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School Reform News

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THE MONTHLY NEWSPAPER FOR SCHOOL REFORMERS

Vol. 9 No. 11 December 2005

Fla. Tax Credit Program Grows

by Jenny Rothenberg

The Florida Corporate Tax Credit (CTC) Scholarship Program has enrolled 15,000 students this year—a 33 percent increase since 2003—making it the seventh-largest school choice program in the country. The increase is the result of a cooperative effort among the organizations that encourage the legislature to support the program, raise the scholarship funds, and distribute the scholarships.

The CTC program is limited to students who qualify for free and reduced-price lunches, and who either attended a public school the previous year or are entering kindergarten or first grade.

When the CTC program was created in 2001, the Florida legislature set the cap for the program at \$50 million in

FLORIDA p. 7

Milwaukee School Choice Spurs Investment

by Mike Ford

The growth of school choice in Milwaukee has led to more than \$118 million in spending on new and remodeled schools in Milwaukee since the citywide voucher program began in 1990.

The impact of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) on facility improvement is detailed in a new

MILWAUKEE p. 19

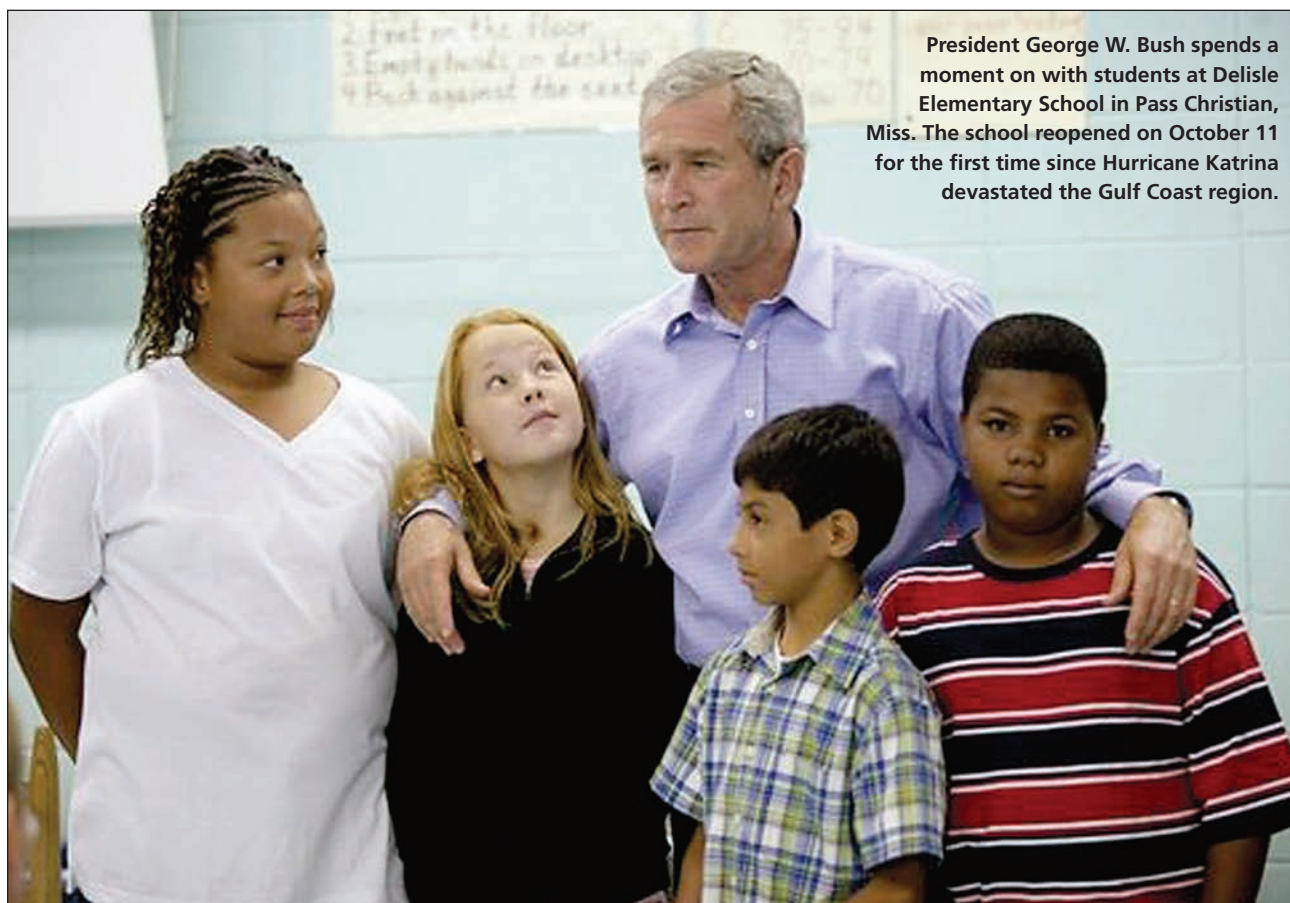
D.C. Families Celebrate School Choice

by Lori Drummer

As the Washington, DC School Choice Program was kicking off its second year of operation with full-capacity enrollment, more than 500 participating parents and children gathered at Vermont Avenue Baptist Church in the District of Columbia on October 5 to celebrate its success.

CELEBRATE p. 17

Legislators Debate Education Help for Hurricane Victims



President George W. Bush spends a moment on with students at Delisle Elementary School in Pass Christian, Miss. The school reopened on October 11 for the first time since Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast region.

White House photo by Eric Draper

by Robert Holland

As one hurricane after another battered America's southern shores in the late summer and early autumn of this year, Capitol Hill swayed back and forth over the policy implications for the education of students affected by Hurricane Katrina. As noted in the November issue of *School Reform News*, President

George W. Bush's proposal to disperse federal relief to public, private, and charter school patrons rankled the public education establishment while heartening parental choice supporters.

Subsequently, Republican leaders of the U.S. House Education and Workforce Committee proposed a sweeping, federally funded K-12 choice program—an emergency

plan that would expire in a year. Committee Chairman John Boehner of Ohio and Louisiana Rep. Bobby Jindal unveiled a plan for Family Education Reimbursement Accounts (FERA), which would enable hurricane-displaced families and their schools to bypass education bureaucracies in order to receive aid for emergency schooling.

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CAPITOL HILL BEAT

NAEP Scores Reveal NCLB's Successes, Weaknesses

by Karla Dial

When the results of the latest round of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests were released October 19, the nation had its first glimpse of how well the policies introduced by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) are working since President George W. Bush signed the law in 2002.

Though Republican leaders such as Rep. John Boehner (R-OH), Rep. Mike Castle (R-DE), and Education Secretary Margaret Spellings praised the modest gains and slightly narrower achievement gaps between white and African-American students, education analysts said much more work needs to be done before NCLB lives up to its hype.

According to an October 19 news release from the U.S. Department of Education:

■ Average reading and math scores increased for fourth-grade students nationwide, and the racial achievement gap narrowed in both subjects.

■ The racial achievement gap in eighth-grade math narrowed to its lowest point since 1990, when the NAEP was first administered.

■ Overall fourth- and eighth-grade math scores reached all-time highs, and overall fourth-grade reading scores matched their all-time high.

■ African-American fourth-graders achieved their highest reading and math scores to date.

Deciphering the Spin

Read another way, however, the 2005 results indicate achievement has remained fairly flat since 2003, "showing that whatever public school educators have done to raise scores—which they claim is a lot—has not translated into improved achievement as measured by NAEP," said George Clowes, senior fellow at The Heartland Institute and former managing editor of *School Reform News*.

"Despite the spur of NCLB, the percentage of fourth-graders who scored 'below basic'—i.e., illiterate—remained unchanged at 36 percent from 2002 to 2005," Clowes said. "The lack of improvement raises serious questions about the efficacy of current reading instruction methods in the early grades."

In eighth grade, reading achievement levels dropped from 32 percent proficiency in 2003 to 31 percent this year, while the proportion of eighth-graders deemed "below basic" rose from 25 to 27 percent.

"For public schools to claim to educate all students and then render one in four of them effectively illiterate by eighth grade is nothing short of educational malfeasance," Clowes said. "It is a tragic waste of human potential affecting millions of lives."



Margaret Spellings listens as President George W. Bush introduces her as the new Secretary of Education during a swearing-in ceremony at the Department of Education in Washington, D.C. on January 31, 2005.



"[R]eforming K-12 education requires not only the achievement targets that NCLB has established, but also the reinstatement of what was part and parcel of the original NCLB proposal—private school vouchers—to provide the necessary incentive for public schools to improve."

GEORGE CLOWES
THE HEARTLAND INSTITUTE

Reforming Teachers

Though Bush told *The New York Times* on October 20 he was pleased with the test results because they reflected a narrowing achievement gap, Education Trust Policy Director Ross Wiener warned against being overly optimistic.

"The absence of really bad news isn't the same as good news," Wiener said, "and if you're concerned about education and closing achievement gaps, there's simply not enough good news in these national results."

In an October 22 editorial, *The New York Times* said in order to make real gains in education, the Bush administration will have to focus less on testing of students and more on better teacher training, "which will in turn mean cracking the whip on teachers' colleges that have basically ignored the standards movement."

Repackaging Reform

Though NCLB, at least as measured

by the NAEP, appears to be leaving one in every four children behind, the law does have its good points, said Herb Walberg, a member of the Koret Task Force on K-12 Education at the Hoover Institution and chairman of The Heartland Institute's board of directors.

"Research suggests the accountability feature of NCLB is raising achievement, and the law does provide increased choice of supplementary education services and increased school choice," Walberg noted. "The public reporting requirements are letting parents and citizens know how badly their neighborhood schools are doing."

However, Walberg said, "there is an alarming federal and state 'big brother' aspect of the legislation, and I would much prefer to see decentralization and consumer choice."

Still Awaiting Vouchers

Universal school choice, Clowes agreed, is a greater long-term key to success than increased testing.

"The public schools' lack of progress in raising student achievement shows that reforming K-12 education requires not only the achievement targets that NCLB has established, but also the reinstatement of what was part and parcel of the original NCLB proposal—private school vouchers—to provide the necessary incentive for public schools to improve," Clowes said.

"In Florida and Milwaukee, vouchers have shown they provide that incentive, and public schools there have improved. These latest NAEP results show that the voucher incentive should never have been removed from the original NCLB reform package," Clowes noted.

Karla Dial (dial@heartland.org) is managing editor of School Reform News.

Hurricane

Continued from page 1

Both congressmen spoke of “empowering parents” to find the best educational opportunities for their children, in public (including charter), private, or religious schools. Parents would be able to register online or with a toll-free telephone number to set up an education account for each K-12 child. The federal government would deposit up to \$6,700 per child into the account, and schools would use account numbers to receive reimbursements via electronic transfer.

In some ways, FERA would resemble Education Savings Accounts, which provide tax advantages for private savings for education from kindergarten through graduate school.

Leaders of the nation’s largest teacher union, the National Education Association (NEA), didn’t like the House plan any better than they liked Bush’s. They circulated a letter opposing the streamlined method of reimbursement, arguing public school bureaucracies should control the disbursement of all relief aid.

FERA Rejected

With four House Education Committee Republicans joining a solid block of Democrats voting “nay,” FERA failed October 28 on a 21-26 vote. It appeared that as a default position, public and private schools would have to apply to the U.S. Department of Education for funds to aid student victims of the hurricanes. A determined Boehner promptly said he would try to get streamlined FERA relief through the Budget Committee as part of the budget reconciliation process.

“It is an outrage,” Boehner said in a news release, “that House Democrats and the education establishment would stand in the way of meaningful relief for the victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The goal of our proposal was to provide reimbursement to schools in the simplest and most efficient way possible in this time of national emergency. Is providing these funds through the layers upon layers of education bureaucracy the best way to achieve this goal? Of course not.”



“The goal of our proposal was to provide reimbursement to schools in the simplest and most efficient way possible in this time of national emergency.”

