

School Reform News

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Public High School Grads Unprepared for College, Work

by Neal P. McCluskey

Whether they went right to work or into college, large percentages of recent public high school graduates do not believe they were adequately prepared for the challenges they faced after graduation, according to a new report from Achieve, Inc., a nonprofit, nonpartisan group created by the nation's governors and corporate leaders to help states prepare young people for post-secondary education, work, and citizenship.

Employers and professors agree with
UNPREPARED p. 6

Thousands Rally for Vouchers in Florida, Wisconsin

by George A. Clowes

Crowds of concerned parents, students, and educators rallied in Tallahassee, Florida and Madison, Wisconsin in January and February to show support for defending and expanding school voucher programs that school choice opponents are trying to kill or limit.

On January 24, parents and students who participate in publicly fund-
RALLY p. 9

Students' Readiness for College Low but Rising, Study Says

by Krista Kafer

Only 71 percent of U.S. students enrolled in public high schools graduate, and only 34 percent graduate ready for a four-year college, according to a new study by the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research.

Tracking graduation and college readiness rates over time using the most recent data available, authors Jay P.
COLLEGE p. 18

Urban Catholic Schools Excel Academically, Struggle Financially



by Brian L. Carpenter

Like urban public schools across America, urban Catholic schools—especially in the Midwest and Northeast—are buckling under financial pressure. With expenses up and enrollments down, Catholic leaders often have no choice but to merge schools or shutter them altogether.

A report published in April 2004 by Sister Dale McDonald for the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA) indicates that during the 2003-04 school year, 123 Catholic schools nationwide were “consolidated or closed.”

In February, the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago announced plans to close 23 elementary schools. Dozens more are slated to close in other cities.

But in contrast to their public school counterparts, research shows Catholic schools—even those predominantly serving poor, minority students—are often academically successful.

Solid Scores, Weaker Financials

In the largest study of New York City Catholic schools ever conducted, researchers Herbert J. Walberg and Paul E. Peterson found Catholic “schools not only achieved more, but also more successfully solved the ‘poverty gap.’” In a 2005 editorial in *New York Sun*, Walberg noted this means Catholic schools help close the “pervasive” achievement gap between middle-income and poor children.

More than 2,000 students, parents, and teachers rallied at the Wisconsin State Capitol in Madison on February 8 to urge lawmakers to lift the cap on enrollment in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program.

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CAPITOL HILL BEAT

Bush Budget for FY06 Includes Choice



The FY06 budget proposed by President George W. Bush could end 40 education programs that duplicate other efforts or have not proven effective. Adult education programs, like this Adult Learning Center in Louisiana, are among those that could be cut.

by Robert Holland

President George W. Bush's proposed Fiscal 2006 budget for the U.S. Department of Education (DoE) is leaner than in recent years, though not by much. Bush's request for \$56 billion in discretionary appropriations for the DoE represents a decrease of \$529 million, or just under 1 percent, from the 2005 budget.

That slight retrenchment comes on the heels of a 33 percent increase (almost \$14 billion) in federal education spending since Bush took office.

Proposed Cuts Assailed

The DoE's discretionary funds constitute 8 percent of the \$514 billion the United States spends at all levels of government on K-12 education. Overall, the U.S. spends more per pupil than any nation except Switzerland. Nevertheless, overall student achievement has not improved greatly over the past decade. Bush raised some hackles by proposing to terminate 40 education programs that duplicate other efforts or have not proven their effectiveness. If he is successful in eliminating all those (and presidents rarely achieve 100 percent success when they target the pork barrel), there would be a savings of \$4.3 billion.

But Bush's intent is not to save those funds but to shift them to larger initiatives, particularly his signature No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), that seem likelier to achieve results for larger numbers of students.

Among the targets for termination are some programs that critics of heavy-handed government involvement in education have questioned for many years, such as Regional Educational Laboratories and Women's Educational Equity. Among oth-

ers on the list are Alcohol Abuse Reduction, Exchanges with Historic Whaling and Trading Partners, Mental Health Integration in Schools, Smaller Learning Communities, and an assortment of vocational education grants.

School Choice Funds Boosted

On the other side of the ledger, school choice fared well among spending initiatives favored by the president. No Child Left Behind requires public school choice when families find their children stuck in chronically low-performing schools. However, most local school districts provide limited opportunities for parents to exercise that choice. The Bush budget proposes these additional reform outlays in response:

- \$50 million for a Choice Incentive Fund to build on the groundbreaking federal voucher program for the District of Columbia that won narrow approval from the 108th Congress. This fund would provide competitive grants to states, school districts, and nonprofit organizations that give parents opportunities to transfer their children to higher-performing public, private, or charter schools.

- \$27 million to encourage states and school districts to provide public school choice across district boundaries. One of the limitations of NCLB is that it calls for choice only within districts.

- \$219 million for grants to 1,200 new and existing public charter schools.

- \$37 million to assist charter schools with obtaining credit to buy, lease, or renovate school facilities. Coming up with adequate facilities has been one of the greatest challenges for organizers of charter schools, which are autonomous

public schools that receive waivers from school district regulations in exchange for a promise to produce results.

High School Testing Sought

With respect to new initiatives, the main thrust of the president's budget is to extend NCLB grade-by-grade accountability into high school. NCLB currently requires states to test students annually in grades 3-8 in reading and math, but they have to test high school students only once. The president would require them to test students in both those subjects in grades 9, 10, and 11.

Bush is seeking \$250 million to help states develop the high school tests. He proposes spending \$1.2 billion to assist states and localities in intervening to help high school students. Another \$200 million would go to a Striving Readers Program to help middle and high school students who are still struggling to read.

Approval of Bush's NCLB blueprint for high school reform is far from a slam dunk. Some congressional conservatives oppose further expansion of federal involvement in education, while many Democrats and school officials contend Washington is not fully funding No Child Left Behind and thus is sticking local school systems with the bulk of the bill.

Unspent Funds Increasing

A report released by the staff of the House Education Committee indicated localities aren't always using the federal money available to them for education. Last year, states returned to Washington more than \$66 million instead of spending it on students and schools. They still have access to more than \$6 billion of unused education funds dating back to the Clinton administration, the report said.

With the release of Bush's budget, "It's only appropriate that we look back at how the money Congress has already appropriated has been used or not used over the past five years," said House Education Committee Chairman John Boehner (R-OH).

The total of federal education dollars unused by states is increasing rather than decreasing, despite frequent complaints about Washington's stinginess. As of January 2004, states had access to \$5.75 billion of unused federal funds. By January 2005, that total had climbed to \$6.05 billion.

Robert Holland (holland@lexingtoninstitute.org) is a senior fellow at the Lexington Institute, a think tank in Arlington, Virginia.

Catholic

Continued from page 1



Also, students in Catholic schools perform better on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), according to report. She cites 2003 NAEP data showing that on the fourth-grade math test, 43 percent of Catholic school students scored at or above the level NAEP calls “proficient,” while only 32 percent of their public school peers did so. By eighth grade, 39 percent of Catholic school students scored at or above proficient, while only 27 percent of public school stu-

grade levels was 2,576,845. A decade later, that number is down about 3.5 percent, to 2,484,252 students.

Still, approximately 47 percent of all students enrolled in private schools attend Catholic schools.

Demographic Pressures

One reason for declining enrollment is the “changing demographics in parishes, particularly inner-city parishes,” according to Dr. Karen Ristau, who will become president of the 200,000-member NCEA in July 2005. She says, “Many churchgoing Catholics [in those parishes] did not grow up in the tradition of attending the parish school.”

Enrollment in Catholic schools flourished until 1965, when it crested at around 5.5 million—more than double today’s enrollment. But several notable shifts began occurring at that time, both in the American social landscape and in the Catholic Church, which caused urban enrollment to plummet and schools to close.

Urban areas experienced decline as many families headed for the suburbs after the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1971 *Swann* decision, which mandated desegregation through busing. Poorer families that remained often lacked the resources to pay tuition. Yet Catholics, committed to social justice as part of the faith, continued to operate urban schools. Today, about 45 percent of all Catholic schools are urban or inner-city schools.

Internal Changes

About the same time, an important shift began taking place within Catholic schools themselves: staff composition. The Second Vatican Council, in 1965, called for greater involvement by lay people in Catholic schools. In addition, Ristau says, “Many religious orders that were once devoted solely to teaching, after Vatican [II] saw new

opportunities to serve in social service agencies and in a variety of other pastoral ministries besides education.”

Those changes are still reverberating in the nation’s Catholic schools.

According to McDonald, in 1960 roughly 74 percent of the professional staff members in the nation’s Catholic schools were vocational Catholics belonging to various orders that did not receive competitive salaries. By contrast, present-day Catholic schools are staffed by about 95 percent laity.

To pay the increased costs of laity staffing, Catholic schools have had to increase tuition, which makes attending more difficult for poor students. Anecdotal evidence suggests charter schools may be attracting students whose parents want a quality education but can’t afford the tuition.

Tough Union Demands

Teacher unions are also beginning to make costly demands on Catholic schools in a few places. In New York City, for example, in September 2004 the Federation of Catholic Teachers charged the Diocese of Brooklyn with unfair labor practices, forcing it into mediation.

“Enrollment in Catholic schools flourished until 1965, when it crested at around 5.5 million—more than double today’s enrollment.”

In Michigan, teachers at Brother Rice High School are attempting to organize themselves into a collective bargaining unit of the Michigan Education Association—the state’s NEA-affiliated public school union. The legality of this action is being challenged in court by the National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation.

Added to these problems are shrinking charitable contributions to the church and parish closings. Catholic officials attribute these to a host of problems including financial losses from recent attention to past priest sexual abuse, economic conditions, and a shortage of priests entering the vocation. Ultimately, fewer parishes means less parish financial support for schools.

Devoted Parents

But some parents are finding ways to keep the school doors open.

The *Chicago Sun-Times* reported in January 2005 that parents at St. Margaret Mary in Chicago had banded together to keep their school open. When the parents learned the diocese was considering closing the school in response to declining enrollment, they had the principal removed and raised \$80,000 in pledges in two months.

Why are parents willing to make

such sacrifices to keep their schools open? Researchers suggest they consider the results worth the sacrifice. After “visits to several dozen classrooms and interviews with eight principals,” Walberg and Peterson observed the following characteristics in urban New York Catholic schools:

- “courtesy, fairness, and respect;
- “a clear mission for learning;
- “an academic curriculum taught well to whole classes;
- “a notebook of assignments and notes for each subject;
- “homework for completion and grading each day;
- “a close connection between parents and teachers; and
- “leadership, with the principal accountable to parents who can leave if dissatisfied.”

In a May 2004 article, “*Brown at 50: The Dream Is Still Alive in Urban Catholic Schools*,” in the peer-reviewed journal *Education and Urban Society*, University of Dayton researchers Timothy J. Ilg and Joseph D. Massucci and Fordham University researcher Gerald M. Cattaro cited an abundance of research backing such observations.

They write, “Catholic schools [are] more effective than public schools in the education of urban minorities in almost every area of student achievement: dropout rates were lower, college graduation rates were higher, college entrance rates were higher, and attendance rates were significantly higher.”

They also note research shows Catholic schools are better racially integrated than public schools.

Continuing Challenges

Despite their high academic achievement and successful racial integration, keeping urban schools open is challenging. Part of NCEA’s plan to meet the challenges ahead involves advocating public policies that give parents school choice.

The organization’s Web site says, “NCEA supports the concept of full and fair parental choice in education which is supported by tax relief, vouchers, scholarships, and other aid to parents so they may seek the educational opportunities they want for their children.”

