implementing methods of teaching that are not very effective.

That leads to the third way, which is how do we improve the teaching methods that teachers use? That's really what's different between the countries in our study. It's not the competence of the teachers, it's the method they use—the average teaching method. If we want to improve teaching, we need to find a way to improve the average method teachers use. If we could just make it 10 percent better, that would affect millions of children.

Clowes: So rather than looking at a heroic teacher model for improvements, you're saying, “What can we do to help all teachers use better methods, better procedures, and better techniques?”

Stigler: Right. When you go to the doctor, you don't have to go to a celebrity doctor to get the benefits of the best practices in medicine. Why shouldn't teaching be the same?

Now, changing teaching methods is not like changing the maintenance procedure for a jet engine, where it is often just a matter of replacing pages in a large maintenance manual. Teaching is very different. Teaching is a cultural activity, and so changing teaching is going to follow the principles of cultural change, where you are dealing with implicit routines that just fire off automatically. That means the changes we identify have to be small ones—incremental changes—because that is the way culture changes.

What is encouraging about this new study is that it shows you can get high achievement from different teaching systems. What that means for a teacher who's been exposed to three different methods used by successful teachers, is that the teacher can choose the one that best fits his or her personal teaching system. That's the one that's going to be sustainable. If you tell teachers to do something that doesn't fit within their cultural system, that's not sustainable.

Here's a real example. After reading our book, The Teaching Gap, a teacher wrote to us saying it very interesting—estimating that the Japanese teachers have students struggle with a problem before they teach them how to solve it. We never do that. They teach them how to solve it first, and then let them work on examples.

She said, “I'm a very traditional teacher—I just get up and lecture—but I decided to try something after reading your book. I now start my lessons by letting students try to solve it on their own, and then give my lecture.” She said this small change had worked brilliantly for her. She saw a huge change in motivation and engagement in her students.

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the court ruling could result in the rejection of many other similarly structured programs.

“If upheld, the court’s logic for striking the scholarships could invalidate many other programs such as Bright Futures college scholarships, McKay Scholarships for special-need children, and funding to private universities such as Bethune-Cookman,” said Bush. “Even non-education programs such as Medicaid funding to hospitals with religious affiliations could be threatened.”

Parental Choice Key
The Florida legislature approved the K-12 Opportunity Scholarships in 1999 to give parents with children in failing public schools the opportunity to obtain a high-quality education for their children. Parents in such circumstances may opt for their children to attend a better-performing public school or, as the law itself puts it, to “attend an eligible private school when the parent chooses” to apply the equivalent of the public education funds generated by his or her child to the cost of tuition in the eligible private school...” [emphasis added]

“Families across Florida depend on this program as the only means to save their children from chronically failing public schools,” said Florida attorney general with the Institute for Justice, a public interest law firm defending the program in court. “This program has provided these families “the vital lifeline to better educational opportunities and a brighter future.”

Religious schools may participate in the program so long as they meet the eligibility requirements which include accepting OSP students on an “entirely random and religious-neutral basis” and agreeing not to compel any OSP student “to profess a specific ideological belief, to pray, or to worship.” The parents of more than 90 percent of the initial 51 OSP students chose religious schools.

The appeals court viewed the selection of religious schools by parents as troublesome since it results in public funds being used by religious institutions. The court found the use by a religious school of any funds once designated “public” is a violation of Article 1, Section 3 of the Florida Constitution, which states, “No revenue of the state or any political subdivision or agency thereof shall ever be taken from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution.” [emphasis added]

School choice supporters note, however, that the OSP funds are designated for the use of parents, not schools; the religious schools are freely chosen from among religious and non-religious alternatives by the parents; and the funds received by the chosen schools are payment for the cost of tuition at the schools. Parents who participate in the scholarship program expressed frustration over the ruling.

“It feels like we’re bumping our heads up against a brick wall just to get a decent education for our kids,” said Tracy Richardson, whose daughter Khaliah attends a Montessori school in Pensacola using an Opportunity Scholarship.

Opponents of the scholarship program, by contrast, were overjoyed by the ruling. Ayesha Khan, legal director for Americans United, called the Times v. Bush ruling “a tremendous victory for public schools and taxpayers.” Andy Ford, president of the Florida Education Association, said the decision was “a triumph for public schools and Florida’s taxpayers.”

The editors of the Times-Union regarded the ruling to be grounded more in “a political agenda than on points of law,” not “about what the restriction of the state or any political subdivision or agency thereof shall ever be taken from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution.” [emphasis added]

The appeals court insisted its ruling was a narrow one that affected only religious options available to many, many kinds of religious options were still open to students receiving that scholarship and therefore there was no religious animus,” he explained. “That’s completely different from the First District Court of Appeals decision, which takes all religious options right off the table. It’s hard to imagine a much more overt statement of disfavor of religion.”