REP. JOHN BOEHNER

Senate Bill Includes Choice

Meanwhile, in the U.S. Senate, the chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee and the ranking Democratic member rolled out their own hurricane relief proposal—one that simultaneously satisfied and disturbed the public education establishment.

Senators Michael B. Enzi (R-WY) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA) proposed distributing \$2.4 billion in federal aid through local school districts, which then would oversee distribution to displaced students no matter what kind of school they were attending.

That preserved the school bureaucracy control the NEA and others sought, but for Kennedy it represented a shift from his original position that students in



Clockwise from top left: Rep. John Boehner, Rep. Bobby Jindal, Sen. Michael B. Enzi, and Sen. Ted Kennedy.

private and religious schools should not receive aid. (See “NEA Opposes Proposed Katrina Relief Plan for Schoolchildren,” *School Reform News*, November 2005.) Kennedy altered his position after critics pointed out that a quarter or more of students in the worst-hit regions of the Gulf Coast had been enrolled in private or parochial schools.



“Senators Michael B. Enzi (R-WY) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA) proposed distributing \$2.4 billion in federal aid through local school districts, which then would oversee distribution to displaced students no matter what kind of school they were attending.”

According to an October 21 *Congressional Quarterly* article, Kennedy’s usual allies on the left did not appreciate his willingness to compromise so that private school families could share in putting the education part of their shattered lives back together.

“This [Enzi-Kennedy] bill is deeply

misguided,” the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, told *CQ*. “This bill does not use the word ‘voucher,’ but that’s what this really is. This gives millions of dollars in virtually unrestricted cash grants to religious schools.” Kennedy denied the HELP measure would launch vouchers, calling it instead “one-time emergency impact aid.”

Concerned About Precedent

Advocates on both sides were looking at the impact the Katrina relief might have on education beyond the coming year. Terri Schroeder, a lobbyist for the American Civil Liberties Union, told *CQ* the Enzi-Kennedy bill would set a dangerous precedent.

“Ultimately, you do it once,” Schroeder said, “you open yourself up for doing it again during the next crisis, especially once you have the infrastructure in place.”

Writing in the October 21 online edition of *Human Events*, Heritage Foundation Vice President Mike Franc called the Boehner-Jindal proposal “the most ambitious education choice plan ever introduced in Congress.”

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Chronically Failing Schools Face Weak Sanctions

by Lisa Snell

Although the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) calls for severe sanctions, including remedies such as state takeover and restructuring, against schools that chronically fail to meet certain performance benchmarks, the reality is that over the past five years few schools have been forced to face sanctions more severe than the ones they dole out to themselves, according to policy analysts and a September report from the Denver-based Education Commission of the States (ECS).

In late September, Massachusetts Education Commissioner David P. Driscoll called for the state to take over three schools with persistently low test scores. The state took over one, Matthew J. Kuss Middle School in Fall River, last year. In practice, a takeover means the state can remove the principal and require the district to increase spending at the school. However, like most current restructuring efforts under NCLB, the state intervention will likely lead only to mild reform for the low-performing schools in Massachusetts.

As the *Providence Journal* editorialized on October 3, “although the state’s experiment in managing these four schools may lead to improvements for the children attending them five or ten years from now, the current students will remain stuck in poor schools—as many of them have been for as long as they have attended school.”

Similarly, a September 29 *Sacramento Bee* feature reported 249 California schools reached federal limits for failure after more than five consecutive years of missing federal test-score benchmarks. The article concluded those schools will probably get by without much legitimate reform, as the state of California has been slow to enforce restructuring options in the federal law.

Across the nation, more than 9,000 schools have not met federal standards, and hundreds of schools will soon be required to “restructure” under NCLB.

“Across the nation, more than 9,000 schools have not met federal standards, and hundreds of schools will soon be required to ‘restructure’ under NCLB.”

Schools Have Options

NCLB was designed to help make schools more accountable for student achievement and to make school performance more transparent. However, in order for NCLB to offer meaningful improvement for low-performing schools, there must be meaningful consequences for persistently underperforming schools, said Matthew Ladner, director of state projects at the Alliance



David P. Driscoll
Massachusetts Education Commissioner

for School Choice, a school choice advocacy organization based in Phoenix. NCLB requires that schools failing to make “adequate yearly progress” for five or more years must face severe consequences known as restructuring.

According to the ECS report about state restructuring efforts under NCLB, the federal law offers five options for school restructuring:

- reopening the school as a public charter school;
- replacing all or most of the school staff (which may include the principal) who are relevant to the failure to make adequate yearly progress;
- entering into a contract with an entity, such as a private management company, with a demonstrated record of effectiveness, to operate the public school;
- turning the operation of the school over to the state educational agency, if permitted under state law and agreed to by the state; or
- any other major restructuring of the school’s governance arrangement that makes fundamental reforms, such as significant changes in the school’s staffing and governance.

According to the ECS report, restructuring efforts to date have been slow and weak at best. The federal government has offered states little detailed guidance on restructuring; states have mostly left it up to local school districts to decide how to restructure low-performing schools; and the districts have chosen mild school interventions that mostly fall into the vague fifth option of “other” major restructuring efforts.

Lax Approach Continues

“School district administrators most often choose mild interventions, such as changing the curriculum or offering technical assistance,” said Rebecca Wolfe DiBiase, a charter school expert and author of the ECS report, “rather than strong interventions such as converting low-performing schools into charter schools or using outside

management companies to operate low-performing schools.”

In California, for example, the majority of fifth-year failing schools have taken the vaguely worded “any other major restructuring” option, said Wendy Harris, an assistant superintendent in the state Department of Education.

As Los Angeles Unified School District spokeswoman Barbara Mecka told the *Sacramento Bee* on September 29, “at Los Angeles Unified, where nine schools entered the fifth-year phase last year, other restructuring included extensive staff changes, bringing in outside consultants, creating small learning communities, or a combination of the above.”

NCLB’s restructuring sanctions have

had little success at providing better schooling options for students attending low-performing schools. School district administrators may feel threatened by some of the more significant reforms that diminish their control, such as state takeover, reopening as a charter, or private management. For that reason, the ECS report predicts the prevailing trend of accepting mild and moderate, rather than strong, improvement strategies from districts will be the norm in the future.

Lisa Snell (lsnell@reason.org) is education director at the Reason Foundation in Los Angeles.

INTERNET INFO

To read the entire text of the report, “State Involvement in School Restructuring Under No Child Left Behind in the 2004-2005 School Year,” by Rebecca Wolfe DiBiase, visit the Education Commission of the States Web site at <http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/64/28/6428.pdf>.

“[T]he ECS report predicts the prevailing trend of accepting mild and moderate, rather than strong, improvement strategies from districts will be the norm in the future.”

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Ambition and Ability Don't Meet for High School Seniors, Study Says

by Neal McCluskey

According to an October report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 69 percent of U.S. high school seniors in 2004 expected to complete college with a four-year degree or higher. Less than half, however, had mastered intermediate-level mathematics, and many could not handle even simple problem solving.

The report, *A Profile of the American High School Senior in 2004: A First Look*, contained findings from the first follow-up of the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, which began in 2002 with a national survey of 10th graders.

For the current report, NCES surveyed high school seniors, focusing on four areas: their proficiency in mathematics; their postsecondary educational expectations; the factors those planning to attend college deemed most important in choosing a school; and their values and life goals. The first two areas provided the most troubling results.

On the positive side, a majority of seniors expected to complete at least a four-year degree after high school, with 34 percent planning to complete a four-year degree and 35 percent intending to go on to post-baccalaureate graduate or professional programs. Another 18 percent planned to complete at least some college or a two-year degree.

"According to the [NCES] report, 21 percent of the students surveyed could not perform simple operations using decimals, fractions, roots, and powers; 38 percent were incapable of 'simple problem solving'; and 65 percent could not handle intermediate-level mathematical concepts."

Skills Don't Support Expectations

But while seniors reported high expectations, NCES found many do not possess the mathematics skills necessary to meet them. According to the report, 21 percent of the students surveyed could not perform simple operations using decimals, fractions, roots, and powers; 38 percent were incapable of "simple problem solving"; and 65 percent could not handle intermediate-level mathematical concepts. Only 4 percent exhibited mastery of "complex multi-step word problems and advanced mathematics."

The results were even worse when students' aspirations were taken into consideration. Sixty-three percent of seniors planning to end their education with a four-year degree had not mastered intermediate-level math, and 32 percent could not handle even simple problems. Among seniors planning to pursue a graduate or professional degree, almost half had not mastered intermediate-level mathematics, and nearly one-fifth had not mastered simple problem solving.

The findings were especially bleak for minority students. Less than 35 percent of African-Americans in the survey demonstrated mastery of simple mathematics, and only 12 percent had mastered intermediate-level skills.

Hispanic students performed only slightly better: A little less than 43 percent had mastered simple problem solving, and just over 18 percent were able to handle intermediate-level problem solving.

Report Confirms Recent Studies

The report's findings echo those of other recent studies. In March 2005, a report from Achieve, Inc., an organization created by governors and business leaders to raise academic standards and achievement, titled *Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work?* reported that most employers and college instructors found recent high school graduates lacked many necessary skills and abilities.

Similarly, *Public High School*

Graduation and College Readiness Rates, a September 2003 Manhattan Institute study by Jay P. Greene and Greg Forster, reported only 32 percent of all U.S. students leave high school qualified to attend a four-year college.

Choice, Standards Recommended

"This illustrates the reality gap between students' expectations and their skills," said Michael J. Petrilli, vice president for national programs and policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in Virginia.

To bridge the gap, Petrilli said, policymakers "must be unabashed about raising standards." It is an effort, he said, that must take place at the state level, though he added the report "does raise the question of whether we need national standards."

Forster, co-author of the Manhattan Institute study and director of research at the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, agreed that improving standards and accountability will help better prepare students for college. He added, however, that the improvements from increasing accountability are not very large and are realized only over a long period of time.

School choice, Forster said, is the only way to help students now.

"Today's kids need accountability today," he said. "[We] need to allow parents to match kids to the schools that can serve them best."

Neal McCluskey (nmccluskey@cato.org) is a policy analyst at the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom.

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By Herbert J. Walberg and Joseph L. Bast

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Florida

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annual tax deferments. Since its inception, demand for the tax credits has been high, said Denise Lasher, executive director of the Florida Education Freedom Foundation (FEFF), an organization that promotes school choice to state legislators.

"The cap was originally raised in 2004, but it was killed in the special session because of a budget shortfall," Lasher said. "This year it is back up to \$88 million, and we are working to see that it stays there."

Raising the Cap

In February 2004, Lasher began demonstrating to legislators the increased demand for the program and explaining how it could save the state money. According to analyses conducted by Florida Tax Watch and the Collins Center for Public Policy, the maximum CTC scholarship amount, \$3,500 per student per year—about half of what public schools spend per pupil—had saved the state more than \$108 million.

"The Florida Corporate Tax Credit (CTC) Scholarship Program has enrolled 15,000 students this year—a 33 percent increase since 2003—making it the seventh-largest school choice program in the country."

At that time, the scholarship waiting list contained the names of 10,000 students.

"We reinforced our data for the leaders in the [state] House and Senate by mobilizing our parents," Lasher said. "They called and wrote to their legislators and appeared in committee meetings, asking their elected officials to appropriate more funding to the program."

When legislators again raised the cap in March 2005, it was vital to show Florida corporations wanted to participate, said Kerri Vaughan, executive director of development for Step Up for Students, a nonprofit organization that raises scholarship funds and awareness of the program. Vaughan said the program has a 92 percent donor retention rate. The other 8 percent stop participating because they no longer pay taxes to the state.

Finding the Funds

To raise the extra \$38 million, Vaughan tapped new sources of funding, because most donors already contribute the maximum 75 percent of their tax liability.

"Not knowing what companies pay Florida taxes is our biggest challenge," Vaughan said. "We rely on our 'true believers' to introduce us to other companies that owe a tax liability to the

state."

