



School Reform News

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THE MONTHLY NEWSPAPER FOR SCHOOL REFORMERS

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California, Massachusetts Reject Universal Preschool



California voters and Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney rejected plans for state-run preschool programs, but in July Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich (inset) authorized a statewide preschool program with a \$45 million annual price tag.

But a similar plan passes in Illinois

By Lisa Snell

The idea of large-scale, state-run, "free" preschool programs stalled in two states and passed in one so far this year.

California voters and Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney (R) rejected plans for universal preschool in June and August, respectively. But on July 25, Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) signed a measure making his state the first to fund preschool for all 3- and 4-year-olds.

Elsewhere, the concept is still in play. According to an August 2006 Manhattan Institute report, *Pre-K: Shaping the System that Shapes Children*, 20 governors mentioned pre-K in their 2005 State of the State addresses, and 26 state legislatures proposed increasing investments in their state's pre-K programs for FY06.

Legislatures in Vermont and Wisconsin held hearings this summer debating the merits of funding preschool for all children. In Virginia, Gov. Tim Kaine (D) will announce the details of his universal preschool plan sometime this fall.

California Rejection

On June 6, 61 percent of California voters rejected a ballot initiative that would have funded voluntary preschool for every 4-year-old in the state through a \$2.8 billion annual tax

PRESCHOOL p. 16

Maine Parents Take Choice to Supreme Court

By Michael Coulter

Jill Guay of Minot, Maine knows other parents in her state can send their children to private schools on the state's dime. She wants to do the same, by sending her daughter to a private school that reflects her values. By October's end she may know whether the U.S. Supreme Court will hear her plea.

Guay, with the help of the Institute for Justice, is seeking to overturn a Maine policy preventing parents from using the state's 133-year-old Town Tuitioning Program for a private religious school.

MAINE p. 8

Harvard Study Refutes NCES Findings

By Hilary Oswald

A Harvard University study released in August refutes the conclusions of a federal report released earlier this summer that said students in public schools perform as well as or better than their private school counterparts.

The new study, conducted by Paul Peterson and Elena Llaudet of Harvard's Program on Education Policy

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Denver May Reform School Funding

By Ben DeGrow

A coalition of parents and community groups has pushed Denver education officials toward revamping the way local schools are funded. Early this fall,

Denver Public Schools (DPS) was ready to make some changes but was taking a closer look at the details.

A report published in June by the Metro Organizations for People (MOP)—a federation of Denver schools, religious congregations, and youth and neighborhood organizations—called on DPS to implement weighted student funding, which distributes dollars to schools based on individual students' needs because of

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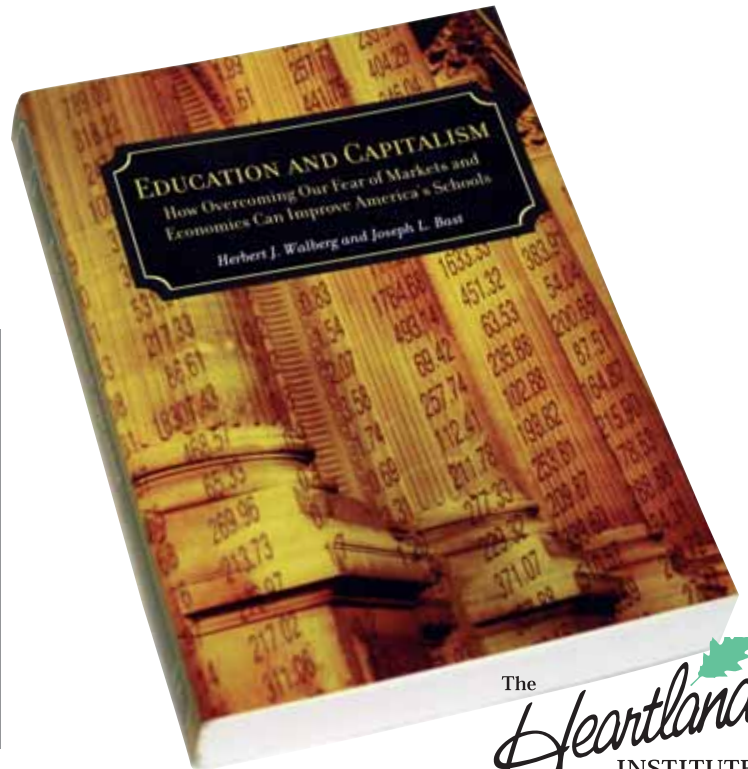
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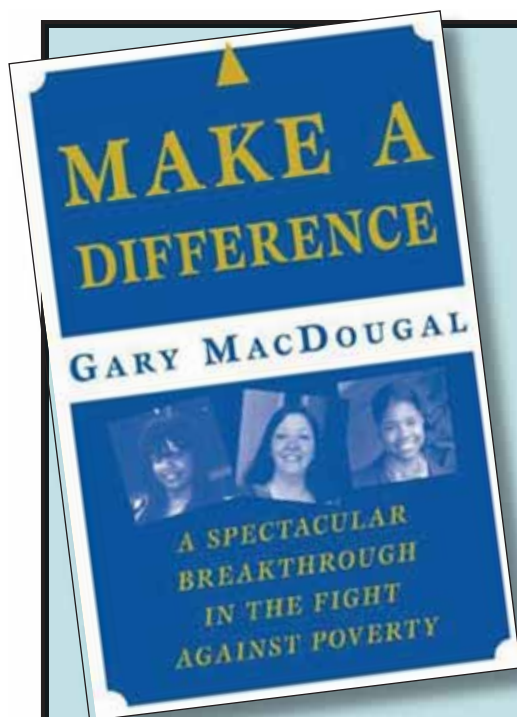