George A. Clowes (clowes@heartland.org) is managing editor of School Reform News.

INTERNET INFO

Labor Union Masks Motives Behind Teacher Façade

by George A. Clowes

Why do top teacher union officials, like National Education Association (NEA) President Reg Weaver, describe themselves as “classroom teachers” rather than union representatives? The annual Harris Poll provides a ready answer: Teachers rank among the most admired of the American public as belonging to an occupation of “very great prestige,” whereas only 15 percent regard union leaders that way.

The teacher union has been so successful in downplaying its identity as a labor union that a survey of members of the Alabama Education Association in 2000 showed only 19 percent regarded the NEA as a union, with an overwhelming 77 percent saying it was “a professional association.”

The idea of putting teachers front and center in the presentation of the labor union’s viewpoints was one of three recommendations made in 1997 by the Kamber Group, which had been hired by the NEA to address union concerns that many Americans at that time considered the NEA “the number one obstacle to better public schools.”

The Kamber Group’s analysis and recommendations are discussed in one of the chapters in a new publication from the Olypima, Washington-based Evergreen Freedom Foundation (EFF). EFF reports many members of the Washington Education Association were unaware the association they had joined was a labor union.

“I was shocked to learn the Washington Education Association is not what it claims to be,” said Grant Pelesky, a fifth-grade teacher from Puyallup, Washington. “Rather than an association of professionals, it is in fact something more than a labor union. Though I do not philosophically oppose labor unions, I do oppose being forced to be a member of one against my will.”

The NEA was founded as a professional association for school superintendents and teachers in the mid-1800s. In a battle for members with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in the 1960s, the NEA was transformed into a powerful labor union—a union made even more powerful by President John F. Kennedy, who signed an executive order lifting a long-standing ban on public employees organizing a labor union.

Now, with funds deducted directly from the paychecks of its 2.7 million members—and non-members, too—the NEA has an annual budget of more than $1 billion. As the EFF report points out, those interests are union interests, not the interests of parents and children.

Continued from page 1

Florida

Continued from page 1
Feminists Are Challenged to Support School Choice

by Krista Kafer

Feminist groups are out of touch with women on the issue of education, concludes a new study by Carrie L. Lukas for the Independent Women’s Forum (IWF). Lukas points out that women, children, and communities benefit from school choice policies, yet feminist groups oppose vouchers and tax credits and offer only tepid support for public school choice programs. Lukas urges women’s groups to return from their “recess from reality” and support school choice.

“Feminist groups like the National Organization for Women claim to be ‘pro-choice,’” said Lukas, who is IWF’s policy director. “But when it comes to giving parents a choice about where to send their kids to school, they change their tune and fight any program that gives parents more control.”

In her report, “Recess from Reality: The Feminist Failure to Embrace School Choice,” Lukas outlines feminist arguments against school choice and shows them to be baseless. She also questions whether the solution offered by these groups—increased funding—would be likely to improve education outcomes. She points out that spending on public education has increased substantially in the past three decades, while achievement has been stagnant.

“The combination of high per-pupil spending and weak student outcomes has resulted in American schools being dubbed the least productive in the industrialized world,” she notes.

Lukas suggests the real solution is to create an education marketplace that puts “individuals in control of resources and having providers compete to win their patronage.” While middle-income and wealthy families have the ability to move to an area with better schools, the poor do not have the same opportunities. Interest in and implementation of voucher, tax credit, charter, and public school choice programs has grown as more people recognize the public school system does not serve students and families well.

School choice programs benefit women and their families in several ways. For example, the current system, which assigns students to schools based on where they live, hurts women and their families by pushing them to purchase an expensive home to gain access to a good school. The cost of doing this can push into the workplace women who would prefer to stay at home, notes Lukas, citing Elizabeth Warren and Amelia Warren Tyagi’s book, The Two-Income Trap. The cost can also draw families out of urban areas and promote economic and residential segregation.

“Bad schools impose indirect—but huge—costs on millions of middle-class families,” write Warren and Tyagi. “In their rush to save their children from failing schools, families are literally spending themselves into bankruptcy.”

Numerous researchers, including Caroline Minter Hoxby of Harvard University and Jay Greene of the Manhattan Institute, have demonstrated the benefit of school choice programs to communities. Voucher and charter school programs spur traditional public schools to improve. Such programs can improve the academic achievement of participants as well as those who remain in their neighborhood schools.