At press time, the CTC program had already doubled its contributions from last year and expected to raise the rest of the \$88 million by December, Vaughan said.

Filling the Seats

Heather Moore, chairman of the Florida Association of Scholarship Funding Organizations (FLA-SFO) and executive director of Florida PRIDE, the state's second-largest scholarship funding organization, said the increase in applications and scholarship awards was primarily the result of well-organized word of mouth. Scholarship funding organizations did very little advertising, in part because it is costly, and relied instead on local centers of influence and satisfied parents to tell their friends about the availability of scholarships.

"When the word is out that we have new scholarships to give away, the response is overwhelming," Moore said.

To help educate qualified families, Florida PRIDE held informational meetings around the state, during which parents were guided through the application process, informed of their responsibilities, and received immediate answers to their questions.

"Because of the [minority] population we are serving, sometimes reading the application in English is a challenge," Moore explained. "When we walk them through it, they have a better chance of completing the process properly the first time."

Creating the Future

The larger influx of applications this year was no problem, Moore said, because almost all SFOs use an independent, third-party processor to determine eligibility.

"Using an independent processor not only avoids the appearance of impropriety, it also means we can approve more students without having to increase our staff," Moore said.

To increase support for the growth of the program, Lasher said she will be working with the McKay Coalition of Schools and the Florida Council of Independent Schools this winter to get an accountability bill passed during the 2006 legislative session. Together, they will push for stronger financial oversight for scholarship funding organizations, standardized testing of CTC scholarship students, and a longitudinal study of students' academic gains.

Moore said she hopes those accountability measures will help the program continue to grow.

"The cooperative effort of raising the cap, raising scholarship funds, and awarding additional scholarships has been driven by the demand," Moore said. "Although we have grown to serving 15,000 students, there are many more who still want school choice."

Jenny Rothenberg (jrothenberg@stepupforstudents.com) is a public relations associate at Step Up for Students, a Tampa-based initiative of the Florida Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program.

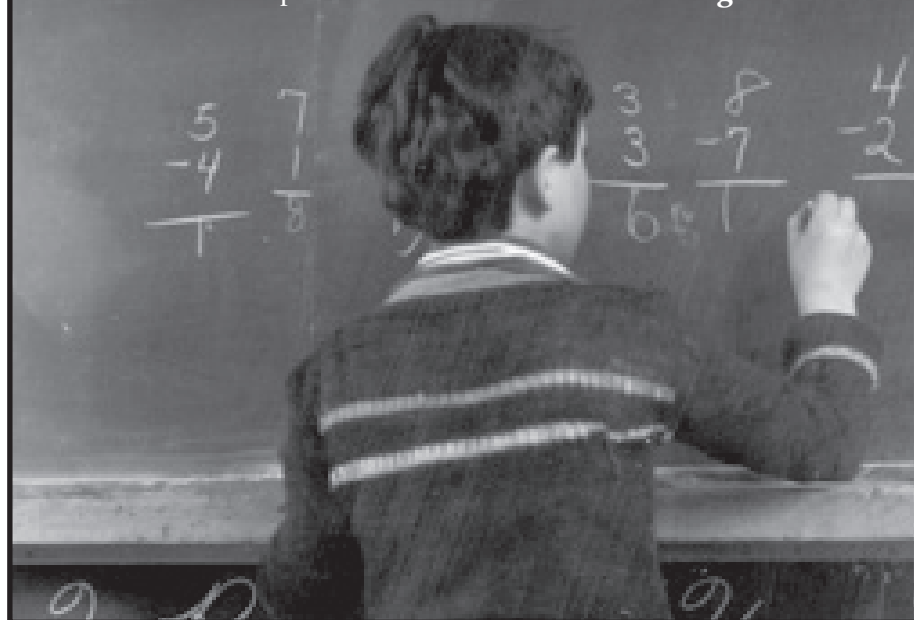
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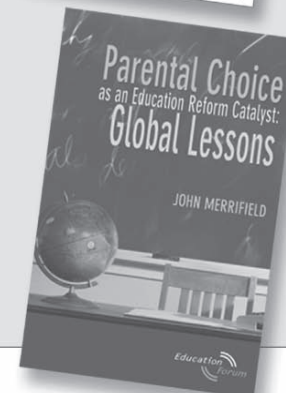
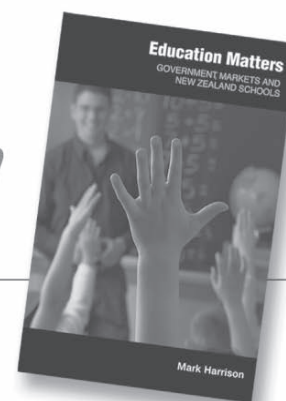
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D.C. Charters: History, Analysis, and Recommendations for the Future

by Kate McGreevy

The Progressive Policy Institute's (PPI) 21st Century Schools Project released a study in early October outlining the history of the charter school movement in Washington, D.C. and issuing several recommendations for improvement.

In "Capital Campaign: Early Returns on District of Columbia Charters," author and PPI policy analyst Sara Mead reports that while D.C. charters have realized successes since their inception in 1996, certain improvements would strengthen their overall performance.

"Charter schools in the District of Columbia have accomplished incredible things in terms of their growth, number of students served, and high-quality schools creating educational options for students who previously had none, but that is not enough," Mead said. "Too many charter schools in D.C. aren't performing as well as they need to be, and D.C. leaders need to do more in terms of both accountability and supporting charter schools in order for the movement to succeed."

Unique History

Mead's report, which provides a detailed history of D.C.'s charter school movement along with demographics, performance records, current challenges, and recommendations, tackles a complicated subject, said Nelson Smith, president of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

"Charters in D.C. are a remarkably complex topic, and Sara Mead does a real good job of exposing some of the political and historical complexities," Smith said.

Smith, the first executive director of the D.C. Public Charter School Board—one of two authorizing agencies for D.C. charters—said residents are often sensitive about the city's unique government structure. While D.C. citizens are self-governed, with an elected mayor and council, the U.S. Congress must approve the city budget.

Mead's report puts the birth of D.C. charters into that context, sketching the interplay of Congress, former President Bill Clinton, and the District's city government. When Congress passed the Omnibus Consolidated Rescissions and Appropriations Act in 1996, which included the D.C. education reform law authorizing charters, federal legislators put D.C. government under the authority of a Control Board and temporarily stripped the city's Board of Education of its powers.

Mixed Results

"The politics of how charter schools came into being and the alliances around them are very important," Mead said. "We often tend to think that because charter

schools aren't part of the traditional school system they should be immune to politics, but actually charter schools are very dependent on the political climate.

"Charter schools in the District of Columbia have accomplished incredible things in terms of their growth, number of students served, and high-quality schools creating educational options for students who previously had none, but that is not enough."

SARA MEAD
PROGRESSIVE POLICY INSTITUTE

That's what determines the laws under which they operate, and the extent of political support can have significant impacts on resources and other issues that impact charter school quality."

Mead's report provides a substantial snapshot of the current state of D.C.'s charter school movement. The district's 42 charter schools enroll 20 percent of its students, a larger share than any other city in the nation.

According to the report, charter schools are slightly outperforming D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) on the Stanford-9 test mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act and are in minimally better shape than DCPS in terms of Adequate Yearly Progress, while serving more minority and low-income students. Mead warns, however, that authorizers need more effective systems to identify underperforming schools and students.

"Longer term, I think the most important issue for D.C. charters is improv-

ing school achievement," Mead said. "Support for charter schools—parent demand, political support, philanthropic and other outside funding—depends on schools delivering good outcomes for kids, but too many charter schools in D.C. aren't delivering the student achievement outcomes they promised."

Policy Recommendations

D.C.'s charter school law provides for several authorizing agencies. In her report, Mead compares charter schools operated by the independent D.C. Public Charter School Board (PCSB) to those operated by the D.C. Board of Education. She finds PCSB schools outperform Board of Education schools, for which she generally reserves her strongest criticism.

"The Board of Education in particular has had a rocky history," she said. "Its initial forays into chartering were disastrous; a portion of the Board has been hostile to charter schools. It has conflicting responsibilities in terms of authorizing charter schools while also running the school district system with which they are competing."

Brenda Belton, executive director of the Board of Education's charter authorization and oversight division, agreed the agency has room to improve.

"Ms. Mead raised some very good points, some of which I will bring up directly with the Board of Education," Belton said. "For instance, the Board needs to be more clear about its role as an authorizer. Steps are being taken now. The Board is preparing to vote on an ad hoc committee whose sole responsibility would be charters. That is a first."

Focus Enhances Performance

Josephine Baker, executive director of the D.C. Public Charter School Board—an entity Mead criticizes for layering the chartering process with too much

paperwork—acknowledged that the PCSB's singular purpose makes her job different.

"Our attention to charter schools is undivided—what we do is all we do," Baker said. "Across the nation, districts pay less attention to charter schools because they are saddled with other duties. The D.C. Board of Education is not different in that regard. They have more responsibilities than we do."

Nelson Smith, of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, believes the PCSB's focus allows it to work more interactively with charter schools, while the Board of Education faces more public pressures.

"The Public Charter School Board concentrates on public charter schools. They can think carefully about accountability systems and oversight goals, and importantly, they work with schools collaboratively," Smith explained. "The Public Charter School Board has the time and space to really think about charter schools."

Achievement Is Paramount

Mead believes both authorizers would benefit from focusing on their comparative advantages, such as the opportunity the Board of Education has to foster change in public schools by working more strategically with the charters it authorizes.

Ultimately, though, Mead insisted that improving performance is key, not only in Board of Education and PCSB charters, but in all public schools.

"We know that quality schools can deliver impressive achievement results for students who are at significant academic disadvantages," Mead said. "The challenge is for operators in schools that aren't doing well to learn from these and other high-performing schools, and also for authorizers to either arrange for interventions so these schools improve, or, in some cases, to shut down those that are truly failing."

Kate McGreevy (mcgreevy@gmail.com) is a freelance education writer living in New Mexico. She formerly worked with the Cesar Chavez Public Charter Schools for Public Policy in Washington, DC.

INTERNET INFO

The full text of Sara Mead's report is available on the Progressive Policy Institute's Web site at http://www.ppi-online.org/ppi_ci.cfm?knlgArealD=110&subsecid=134&contentid=253547.

For more information on: the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, visit <http://www.publiccharters.org>; the D.C. Public Charter School Board, <http://www.DCpubliccharter.com>; the D.C. Board of Education, <http://www.k12.DC.us/DCps/boe/boehome.html>.





“SCHOOL CHOICE AND THE MAINLINE PROTESTANT FUTURE”

A HOLIDAY MESSAGE FROM THE YANKEE INSTITUTE

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*M*ost predictions about the future of America’s mainline Protestant religions are decidedly gloomy.

While overall church membership in the United States grew 33 percent between 1960 and 2000 — due largely to the popularity of evangelical and Pentecostal movements — the combined membership of the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church, the United Church of Christ and smaller mainline denominations dropped 21 percent.

Remarkably, none of the worried discussions among Protestant leaders about the trend lines for their respective denominations ever considers the promising implications of school choice. While the only justification for any education policy in a pluralistic democracy is the academic well-being of all children, regardless of faith, school choice would nevertheless bestow a remarkable collateral benefit on organized religion.

If public dollars were allowed to follow a student to whatever institution the parent selects, public or private, the economic barrier to parochial schooling would be eliminated. Houses of worship with attached schools or free standing schools with a religious mission could open their doors to pupils from all economic classes without having to worry about providing scholarships or otherwise subsidizing families of modest means. Choice would put all parochial schools on a firmer financial footing.

The Catholic Church, with 50 percent of independent schools, would be the most obvious beneficiary of school choice, but not the only one. 34 percent of private students now attend non-Catholic, religiously oriented schools, many operated by Protestant organizations, much as Catholic parochial schools are associated with regional parishes.