In addition, Ristau thinks the answer may lie with some of the very children in today’s Catholic classrooms.

“One of the key challenges is developing leaders for the future—how we Catholic educators will replace ourselves in the next generation,” Ristau says. “One of the exciting possibilities about NCEA, as an association, is the opportunity to bring people together from schools, colleges, and universities to address this issue.”

Brian L. Carpenter (carpenter@mackinac.org) is director of the leadership development initiative for the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a research and educational institute headquartered in Midland, Michigan.

“Catholic schools [are] more effective than public schools in the education of urban minorities in almost every area of student achievement: dropout rates were lower, college graduation rates were higher, college entrance rates were higher, and attendance rates were significantly higher.”

TIMOTHY J. ILG, JOSEPH D. MASSUCCI,
GERALD M. CATTARO
EDUCATION AND URBAN SOCIETY

dents achieved that level. The differences in 2003 NAEP reading results are similar.

But while Catholic schools succeed where conventional public schools often fail, keeping open the schools that help close the “poverty gap” is a growing challenge.

McDonald’s report shows enrollment in Catholic schools nationwide is declining. In 1993-94, total enrollment at all

Private Schools Are Closing the Achievement Gap

by Andrew J. Coulson

A recent analysis of national test score data suggests private schools do a better job than public schools of closing the achievement gap between black and white students as they progress from fourth to 12th grades.

That was true despite the fact that the disproportionately higher dropout rate among African Americans in public schools tends to remove poor performers from the test-taking population of public school seniors.

Closing the achievement gap between black and white students has been one of our nation's overarching goals for half a century. However, there remains a gulf of more than 200 points between the SAT scores of white students and black students, and black children trail their white peers by significant margins on every subject tested by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Private Schools Do Better

One aspect of the very familiar achievement gap, however, is almost univer-

sally unknown: how it differs between public and private schools. This disparity can be documented by using a



"Averaged across subjects, the public school racial achievement gap is virtually unchanged between fourth and 12th grades. By contrast, the gap in private schools is an average of 27.5 percentage points smaller in the 12th grade than the fourth."

U.S. Department of Education database to compute the average NAEP test score differences between black students and white students in both public and private schools. The results appear in the accompanying table.

As the table shows, there is a sizeable achievement gap between black and white fourth-graders in both public and private schools. It is also clear the private-sector achievement gap is narrower in the 12th grade than the fourth grade for all of the core NAEP subjects. Public schools, by contrast, see a larger gap in both writing and mathematics at the 12th-grade level than at the fourth.

Averaged across subjects, the public school racial achievement gap is virtually unchanged between fourth and 12th grades. By contrast, the gap in private schools is an average of 27.5 percentage points smaller in the 12th grade than the fourth.

Statistics Understate Difference

The achievement gap closes faster in private schools not because white private school students lose ground with respect to white public school students as they move to higher grades, but because black private school students learn at a substantially higher rate than black public school students.

Still, the comparison in the table is arguably unfair to the private schools.

Economist Derek Neal has found that black students attending urban private schools are far more likely to complete high school, gain admission to college, and complete college than similar students in urban public schools.

Similarly, in a study comparing graduation rates of all Milwaukee public school students (of all income levels) with those of the low-income participants in the city's private school voucher program, Manhattan Institute Senior Fellow Jay Greene found the voucher students were more than one-and-a-half-times as likely to graduate as public school students.

More remarkable still, Greene found this to be true even when he compared the voucher students with those attending Milwaukee's elite group of academically selective public schools.

This higher graduation rate in private schools is not only a boon in itself; it also casts the private sector achievement gap reductions in an even more favorable light. Dropouts tend to be

poor performers academically, so when they leave the test-taking population, the average test scores of the remaining students usually rises.

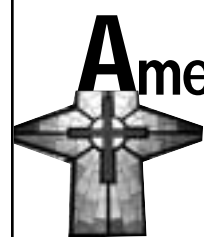
This dynamic should generally improve the test scores of public high school seniors, which means public schools have an even worse impact on the test score gap than the statistics show.

White/Black NAEP Achievement Differences for Public and Private Schools

NAEP Test Subject	Year	4th Grade Gap		12th Grade Gap		Percent Difference* Between 4th and 12th Grade Gaps	
		(Public)	(Public)	(Public)	(Private)	(Public)	(Private)
Reading	2002	29	25	-13.8	27	14	-48.1
Writing	2002	20	23	15.0	22	18	-18.2
Math	2000	30	33	10.0	28	23	-17.9
Science	2001	35	31	-11.4	27	20	-25.9

Source: NAEP Data Tool, <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/naepdata/>

*Negative number indicates a 12th grade black/white score gap that is smaller than its corresponding fourth-grade gap.



American Catholic Schools in Historical Context

Although they had already existed in America for more than two centuries, Catholic schools came into promi-

nence in the late nineteenth century as Catholic immigrants found it difficult to integrate into America's public schools.

In his book *Market Education, The Unknown History*, education researcher Andrew Coulson describes how the conflict between Catholics and Protestants over the appropriate worldview to teach in public schools sometimes escalated into violence.

In the "Philadelphia Bible Riots" of 1844, Coulson notes, a dispute occurred over reading the Catholic Bible in public schools. He writes, "thirteen people lost their lives and St. Augustine's Church was burned to the ground."

In 1875, Congressman James G. Blaine proposed a Constitutional amendment intended to prevent taxpayer support for Catholic schools. Although it failed narrowly

along party lines in the U.S. Senate, many states that entered the union after 1875 incorporated similar language in their state constitutions.

After decades of such cultural tensions, the Third Baltimore Council of 1884, a meeting of American Catholic Bishops and other Catholic leaders, issued a decree that every parish would have a school of its own.

By the turn of the twentieth century, Catholic school enrollment was growing steadily, but opposition continued. For instance, Oregon passed a law requiring all children to attend public schools. A 1925 Supreme Court decision, *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, struck down Oregon's law, creating a legal precedent for parental choice in education that stands to the present day.

Although Blaine language (or wording similar to it) remains in 37 state constitutions today, the Supreme Court struck a blow to the root of Blaine in 2002, in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*. That decision, which some

have likened in magnitude to the Court's 1954 *Brown v. the Board of Education*, ruled it was not unconstitutional for children to attend religious schools (mostly Catholic schools in the *Zelman* case) with publicly funded vouchers.

— Brian L. Carpenter

INTERNET INFO

For more information on state constitutional Blaine Amendments, see <http://www.blaineamendments.org>.

For more information on the history of Catholic schools or the National Catholic Educational Association, visit <http://www.ncea.org>.

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INTERNET INFO

See Derek Neal, "The Effects of Catholic Secondary Schooling on Educational Achievement," *Journal of Labor Economics*, vol. 15, no. 1 (1997), available online at <http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artId=3684>.

See Jay P. Greene, "Graduation Rates for Choice and Public School Students in Milwaukee," *School Choice Wisconsin*, September 28, 2004, available online at <http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artId=16622>.

Unprepared

Continued from page 1

that assessment, according to the study, published as *Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work?* in February 2005. Overall, the study said, “substantial proportions of high school graduates identify gaps in preparation for the skills and abilities expected of them today, and employers and college instructors offer more critical assessments.”

In addition to identifying graduates’ self-reported flaws, the report highlighted solutions offered by recent graduates, college instructors, and employers: “more rigorous courses and higher expectations in high school.”

Graduates Admit They’re Unprepared

The report was based on surveys of 1,487 public high school graduates from the classes of 2002, 2003, and 2004; 400 employers “who make personnel decisions,” such as owners, company presidents, and others; and 300 instructors who teach first-year students at two- and four-year colleges. The surveys were conducted between December 4, 2004 and January 5, 2005. Depending on the group surveyed, response errors ran from plus

or minus 3.8 percentage points to plus or minus 6.13 percentage points.

According to the survey, 39 percent—nearly two in five—of recent graduates who went to college after graduation said there were gaps in their high school preparation for the expectations of college. Moreover, even among those who reported feeling extremely well prepared for college, 31 percent took at least one remedial college course.

Among recent graduates who went to work right after high school, 39 percent reported gaps in their preparation for the workplace. The employers who were surveyed apparently agreed, estimating 39 percent of recent high school graduates were “unprepared for the expectations that they face in entry-level jobs.”

Professors Unimpressed

The harshest assessment of recent graduates’ preparation came from college instructors. Only 18 percent of professors polled felt students came to college “extremely” or “very well prepared,” while a quarter reported students are “not too well prepared” or “not well prepared at all.”

Instructors estimated half of all students who arrive at their schools are inadequately prepared for college-level math and college-level writing. In addition, large percentages of instructors felt the public high schools are failing to ade-

quately develop students’ abilities to do such things as “read and comprehend complex materials” (70 percent), “think analytically” (66 percent), and “do research” (59 percent).

Large majorities of graduates acknowledged they would have worked harder in high school had they known then what they know now. Sixty-two percent of college students said they “would have taken at least one harder course,” as would 72 percent of recent graduates who did not go to college.

Only 24 percent of all surveyed high school graduates felt “they faced high academic expectations” in high school and “were significantly challenged.”

All Want Higher Standards

Large percentages of students, employers, and college instructors alike agreed students need more challenging course work in high school, translating into widespread support for raising standards. Eighty-two percent of college students, and 80 percent of working graduates, reported they would have worked harder in high school had their schools demanded more of them.

Similarly, large majorities of employers (83 percent) and college instructors (81 percent) agreed that making curricula more difficult would help alleviate the problem of inadequately pre-

pared graduates.

Perhaps the most surprising finding of the survey was that all three groups—students, college instructors, and employers—not only favored tightening high school standards, but they also supported requiring that students pass exit exams to graduate. Eighty-one percent of graduates endorsed the idea, as did 79 percent of instructors and 89 percent of employers.

In addition to higher standards and exit exams, other popular remedies included providing more Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes; “providing opportunities for real-world learning”; “making coursework more relevant”; and having teachers or guidance counselors give students course-taking advice early in high school.

“Like their college instructors and employers,” the report concludes, “recent high school graduates say higher expectations in high school and tougher course requirements and tests prior to graduation would leave them better prepared for the real challenges they are now facing.”

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College Un-Prep: Are Schools—or Students—to Blame?

Achieve, Inc.’s new report, *Rising to the Challenge*, clearly shows that college instructors, employers, and recent public high school graduates are dissatisfied with graduates’ preparation for college or employment. But it’s much less clear who is to blame: schools or students?

Nearly 40 percent of high school graduates surveyed said there were gaps in their high school preparation for college or employment. Employers and college instructors agreed, with the former estimating 39 percent of recent graduates were unprepared for entry-level jobs, and 25 percent of the latter saying incoming students were inadequately prepared for college.

While flaws in recent graduates’ preparation for life after high school were easily identified, the causes were not. Large percentages of graduates reported they did not work as hard as they could have in high school, noting that if they knew in high school what they discovered afterwards, they would have put in more effort.

Low Standards at Fault

The students tended to blame the schools, rather than themselves, for their limited effort. About 80 percent

said that if their schools had demanded it they would have worked harder.

Public Agenda’s recently released survey, *Life After High School: Young People Talk about Their Hopes and Prospects*, corroborates Achieve’s findings. In Public Agenda’s report, 62 percent of graduates who went to college, and 78 percent who went straight to work, said they could have worked harder in high school.

But those students, too, tended to blame the schools for their problems, with 48 percent who went to work, and 38 percent who went to college, saying their teachers and classes “should have done a lot more” to prepare them for life after graduation.

So are low standards to blame for graduates’ shortfalls, or students themselves? In both *Rising to the Challenge* and Achieve’s December 2004 report, *The Expectations Gap—A 50-State Review of High School Graduation Requirements*, low standards are fingered.