Feminist groups ignore the benefits of school choice, and instead raise objections. Lukas addresses feminist arguments against vouchers and tax credits from the National Organization for Women (NOW), the American Association of University Women (AAUW), and National Women’s Law Center:

Vouchers divert funds from public schools, thereby weakening them. Choice policies do not deprive public schools of funds, explains Lukas. Private schools cost less than public schools. Providing a family with a voucher equal to the average tuition at a private school, which is less than the per-pupil expenditure at a public school, would provide resources for public schools. In 1999-2000, for example, average private school tuition was $4,689, while public school tuition was more than $8,000.

Vouchers provide disproportionate help to private religious school students. Lukas points out that most private schools are religiously affiliated because the market for non-religious private schools is much smaller than that for secular schools, largely because the public school system provides families with a free secular education. In higher education, Lukas notes, the government does not discriminate against faith-based schools. All students receiving benefits under the federal G.I. bill may attend a public or private school of their choice.

Private schools lack accountability. “Private schools and charter schools are held accountable by parents who can elect whether or not to send their children to those schools. This form of accountability is more thorough than accountability based on the outcome of one measure such as a standardized test.”

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CARRIE L. LUKAS
INDEPENDENT WOMEN’S FORUM

INDEPENDENT WOMEN’S FORUM

UNION CONTINUED

“The union’s lobbying efforts have very little to do with ensuring that excellent teachers are recruited and well compensated and that students are literate and ready for the world of work and citizenship,” writes EFF Executive Director Lynn Harsh in her introduction to the report.

EFF’s publication is designed to explain how the NEA has achieved its considerable influence over the operation of the nation’s public schools and how the union expects to maintain that sway. Suggestions for beginning to reduce union influence are provided for teachers who have religious objections to union policy and for teachers who want to become agency fee-payers.
How to Close the Achievement Gap?

by George A. Clowes

The achievement gap between black and white students has been a persistent feature of the performance of America’s public schools, despite equally persistent efforts to close that gap since the 1954 Brown decision, when the U.S. Supreme Court declared separate schools for black and white students were equal in facilities but simply needed to be integrated to raise black student achievement.

Black high school seniors currently perform at about the same level as white eighth-graders in reading and math. This achievement gap goes a long way toward explaining why there is a college graduation gap and a wage gap between blacks and whites, according to Harvard University professor Christopher Jencks, author of The Black-White Test Score Gap.

Those disparities almost disappear once you compare African Americans and whites who actually have the same test scores,” said Jencks in a new video documentary from the Corporation for Educational Radio and Television (CERT), called Closing the Achievement Gap. “So if you can narrow that test score gap, you might be able to do an awful lot economically and educationally.”

This “persistent and dramatic achievement gap between black students and white students” remains the biggest challenge faced by public education today, according to Clarence Page, the Chicago Tribune’s Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist and narrator of the CERT program. “If we could close that gap ... and truly equalize educational achievement between the races, most of our other socioeconomic debates would just go away,” said Page.

George A. Clowes (clowes@heartland.org) is managing editor of School Reform News.

Amistad Charter School Shows the Way

When measured against the academic performance of the average white student in Connecticut, the results achieved by the eighth-graders at Amistad Academy in New Haven are, well, just average.

But since 98 percent of Amistad students are black or Latino and predominantly urban low-income, those achievement levels mean the charter school has succeeded in closing the black-white achievement gap and boosted the performance of its students well above state averages.

Black eighth-graders in Connecticut lag far behind their white peers in the percentage that achieve mastery on Connecticut Mastery Tests. In the 2003 reading tests, 81 percent of white students achieved mastery, compared to only 39 percent of black students. In math, 68 percent of white students, but only 22 percent of black students, achieved mastery. In writing, 69 percent of white students and just 37 percent of black students achieved mastery.

By contrast, mastery achievement by black students at Amistad was at approximately the same level as their white peers: 70 percent in reading, 64 percent in math, and 91 percent in writing.

The 2004 mastery achievement percentages are even better. For Amistad eighth-graders as a group, 80 percent achieved mastery in reading, 75 percent in math, and 85 percent in writing—compared to overall state averages of 67, 56, and 62 percent respectively.

When students enter Amistad in fifth grade, their average performance is more than two years below grade level. But the school they enter has high expectations for every student, with teaching and learning techniques modeled on those used by a small private school in Calgary, Canada. Now Amistad Academy is the model, with school administrators planning to open five K-12 schools in New York over the next two years at the request of the city’s chancellor of schools, Joel Klein.