Of course, the religious consequences of parents being free to pick their children’s schools go far beyond the realm of school finance. With Gallop and other surveys showing that up to half of all American parents would gladly switch their children out of public schools if the government supplied a voucher or tax credit, any legislation permitting taxpayer funding of private education would inevitably precipitate a dramatic increase in the demand for Protestant schools.

In the words of former New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani, “... you would see a significant number of non-Catholic parochial and private schools develop. You would see many of the Protestant denominations develop parochial schools that would attach to their churches, and you would see private groups putting

together schools because the funding would be there for it.”

The opponents of school choice have always cited this predicted benefit to organized religion as a reason to oppose education reform, and many in the clergy have amazingly allowed themselves to be intimidated by this argument — essentially agreeing that what strengthens faith is bad for the overall quality of education.

In reality, many of the goals subsumed under the egalitarian priorities of public education turn out increasingly to require a spiritual context. According to a study presented to the American Political Science Association by the Manhattan Institute’s Jay Greene and Nicole Mellow, parochial schools are much more successful at integrating black, Hispanic, and other minority students than their public counterparts — and for a very simple reason. When families chose schools based on a philosophy or mission, their children are more likely to be attracted to each other by interests and beliefs transcending racial differences.

What is true of racial integration also seems to be true for mainstreaming children with physical and moderate emotional handicaps. In Milwaukee, Cleveland, the Englewood Independent School District of San Antonio, Texas, and other communities where children are currently subsidized to attend independent schools, those with special needs are far more likely to take advantage of the opportunity and to select a parochial setting. Of the over 300 independent schools that participate in Florida’s popular McKay Scholarship Bill, which gives education scholarships to parents of moderately disabled children, the vast majority are Catholic or Protestant.

School choice offers Protestant churches a stunning opportunity to reverse the decline of the last half-century and to rebuild their respective denominations on the firm foundation of every parent’s greatest concern: the educational welfare of his or her child. To learn more, read “School Choice and the Mainline Protestant Future” in the summer issue of *Faith and Freedom* by going to the link at www.yankeeinstitute.org.

Lewis M. Andrews, Ph. D.

Executive Director

Better Teachers Want Better Pay in Texas

by **Connie Sadowski**

More than 100 education reformers from across Texas attended a "Professional Pay for Professional Educators" panel discussion October 26 in Austin, hosted by the Texas Public Policy Foundation (TPPF), a local research and policy organization. The purpose of the gathering was to examine how successful teacher-pay programs improve education outcomes.

"Texas public schools need to establish a better pay system based on market principles to recruit and retain highly effective teachers. Schools have to pay competitive salaries, and increases should be based on what schools can afford and on the merits of individual performance, with no more across-the-board pay raises," TPPF Research Director Chris Patterson told *School Reform News*.

"Incentive pay is a part of how we are going to recruit, retain, and reward the best teachers in Texas," agreed State Rep. Dianne Delisi (R-Temple), a member of the Texas House Public Education Committee. "Incentive pay must be set in a total compensation package. Any business will tell you that when they are negotiating to bring the best and brightest into their company, they not only discuss compensation, they also discuss benefits including health care and growth potential."

Accountability, Compensation Linked

Dr. Lewis C. Solmon, president of the Teacher Advancement Program Foundation (TAP), a California-based organization working to attract, retain, develop, and motivate talented people to become teachers, explained performance pay "is only respectful and fair to teachers who demonstrate excellence in classroom performance, achieve exceptional student performance, and take on extra responsibility, as compared to the current system of compensation based on experience and number of courses taken, which do not correlate to student achievement."

"Texas has demonstrated a real commitment to accountability and methodology to measure student achievement," Solmon concluded. "Texas now needs a compensation system for teachers to reflect the goals all parents and educators seek."

The Texas legislature must lay the groundwork for a comprehensive, state-wide plan, Patterson said, by "making specific funds available to districts for performance pay, setting standards for district performance-pay systems, and improving state assessments to provide more information about the performance of students and teachers."

"Texas school districts—not the state legislature—should adopt performance pay systems for teachers," Patterson concluded.

Teachers' Input Important

A comprehensive professional pay system will take time to develop, said Gary Stark, TAP's vice president of program development, and the best place to start

is by asking teachers.

"Our goal is to attract and retain talented people to the teaching profession and keep them there by making it more attractive and rewarding to be a teacher. We provide the opportunity for good teachers to earn higher salaries and advance professionally, just as in other careers, without leaving the classroom," Stark said. "TAP helps teachers become the best they can be, by giving them opportunities to learn better teaching strategies and holding them accountable for their performance."

Becky Wissink, an education consultant representing the Denver Professional Compensation System for Teachers (ProComp) in Colorado, said the more teachers are included in the design of a performance-pay program, the more willing they are to participate in it when it's finished. (See "Denver Voters Approve Merit Pay for Teachers," page 12.)

"Schools have to pay competitive salaries, and increases should be based on what schools can afford and on the merits of individual performance, with no more across-the-board pay raises."

CHRIS PATTERSON
TEXAS PUBLIC POLICY FOUNDATION

Performance Pay 'Fairer'

"Most teachers would not object to a comprehensive system of pay, as long as the system did not focus solely on test scores," Wissink said. "There is more to the teaching profession than one test on one day during the school year." In Denver, current teachers can opt into the compensation package but are not required to do so, and "that is a necessary component to teacher buy-in of the program," Wissink said. "No system is fair, but a fairer pay system is achievable."

When forming their legislative program in March 2005, delegates to the Texas Association of Classroom Teachers Convention voted to adopt a position against state-mandated individual performance pay. Holly Eaton, director of professional development for the 50,000-member organization, explained, "The bottom line is, until we get Texas teacher salaries up to par, it is far too early to talk about performance pay. Performance pay is no substitute for an adequate base pay."

Texas Instruments (TI), which is based in Dallas and employs approximately 36,000 people worldwide, is a big believer in pay for performance, said Public Affairs Director Torrence Robinson. The company uses it as an incentive to improve productivity and retain employees; the same method could work for teachers, he said.



Jill Livingston works with her fourth-grade team in their TAP cluster. From left to right are Lyndsey Theobald, Nancia Sterling, Livingston, and Katrina Shackelford.

"TI employees worldwide have a common goal to reach and also understand their individual role in achieving success," Robinson said. "The challenge for school districts will be to measure on multiple variables and not just a single test score. Pay for performance must be well thought-out, with significant input and across-the-board support, in order to be a valued tool."

Campus-Based Training

A professional performance plan such as TAP's allows teachers to meet in clusters during the school day without leaving campus to discuss instructional strategies aimed at specific student achievement needs.

The cluster meetings give teachers an opportunity to meet, learn, plan, mentor, and share with other teachers, with the purpose of improving the quality of their instruction and thereby increasing their students' academic achievement.

Jill Livingston, a teacher at Audelia Creek Elementary School in Richardson, Texas, said cluster meetings provide campus-wide consistency in teaching practices.

"Through cluster meetings we are seeing the transfer of knowledge being used schoolwide," she explained. "It is great to see the same strategy used in fourth grade also being used in PE."

Local Control Wanted

Catherine Clark, an associate executive director for the Texas Association of School Boards, said increasing salaries is a good thing but increasing the cost of employee benefits is problematic. A compensation system, Clark said, should include professional base pay and benefits, including performance-pay bonuses.

Also, in considering any plan "in a state as diverse as Texas, a universal pay system is inappropriate," Clark said, adding, "the state education agency can give districts guidance on the elements of a good system, but it should be up to local decision-makers to design the specifics of the local plan."



Gov. Rick Perry

Any plan "should include leadership commitment to planning, implementing, evaluating, and paying for the system over a period of several years," Clark said.

"It's always time well spent when we are talking about improving student learning and improving our schools in the state of Texas," Clark concluded.

Connie Sadowski (connie@ceoaustin.org) is director of the Education Options Resource Center at the Austin CEO Foundation.

INTERNET INFO

More information about professional educator compensation packages is available at the TAP Foundation Web site, <http://www.tapSchools.org>; and the Denver Public Schools site, <http://www.DenverProComp.org>.

Audio of the October 26 panel discussion on the professional compensation plan for teachers is available at <http://www.texaspolicy.org/audio/2005-10-26-pp-teacher.html>.

More information on Denver's ProComp pay plan is available online at <http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artid=17927>.

Massachusetts Governor Proposes Merit Pay System for Teachers

by Michael Coulter

Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney (R) has proposed a package of education reforms—including merit pay for some public school teachers—for consideration this fall by the Massachusetts legislature. At press time, the legislature's Joint Committee on Education was expected to hold hearings on the proposal by the end of the year.

"If we're serious about keeping our kids at the forefront of a highly challenging and competitive world economy, then we have to take the necessary steps to energize our education system," Romney said in a September 22 statement accompanying the new education proposals.

The package of education reforms includes a program to purchase laptop computers for students in grades 7 through 12, hiring new math and science teachers, a requirement for most schools to offer Advanced Placement (AP) math and science courses, an overhaul of the teacher evaluation process, additional vocational training as part of high school, and increased remedial measures for schools with chronically bad performance.

The merit pay plan, which would be implemented over two years, includes three ways in which individuals could earn merit pay.

Earning Merits

Under Romney's plan, \$2,500 individual bonuses would be available to any instructor who teaches an AP math or science class, participates in the Commonwealth Teaching Corps (a program enabling college graduates with degrees in math, science, or engineering to teach in public schools), receives high teaching evaluations, or passes the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure.

In addition, teachers who demonstrably improved students' academic performance on standardized tests would be eligible for bonuses, though no more than one-third of the teachers in any district would be able to receive merit pay based on performance evaluations. Teachers could earn up to \$5,000 in bonuses in any academic year—for example, by teaching two AP courses, or by teaching one AP course and receiving a student performance bonus from the district. Performance standards would be subject to approval by the Massachusetts Board of Education.

"With significant and targeted new money linked to incentives for teachers we can make Massachusetts a national leader in math and science," said Paul Grogan, president of the Boston Foundation and co-chair of the Great Schools Campaign, in a statement released by the governor's office September 22.

The total cost of the education reform package is projected to be \$189 million over two years. The projected cost of the merit pay initiative, assuming 100

percent of the districts participate, is estimated to be \$70 million during the two-year period. Most districts that participated in the program would be required to pay 50 percent of the merit costs from their existing revenue sources. The state would cover 100 percent of the costs of merit pay in schools characterized as "turnaround schools"—those which have not experienced significant academic improvement, as determined by standardized-test scores, over a three-year period.

"All teachers certainly deserve to be paid a fair wage. However, we believe the time has come to look at more than just seniority and courses completed when it comes to compensation packages."

ALISON FRASER
MASS INSIGHT EDUCATION

Getting Demerits

The Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA), an affiliate of the National Education Association, strongly opposes the merit pay plan. In a September 22 statement, the union said it was an "inequitable, ineffective, and divisive" plan that "def[ies] logic" and is "riddled with absurdities," based partially on the union's assertion that fewer AP courses are available in schools located in poorer neighborhoods.

"If the governor truly wants to help improve student achievement, his first step should be to reverse the hundreds of millions of dollars in state education spending cuts that have occurred on his watch and before," MTA President Catherine A. Boudreau said in the statement. "If he has another \$69 million to spend, that money would be far better spent by targeting help to low-performing schools, reducing class sizes, extending learning time for struggling students and using other proven strategies.

"What's worse," the statement read, "it gives good teachers an incentive to flee inner-city schools for the suburbs. Why should an AP calculus teacher in Weston receive a \$2,500 bonus for which a remedial math teacher in Worcester is not even eligible?"

The MTA also rejected the provision that only one-third of the teachers in any district would be eligible for bonuses, saying this "would arbitrarily deny extra pay to excellent teachers" and is "uniquely designed to destroy collegiality in a school."

Dividing Teachers

Instead of merit pay for some teachers,

especially those in the fields of math and science, the MTA asserts pay for all teachers should be increased and all classes should be smaller. When asked for comment, the union referred to its news releases. But Mass Insight Education, another education group in the state, supported Romney's idea.