Just as large percentages of respondents in *Rising to the Challenge* thought increasing standards would improve high school students’ preparation, *The Expectations Gap* concluded every state should bolster

curriculum requirements.

Students Don’t Value Academics

Other studies, however, suggest the problem might be that American students simply do not value academics.

In 2001, The Brookings Institution’s Brown Center on Education Policy surveyed foreign students who studied in American high schools, and in 2002 it surveyed American students who went abroad. Both surveys found American students care much less about academic studies than do students in other societies, and that U.S. students emphasize athletics and employment much more than do their counterparts.

— Neal P. McCluskey



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High School Students Apathetic, Unknowledgeable About First Amendment

by Kate McGreevy

Most high school students in the United States do not understand or are apathetic toward the First Amendment, according to a survey released in January by the University of Connecticut. The survey suggests media studies classes and student journalism give students a greater appreciation and understanding of First Amendment rights than they would have without that background.

For the project, "The Future of the First Amendment," commissioned by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, more than 100,000 students, almost 8,000 teachers, and more than 500 administrators and principals at public and private high schools were surveyed.

"These results are not only disturbing; they are dangerous," said Knight Foundation President and CEO Hodding Carter III in the Knight news release. "Ignorance about the basics of this free society is a danger to our nation's future."

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution protects the freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and the right to petition the government for redress of grievances.

Civics Education Missing

Findings of the survey indicate that a majority of students are apathetic and uninformed about First Amendment protections. For example:

- Nearly 75 percent of students surveyed either do not know how they feel about the First Amendment or admit they take it for granted;
- 75 percent falsely believe it is illegal to burn the U.S. flag as a form of public statement; and,
- 50 percent think the government can censor the Internet.

"Schools are not teaching the principles of the First Amendment broadly enough," Richard Lee Colvin, director of the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media at Columbia University, said in the report. "That's in part because civics education has all but disappeared."

The survey does not offer any direct com-

mentary on traditional civics courses. It does suggest, however, that increased exposure to the First Amendment through news media in the classroom and through student journalism increases student appreciation of the First Amendment.

For example, among students who have completed courses in media or the First Amendment, 87 percent believe people should be permitted to voice dissenting opinions; the number drops to 68 percent among those who have not taken such courses.

A primary researcher for the study, Dr. Kenneth Dautrich of the University of Connecticut, acknowledged, "there are a variety of sources from which students might get knowledge of or form opinions about the First Amendment. The survey asked about their parents' behavior, the extracurricular activities—like student newspapers—that they are involved in, etc. For each student we also have attitudes of the principal and the school environment—for example, is there a school paper, tv station, radio, etc."

Media, Journalism Programs Waning

The report also reveals that media programs and journalism opportunities are waning in many high schools, and less than 20 percent of administrators surveyed consider journalism a high priority.

"The last 15 years have not been a golden era for student media," said Warren Watson, director of the J-Ideas project at Ball State University. "Programs are under siege or dying from neglect. Many students do not get the opportunity to practice our basic freedoms."

According to the survey, of the high schools that do not currently offer student newspapers, 40 percent had eliminated those papers in the past five years. Schools in lower-income areas had a more sizeable decrease in student newspapers, 21 percentage points greater than in upper-income schools.

Administrators Blame Costs

Administrators cite financial constraints as the main obstacle to the expansion of student media options.

With public attention often fixed on No Child Left Behind, high-stakes testing, and

myriad other educational measures, the authors of the report believe the survey is a call to action.

"Civic education is crucial to developing well-informed and responsible citizens," said Dautrich, who conducted the research with University of Connecticut colleague Dr. David Yalof, of the school's public policy department.

"By surveying students across the country as to their awareness and appreciation of First Amendment rights, Knight Foundation has provided a timely window into this important and often overlooked aspect of the educational process."

Government, History Courses Needed

Victoria Hughes, president and founder of the Bill of Rights Institute, agreed.

"Knight Foundation has provided a great service with this comprehensive survey that spotlights the lack of civic knowledge among our high school students," she said.

Hughes is optimistic because she believes there is general agreement among teachers and administrators in many states with regard to civics standards and the value of teaching the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. However, she notes two possible barriers to achievement.

"First, teachers do not always possess the knowledge necessary to teach, in a meaningful way, the First Amendment. Some are not comfortable going into great depth," Hughes laments. "Secondly, textbooks do not approach the Constitution with any sustained in-depth treatment. These issues are difficult, and teachers and students need appropriate resources."

Hughes also warns that although media studies and student journalism are educationally beneficial for some students, journalism is not the answer for all.

"Students should be learning about the First Amendment and civics through the core curriculum—that is, in required American government or American history courses," she said. "We have to get down to business and educate our students to be active, informed citizens."

Kate McGreevy (mcgreevy@gmail.com) is a freelance education writer from Indiana. She formerly worked with the Cesar Chavez Public Charter High School for Public Policy in Washington, DC.

Students Benefit from Project CREO

by George A. Clowes

A total of 531 students transferred to better-performing public schools and more than 200 were able to receive tutoring services during 2003-04 as a result of help provided by Project CREO, according to a February 2005 update from Hispanic CREO, the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options.

Initiated in the fall of 2003 with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Project CREO is a five-city outreach effort to educate parents about the school choice and supplemental services provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

A total of 22,775 parents were trained by Project CREO, with the largest number—7,744—being in Miami, Florida. The four other cities where parents were trained were Austin, Texas (5,226), Camden, New Jersey (2,620), Dallas, Texas (4,027), and San Antonio, Texas (3,154).

Of the 531 students who transferred to better schools through Project CREO, 219 were in Austin, 150 in Camden, 118 in Dallas, and 44 in Miami.

GAO Reports Few Transfers

Nationwide, of the nearly 3.3 million students eligible to transfer to better public schools under NCLB in the 2003-04 school year, less than 1 percent—just 31,500 students—actually transferred, according to a December 2004 report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO).

While the GAO report identified "tight timelines and insufficient classroom capacity" as the major reasons for the low transfer rate, it also suggested school districts might need help in providing information on choice options to parents so they could make informed decisions. That is the focus of Project CREO.

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Daniel Price www.aclsonoma.org

INTERNET INFO

The full "Future of the First Amendment" report is available online at <http://firstamendment.jideas.org/findings/findings.php>.

More information is also available on the Web sites of the Knight Foundation, <http://www.knightfdn.org> and Bill of Rights Institute, www.billofrightsinstitute.org.

INTERNET INFO

Further information on Hispanic CREO is available online at <http://www.hcreo.org>.

The December 2004 report from the Government Accountability Office, "No Child Left Behind Act: Education Needs to Provide Additional Technical Assistance and Conduct Implementation Studies for School Choice Provision," is available online at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d057.pdf>.

Latest California Test Scores Bring Good News for English Learners

by Don Soifer

When California voters passed Proposition 227 in 1998, opponents of the measure predicted it would be a disaster for students whose primary language is not English. But according to the latest test scores, the new focus on English fluency is producing remarkable improvements for English learners.

The law required California schools to abandon “transitional bilingual education programs” that taught immigrant students predominantly—and often exclusively—in their non-English native languages. Instead, Proposition 227 called for schools to implement English immersion programs designed to close the language gap in one year.

Implementation Uneven

Proposition 227’s implementation has been uneven by all accounts. But the law’s emphasis on early English fluency has been felt across California. The state’s latest test scores, announced in February, demonstrated major gains for the third year in a row.

Statewide, 47 percent of English learners scored in the top two categories of English proficiency on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) for 2004. In 2003, 43 percent scored in the top two categories; 34 percent did so in 2002; and only 25 percent

in 2001. The scores thus show an improvement of 22 percentage points in the past four years.

California Superintendent of Public Instruction Jack O’Connell heralded the improvements. “These results are a clear indication that statewide efforts to help all English learners learn English as quickly as possible are working,” said O’Connell in a written statement.

“These results are a clear indication that statewide efforts to help all English learners learn English as quickly as possible are working.”

JACK O’CONNELL
CALIFORNIA SUPERINTENDENT
OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

L.A. Scores Improved Greatly

Driving the increase were substantial gains in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the state’s largest. The percent of seventh- and eighth-grade English

learners in Los Angeles scoring in the top two categories jumped by 43 points since 2001, and every grade level increased by at least 17 points.

By contrast, two northern California school districts—where resistance to Proposition 227 has been vigorous—showed increases below the state average. Alum Rock Elementary and San Jose Unified School District both had 46 percent of English learners score in the top two categories of English fluency. Both school districts tested fewer English learners this year than in recent years, while Los Angeles Unified tested 7 percent more English learners in 2004 than it had three years ago.

O’Connell noted a potentially troubling trend related to English learners. The most recent figures indicate a growing gap between the number of English learners testing fluent in English and the number officially reclassified by their schools as fluent. While 43 percent of English learners demonstrated English fluency on the CELDT in 2004, only 8.3 percent had been reclassified as fluent by their school district.

“I am concerned about this because English learners may not have full access to rigorous academic courses [until they are reclassified as fluent],” said O’Connell in his statement. He is urging school districts to review their procedures for

reclassifying English learners when they become fluent in English.

Hastings Sacked from State Board

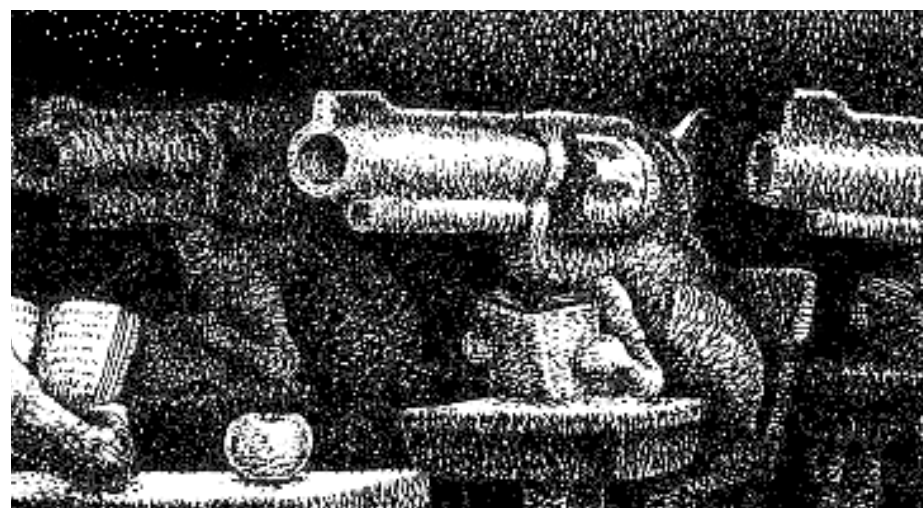
Ironically, shortly before the positive CELDT results were announced, English immersion’s strongest advocate lost his seat on California’s state Board of Education. Reed Hastings, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur who championed Proposition 227, was denied his seat by a vote of the State Senate Rules Committee.

Hastings was originally appointed by Democratic Gov. Gray Davis in 1999, and current Republican Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger sought to reappoint him in 2004. But Hastings, a lifelong Democrat, had his nomination shot down by Democrats opposed to his position on bilingual education.

“What signal do you send to parents and children when a qualified and well-respected community leader like Reed Hastings is sacrificed to advocates of a narrowly focused agenda who wield power in Sacramento?” asked Margita Thompson, the governor’s press secretary, in a January 12 statement.

Don Soifer (soifer@lexingtoninstitute.org) is executive vice president of the Lexington Institute.