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Make a Difference is both a compelling memoir and convincing proof that we now know important answers to help solve America's poverty problem—without spending any more of the taxpayers' money.

Author Gary MacDougal spent years working in Illinois inner cities and rural communities—talking with “ladies in the backyard,” befriending community leaders, and working with local organizations in his quest to find solutions that have long eluded academic researchers and politicians. As chairman of the Governor's Task Force on Human Services Reform, MacDougal was the catalyst for the complete overhaul of the state's welfare system, which included the largest reorganization of state government since 1900.

Eight years after MacDougal's suggestions were implemented, Illinois now stands well ahead of California, New York, and other big-city states, with a spectacular 86 percent reduction in the welfare rolls since reform implementation in 1996, second only to Wyoming among all 50 states. The welfare rolls in Chicago's Cook County have been reduced an amazing 85 percent, with studies showing that most who left the rolls are working, and at pay above minimum wage.

MacDougal's extraordinary journey shows the way for the rest of the nation and proves there are ways we can all help provide a ladder of opportunity for those in poverty. We each can *Make a Difference* in the ongoing effort to end America's poverty problem.

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D.C. School Choice Eligibility Expansion Receives Bipartisan Support in Congress

Backers seek increase to keep students in program

By Dan Lips

U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback (R-KS) introduced legislation in July to amend the federally funded D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program to allow participating families to remain in it even if their incomes rise above the limit of the original legislation.

The scholarship program, enacted by Congress in 2004, provides tuition scholarships worth up to \$7,500 to approximately 1,700 Washington, DC students to attend private schools.

To be eligible, students' families must have incomes below 185 percent of the federal poverty guidelines. Once a child is enrolled, he or she can stay on scholarship as long as his family's income remains below 200 percent of the poverty line.

Brownback's proposal would raise the income cap for children already participating in the program to 300 percent of the poverty line. The income guidelines for children entering the program would remain the same.

Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-LA) is supporting Brownback's proposal.

Two Thoughts

The measure's supporters say it's needed to allow families to remain in the program and preserve its validity in federally mandated academic effectiveness evaluations. Critics charge expanding the income limits undermines the program's purpose of helping low-income families.

Sally Sachar, president of the Washington Scholarship Fund, the nonprofit organization that administers the program, explained why the change is necessary.

"Under the current income guidelines, some students will lose their scholarships due to relatively small increases in their household incomes," Sachar said. "Without the legislative change, these families will have to remove their children from their new educational settings because they cannot afford tuition."

Democrat Eleanor Holmes Norton, a non-voting delegate representing the District of Columbia in Congress, opposes Brownback's proposal. She argues allowing families whose incomes rise dramatically to remain in the program is outside the original purpose of the law and harms the evaluation.

In a July 18 statement directed to Brownback and Landrieu, Norton said, "Some senators seem determined to raise the income limit, even if it means that the program being evaluated is no longer the low-income program the statute mandates." She suggested the legislation would result in an unfair situation for some District residents.

"This amendment guarantees that unsubsidized low- and modest-income

families struggling on their own to send their children to Catholic and other religious schools in the District of Columbia will find their children in the same schools with subsidized voucher children," Norton said.

Little Change

Sachar said the proposed change wouldn't significantly alter who benefits from the scholarship program.

"If the income eligibility limit is raised," Sachar explained, "the average household income for scholarship students would increase only slightly, from the current average of \$21,100—106 percent of the federal poverty line for a family of four—to approximately \$22,600—113 percent of the federal poverty line for a family of four."

"If the income eligibility limit is raised, the average household income for scholarship students would increase only slightly, from the current average of \$21,100 ... to approximately \$22,600 ..."

SALLY SACHAR

PRESIDENT

WASHINGTON SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Other supporters say the change must be made to protect the validity of the federally mandated academic evaluation of the scholarship program.

"This is one of the few federal programs that is being evaluated using a rigorous evaluation," explained Nina Rees, a consultant to the Alliance for School Choice. "Sen. Brownback's intent was to ensure that the study's integrity was not being compromised so early in the process [due to too many students being forced out of the program]."