"All teachers certainly deserve to be paid a fair wage. However, we believe the time has come to look at more than just seniority and courses completed when it comes to compensation packages," said Alison Fraser, director of Mass Insight's Great Schools Campaign.

"Merit pay should reward teachers based on levels of responsibility, differing levels of expertise, and improving student achievement," Fraser continued. "We are dedicated to excellence in teaching in all subjects; in the real world, though, economic imperative dictates paying more for workers in some disciplines than in others. It may be time to adopt this global economic model, in order to attract the best teachers to the hardest-to-staff positions."



Gov. Mitt Romney

If Massachusetts adopts merit pay for teachers, it will become the sixth state to do so. Arizona, Florida, Iowa, New Mexico, and North Carolina all use public funds to support bonuses for classroom performance.

Michael Coulter (mlcoulter@gcc.edu) teaches political science at Grove City College in Pennsylvania.

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Denver Voters Approve Merit Pay for Teachers

by Karla Dial

Denver voters easily approved a \$25 million property tax increase to fund a new merit-pay program, known as the Professional Compensation System for Teachers (ProComp), in Colorado's statewide elections November 1. Measure 3A passed by 58 percent after six years of program development.

As reported in the November issue of *School Reform News*, ProComp ends the standard policy of increasing teachers' salaries primarily based on their seniority and education, and instead gives raises to teachers who sharpen their skills, increase student achievement, or agree to work in the city's toughest schools. Teachers' raises will be based solely on performance, with occasional cost-of-living adjustments.

The program is set to begin in January 2006. Current teachers began enrolling November 7 and have seven years to decide whether they want to opt in. New teachers hired after January 1 will be enrolled automatically.



"ProComp ends the standard policy of increasing teachers' salaries primarily based on their seniority and education, and instead gives raises to teachers who sharpen their skills, increase student achievement, or agree to work in the city's toughest schools."

"Denver took an encouraging step away from just paying teachers for years in the classroom and degrees on the wall," said Ben DeGrow, a policy analyst at the Independence Institute's Education Policy Center in Golden. "But the next city school district to pursue compensation reform should give less money for completing certificates and projects, and offer greater rewards for making a positive difference in student learning."

Increasingly Expensive

School districts nationwide were watching the debate over ProComp, which the National Education Association (NEA) opposed because it's a merit-pay plan and, as NEA President Reg Weaver told the *Rocky Mountain News* before the vote, there is little proof it will raise teachers' skills and students' performance.

Denver Public Schools (DPS) currently spends \$200 million a year on teachers' salaries. ProComp will cost about \$10 million in 2006, DPS Senior Policy Advisor Brad Jupp told the *Denver Post* on November 3. ProComp

gradually will become more expensive as more teachers enroll. Teachers will be able to continue getting raises until retirement, instead of topping out the pay scale at \$50,000 to \$55,000 a year. A trust board of teachers, community members, and district officials will monitor its annual costs.

In exit polls, voters seemed confident about ProComp.

"I think education is so important,

and anything that takes away from that is sad and scary," Bryann Brickell, a 30-year-old construction worker who voted for 3A, told the *Rocky Mountain News*. "I think it's very important for our future to ensure we have the best people."

Karla Dial (dial@heartland.org) is managing editor of *School Reform News*.

INTERNET INFO

Additional information on teacher pay is available through *PolicyBot™*, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.heartland.org>, click on the *PolicyBot™* button, and choose the topic/subtopic combination Education/Teacher Pay.

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Edited by Joseph L. Bast and Dennis Byrne
The Heartland Institute, 2005

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Arizona Child Advocates Want Better Education for Foster Kids

by Wendy Cloyd

Children in foster care often move from one place to another several times a year, changing schools with each move. Such disruption in education is detrimental to a child's learning and social development. Now, child advocates in Arizona are working to keep kids in the same classroom even when they are moved to a new home.

The nation's 540,000 foster children are one of the most at-risk groups in the education system, according to studies conducted by several child welfare organizations over the past decade. One of these, *Assessing the Long-Term Effects of Foster Care: A Research Synthesis*, released in 1996 by the Child Welfare League of America, reports that half of all foster children will never graduate from high school.

"The nation's 540,000 foster children are one of the most at-risk groups in the education system, according to studies conducted by several child welfare organizations over the past decade."

According to an October 7 *Arizona Republic* article, 75 percent of that state's 10,000 school-age foster children are working below grade level, and 83 percent will be held back a year.

Karin Kline, speaking for Arizona's Division of Children, Youth, and Families, said the state's foster care system recognizes instability in education is a problem to be addressed.

Finding Stability

"If you think about it, a child being removed from their home is very traumatic. It may be abusive, it may not be healthy for them, and in most cases children are removed because of neglect—but it is all that they know," Kline said. "So when we move them to foster homes not in their own neighborhoods, then we also take away their friends, their family, their teachers, and this is a national issue."

When they are moved from school to school, children don't have time to adjust and catch up to their peers, a problem that can follow them into adulthood, Kline said. That's why child welfare officials in Arizona are eager to find solutions.

"We have one program that has been very successful, called Family to Family," she said. "One component is actually knocking on doors in neighborhoods and saying, 'We've got a kid that came from your neighborhood. Are you willing to provide a home?'"



On December 12, 2002, several dozen educators, education reformers, community activists, and school children met in the Goldwater Institute's conference room for the kick-off celebration of the Investing in Children of Arizona Scholarship Fund (ICASF), a scholarship trust organization created for the express purpose of serving underprivileged children.

Finding a neighborhood home ensures children do not have to move to a different school away from friends and familiarity, and they often manage to stay on track in their studies despite the disruption in their home life. The program also works hard to maintain each placement, so that children move less frequently.

Protecting Futures

Dan Lips, an education analyst with The Heritage Foundation, said child advocates in Arizona are on the right track. He has studied trends in the education of foster care children and found some disturbing statistics.

"Based on any number of factors, children in foster care are at risk of poor life outcomes," Lips said. "Early evidence of these poor life outcomes is clear in the classroom, and all of the research agrees that the children in foster care are well behind the general population. In a report on foster children's educational needs published by the Maryland Public Policy Institute in October 2005, Lips writes, 'Compared to the general population, foster children have lower scores on standardized tests and higher absenteeism, tardiness, truancy, and dropout rates. Research has found that foster care children are more likely than the general population to be convicted of crimes and incarcerated. They are more susceptible to drug and alcohol abuse, and [more likely] to have poor physical or mental health.'

"Adults who were former foster children are more likely to be homeless, unprepared for employment and lim-

ited to low-skill jobs, and dependent on welfare or Medicaid," Lips notes.

Losing Ground

All of those things, Lips said, stem directly from the instability in foster children's lives—something that doesn't stop when they enter the foster-care system.

"The Department of Education has a statistic that says a child loses four to six months [of educational progress] any time they transfer," Lips explained. "In the case of most families, you have the benefit of moving with your family. But these kids are coming from a bad circumstance, often shifting around with nothing at all in the world of stability. Imagine how tough that is."

Wendy Cloyd (wendy_cloyd@hotmail.com) is a freelance writer in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

INTERNET INFO

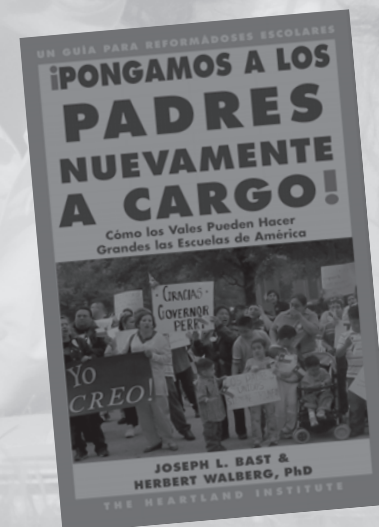
The full text of Dan Lips' report, "School Choice for Maryland's Foster Care Children: Fostering Stability, Satisfaction, and Achievement," is available through PolicyBot™, The Heartland Institute's online research database, at <http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artid=17989>.

New Bilingual Edition!

A Guide for School Reformers

LET'S PUT PARENTS BACK IN CHARGE!

by Joseph L. Bast & Herbert J. Walberg, Ph.D.



In November, The Heartland Institute released a new bilingual edition of its popular book, *Let's Put Parents Back in Charge!* The new edition includes both English and Spanish texts in the popular "flip book" style.

Let's Put Parents Back in Charge! was written by Joseph L. Bast and Herbert J. Walberg and first published by The Heartland Institute in 2003. It was a groundbreaking tool in the school choice movement, making the case for competition and markets in K-12 education in clear and easy-to-understand language. Some 60,000 copies have been distributed throughout the country by elected officials, education reform advocates, parent groups, and others.

Heartland plans to work closely with grassroots school choice organizations, charter schools, Hispanic business and civic groups, and national school choice groups to distribute the new book. If you are interested in assisting with distribution, please contact Heartland Public Affairs Director Ralph Conner at 312/377-4000, email conner@heartland.org.

Individual copies can be ordered for \$5.95 in

The Heartland Institute's online store at <http://www.heartland.org>.



Colleges of Education Urgently Need Reform, Psychologist Says

An interview with Reading First architect G. Reid Lyon

by Nancy Salvato

Dr. G. Reid Lyon is probably best known for his role as a research psychologist and advisor to President George W. Bush on child development and education research and policies, and as one of the architects of Reading First, a federal legislative initiative to improve the reading skills of children in kindergarten through third grade.

Now, Lyon is senior vice president for research and evaluation at Best Associates, a Dallas-based private merchant-banking firm with a special interest in educational initiatives. He is helping develop innovative approaches for the American College of Education, a national teacher's college that trains teachers and administrators to use the most current scientifically based educational methodologies. The college is located in Chicago but uses a blended model—live instruction supported by online interactions with professors.

Lyon is also helping develop the Texas-based Whitney International University, part of a worldwide effort to create high-quality higher-education institutions in key regions of the world and make private postsecondary education more available to all qualified students. Classes, which will begin in the 2006-07 school year both online and in classrooms worldwide, will focus on professional, technical, and practical training and education that prepares students to enter the workforce successfully.

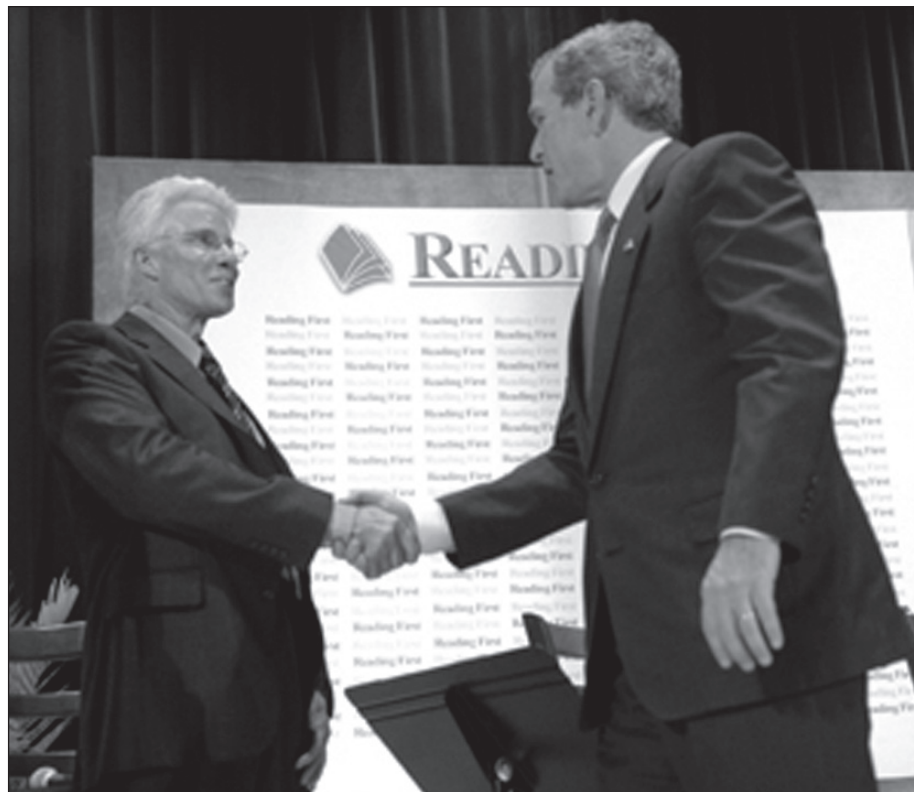
School Reform News reporter Nancy Salvato recently met with Dr. Lyon to discuss teacher education and philosophy.