School Violence Is Under-Reported



by Kate McGreevy

School violence, although generally decreasing in the United States, is under-reported in many schools, according to a new report from the Reason Foundation. School crime data are largely unavailable and incidences of violence often downplayed.

“As a parent you are far more likely to find crime data about your child’s school in the newspapers than you are on the district’s Web site,” stated Lisa Snell, author of the report, in a January 27 news release.

Snell is director of education at Reason. Her report, *School Violence and No Child Left Behind: Best Practices to Keep Kids Safe*, was released in January 2005.

Statistics Inconsistent, Dubious

Snell’s analysis points to inconsistencies in reporting and defining school violence.

“Forty-four states and the District of Columbia reported not a single unsafe school,” the report states. “Yet there were nearly 1.5 million crimes in America’s schools in 2002.”

A combination of factors, including negligent reporting and withheld data, help explain the discrepancy, noted Snell.

“Unless someone files a Freedom of Information Act request, there is no way the public will know the true number of incidents,” Snell said. “Even when the violence is reported, state definitions for what constitutes a dangerous school do not match the actual violence that occurs in schools.”

Statistics Required by Law

Under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), states are required to develop objective criteria, such as data on firearms and fights, to be used along with trend

analysis in identifying “persistently dangerous schools.”

Only 52 of the nation’s 92,000 public schools were labeled “persistently dangerous” under NCLB in the 2003-04 school year. While Snell acknowledges most school violence is concentrated in a few schools, she said the “persistently dangerous” figure is misleading.

In the report, she gives the example of Los Angeles’ Locke High School: 14 sex offenses, 53 robberies, and 22 assaults from 2000 to 2002, yet not labeled “persistently dangerous.” Instead of expulsion, Snell noted, dangerous students are given “opportunity transfers,” and the schools’ records remain clean.

“Schools consistently underreport violence figures and then make it extremely difficult for parents to learn what criminal activity is taking place on campus,” Snell stated. “Districts are essentially lying to parents about the reality of school violence.”

In her analysis of 80 large school districts across the country, Snell concludes 75 percent of them have no school crime data available through district or state-level Web sites. Florida is a notable exception; every school in the state must provide parents with crime data. Even there, however, the data are self-reported by schools.

Decentralization, Choice Called For

Snell offers several recommendations for improving school safety and communicating more effectively with parents. School choice, she argues, is a critical component.

“The act of choosing and the related imperative for schools to make themselves ‘choice-worthy’ is the key to any serious anti-violence policy,” Snell writes. “Forced assignment to schools and the resulting

“Only 52 of the nation’s 92,000 public schools were labeled ‘persistently dangerous’ under NCLB in the 2003-04 school year.”

mismatches and detachment beget boredom and violence and create schools that are unresponsive to parental demands for safer schools.”

Snell also proposes several reporting-specific improvements, among them creating uniform standards, making crime statistics part of school report cards, and reporting crime in a timely fashion.

“Our general conclusion was to encourage innovation and experimentation in schools through decentralization and deregulation. Incentives matter, so effectively addressing school violence must include some level of parental choice,” Snell said.

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INTERNET INFO

School Violence and No Child Left Behind: Best Practices to Keep Kids Safe is available online at Reason Foundation’s Web site,
<http://www.rppi.org/ps330.pdf>.

Rally

Continued from page 1

ed school choice programs gathered on the steps of the Florida Supreme Court in Tallahassee to join a group of 18 diverse organizations to file “friend of the court” briefs urging the court to uphold the state’s Opportunity Scholarship program. A lower court ruled against the program last year in response to a court challenge by school choice opponents.

On February 8, more than 2,000 parents, students, and teachers converged on the Wisconsin State Capitol in Madison to urge legislators to lift a decade-old limit on student enrollment in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) that threatens to disrupt the program next year when participation is expected to surge beyond the cap.

“On January 24, parents and students who participate in publicly funded school choice programs gathered on the steps of the Florida Supreme Court in Tallahassee ... urging the court to uphold the state’s Opportunity Scholarship program.”

Choice Called “Civil Right”

At the Tallahassee rally, Bishop Harold Ray of West Palm Beach’s Redemptive Life Fellowship said school choice is fast becoming “the pre-eminent civil right of the 21st century.”

Ray is a senior administrator with the Redemptive Life Academy, a private religious school serving participants in all three of Florida’s K-12 school choice programs.

Across the state, almost 27,000 students now take advantage of the parental choice programs that state legislators have created over the past six years to provide parents with additional educational options:

- more than 700 children use publicly funded Opportunity Scholarships to transfer from public schools that receive failing grades from the state;
- almost 14,000 children with disabilities use publicly funded McKay scholarships to transfer from public schools that parents deem unsatisfactory; and
- about 12,000 children attend private schools with the help of privately funded scholarships, with businesses providing the funds through a tax credit program.

In November, the state’s 1st District Court of Appeals struck down the Opportunity Scholarship program, ruling it violated a provision in Florida’s constitution barring public funds being used to aid any religious institution—even though the scholarship funds provide

aid to parents, not to institutions, an approach the U.S. Supreme Court has found to be largely acceptable under the Constitution. (See “Appeals Court Strikes Down Florida Vouchers,” *School Reform News*, January 2005.)

Decision Could Be Precedent

Although the Florida ruling dealt with only one program, parental choice advocates are concerned the court’s interpretation of the state constitution puts other pre-K, K-12, and postsecondary scholarship programs at risk, too.

“I would not be able to go to the school of my choice or complete my dream without my scholarship,” said college student Leah Cousart, who uses a state-funded Bright Futures Scholarship to attend Southeastern College, a private religious university in Lakeland, Florida.

Cousart’s concerns were shared by parent Micelle Emery, who wants to send her daughter Aislinn and son Erid to Alpha Christian Academy in Winter Park, Florida.

“Parents know their children and need to be able to decide what’s best for them in all areas, especially education,” said Emery. “Why should I lose my right to send my children to a school that promotes the values, the level of education, and the safety that is important to me simply because that school is religious?”

Throng Cheers School Choice

At least 56 busloads of students, parents, educators and other supporters—totaling more than 2,000 people—rallied outside the Wisconsin State Capitol in Madison at noon on February 8 to show support for lifting the MPCP enrollment cap.

“You must let Governor Doyle hear you,” rally leader Howard Fuller told the crowd. Fuller, a former Milwaukee Public Schools superintendent and now chairman of the Black Alliance for Educational Options, said the sight of thousands of students with varying ethnic and religious backgrounds was “exhilarating.”

To enthusiastic applause and chants of “lift the cap,” Fuller introduced the four legislators who sponsored the Senate and Assembly versions of the bill to raise the enrollment cap: Reps. Leah Vukmir (R-Wauwasota) and Jason Fields (D-Milwaukee), and Senators Alberta Darling (R-River Hills) and Jeff Plale (D-South Milwaukee).

Also well-received were Senate Majority Leader Dale Schultz (R-Richland Center) and Speaker John Gard (R-Peshtigo), who both expressed strong commitment to school choice.

Bill Passed State Senate

After the rally concluded with a cheer of “Governor Doyle, lift the cap,” the group moved inside the Capitol building to thank other supportive legislators, fill-

ing up not only the Rotunda but also its three levels of balconies.

“We have never seen such an enormous show of support for parent choice,” said Susan Mitchell, vice chair of the Alliance for Choices in Education. “Milwaukee parents and students know that the enrollment cap means slow death for a program they value highly.”

Later in the afternoon, the Senate approved Assembly Bill 3, which would raise the current MPCP enrollment limit of 15,000 to 16,500, but for only one year. Since the bill was approved by the Assembly in January, it now goes to Gov. Jim Doyle (D), who vetoed two earlier bills to lift the cap.

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INTERNET INFO

Information on the Opportunity Scholarship court case is available from the Web site of the Institute for Justice at <http://www.ij.org>.

Information on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program and other school choice programs is available from the Web site of School Choice Wisconsin at <http://www.schoolchoicewi.org>.



Bishop Harold Ray of the Redemptive Life Academy addresses participants in a January 24 rally in Tallahassee, Florida.



Wisconsin State Rep. Leah Vukmir addresses a “Lift the Cap” rally on February 8 outside the state capitol in Madison.



Wisconsin State Senator Alberta Darling with rally participants inside the state capitol in Madison.

THE FRIEDMAN REPORT

Profile: Marcela Garcini



Marcela Garcini

by Sarah Faulkner

It's difficult to get a complete picture of Marcela Garcini, director of Project CREO (Council for Reform and Educational Options), without looking at her as a mother, a fighter, and a leader in the school choice movement. She has seen both the need for, and the benefits of, school choice firsthand as an educator and a parent.

Garcini was born and reared in Mexico, where she graduated from the University of Mexico Valley and went to work for the government. In 1995, Garcini moved to the United States. When she began working in the Dallas Independent School District, she saw the differences in the educational systems between her native and adopted homelands.

"The educational system is very different in the United States," Garcini says, pointing out that parents in Mexico don't attend many meetings or interact with a school board. "When immigrants come to this country, it's very hard to understand all of the extras," she says.

Teachers' Expectations Low

As an educator, Garcini saw a great number of immigrant students, as well as American-born students who had spent time in Mexico or who spoke Spanish as a first language. She saw "teachers who didn't care and had low expectations" for these students, and "it opened my eyes from a professional point of view," she says.

Despite it having been what she calls "a very disturbing point in my life," Garcini made the most of her teaching years by forming lasting relationships with her students. She says the ninth- and tenth-graders she taught from 1999 to 2001 are still an important part of her life, even now as they graduate, go on to college, and get married. She says many people don't understand "how important it is to be a good teacher, how

much influence you can have on students."

Education reform became even more important to Garcini when her oldest son was ready to start school. She is the mother of two sons, the oldest diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Because of the diagnosis, Garcini was worried about her son attending the public school in their district, which had more than 1,000 students. "I knew he wasn't going to receive the structure we were looking for" at that school, she says.

Help came in the form of a privately funded voucher that allowed her son to attend a private school. She calls the private school "the best place for my son," and she is thankful for the voucher. "If you don't have choices, your children can fail," she says.

Hispanics Poorly Informed

Garcini has been director of Project CREO since 2003. The group is an initiative of Hispanic CREO, and its mission is to inform parents of their rights under No Child Left Behind. "When we talked to Hispanic parents, they had no idea about No Child Left Behind. We can see a barrier of communication," Garcini says, noting some parents don't even understand the concept, while others are being left out by public schools that aren't "doing their job. Public schools should inform them," she says.

She is passionate about helping other parents because "if you want a good education for your child, you need to become involved," she says. "There's not one parent who doesn't want to see their children succeed." To ensure that more children succeed, Garcini is helping parents learn about their choices and options.

Garcini considers herself a "fighter for school reform," and she vows to continue the fight, no matter how long it takes. She is optimistic that school reform is working and more changes are on the way. She says, "every child in America deserves a good education. How can we deny education for children?"

She notes, "little by little, we're making a difference." She is encouraged when she sees "a mom who feels better about where her child is," especially when that mom no longer has to worry about gangs or violence. She is encouraged by her own son's success and believes "without that [private] school, he would have failed."

"[Project] CREO is working very hard, and it will make a difference in a lot of children's lives," she says. "We're ready to fight whatever comes."

Sarah Faulkner (scummings12002@yahoo.com) is an adjunct fellow with the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation.

School Choice Roundup

by Sarah Faulkner

ARIZONA

Arizona Working Toward Voucher System

Arizona Republicans vowed to increase their efforts to implement a voucher system for education, in hopes of giving parents more choices and saving money the state currently spends on public schools.