“You had the New Haven kids basically scoring as well as kids in Greenwich, in some of the wealthiest suburbs in the state,” said New Haven Register education reporter Natalie Missakian. “I think that it makes it more difficult for educators to sort of say that ‘it’s out of our hands and that we can’t do more than we’re doing.’ I think Amistad proves that it can happen ... it can be done.”

Amistad Academy is a charter school of about 250 students in grades five through eight. Selected by lottery from a pool of applicants from other New Haven public schools, Amistad’s students are about 66 percent black, 33 percent Latino, and 2 percent white. Almost nine out of 10 students qualify for the federal free or reduced price lunch program.

The school’s strategy is to encourage high achievement and model good behavior through positive reinforcement and strict discipline. Students wear a school uniform—a blue collared shirt or sweater and khaki pants or skirt. Each morning, all students refresh their commitment to the Amistad REACH motto by reciting it in unison:

R - respect!
E - enthusiasm!
A - achievement!
C - citizenship!
H - hard work!

The Amistad Academy story is told by the Chicago Tribune’s Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist, Clarence Page, in Closing the Achievement Gap, a new 60-minute video documentary from the Corporation for Educational Radio and Television.

The Black-White Test Score Gap

Further details about the video documentary, Closing the Achievement Gap, including purchasing information, is available from the Web site of the Corporation for Educational Radio and Television at http://www.pbs.org/closingtheachievementgap.


George A. Clowes (clowes@heartland.org) is managing editor of School Reform News.

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INTERNET INFO
Students Pin Achievement Gap on Teachers with Low Expectations

by George A. Clowes

In the recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Towards the Public Schools, three of four Americans (74 percent) attributed the achievement gap between white students and black and Latino students to factors other than schooling. When asked about who was most important in determining how well or how poorly students performed in school, 45 percent said the students' parents, 30 percent said the students' teachers, and 22 percent said the students themselves.

Several other recent surveys of teachers and students indicate schools and teachers, not parents, are the major contributors to the achievement gap. Drawing on extensive interviews with high school students in Connecticut, New York, and Washington State, researcher Christopher Unger of Brown University's Education Trust found many schools did not give students a vision of their potential. This is particularly a problem for low-income children from the inner city or in rural areas who often don't have an idea of their own possibilities.

"High schools don't give students the sense that they can make their life what they want—if they pursue their dreams and interests—rather than have life happen to them," Unger told Education Update, a publication of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Even when students do have higher aspirations, their perspective often is not shared by teachers. A recent statewide survey of academic expectations in Rhode Island found black and Hispanic students had higher hopes for their future than they thought their teachers had. While 74 percent of black students thought they would go to college, only 64 percent said their teachers held the same view. With Hispanic students, the figures were 77 percent and 68 percent respectively.

"It's almost as though the kids are telling us that we need more faith in them," Julie Wollman-Bonilla told Providence Journal reporter Linda Borg. Wollman-Bonilla is interim dean of the School of Education and Human Development at Rhode Island College.

In July, West Virginia's Education Alliance made a significant contribution to the study of the achievement gap with the publication of a report titled, "Student Voice: West Virginia Students Speak Out About the Achievement Gap." The report details the results of a series of focus group interviews in which white and black low-income high school students from urban and rural school environments were asked what they thought schools should do to close the achievement gap.

The student responses make it clear they believe the achievement gap is largely the result of actions of teachers and other school personnel.

The researchers found that while teachers, counselors, and administrators provide support and encouragement to some white students, helping them feel their futures are bright, they do not do the same for other students, particularly rural low-achieving whites. As a result, these students have no meaningful vision for the future and little is expected of them academically. Black students face similar neglect plus a variety of other challenges, including racism, verbal abuse, and exclusion from academic enrichment opportunities.

"Even in 2004, racist sentiments and actions appear acceptable among some white students and school personnel, particularly in rural schools," notes the introduction to the report.

The West Virginia students said improved achievement would come from having:

- teachers who care about them;
- teachers with clear instructional goals;
- teachers who use a variety of instructional strategies;
- teachers who use hands-on learning activities;
- math teachers with better teaching skills; and,
- tutors as well as classroom instruction.

In addition, the students want teachers to stop:

- showing favoritism among students;
- insulting and verbally degrading students;
- using profanity;
- judging and discriminating against students based on their race; and,
- leaving the classroom for extended periods of time.

"I feel that teachers try to set you up to fail," said one black student. "They talk bad or they don't encourage you or they just don't care ... it seems like they want us to fail."

— G.C.
Only 70% of all students in public high school graduate. Of those, less than 50% are qualified to attend four-year college.

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