Salvato: At a 2002 forum sponsored by the Council for Excellence in Government, you said if you could pass any piece of legislation, it would be “to blow up colleges of education.” How will your new college prepare teachers so they can meet the individual needs of their students?

Lyon: My comment was born out of frustration, given the level of evidence we have about what works and how kids learn, and the distance between that knowledge and what our teachers are provided in their teacher education programs.

You only have to look at the billions of dollars states and districts are spending on professional development for teachers already teaching, to understand the gravity of this situation. Why in the world would schools have to re-teach concepts to teachers they should already know? And it is the case that higher education and teacher education [have] a very hard time changing, no matter what the circumstances.

There are many reasons for this, but a critical one is that colleges of



G. Reid Lyon (left) greets President George W. Bush at a meeting to discuss Reading First, a federal initiative to improve reading skills of K-3rd grade students.

“Teachers and administrators must have the means to make accurate decisions about kids’ lives. Many [teachers] prepared in our existing colleges of education are not at that level.”

education are not accountable for what their graduates know and how that knowledge affects students in their graduates’ classrooms. Colleges of education are process-driven, not outcome-driven—the faculty, rather than student achievement, reinforce the teaching and the scholarship within the college.

Teachers can matriculate knowing absolutely nothing about evidence-based approaches, why evidence is critical in selecting and implementing instruction, and [they are thus trained to] implement instruction on the basis of philosophies and beliefs [not based on evidence]. However, when many of their students fail to learn to read, they and their schools are blamed. The institutions that provided them with the faulty information are not held accountable.

When we provide teachers and administrators with the most current and accurate information, they will know how to determine whether concepts such as multiple intelligences and differentiated instruction are valid.

They will know how to ask, “What evidence of effectiveness do these approaches have, and have they been found to work with students similar to those in my classroom?”

This is the level of training that is critical. Teachers and administrators must have the means to make accurate decisions about kids’ lives. Many [teachers] prepared in our existing colleges of education are not at that level.

Salvato: How critical are parents and their own education to their children’s success in school?

Lyon: Parent education is critical, and it has never been mobilized the way it needs to be.

We scientists haven’t done a good job of presenting information in a compelling, user-friendly way. There’s not a lot of useful information being provided to parents currently, and we have to remember that many of our most disadvantaged parents cannot read. We must be able to provide the most useful information in a way that makes sense and gives parents direction in how to improve the education of their children.

We need to focus on numerous ways to communicate to all parents so they become genuine partners in the education process.

Parents must hold us accountable for ensuring their children receive the most effective and appropriate education. Information must be transmitted through churches [and other] groups and organizations they trust. As we

are establishing the American College of Education, there is a lot of thinking going on about how we provide information to all parents in a way that is meaningful. Parents want to help their kids succeed.

Salvato: Why is the American College of Education offering courses only in Curriculum and Instruction and in Administration? Since you helped craft Reading First, why not include a course on reading methods?

Lyon: First, developing the American College of Education is an enormous task. But you have to examine which areas of education have a significant impact on all the learning activities that take place in school. Teachers in a curriculum and instruction program frequently do teach reading at the elementary and secondary levels. Many also become curriculum directors of reading and math programs. They must [have] the best information possible, because they will influence the culture of the school environment.

You can have the best teachers and the best programs, but without strong, building-level leadership, students typically fail.

In all of our programs that will be coming online as we move forward, we are making sure everything we teach and everything we do is based upon the most current and accurate information available. We are also making sure everything that is taught to teachers can be immediately applied to ensure relevance and improve fidelity of implementation. All of us learn better and retain what we learn if we can use the information in our daily lives.

Our students will be receiving information both from faculty and from online resources. A tremendous amount of current research indicates this blended approach is highly effective. Why? Because concepts that are learned can be applied and implemented and practiced through immediate, online interactions. Moreover, students can work together online to collaborate and solve problems directly relevant to their everyday classroom practices.

In using online platforms as well as faculty involvement, we can check to see if our students are understanding the concepts they are learning, and can then provide additional, immediate instruction if they do not understand. This ongoing progress monitoring is essential. Very importantly, we are developing assessment systems that allow us to track our students into the classrooms they teach in, and determine if what we taught them actually benefits the students they teach. This is a very effective way to determine how well we are doing where it counts: student achievement.

Nancy Salvato (nancy.salvato@basicsproject.org) is president of The Basics Project, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and educational project whose mission is to promote the education of the American public on the basic elements of relevant political, legal, and social issues important to our country.

Education a Top Priority at State Policy Network Meeting



by Lori Drummer

More than 300 people attended the State Policy Network's (SPN) 13th Annual Meeting in Charleston, South Carolina, September 29-October 1—the organization's largest meeting since its founding in 1992. SPN is the nation's only organization dedicated to improving the practical effectiveness of state-based think tanks. South Carolina Gov. Mark Sanford (R) addressed the crowd, stressing the public's need for competition among schools.

The three-day event included development sessions and policy forums designed to help state-based think tanks better educate local citizens, policymakers, and opinion leaders about market-oriented solutions to state and local policy challenges.

Sanford Calls for Choice

Sanford delivered the keynote address at the opening banquet, which was hosted by the South Carolina Policy Council, the predominant public policy think tank in South Carolina. Sanford said the state has a responsibility to serve its citizens in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

"If you have your principles right in life, good things will follow," Sanford said. He stressed his commitment to advancing school choice, especially in view of "how unique God makes each child."

During his remarks, Sanford reminded listeners "nobody spends your money like you do," a statement met with loud and long applause. He encouraged all state leaders to invest in programs that have proven results, and he urged each state think tank to engage in productive debate with their respective legislatures.

"We felt compelled to host the SPN Annual Meeting in South Carolina, given all the recent school reform efforts going on in the state," SPN President

Tracie Sharp said. "The South Carolina Policy Council and Governor Sanford continue to lead the charge for real education reform."

Sanford has been a strong proponent of greater educational choice, evidenced by his February 2004 proposal for the "Put Parents in Charge Act," a tuition tax credit program. Reintroduced for the 2005 session, the bill includes a tax credit for educational expenses, including tuition and donations to scholarship organizations. The bill did not pass before the end of the summer legislative session.

Innovation Grant Awarded

The Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation presented its second annual \$25,000 grant to the Grassroot Institute of Hawaii, for Innovation in Promoting School Choice. The grant is intended to be used to promote the concept of universal school choice and to spark a constructive dialogue about K-12 education reforms between lawmakers and the public.

By accepting the grant, the Grassroot Institute of Hawaii is charged with encouraging new and innovative efforts to promote school choice throughout the state. In exchange, the Friedman Foundation hopes to develop long-lasting partnerships with the think tank as it undertakes efforts to promote education competition.

"The Foundation was very pleased at the number and quality of proposals we received for our 2005 Innovation Grant, and look forward to even more interest for the 2006," said Brian McGrath, director of programs and state relations at the Friedman Foundation. "We think



"We felt compelled to host the SPN Annual Meeting in South Carolina, given all the recent school reform efforts going on in the state. The South Carolina Policy Council and Governor Sanford continue to lead the charge for real education reform."

TRACIE SHARP
STATE POLICY NETWORK

it is crucial for advocates to continue to look for new and creative ways to promote school choice, and are proud to help SPN members do just that."

Shared Experiences

The Friedman Foundation also helped develop a variety of conference panels targeting specific trends in education policy.

"The K-12 education reform panels were essential to the SPN Annual Meeting since every state-based think tank is tackling this issue in their respective state," Sharp said. "We were pleased that the Friedman Foundation could once again partner with SPN on these crucial strategy sessions."

The panels helped state policy experts learn from other states' experiences. Sessions included media training, current school choice programs, and trends in pre-kindergarten programs. Royce Van Tassell, executive director

of Education Excellence Utah, and Jay Greene, Ph.D., a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, led a stimulating discussion about the tactics teacher unions use in opposing education reforms. Van Tassell discussed Utah's battle for school choice, and Greene shared the findings documented in his new book, *Education Myths: What Special-Interest Groups Want You to Believe About Our Schools and Why It Isn't So*.

Turnout High

"We were really enthused by the high turnout and active participation for the panels," McGrath said. "There was a lot of interaction between the panelists and the audience, which made for a better learning experience for everyone."

Next fall, SPN will host a K-12 Education Reform Summit in conjunction with its 14th Annual Meeting in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The goal of the summit is to bring together education reform advocates from across the country for two days of networking and strategizing.

Lori Drummer (ldrummer@alec.org) is director of the Education Task Force at the American Legislative Exchange Council.

INTERNET INFO

Transcripts of panel presentations at the 2005 State Policy Network annual meeting are available online at <http://www.spn.org>.

Heartland Institute Fellow Leads Project on Unintended Consequences

Unintended consequences abound in politics and government, and in the private sector as well. Increased expenditures by school districts fail to bring the expected improvements in student achievement. High tax rates produce less revenue than lower rates. Higher spending on health care often correlates only to poorer health. The ban on DDT led to catastrophic increases in malaria mortality rates, and the Endangered Species Act has endangered species instead of saving them.

Soon, comprehensive documentation of such unintended consequences will be available. Dr. Jay Lehr, The Heartland Institute's science director, and his associate James Jacobs have been contracted by the University of Michigan Press to edit a series of books about these and many other unintended consequences of government and private action. Topical areas include each of Heartland's areas of major focus: health care, education, budget and taxes, and environmental science.

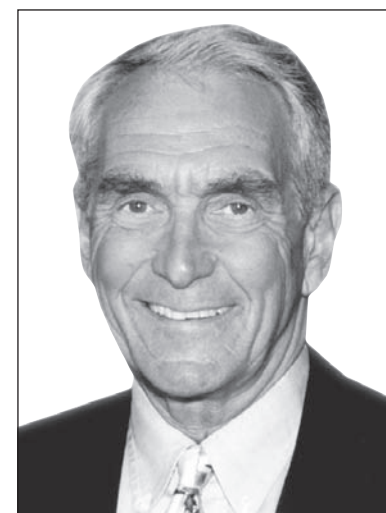
Heartland is pleased to participate in this important project, which could bring the folly of so many misguided public policies home to the average citizen who is affected by them.

Contributors are being sought from every walk of life who have encountered or become aware of stories that had interesting, if not momentous, unintended consequences. Politics is rife with them, but so is nearly every other field. Contributions to the book can be as short as 500 words or as long as 1,400. The University of

Michigan Press intends to publish annual volumes beginning in 2006. The deadline for the first volume is April 2006. Approximately 100 contributions will be selected for the first volume.

Complete information on the project and instructions on how you can participate are available online at <http://www.crystalballprize.com>.

The logo for the Web site is the famous Post-it note, the unintended consequence of a product developed by 3M from a failed search for a new glue that would harden and not be sticky. The name of the Web site alludes to the plan of the University of Michigan Press to give an annual award to the individual or individuals possessing the most erroneous crystal ball in their work.



Jay Lehr, Ph.D., science director
The Heartland Institute

Report Debunks Voucher Myths, Calls for School Choice

by Kate McGreevy

A report recently released by the Maryland Public Policy Institute endorses and explains school vouchers in a way designed especially to provide guidance for policymakers.

"Top Five Myths of School Vouchers and Why They Should Not Impede Education Reform in Maryland" was released September 12, 2005. Author Kirk A. Johnson, Ph.D., an adjunct fellow of the Maryland Public Policy Institute and senior policy analyst at The Heritage Foundation, said state policymakers are the intended audience.