Committees in both the House and Senate are working on voucher bills, encouraged by Democratic Gov. Janet Napolitano's recent appearance at a legislative committee meeting. Napolitano is interested in continuing the phase-in of all-day kindergarten, which won approval for state funding last year.

The *Arizona Daily Sun* reports that Napolitano told the committee she is willing to negotiate and plans to support anything that will enhance public education. State Sen. John Huppenthal (R-Chandler) told the newspaper he was satisfied by the "commitment to negotiate."

"Now we're faced with the opportunity to break up the Ma Bell of education to give consumers a choice," State Rep. John Allen (R-Scottsdale) told the *Daily Sun*, comparing vouchers in education to the introduction of competition in the telephone industry.

Arizona Daily Sun
February 17, 2005



Sen. John Huppenthal



Rep. John Allen

FLORIDA

Florida Gov. Bush Offers "A-Plus-Plus" Plan

Gov. Jeb Bush

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush (R) is proposing a major expansion of the state's voucher program by offering vouchers to any student who has failed state reading tests for three consecutive years.

That proposal is just part of Bush's package of education law changes for K-12, which has been dubbed "A-Plus-Plus," a sequel to the "A-Plus" plan Bush unveiled during his 1998 gubernatorial campaign. "A-Plus-Plus" will offer the vouchers, different levels of pay for teachers, and a later date for the Florida

Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT), giving students additional time to learn.



Sen. Evelyn Lynn

"The overall goal of the legislation is to attract more teachers to the teaching profession and assist students in having academic success in the middle grades," State Sen. Evelyn Lynn (R-Ormond Beach) told the *Tallahassee Democrat*. Lynn is sponsoring the bill on Bush's behalf.

Students who score at the lowest level for three straight years on the FCAT will be allowed to attend a new public school or receive a voucher for a private school. The *Tallahassee Democrat* estimates the measure has the potential to help tens of thousands of Florida students.

Through its three existing voucher programs, Florida already offers vouchers to more students than any other state. State Rep. Dennis Baxley (R-Ocala) was quoted in the *Tallahassee Democrat* as saying, "We're on the right course and we need to do everything to keep improving Florida's schools."

Baxley added, "Florida schools are getting better, and the vouchers play an important role. ... [I]f a child is doing poorly on the FCAT in public schools, [we think] that the private schools should have an opportunity to give that child a better chance of passing the test."

Lynn called Bush's plan "a natural extension of education reform we have started in K through 5."

Tallahassee Democrat
February 22, 2005



Rep. Dennis Baxley

INDIANA

Indiana House Committee Approves School Choice

The Indiana House Education Committee recently approved a bill that gives parents the right to transfer their children, at state expense, to other public, private, or charter schools if their current public school is failing, as defined by federal law.

More than 200 parents and students gathered at the Statehouse in Indianapolis to support the bill, which they say gives parents more power in bettering their children's education. "We are giving parents and children more options," Rep. Bob Behning (R-Indianapolis), sponsor of the bill, told the *Indianapolis Star*.

Under No Child Left Behind, more



Milton and Rose D. Friedman



Rep. Bob Behning

than 50 Indiana schools are not meeting federal standards. With the new proposal, 25,000 students in 16 counties could leave their failing schools to attend better ones. The *Indianapolis Star* reports the state funds would go with the students to their new school and estimates the amount at about \$9,000 per student.

School choice supporters were encouraged, saying the measure gives all parents—poor or wealthy—the same chance to opt out of poorly performing school districts. The bill will soon be up for consideration by the full House.

Indianapolis Star
February 16, 2005

MINNESOTA

School Choice Proposal Offered in Minnesota



Sen. David Hann

School choice is a hot topic in Minnesota, thanks to a bill recently drafted by two Republican lawmakers. Senator David Hann (R-Eden Prairie) and Rep. Mark Buesgens (R-Jordan) are sponsoring the bill in their respective houses.

If passed, the bill would give eligible low-income families in Minneapolis and St. Paul the chance to send their children to accredited private or religious schools. Eligible students accepted into their chosen school would receive a state grant in the amount of Minnesota's basic per-pupil allocation for education.

With "the changes that the state is facing, the kind of demographic changes, the kind of changes that we're trying to deal with in education, we need to look at all options," Hann said, according to an article published on the Minnesota Public Radio Web site.



Rep. Mark Buesgens

Buesgens is a long-time public school administrator, and he pointed out the proposal is not to be taken as anti-public school. "To deny, especially the poorest of the poor in our urban core, the opportunities of the full range of choices and therefore the opportunity to better their lot, simply because of finances,

that's absolutely wrong," he said.

Minnesota Public Radio
February 4, 2005

NEW JERSEY

New Jersey's Jackson Calls for Change



Rev. Reginald Jackson

The Rev. Reginald Jackson, an influential black leader in New Jersey, recently led a group of school voucher advocates in taking their campaign to the Statehouse. The group's goal is to see a bill introduced that will give poor families the choice of attending private schools with public funds.

The group of clergy and community groups is appealing to families in poor areas and election-year politicians. Jackson told the *Newark Star Ledger* he would take the fight to court if current measures don't effect a change.

Jackson is probably best known in the state for his work in ending racial profiling by New Jersey State Police. He believes his fight for school choice is much the same, telling the *Star Ledger*, "we must pressure the state against this means of racial profiling."

"The Black Ministers Council comes to not just talk about the plight of minority and poor children, but to announce our intent to revive the civil rights movement in this state and to center it around the issue of the education of our children," Jackson said.

Newark Star Ledger
February 11, 2005

NEW YORK

New York Special Education Students Lose Funding

Current federal law deems that parents who put their special education students in private schools after failing to find a suitable program within a government-run city school are to be reimbursed by their city's Education Department.

A New York court recently ruled the city is not required, however, to reimburse special education students who never attended a city school.

In 2004, New York paid for the private

school education of 1,900 special education students. The city's Education Department reports nearly half of those students had never attended a public school. Parents must apply for reimbursement annually, and those students are in danger of being cut off when they apply next year.

There is some criticism that wealthy parents are securing private school reimbursements when they don't need them, rather than first trying to enroll their special education students in a public school. Jill Chaifetz, executive director of Advocates for Children, responded to that criticism in the *New York Daily News*.

"I can't tell you if well-off parents are scamming the system," she said, "but there is a severe lack of appropriate supports and services for many children, and that is why those children end up going to private programs."

New York Daily News
January 7, 2005

OHIO

Ohio Governor Proposes New Voucher System



Gov. Bob Taft

Ohio Gov. Bob Taft's (R) new budget proposal includes funds to expand Cleveland's voucher program, state aid for private schools, and a new set of vouchers that would cost \$9 million.

The new voucher program is for children in failing public schools. Taft defines a failing school as one in which two-thirds of the children fail math and reading proficiency tests for three years in a row.

If implemented, the plan would give up to \$3,500 in public money to each of 2,600 students who qualified. The students would be allowed to attend the private school of their choice starting in the 2006-07 school year.

In a recent news conference, Taft said, "I have lost my patience with children [being] trapped in failing schools."

Susan Bodary, Taft's executive assistant for education and work force policy, told the *Akron Beacon Journal* that Taft committed himself to finding alternatives to failing schools after a series of meetings with large urban districts last year. In addition to the problems in the public schools in those districts, Bodary noted the Catholic schools that have failed in recent years are almost exclusively in

urban, high-poverty areas that have been hit hard "in challenging economic times." Taft is concerned that when those families lose jobs, they can no longer afford tuition for their children.

"We wanted to make sure that those families have the full capacity to make this choice and the economic means to stay in those schools," Bodary told the *Beacon Journal*.

Akron Beacon Journal
February 20, 2005

TEXAS

Texas Seeks Vouchers for Urban Students

Legislation was recently filed in Texas to allow urban students to use public funds to attend private schools. School voucher advocates told the Associated Press the bill is an important step in understanding how to meet the needs of students who aren't being well-served.

The bill would apply to counties with more than 800,000 residents. Students would be eligible for vouchers if they live in the county's largest district that has a majority of failing students, or if at least 90 percent of the students in the district were failing in the previous school year. In addition, students would have to meet certain conditions—being at risk of dropping out of school, being a victim of violence, or having difficulty with English, for example—to be eligible for assistance.

If the bill is passed, eligible students will have the choice of attending another public school or a private school.

Michael Sullivan, vice president of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, told the Associated Press, "experience would dictate that this is a good thing," noting other states have had success with voucher programs.



Rep. Jodie Laubenberg

Rep. Jodie Laubenberg (R-Parker) agreed, saying if the objective is to provide a good education, "then who can argue whether it's going to a public school or the little Catholic school down the street?"

Lubbock Avalanche-Journal
February 19, 2005

Sarah Faulkner (scummings12002@yahoo.com) is an adjunct fellow with the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation.

New Computer Technology Increases School Security

High-tech mapping system aids first responders

by Paul H. Seibert

High-tech security will soon help protect an already secure environment at The Governor French Academy, a small, private college-preparatory school in Belleville, Illinois.

Founded in 1983, the K-12 school has always offered a secure environment for students, but school officials are now taking that security into the twenty-first century with geographic mapping technology. Officials expect the system to be fully operational this summer.

Joining forces with the Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Laboratory of St. Louis University, the academy is the first school in the St. Louis Metro East area to add the Crisis Intervention Response Application (CIRA) program to its arsenal of school security plans. Through CIRA, first responders to an emergency situation will be able to "enter" the building virtually, in order to better plan their response, before arriving at the site.

School Mapped Digitally

Under a grant from the Stupp Foundation, St. Louis University estab-

lished the GIS program in 2003. Students and staff in the program contract with schools and other private and public agencies to provide digital mapping of the client's buildings and surrounding areas. Through digital photography, every area of the client building is detailed in 360-degree photo images. Those images are melded into a set of architectural plans and aerial photographs.

"[F]ire and police departments ... can access maps, blueprints, and interior photos on the disk to 'see' the building inside and out prior to arrival or entry."

All of the information is stored on a CD-ROM provided to area fire and police departments, the first responders in an emergency. The agencies can access maps, blueprints, and interior photos on the disk to "see" the building inside and out prior to arrival or entry.

CIRA "was created so first responders can easily walk through the building in case there is an emergency," according to Jim Gilsinan, dean of the university's College of Public Service. CIRA gives

first responders the opportunity to plan more effectively in an emergency and clearly designate entry scenarios and action plans within a specified building, allowing speedier and safer response in any type of emergency.

Other Schools' Adoption Expected

Seeking to disperse the technology to schools in the St. Louis area, the GIS Lab works with school staff and students to maintain and update the program after the initial program is written. Other schools are expected to follow the lead of The Governor French Academy in engaging the new technology.

The mission of the program is "to teach, to research, and to serve," explained Gary Higgs, director of the GIS Lab. "We are looking for partners with which to develop and share this technology. And it doesn't matter where those partners are in relation to St. Louis, Missouri," he added.

Local police and even the U.S. attorney for the area are interested in getting more schools to participate in the program.

"It's tactically wonderful to be able to look at something and have a layout of a building you're going into and a plan of attack," said Sgt. Don Sax of the Belleville Police Department. Sax said he hopes other schools and agencies will take advantage of digital mapping technology.

Students Participate in Mapping

CIRA offers a learning experience for students, too. Governor French Academy students already have begun measuring and mapping the academy's campus to generate required blueprints, while students and staff from St. Louis University are photographing the academy's interior using a digital camera with a fisheye lens. Generating the final CIRA disk is expected to take several months.

Implementation of this kind of mapping technology normally costs tens of thousands of dollars, but because of the university's collaborative GIS program, the digitized mapping of The Governor French Academy will cost dramatically less.