Johnson's report contends Maryland has a broken education system, citing the recent decision by the state's Board of Education to take over the failing Baltimore City Schools as well as dismal scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress for Maryland's fourth- and eighth-grade public school students.

Political Climate 'Not Ready'

In the report, Johnson tackles five commonly held reasons for opposing vouchers (see "Top Five Myths About School Vouchers," this page), including the claims that vouchers take money from the public school system, are not accountable for public funds, and draw gifted

students away from the public schools.

Johnson wrote the report with Maryland's legislators in mind. Governor Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R), who helped pass the state's first charter school law before gaining his current office nearly three years ago, currently does not support school vouchers. His lieutenant governor agrees with that position. In September 2004, the *Baltimore Sun* quoted Lt. Gov. Michael S. Steel as saying vouchers "[are] not something I'm pushing or the governor is pushing.



"The governor has opposition 'at this time,' which to me is code for 'he doesn't want to fight the battle right now.' Maryland is a heavily left-leaning state, and it will take some time before politicians feel sufficiently comfortable discussing vouchers."

KIRK A. JOHNSON, PH.D.
MARYLAND PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE

Maryland is not ready."

However, Johnson said Ehrlich might not actually oppose school choice but is finding the political climate too harsh for a reform some consider extreme.

"The governor has opposition 'at this time,' which to me is code for 'he doesn't want to fight the battle right now,'" Johnson said. "Maryland is a heavily left-leaning state, and it will take some time before politicians feel sufficiently comfortable discussing vouchers."

Policy Groups Support Vouchers

While parent groups have advocated successfully for school choice programs in places like nearby Washington, DC over the past few years, Johnson noted support in Maryland is not currently coming from the grassroots.

"The Maryland Public Policy Institute is certainly pushing vouchers," Johnson said. "Certain legislators, such as state Delegate Joseph Boeteler [a Baltimore County Republican], are interested in other forms of school choice, such as tax credits. Generally, though, MPPI is the only group pushing vouchers at this time in the state."

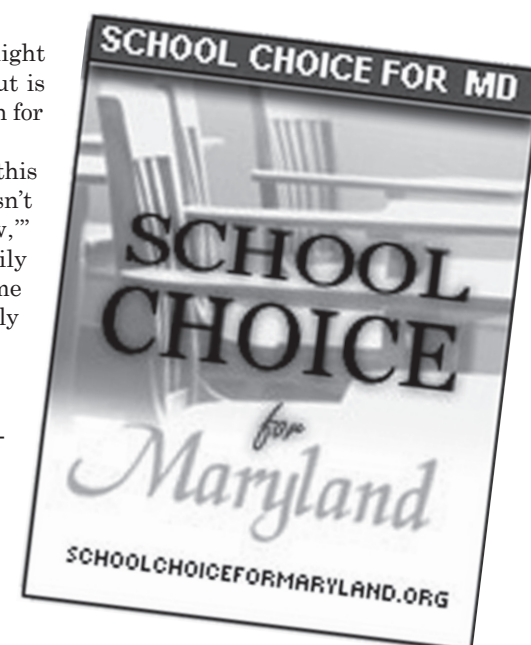
One group definitely opposed to vouchers is the Maryland State Teachers Association. According to its Web site, "We have long held that every available tax dollar provided by Marylanders ought to go to meet the needs of the public schools. There are plenty of unmet needs in our public schools and our state ought not to be giving money to people to spend on private schools."

Johnson counters this claim directly in Myth #1 (see sidebar), noting research shows the city of Baltimore, for example, could save between \$1 million and \$6 million annually by adopting a voucher plan.

Private Schools Ready

Although vouchers might be a few years away in Maryland, Johnson is confident organizations such as the Archdiocese of Baltimore would be amenable to accommodating students seeking a better education.

"I have no doubt that private schools



would grow to accommodate the demand," Johnson said. "Recall that the Archdiocese of Washington Schools was a strong force in the DC voucher debate, promising to open up space for students. I am certain that would happen again with a statewide voucher program in Maryland."

Kate McGreevy (mcgreevy@gmail.com) is a freelance education writer living in New Mexico. She formerly worked with the Cesar Chavez Public Charter Schools for Public Policy in Washington, DC.

INTERNET INFO

The full text of "Top Five Myths of School Vouchers and Why They Should Not Impede Education Reform in Maryland" is available online at <http://www.mdpolicy.org/research/education/policyreport2005-3.pdf>.

To learn more about the Maryland State Teachers Association, visit <http://www.mstanea.org>.

Top Five Myths About School Vouchers

Myth #1: Vouchers siphon money away from public schools.

Debunked: Vouchers have the potential to save money for districts, because voucher amounts are typically less than the average per-pupil allotment, while the responsibility of educating a voucher child is shifted to a private school.

Myth #2: Voucher schools are not accountable to the government for funds.

Debunked: The accountability discussion should be shifted from one about public funds to one about parental rights. If parents are not satisfied with a voucher school, they can hold that school accountable by taking their child and their voucher elsewhere.

Myth #3: Vouchers "cream" the best students from the public schools.

Debunked: Statistics show little evidence to support the claim that voucher students are either socioeconomically privileged or academically gifted. Voucher students might enjoy one major advantage: involved parents.

Myth #4: Voucher students do not have better academic achievement than public school students.

Debunked: The academic achievement gains of voucher students have been well-documented in cities such as New York City and Dayton, Ohio, and in no evaluation have students using vouchers performed worse than their peers on standardized tests. Even if academic gains are not made, vouchers save taxpayer money and empower parents.

Myth #5: Other school reforms, such as smaller classes, work better than vouchers.

Debunked: While some reforms might be effective on a small scale, vouchers have the potential to effect large-scale change, while increasing student achievement and saving states money.

From "Top Five Myths of School Vouchers and Why They Should Not Impede Education Reform in Maryland," by Kirk A. Johnson, September 12, 2005, Maryland Public Policy Institute.

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Celebrate

Continued from page 1

Virginia Walden Ford, executive director of D.C. Parents for School Choice and chair of the D.C. Black Alliance for Educational Options, hosted the School Choice Parent Dinner, which included a keynote address from former U.S. Education Secretary Roderick Paige. School choice students of all ages performed a dance selection, violin solos, and choir songs.

"As I looked at the happy faces of the families who came to celebrate educational opportunities for their children, I was reminded of why it is so important to continue to advocate on their behalf for quality education for all children," Ford said about the evening.

During her opening remarks, Ford likened her work for school choice to the work of the Underground Railroad, because she believes both programs directed people to freedom.

"As I looked at the happy faces of the families who came to celebrate educational opportunities for their children, I was reminded of why it is so important to continue to advocate on their behalf for quality education for all children."

VIRGINIA WALDEN FORD
D.C. PARENTS FOR SCHOOL CHOICE

Parents' Importance Emphasized

Paige reiterated the theme of freedom during his passionate speech about the need to promote school choice. Born in segregated Mississippi, he had no choice in the inferior schools he attended, he said, but his family saw no choice but for him to succeed academically. He reminded parents their children were "not born defective," and said it is up to them, as parents, to encourage their children to pursue education at all levels.

"What an evening it was!" Ford said. "Hundreds of parents and children attended, along with many of our school choice friends. It was such a wonderful, magical night."

Sally Sachar, president of the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF)—the designated administrator of the scholarships in the program—said every parent involved was as important as the keynote speakers.

"It was a wonderful night for everyone involved, especially for the parents who have worked so hard and are so committed to the education of their children," Sachar said. "The families are the true heroes of the school choice movement, along with Virginia Walden Ford and D.C. Parents for School Choice."

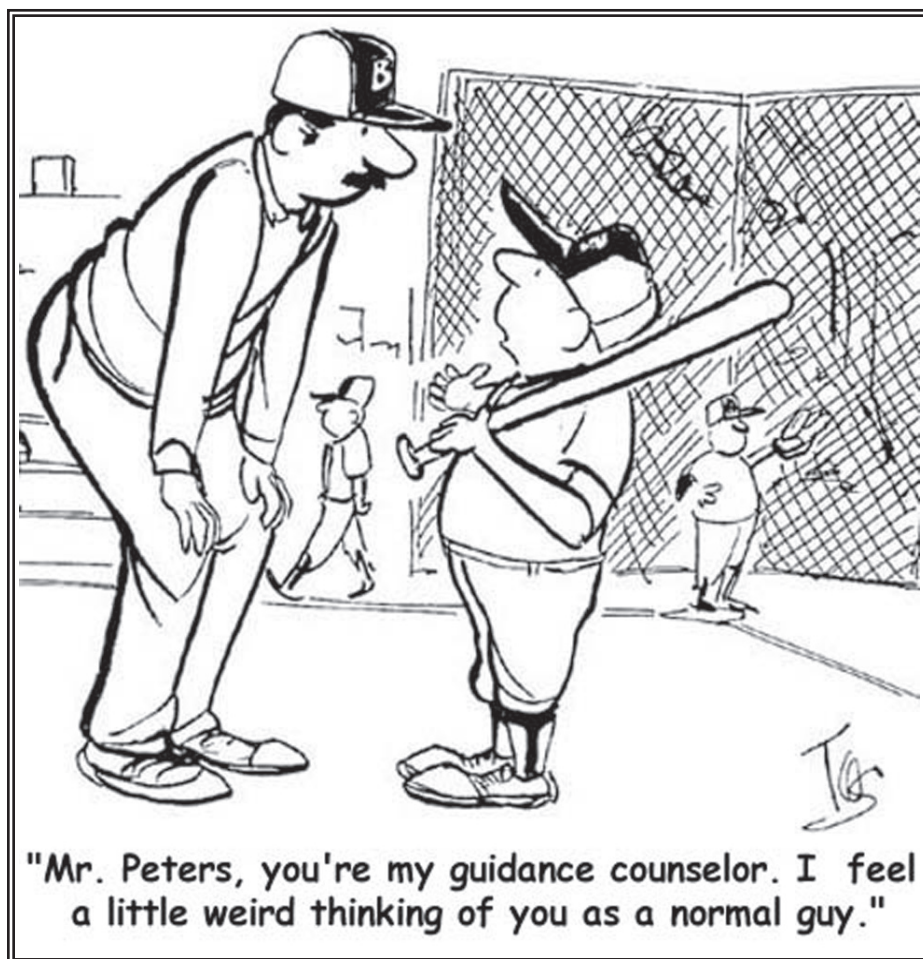
Demand for Choice Strong

According to the U.S. Department of Education's first evaluation of the D.C. scholarship program, now in its second year of operation, "a majority of public school parents who applied to the program cited 'academic quality' as the primary reason why they wanted to choose a new school. A high percentage of parent applicants, especially those with children attending schools 'in need of improvement,' identified fighting and tardiness as serious problems at their current schools."

The federally funded D.C. Opportunity



(Top, from left) Alan Price, Amir Price, Alexander Coal, Virginia Walden Ford, and Teresa Price (Alan, Amir and Alexander's mother). The boys played violin solos for guests at the October 5 celebration of the DC School Choice Program. (Below) Virginia Walden Ford is executive director of D.C. Parents for School Choice.



Scholarship Program has experienced overwhelming demand and was filled to capacity beginning its second academic year. WSF announced in September that 1,705 students have enrolled in 59 non-public District of Columbia schools for the 2005-06 school year.

The program provides eligible low-income children with up to \$7,500 per year to pay for tuition, transportation, and fees at participating non-public schools in the District. Because not all scholarships will be funded for the full \$7,500, WSF was able to serve more than the 1,613 students funded under the federal appropriation.

Of the students who received new scholarships and enrolled in participating schools this year, 56 percent either attended D.C. public schools identified as "in need of improvement" last year or are attending kindergarten in 2005-06. The median household income for children who received scholarships in the program's first year was less than \$19,000. Approximately 80 percent of the children who applied for scholar-

ships in the program's first year were living in single-parent homes.

Lori Drummer (ldrummer@alec.org) directs the Education Task Force at the American Legislative Exchange Council, where she is responsible for overseeing the development of ALEC policy related to education reform and school choice programs.

INTERNET INFO

Additional information on the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship Program is available through *PolicyBot™*, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.heartland.org>, click on the *PolicyBot™* button, and choose the topic/subtopic combination Education/Vouchers: D.C.

Chicago Sports Upset: Student-Athletes Edge Out Peers Academically

by George A. Clowes

Good news about student athletes in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) was publicized in Mayor Richard M. Daley's "Principal for a Day" news conference October 27.

In addition to announcing that an anonymous philanthropist had donated \$2 million to provide basketball shoes to every basketball player in the city's public schools, CPS Chief Executive Officer Arne Duncan reported on a district analysis that showed student athletes in CPS high schools, on average, performed better academically than other students.

The student-athletes not only earned higher grade-point averages than the student body as a whole, but they also had better attendance records.

"The myth of the dumb jock is just that—it's a myth," said Duncan, according to CPS official Calvin Davis, who was at the news conference. Duncan went on to stress the importance of sports in teaching children about the value of leadership, teamwork, discipline, and hard work.

Integral to Education

Davis, director of CPS Sports Administration and Facilities Management, had spoken about the student-athlete study a week earlier at the second annual Sports Is Education Symposium at Loyola University's Water Tower Campus on October 20.

"Sports is part of the educational system," Davis said, noting that in more than 90 percent of CPS high schools, "student athletes had higher GPAs, better attendance [records], and fewer disciplinary referrals" than their non-athlete peers. They also had higher graduation rates, he observed.

Organized by Chicago-Kent sports law professor Eldon Hamm, sports media producer Terry Poulos, and Loyola University athletic director John Planeck, the annual Sports Is Education Symposium serves as a forum for school administrators, athletic directors, and coaches—those who work at the intersection of education, law, and sports—to share expert advice on proven practices in that field.

Background Checks Urged

One of the panel discussions at the symposium was about the screening of coaches. Planeck urged attendees to perform background checks on all coaches, saying it "will save you a lot of aggravation in the long run."

In addition to verifying that applicants actually are who they say they are and have the educational qualifications they claim to have earned, background checks fulfill "due diligence" and protect an organization from negligent-hiring lawsuits regarding employees or volunteers who have unacceptable criminal convictions in their past, such as sex offenses or assault and battery.

Davis reported CPS has an extensive in-house process for screening all coaches, including taking fingerprints and carrying out background checks.

Screening Available

An alternative to in-house screening was

presented by LexisNexis sales executive Mike Empey, who explained his firm's Screening Solutions division offers schools and other clients a range of background checks, with the cost depending upon the extent of checking required for due diligence.

Although a low-cost background check doesn't provide as much information as an expensive one, Empey said checks for coaches cost about \$30 to \$35 apiece. To determine the appropriate level of screening, LexisNexis provides its clients with

guidelines for "Establishing a Best-Practice Background Screening Program."

Sometimes a background check isn't done, said Empey, because the applicant fails to complete the first requirement of the screening process—signing a consent form to allow LexisNexis to do the background check. But even a clean background report may show a red flag, such as frequent moves.

"If a coach has moved every year for the last 10 years, he's probably not a very good coach," Empey said.

George A. Clowes (clowesga@aol.com) is a senior fellow at The Heartland Institute.

INTERNET INFO

For more information about LexisNexis Screening Solutions, visit <http://www.LexisNexis.com/screening>.

HILLSDALE COLLEGE ANNOUNCES THE TENTH RECIPIENT OF THE



\$25,000 Henry Salvatori Prize FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING

EACH FALL, Hillsdale College seeks nominations for the Henry Salvatori Prize for Excellence in Teaching. This prize honors teachers in grades K-12 who are committed to rigorous standards and to a traditional, time-tested approach to education. Endowed by the late businessman and philanthropist Henry Salvatori, this competition is open to teachers in non-profit private and public schools who have employed the *Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide*. Winners receive a \$25,000 cash award payable to their school.

Kjerstie Keen of Cheyenne Mountain Charter Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado, is hereby named the recipient of the 2005 Henry Salvatori Prize for Excellence in Teaching.

The *Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide* is an invaluable resource for teachers, administrators and parents who seek to educate their children in a well-balanced core of essential subjects. Based on the daily operation of Hillsdale Academy, the K-12 model school of Hillsdale College, the *Guide* contains course syllabi, supplementary reading lists, school handbooks and administrative policies. It is currently being used by more than 500 schools nationwide, as well as by countless home-schooling parents.

To learn more about the Henry Salvatori Prize for Excellence in Teaching or the *Hillsdale Academy Reference Guide*, call (800) 989-7323 or log on to www.hillsdale.edu/academy.

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KJERSTIE KEEN
2005 Henry Salvatori
Prize Recipient



Milwaukee

Continued from page 1



Gov. Jim Doyle

report, "School Choice and Community Renewal," released in late September by School Choice Wisconsin (SCW). Information for the report was gathered through a comprehensive survey of the 140 MPCP schools.

"Many of the [facility improvement] projects involve new and renovated schools in areas of high poverty. The projects help stabilize these neighborhoods and take fiscal pressure off the Milwaukee Public Schools and its taxpayers," SCW President Susan Mitchell said.

'Families Can Remain'

The study revealed that since 1990, \$80.2 million has been spent on new schools and facility improvements in private schools participating in the MPCP, \$30.2 million in independent charter schools, and \$8.2 million in private partnership schools serving public school students.

The 91 projects at 71 schools ranged in cost from \$1,000 to \$8.2 million, with the average project costing about \$1.3 million. Funds were provided by an array of sources, including private grants, loans, and capital campaigns. Public funds were not counted in the survey.

The projects ranged from basic maintenance to construction of new schools. One prominent project took place at St. Anthony School on Milwaukee's south side, where the 133-year-old school finished a \$1.1 million renovation last year.

"Parents no longer need to abandon central city neighborhoods in order [for their children] to attend quality schools," St. Anthony President Terry Brown said. "Families can remain in their neighborhoods and create a strong and cohesive social fabric because they are confident that they are exercising

the best available educational choice for their children."

Rationing Looms

St. Anthony's and other schools in the MPCP face considerable uncertainty, however, because they could soon be forced to deal with seat rationing in the program. State law caps total enrollment at a number equal to 15 percent of students in the Milwaukee Public Schools.

The ceiling—currently 14,751 students—was reached in October. Rationing would disrupt planning by families and schools throughout the MPCP by dividing up the limited number of spots in the program between former recipients and new applicants. Some children who qualify for the program won't be able to participate.

Governor Proposes Lifting Cap

Wisconsin Gov. Jim Doyle (D), who vetoed three separate legislative efforts to lift the cap and avoid rationing over the past three years, on November 4 proposed increasing MPCP enrollment to 18 percent of the number of students enrolled in Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). Doyle's proposal is part of a much larger education package that also changes standardized tests and accreditation requirements, increases MPS funding, and reduces class sizes statewide.

Because Doyle's proposed reform package includes so many facets, Sen. Luther Olsen (R-Ripon), chairman of the Senate Education Committee, gave it little chance of passing. Sen. Alberta Darling (R-River Hills) expressed similar misgivings to the Associated Press

on November 5, saying if Doyle "was serious about giving Milwaukee's low-income minority parents continued educational choices, he would propose a choice cap expansion plan that has no strings attached."

Howard Fuller, chair of the Black Alliance for Educational Options, a nonprofit school choice advocacy organization based in Milwaukee, said in a November 4 news release that Doyle should simply lift the cap altogether. "The Governor's intentions will be measured by his willingness to work with legislative leaders on a plan that has a reasonable chance of passing the Assembly and Senate," Fuller said.

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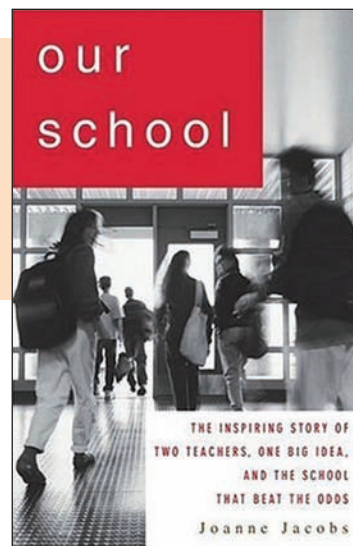
California Charter School Prepares Hispanic Students for College

Our School: The Inspiring Story of Two Teachers, One Big Idea, and the School That Beat the Odds

Joanne Jacobs

(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

256 pages, ISBN: 1403970238, \$16.47



review by Nancy Salvato

Author Joanne Jacobs understands a fundamental problem with the way our public school systems are set up: "Less affluent parents are stuck with what they get." Reform, she observes, can take years. Unfortunately, that is not a luxury kids stuck in the system can afford.

Charter schools offer an alternative approach to education—a way to escape the system. For example, students attending Downtown College Prep, a charter school in San Jose, California, learn in a dynamic environment where teachers and administrators try new ways to provide a learning experience that truly prepares them for college, as Jacobs relates in *Our School*. Students must work hard to succeed there, and students who don't devote themselves to their education don't get ahead.

Helping Underachievers

"Charters flourish where the traditional public school system has failed to meet the needs of some or all students," Jacobs writes. Two teachers, Jennifer Andaluz and Greg Lippman, decided to start their own charter school to prepare San Jose's underachieving Hispanic students for four-year colleges. They launched Downtown College Prep (DCP) in the fall of 2000.

In 2004, DCP scored a perfect 10 on the California Academic Performance Index—the key rating tool for Golden State schools under the Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999—compared with schools with similar demographics. DCP enrolled the highest percentage of

students who are not fluent in English, and tied with another school for the most low-income students.

The school's success did not come overnight. In the first year, most incoming ninth graders were reading at a fourth- to sixth-grade level, a few even lower. The majority needed to learn how to do homework. The teachers learned early on that they had to dedicate most of their efforts to closing the learning gap in the ninth grade.

For many students, that meant attending summer school or even repeating a grade, but the administrators were determined no one would graduate DCP unprepared to meet the demands of college.

Inspiration, Information

The most difficult task for teachers that first year was to get students to buy into the idea that they could go to college and that it was within their reach, Jacobs reports. Many DCP students were "victims of bad bilingual education, ... semiliterate in two languages," Jacobs writes.

Nonetheless, teachers refused to water down their expectations or their curriculum goals. Instead, they patiently worked to get their students up to speed.

Another problem the school faced in its early days was communicating with students' parents, who often spoke less English than their children. Some parents were operating under the misconception that "F" stood for "fabuloso," meaning fabulous.

"Immigrant parents often don't know their children are doing poorly in school until they're way behind," Jacobs notes. To combat that problem, parents of ninth graders attended monthly classes on how to help their children succeed in school. Among other things, they learned it's not OK to pull their kids out of school for long vacations in Mexico.

Working Harder

DCP uses an eight-hour school day, releasing children at 5:00 p.m., and it requires students to wear uniforms. Kids can be, and are, expelled for bad behavior. Students and faculty alike are required to adhere to core principles relating to motivation, pride, and community.

"We try to build character," Lippman explained. "It's not enough to teach basic skills. Students also need to learn to solve problems and handle failure."

The biggest problem DCP faced in its first three years of operation was finding a school building big enough to house its expanding enrollment. After starting with 102 students in fall 2000, administrators rented a former gym in downtown San Jose in 2002. As 368 students started school at DCP in fall 2004, administrators signed a long-term lease on a closed elementary school building, which currently meets their needs.

In spring 2004, the first graduating class, 54 students, accepted their diplomas. The DCP college counseling program found ways for all of them to pay their first semester's college tuition.

Nancy Salvato (nancy.salvato@basicsproject.org) is president of The Basics Project, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research and educational project whose mission is to promote the education of the American public on the basic elements of relevant political, legal, and social issues important to our country.

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