Paul Seibert (seib@governorfrench.com) is director of Charter Consultants, a division of The Governor French Academy, Inc., of Belleville, Illinois, and editor of the Illinois Charter School Facts.

INTERNET INFO

Additional information is available from The Governor French Academy at 618/233-7542 and from St. Louis University's Norman J. Stupp Geographic Information Systems Laboratory at 314/977-3384, or online at <http://gis.slu.edu/projects/main.html>.

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Stossel: Politicians' Kids Go to Private Schools

by George A. Clowes

"Politicians who promote public schools don't always send their kids to them," said ABC News journalist John Stossel in a segment of the 20/20 program broadcast on January 28, called "Public Schools for Poor Kids, Not Politicians' Kids."

You might think the people who fight for public schools would always send their children to those public schools, but that's not the case, explained Stossel. As an example, he cited Sen. Hillary Clinton (D-NY), who has called public education the "cornerstone of our democracy." Her husband, former President Bill Clinton, also declared he was "unalterably opposed to a voucher system to



"[M]any politicians oppose the idea of letting education dollars follow the child to whatever school their parents choose."

give people public money to take to private schools."

Yet when the Clintons were in the White House, they sent their daughter Chelsea to an exclusive private school.

Stossel pointed out that many poor families would like to exercise the same option as the Clintons, but don't have the money. He cited the example of Ivan Foster, who wants to get his two children out of the dangerous public schools in Camden, New Jersey, where spending is almost \$15,000 per pupil. If Foster could use those education tax dollars as a voucher, he could afford to send his children to a private school.

But many politicians oppose the idea of letting education dollars follow the child to whatever school their parents choose. These anti-voucher politicians, noted Stossel, include U.S. Senators Lincoln Chaffee (R-RI) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-IL), all of whom have chosen private schools for their own children.

When Stossel described parents without money as being "stuck in the prison of the government monopoly," Jackson responded by saying, "I wouldn't call it necessarily a prison."

Jackson also said, "No one is keeping [poor parents] locked in now. They can make decisions for themselves."

George A. Clowes (clowesga@aol.com) is associate editor of School Reform News.

INTERNET INFO

A transcript of the January 28, 2005 John Stossel 20/20 segment is available online at <http://abcnews.go.com/2020/story?id=448934>.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

An Effective "Second Chance" School

by Charles V. Byrne

White Hat Management, an education management organization founded by David Brennan and headquartered in Akron, Ohio, serves nearly 15,000 students in various schools it operates across the country.

Among the most remarkable of the White Hat schools are the 23 Life Skills Centers: 18 in Ohio, two in both Colorado and Michigan, and one in Arizona. The Life Skills Centers offer an alternative education environment giving a "second chance" to high school-age students who dropped out of conventional schools but have since discovered the importance of a high school diploma.

Students enrolled in Life Skills Centers have a full and lively schedule. They attend class four hours a day, five days a week. Instruction is highly disciplined, without all the frills, and heavy on computer use with a teacher facilitator. Students have time for employment or family responsibilities. They also participate in some community affairs—e.g., a health fair or Black History Month events. When they graduate, they receive a state-recognized high school diploma, not a GED.

Each Life Skills Center has an aggressive placement department that assists students in seeking and securing employment. Students are given skills in resume writing and taught how to present themselves in an interview. At the same time, students are cautioned that "there's no free lunch!"—that they are not "owed" employment by anybody and have to work hard to earn and keep their jobs. It's an effective "tough love" program.

I had the pleasure of visiting the Lake Erie Life Skills Center on Cleveland's west side. The student body is split evenly among white, Hispanic, and black students. Half of the staff is bilingual in Spanish. The center draws from several west suburbs, because no one else offers such a program.

The Lake Erie center's administrator is Joe Czerwien, a former teacher and director of educational

services for the Youngstown court system. In the court system position, he interacted with that area's Life Skills

The center holds graduation ceremonies in June and December. Czerwien sees to it that it is a memorable event for



"[White Hat Management's] Life Skills Centers offer an alternative education environment giving a 'second chance' to high school-age students who dropped out of conventional schools but have since discovered the importance of a high school diploma."

Centers and found them effective in dealing with truants. When a change of political administrations took place, Czerwien was out of a job and sought out Life Skills.

Joe's administrative assistant, Jose Leon, offers a good deal of enthusiasm as a past military man and teacher who came from Puerto Rico to teach. An inspirational force for the students, Leon hopes to return to Puerto Rico one day and establish a Life Skills program there.

The Lake Erie Life Skills Center enrolls 678 students in three tracks, with new students arriving daily. Master teacher Brenda Socha is responsible for curriculum development and the 32 teaching staff members.

students and guests alike.

In December 2004, I was invited to attend the graduation ceremony for 43 students. It was a moving experience, a classic pomp-and-circumstance ceremony. A staff member with a beautiful soprano voice sang. Distinguished speakers delivered inspiring messages for the students. Three students spoke at the ceremony as well, paying tribute to the encouragement they had received from the center's staff. City Councilman Jay Westbrook was in the audience and acknowledged from the podium. Czerwien makes a point to be actively engaged in the community.

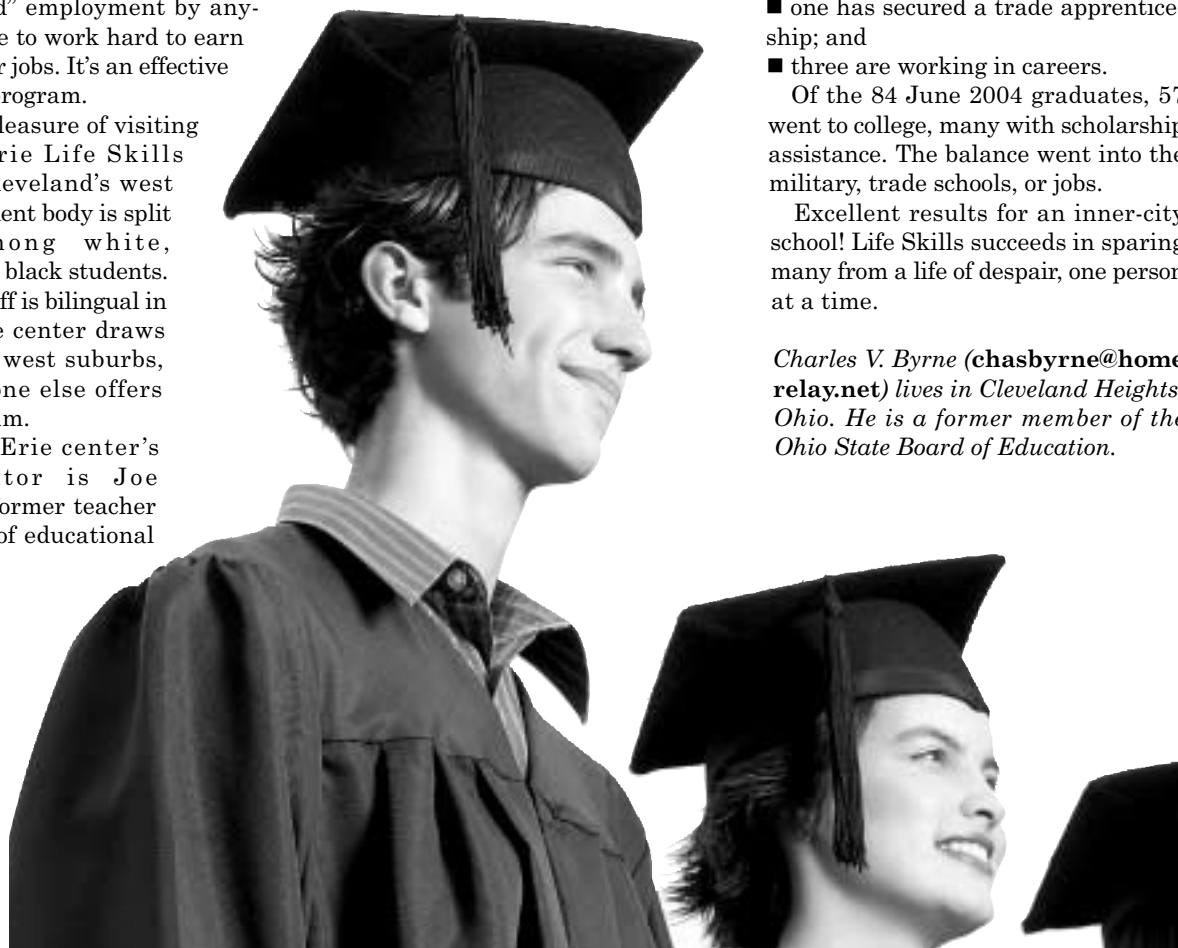
Of the 43 graduates in the December ceremony:

- 29 are going on to college;
- four are going into the military;
- six are going to trade schools;
- one has secured a trade apprenticeship; and
- three are working in careers.

Of the 84 June 2004 graduates, 57 went to college, many with scholarship assistance. The balance went into the military, trade schools, or jobs.

Excellent results for an inner-city school! Life Skills succeeds in sparing many from a life of despair, one person at a time.

Charles V. Byrne (chasbyrne@homerelay.net) lives in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. He is a former member of the Ohio State Board of Education.



Bringing the Profit Motive and Moral Values to Education

an interview with J.C. Huizenga

by George A. Clowes

“Build a better mousetrap, and the world will beat a path to your door.”

Attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson

Many entrepreneurs have discovered that Emerson’s maxim often requires a substantial investment in informational advertising before customers appreciate the superiority of a new marketplace offering.

But from the time he opened his first charter school in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1995, businessman J.C. Huizenga has found thousands of parents beating a path to his door for a chance to enroll their children in one of the 51 new schools he has opened over the past decade. The schools had a waiting list of 6,300 students at the start of the 2004-05 school year.

Huizenga is founder and chairman of National Heritage Academies (NHA), a for-profit educational management company based in Grand Rapids. While most other K-12 firms have found it difficult to maintain growth and avoid losses, NHA has been profitable since 2000 and is one of the nation’s fastest-growing companies. With revenues of more than \$200 million, NHA serves nearly 27,000 students in Indiana, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, and Ohio. The company’s aim is to create 200 of the highest-quality schools in the country.

Huizenga’s vision in establishing National Heritage Academies was to offer schools that challenged children to achieve their greatest potential through a common-sense approach based on what parents expected schools to provide their children. NHA schools stress parental involvement and provide students with a back-to-basics curriculum—E.D. Hirsch’s Core Knowledge Sequence in a disciplined environment with strong academics and reinforcement of the moral guidance parents seek to impart at home.

Test scores at NHA schools are well above the national average on standardized tests measuring grade-level growth, and a recent Wirthlin Worldwide survey showed 96 percent of all NHA parents were satisfied with the education their children are receiving.

“If we do not succeed ... parents will look elsewhere for their child’s education,” the company notes in its promotional materials. “This ultimate accountability is what keeps us totally focused on the success of every single child enrolled in our schools.”

In addition to serving as chairman of NHA, Huizenga owns and is actively involved in six manufacturing compa-



J.C. Huizenga

nies. Born in Chicago, Illinois, he is a graduate of Hope College, Michigan, where he majored in economics. Huizenga has received numerous awards, including Michigan’s Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 2000, the first-ever Leadership Award from the Michigan School Board Leaders Association in 2001, and the James P. Boyle Entrepreneurial Leadership Award from the Education Industry Association in 2003.

Huizenga recently spoke with *School Reform News*’ associate editor, George Clowes.

Clowes: *How did you become involved in the education business?*

Huizenga: I grew up in Chicago and went to Hope College in Holland, Michigan, where I majored in economics. My first interest in education was sparked at

“Teach Michigan” to promote school choice as a means of helping them. Paul enlisted me in that effort.

Teach Michigan was instrumental in helping win approval of charter school legislation in Michigan in 1994. That also was when my son was born. The conjunction of those two events made me start thinking about where I was going to educate my son and helped me understand education from a parent’s perspective.

I got to thinking about the possibility of opening a charter school that would overlay a business model on top of the education model. I sought out Mark DeHaan, who lived here in Grand Rapids and shared an interest in education reform, to help put together an application that was due to Grand Valley State University by May 15. On June 1, I got a call that we had been approved. We had only three months to open a school, and we were too naive to realize it couldn’t be done.

Mark joined me in working throughout that summer to create our first school. We converted an existing office building to a classroom facility. It took extensive renovation and I think we amazed the community that we were able to complete it, on time, right after Labor Day.

With so much to do and so little time, we had only three weeks at the end of the summer to market the school. We offered one class each in grades K-5, and we had three points of differentiation that were included from day one: first, academic excellence; second, parental involvement; and, third, a moral focus. Those were the three key points that con-



ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

how the management company would work with the Board, how the management company would get paid, what services we would provide, and how that whole interface would work.

Before we started, I had theorized that in 10 years there would likely be a half-dozen major management companies operating schools and that one of them would probably come from West Michigan. That’s because here in West Michigan, there’s a real focus on quality private schools. There are a lot of private schools, they are all faith-based, and the Dutchmen have figured out how to create maximum value in education.

The Dutchmen of West Michigan are adamant about quality, but they’re also thrifty. They don’t want to pay a dime more than they absolutely have to. The result is that they get the maximum quality of education for the least amount of cost. I call that “educational equilibrium.” Because of the marginal utility principle, any additional dollars spent result in marginally less value. Correspondingly, any fewer dollars spent denigrate quality.

We don’t want to jeopardize private schools, or, for that matter, public schools. In fact, we don’t go into small school districts because we don’t want to deplete a significant share of the students in a smaller district. When we open a new school in a new area, we create grades K-5 and then add a grade in each successive year until we mature to grades K-8. Our expectation for a mature school is an enrollment of about 700 students and we will make every effort to fill every last seat because we believe an empty seat is a child left behind.

Clowes: *I understand you’re also looking at the possibility of creating charter high schools.*

Huizenga: It’s my desire to meet the needs of our parents, and our parents have been asking, “When are you guys going to do high school?” The question is arising more frequently now that we have begun to graduate classes that have gone through our schools all the way from kindergarten to eighth grade. What we’re hearing from parents whose children are now in high school is that they have a very good educational foundation for high school work. If anything, their first year in high school is an easy year, which doesn’t necessarily make the parents

“The Dutchmen of West Michigan are adamant about quality, but they’re also thrifty. ... The result is that they get the maximum quality of education for the least amount of cost.”

Hope as a result of studying Milton Friedman and his writings about education reform. He said we need to introduce privatization if we want to see true reform in education because privatization always does two things: It drives up quality and it drives down cost. In fact, quality and cost are the two biggest challenges facing us currently in public edu-

It was Paul DeWeese who made me realize that privatizing public education was not only practical but also desperately needed. Paul is a trauma care physician—he also went to Hope College—who did his residency in Detroit and got to know the central city residents and their children. He realized those children didn’t have much hope for success with the poor education they were receiving in the city’s public schools, so he created a public policy group called

nected with our original parents.

We were expecting 100 to 120 students when we opened the school. We got 174. With that many students, we had to hire another teacher and add a class. We were amazed at the very strong response, and we said, “Hey, that worked so well, let’s try it again.”

Clowes: *When you began looking at a second school, were you looking long-term, at a chain of schools?*

Huizenga: We had put a lot of time into figuring out how all the various agreements and contracts had to be structured so that the school could operate and meet the requirements of the charter school law. Realizing we had already completed the heavy lifting, we thought we might as well continue to open schools and test market demand. Although the Board holds the charter, we had to work out



PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

happy because they want to see their children challenged.

After listening to parents' needs and desires and wants for what happens to their child after they leave our school, we started to look at how we might create charter high schools. We're still looking at it, but we recently announced that we would not be able to offer a high school option this fall. That was a major disappointment for the parents.

Our concern is if we try to do too much, we could lose quality—not only in high school but across the board. High school presents a whole different aspect of education from elementary school: Separate facilities; different teaching certifications; a learning curve on regulations; cars; dating. We looked at all of that and decided we couldn't justify diluting our focus at this time. After all, we were already growing so fast that we'd been on the Inc. 500 list of fastest-growing companies for four years straight, and we did not want unmanageable growth to jeopardize our future.

"The moral focus we offer ... is based on the four Greek cardinal virtues: temperance, prudence, justice, and fortitude. This is a philosophical concept, not a religious one."

Clowes: A recurring issue with charter schools is that the funding doesn't include capital needs, which the Goldwater Institute estimated some time ago to be \$500 to \$700 per student per year. What are your thoughts with regard to capital funding for charter schools?

Huizenga: In the states where we're operating, we receive somewhere between \$5,500 and \$8,500 per student per year, which is notably less than the school districts receive. I must admit, even though we aren't getting the capital component, we aren't doing badly. And so, from a taxpayer value standpoint, I don't think there should be a capital



MORAL FOCUS

supplement. I believe we need to provide value not only to the child but also to the taxpayer. That's the other part of what Milton Friedman talked about—school cost as well as school quality.

In our 10 years, we have saved the taxpayer a substantial amount. We have approximately \$200 million in land and buildings the taxpayer hasn't had to fund. In addition to that, we've paid somewhere north of \$50 million in various taxes and oversight fees. Fifty million and \$200 million add up to a quarter of a billion dollars.

Clowes: That's real money.

Huizenga: As a taxpayer I think the amount is noteworthy. We also budget for future capital expenditures out of operating funds, so that as infrastructure needs to be replaced there will never need to be a supplemental millage against the taxpayer. That's the beauty of the business model overlaid on the education model—it keeps everybody focused on what provides value.

Clowes: Do you get much criticism for being a business that's in education, "making money off the backs of the children," as some critics put it?

Huizenga: I'm proud to be a taxpaying entity. If we weren't making money, we wouldn't be paying taxes. We're able to fill our schools only by providing an education that parents view is the highest quality of the choices afforded to them. If we can do that, pay a significant amount of taxes, and still have some left over, I think that's quite an achievement.

There are some people who take issue with the fact that we are a for-profit organization. My answer to them is: That money doesn't go into anybody's pocket. That money goes into the next school that gets built. At the rate we're growing, we're plowing it all back into future schools.

I also believe that if you're going to do something, you need to do it in a way that provides for future continuity. If we were going to grow and do it all on a not-for-profit basis, it would mean we'd have to seek contributions to fund what we're doing. That's not a sustainable model. The free market and the profit motive help for-profit organizations endure longer than the ones that are not-for-profit—unless they've got a huge endowment.

Clowes: Your curriculum focuses on grammar, heroes, and patriotism, among other things. Can you still get textbooks to cover those subjects?

Huizenga: The problems we see in education today are, I believe, driven more by pedagogy than curriculum. Yes, there are social studies textbooks and history textbooks that are way off the mark, but there are quality choices in every market, whether it's widgets or education.

To the extent we can avoid it, I don't want to create our own curriculum. In a free-market society, competing alternatives will drive quality curriculum choices. Our hardest decision then is to choose between better and best. The danger with creating a proprietary curriculum is that you end up with a "not invented here" syndrome. You have to invest a tremendous amount on maintaining your own curriculum, whereas if you buy it, it will be maintained and updated for you.

Clowes: Some people have raised concerns that National Heritage Academies promotes religion on campus. What gives rise to those concerns?

Huizenga: We are public schools. There is nothing religious to what we do. Because virtue is one of our hallmarks, there has been some confusion about this, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to set the record straight.

The moral focus we offer serves only to reinforce the values our parents prac-

tice at home. It is based on the four Greek cardinal virtues: temperance, prudence, justice, and fortitude. This is a philosophical concept, not a religious one. From these four virtues stem qualities like courage, honesty, respect, integrity, fairness, and other virtues our forefathers sought to instill when they founded this great nation conceived in liberty.

The ACLU joined a lawsuit against us about five years ago on this very issue, and we demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt that our schools have no religious component whatsoever. A federal district judge dismissed the case in summary judgment, and his ruling was so convincing that the ACLU chose not to appeal.

If the state is paying the bill, then we'd better be willing to follow the rules and we do. I myself have a deep, personal faith, but I'm not going to bend the rules in any way, shape, or form. If a parent wants to get a good, faith-based education, there are plenty of options out there. That's not the market we wish to serve.

INTERNET INFO

Further information on National Heritage Academies is available from the company Web site at <http://www.heritageacademies.com>.

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Hawaii Withholding Funds from Charters

Dept. of Education opens investigation

by Laura Brown

The U.S. Department of Education (DoE) has opened an investigation into the withholding of approximately \$1.7 million in federal special education funding by local state education officials from Hawaii's charter schools.

In at least one case, the withholding caused a local charter school, owed \$160,000, to suffer such severe financial trouble that it is in jeopardy of being shut down.

State education officials have attempted to downplay the matter. The information became public on February 7 in a Joint Senate/House Informational Briefing at the state capitol on the Waters of Life charter school audit, during the testimony of Dewey Kim, former director of the state's Charter School Administrative Office, who is now a charter school consultant.

In his review of the finances of Waters of Life charter school, which was recently criticized in an audit by State Legislative Auditor Marion Higa for financial mismanagement and subsequently is in jeopardy of losing its charter, Kim learned \$160,000 in special education funds were withheld from the school by

the Hawaii DoE over a two-year period.

Higa confirmed at the hearing that she had discovered the withholding during the state's audit. Chuck Higgins, director of the Hawaii DoE Charter School Office in charge of administering federal funds, would neither deny nor confirm the charge.

Missing Money Exacerbated Debt

Payment of the \$160,000 owed to Waters of Life would be sufficient to cancel a large portion of the school's debt and would reduce the threat of closure by the state.

The total amount of debt incurred by Waters of Life during the first two years of operation was \$257,000, primarily caused by a failed lawsuit filed against the school by the state attorney general to shut it down for alleged back payments on school lunches, substitute teachers, and required centralized services; a lawsuit by a local homeowners association for zoning violations; and by the Hawaii DoE's failure to provide funding equal to other public schools.

Instead of suing the state, as another Big Island charter school did for money it never received, Waters of Life agreed to a five-year debt repayment plan with the state Board of Education (BoE) in a settlement agreement dated October 17, 2002. Waters of Life made all payments on time until the December 31, 2004 pay-

ment was delayed for 20 days due to an internal communications error prior to the three-week winter break.

Board Persisted in Attacks

Although the school's administrator brought all payments current with a \$10,000 payment to the Board of Education at its February 1, 2005 Charter School Committee meeting, the BoE scheduled a decision on whether to revoke Waters of Life's charter at its February 17 meeting.

Ultimately, the BoE issued a reprieve for the school after the charter school's attorney, Ted Hong, outlined a convincing case in his testimony that Waters of Life was entitled to due process under the law before its charter could be revoked. Closing the school would have displaced 181 students.

According to Kim, Waters of Life is not the only state school experiencing financial difficulty. He estimates a total of \$1.7 million in special education funds were illegally withheld from other charter schools across the state.

By verifying the school's fiscal and academic viability, Kim's testimony undermined apparent attempts by the Board of Education, Department of Education, and House and Senate education chairs to expose the "failings" of Waters of Life. State Sen. Bob Hogue (R-Kailua) asked Kim if he felt the audit was part of a larger attack on all charter schools.

Kim replied, "I am apolitical, and I am not aware of any politics involved or any



Kim's statement on racial discrimination made lawmakers and school officials at the meeting visibly uncomfortable. The DoE is currently reeling from accusations of racism at Radford High School in Honolulu, where the reported harassment of several African-American students culminated in an attack by local students after a basketball game in January 2005.

School Managing Finances Well

Beyond providing an excellent educational opportunity to the Hawaii school system's five under-served populations, Kim testified that Waters of Life was on solid ground financially.

The charter school's investment in property resulted in an increase in value from \$350,000 to \$850,000, based on a recent appraisal. The school is planning to sell its school property and pay off its remaining debt to the state.

"With fair funding, charter schools will fulfill their potential to be incubators for change," testified Jim Shon, director of the Charter Schools Administrative Office. "Benign neglect of charter schools by the state has led to problems for the charter schools," he said.

U.S. Congressman Ed Case (D-HI) affirmed in a letter to the Hawaii Reporter dated February 9, 2005 that he had initiated a federal investigation in July 2003 into the Hawaii State Department of Education's fiscal management practices. Specifically, Case asked the U.S. Department of Education to determine whether Hawaii's charter schools are receiving the proper amount of federal funds for special-needs students.

The Hawaii DoE is now reaching out to Waters of Life in an attempt to resolve its debt and help the school find permanent facilities.

Laura Brown (laurabrown@hawaii.rr.com) is education reporter and researcher for *HawaiiReporter.com* and education policy analyst for the Grassroot Institute of Hawaii.

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"Dewey Kim, former director of the state's Charter School Administrative Office, ... learned \$160,000 in special education funds were withheld from the school by the Hawaii DoE over a two-year period, 2001-2002."

large-scale attempt to undermine charter schools, but I believe racial discrimination could be a factor, because Waters of Life is the only charter school in the state serving primarily African-American students."

Racial Discrimination Suggested

Kim, who worked as an attorney general for several years and handled many discrimination cases during his tenure, stated that charter schools serve five under-represented groups in the Hawaii DoE system:

- African-American students;
- children of military dependents;
- newcomers from the mainland, especially Caucasian students;
- Hawaiian children who come primarily from rural areas, and
- special-needs students.

Judge Orders Sharply Higher Spending for New York City Public Schools

by George A. Clowes

Culminating a 12-year court battle over the funding of New York City's public schools, New York State Supreme Court Justice Leland DeGrasse issued a final decision on February 15 ordering the state legislature and governor to spend an additional \$5.63 billion a year to educate the city's 1.1 million public school students.

That means an increase of \$5,100 per child per year on top of current spending of about \$11,500 per pupil. DeGrasse also ordered additional capital spending of \$9.2 billion over the next five years, or another \$1,700 per pupil per year.

Judge Shortened Deadline

DeGrasse's ruling, which was not unexpected, affirmed the November 2004 recommendations of a judicial panel he established last summer when state legislators failed to comply with a 2003 court order to reform the state's school funding system so that it provided all students with the opportunity to receive a "sound basic education." (See "Big Apple Hits Jackpot in School Finance Case," *School Reform News*, February 2005.)

"New York State Supreme Court Justice Leland DeGrasse issued a final decision ... ordering the state legislature and governor to spend an additional ... \$5,100 per child per year on top of current spending of about \$11,500 per pupil."

While the 2003 court order gave state lawmakers 13 months to come up with a new school funding system, DeGrasse's February 15 order gave the legislature just 90 days to implement his remedy. The plaintiff in the case, the Campaign for Fiscal Equity (CFE), had called for the state to be held in contempt of the court and be assessed a fine of \$4.2 million a day, but DeGrasse declined.

"By accepting the panel's recommendations, the judge has laid out a clear road map for the governor and the legislature to follow," said CFE Executive Director and Counsel Michael A. Rebell in a statement after the order was issued. "The governor and the legislature must now act promptly to comply."

Gov. George Pataki's (R) spokesman, Kevin Quinn, said the governor would continue to work with all parties to

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ELIOT SPITZER, ATTORNEY GENERAL
STATE OF NEW YORK

reach a consensus because that was the only avenue to achieve "true and timely reform" for the whole state and not just for New York City.

Separation of Powers Cited

In its response to the panel report, the state had argued the separation of powers doctrine precludes the judiciary from forcing the legislature to make specific expenditures on education. The state noted Article VII of the New York State Constitution vests the authority for appropriating state funds in the governor and the legislature.

"While courts, admittedly, have broad equitable powers, there is no precedent in New York for any court directly ordering the expenditure of funds," argued State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer (D). "For a court to do so would place it well beyond its judicial function and directly into the budget process. ... Such an order would be antithetical to the notion of separation of powers, one of the cornerstones of the democratic governments of both our nation and its states."

Spitzer cited an 1898 Court of Appeals ruling that warned of the dangers of upsetting the balance of power among the three branches of government:

"It is not merely for convenience in the transaction of business that they are kept separate by the Constitution," the ruling said, "but for the preservation of liberty itself, which is ended by the union of the three functions in one man, or in one body of men. It is a fundamental principle of the organic law that each department should be free from interference, in the discharge of its



Gov. George Pataki

peculiar duties, by either of the others."

DeGrasse dismissed the state's argument, maintaining the recommendations of the panel "do not offend the doctrine of separation of powers." It is

the duty of the judicial branch to "safeguard rights provided by the New York State Constitution, and order redress for violation of them," he declared.

Quinn said Pataki "continues to believe that we need a statewide solution and that these decisions should be made by elected representatives of the people, not the courts, and therefore an appeal will be filed."

George Clowes (clowesga@aol.com) is associate editor of *School Reform News*.

INTERNET INFO

The Web site of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity contains all of the court documents and rulings regarding the lawsuit. <http://www.cfequity.org>

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College

Continued from page 1



Jay P. Greene



Marcus Winters

Greene, Ph.D. and Marcus A. Winters found a loss of 1 percent in the national graduation rate from 1991 to 2002. During the same period, however, the percentage of students graduating prepared for college rose 9 percent.

Public high school reforms are both the reason for the rise in college readiness since 1991 and the key to a future growth in college attendance, conclude the authors of the February 2005 report, *Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates: 1991-2002*. The

"Financial aid and affirmative action programs are unlikely to increase the number of students in college ... because poor academic preparation is the most significant barrier to college attendance."

authors conclude there is "some reason to believe that the standards and reform movement has been increasing the skills of our high school graduates. Finally, our results imply that we cannot increase participation in four-year colleges without addressing the problems of the K-12 education system."

Financial aid and affirmative action programs are unlikely to increase the number of students in college, the authors say, because poor academic preparation is the most significant barrier to college attendance.

The study finds similarities in the rate of college readiness and college attendance, indicating "there is not a large pool of students who have the skills necessary to attend college but do not do so because of lack of funds or other non-

academic factors," according to the authors. Therefore, they conclude, until more students graduate college-ready, aid and access policies will not significantly improve attendance rates for poor and minority students.

Blacks, Hispanics Still Lag

At present, little more than half of all black and Hispanic students graduate, and less than a quarter graduate with the skills and coursework required for college.

High school graduation and college readiness rates vary significantly by state, the study noted. The states with the highest graduation rates are New Jersey (89 percent), Iowa (85 percent), Wisconsin (85 percent), North Dakota (85 percent), and Minnesota (84 percent). The states with the lowest rates of graduation are Alaska (59 percent), Alabama (58 percent), Tennessee (57 percent), Georgia (56 percent), and South Carolina (53 percent).

Other findings include:

- a significant gap exists between graduation rates of white and minority students. While 78 percent of white students graduated, 56 percent of black students and 52 percent of Hispanic students graduated from high school with a regular diploma;
- college readiness rates also vary widely: 40 percent of white students graduated prepared for college, while 23 percent of all black students and 20 percent of Hispanic students were similarly prepared;
- college readiness and college attendance rates do not vary significantly. According to the most recent statistics, the population of college-ready graduates in 2002 was 1,325,825, and the number of entering freshman was 1,374,649 in 2001.

Government Numbers Questioned

The study employs a revised version of the Greene Method pioneered by the study's co-author in earlier research. The method uses enrollment and diploma data from the Department of Education's Common Core of Data.

The method compares the number of students who received their diplomas in 2002 to an estimate of the number who entered high school in 1998-99 and should have graduated in 2002. Calculations are made to account for

population movement and for students who were held back in the ninth grade.

The Greene Method produces a lower graduation rate than the one calculated by the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

The NCES figure includes GED earners, while these are excluded by the Manhattan Institute study for two reasons: The future prospects of GED earners are similar to dropouts rather than diploma earners, and in fact GED earners are dropouts from the K-12 education system. The NCES also uses a different body of data, one the Manhattan authors consider less reliable.

"Unfortunately, the calculations of high school graduation rates that we would hope would be the most reli-

achievement on NAEP exams. Students can score at the "advanced," "proficient," or "basic" levels. Those unable to meet the minimum threshold are considered "below basic."

The minimum core is four years of English, three years of math, and two years each of natural science, social science, and foreign language. That is the minimum high school transcript necessary to be admitted to the nation's least-selective four-year colleges or universities.

By these measures, only 34 percent of all students were found by Greene and Winters to be college-ready.

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings has noted that "80 percent of the jobs now require post-secondary training. We must do a better job in

"[T]here is 'some reason to believe that the standards and reform movement has been increasing the skills of our high school graduates. Finally, our results imply that we cannot increase participation in four-year colleges without addressing the problems of the K-12 education system.'"

JAY P. GREENE, PH.D. AND MARCUS A. WINTERS
MANHATTAN INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH

able—those produced by government agencies—are consistently among the least plausible. At both the national and state levels, officially reported high school graduation rates are routinely inflated," the report said.

Few Students College-Ready

To calculate college readiness, Greene and Winters use graduation rates, test scores from the Department of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and NAEP transcript research. They define college-readiness using three measures:

- the student must have graduated from high school;
- the student must have scored at or above the "basic" level on the NAEP reading exam; and
- the student must have taken the minimum core of high school classes required for college admission.

The "basic" level is the lowest level of

ensuring better high school graduation rates as well as making sure that those graduates take a rigorous course of study that prepares them either for college or the workforce."

Krista Kafer (krista.kafer@heritage.org) is senior policy analyst for education at The Heritage Foundation.

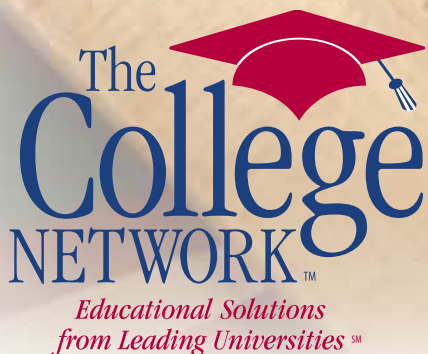
INTERNET INFO

The February 2005 study by Jay P. Greene and Marcus A. Winters from the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, *Public High School Graduation and College-Readiness Rates: 1991-2002*, is available from the Institute's Web site at http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/ewp_08.htm#01.

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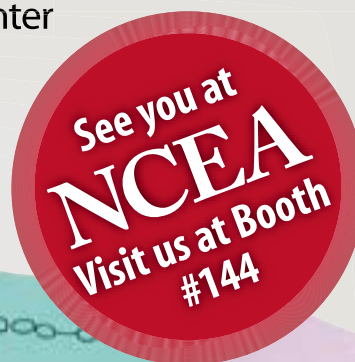
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