The results of the initial academic evaluation—measuring test scores of comparison groups of private school and public school students that entered a lottery for scholarships—will be released next year.

In 2005, Georgetown University researchers released the first report



U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback has introduced legislation that would allow participating families to remain in the D.C. Opportunity Scholarship program.

studying the D.C. voucher program's impact. The report, based on focus group discussions with participating families, found parents and students alike were "very satisfied" with their experience in the scholarship program.

Practical Step

In addition to protecting the federally mandated academic evaluation, Rees said the proposed changes are a fair, practical remedy.

"As a matter of principle, sound public policy programs should not discriminate against work and marriage, and they should always have a cost-of-living adjustment," Rees explained. "So in this respect, the Brownback fix helps to keep in the program more children whose families are simply trying to make ends meet."

In July, the Senate Appropriations Committee passed Brownback's measure, including it in Congress's budget for the District of Columbia to be considered by the full Senate this fall.

Its prospects for implementation this year, Rees said, "are very good, especially given Sen. Landrieu's support."

Dan Lips (dan.lips@heritage.org) is an education policy analyst at The Heritage Foundation in Washington, DC.

INTERNET INFO

Washington Scholarship Fund, <http://www.dcscholarships.org/>

Harvard

Continued from page 1

and Governance, criticizes the methodology federal researchers used to analyze the data.

"It is unfortunate that a study commissioned by an agency of the United States government has not kept pace with contemporary research standards," the authors write.

Flawed Methods

The federal study—commissioned by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a research division of the U.S. Department of Education, and released July 14—compared math and reading scores on the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test for fourth- and eighth-grade students in public and private schools.

Private school students boasted higher scores, but when researchers controlled for factors including race and family income, the private school advantage gave way to a draw in most categories. Public schools did better in fourth-grade math, and private schools performed better in eighth-grade reading, according to the NCES.

But when Peterson and Llaudet reexamined the federal researchers' methodology, they found the NCES study included two major flaws.

First, the NAEP data reflect student

performances at only one point in time. In order to examine how effectively schools raise student achievement, the Harvard study says, researchers must look at data collected over time.

Second, to control for differences among students, the NCES study inferred certain background characteristics of students based on their participation in federally funded programs, including Title I programs for disadvantaged students and the free lunch program. The NCES study undercounts the incidence of economically disadvantaged students in private schools and overcounts this population in public schools, the Harvard authors said.

"Why are we obsessed with knowing what is best for each child nationally? We should look at which school is best for each child, on a case-by-case basis."

MATT WARNER

DIRECTOR

EDUCATION REFORM TASK FORCE

AMERICAN LEGISLATIVE EXCHANGE COUNCIL

Different Schools

For example, the NCES reported 44 percent of all fourth graders in public schools who took the math test were

receiving Title I services for disadvantaged students, compared with 7 percent of students in private schools.

The Harvard researchers say these differences might be more reflective of differences in the schools than of differences in students as the NCES study suggested.

"Often private schools don't have motivation or interest in these federally funded programs," Llaudet explained.

Furthermore, "if a public school has a schoolwide Title I program," Peterson and Llaudet wrote, "something that is permitted if 40 percent of its students are eligible for the free lunch program, then every student at the school regardless of poverty level is said to be a recipient of Title I services."

Private schools cannot receive Title I funds, the Harvard authors note.

Apples and Oranges

When Peterson and Llaudet assigned other variables to control for students' backgrounds—including parental education levels and school location—they found private school students performed better than public school students in 11 of 12 categories.

The Harvard researchers do not conclude that private schools are more effective than public schools in raising test-score performance. "NAEP data are too fragile to permit any conclusion about school sector effects, one way or another," they wrote.

Limited Relevance

After its July release, the NCES study inspired critics of school choice programs to cite it as evidence such programs are futile. However, even the study's authors included a caveat in its executive summary: "[T]he estimated effects should not be interpreted in terms of causal relationships."

"It's a shame anyone thought this study was relevant to the debate about

free-market education reform," said Andrew Coulson, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom.

School choice advocates endorse a free-market approach to education, which would allow a parent to choose the best school for his or her child from numerous options. The debate is very different from comparing public and private schools, Coulson said.

Matt Warner, director of the American Legislative Exchange Council's education reform task force, agreed. "Why are we obsessed with knowing what is best for each child nationally?" Warner asked. "We should look at which school is best for each child, on a case-by-case basis."

Hilary Masell Oswald (hilary_owald@comcast.net) is a freelance writer in Evanston, Illinois.

INTERNET INFO

The National Center for Education Statistics' July 14, 2006 study, "Comparing Private Schools and Public Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling," 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 search for document #19702.

The August 2, 2006 report, "On the Public-Private School Achievement Debate," by Paul E. Peterson and Elena Llaudet, also is available through *PolicyBot™*. Search for document #19703.

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"Big deal, an A in math. That would be a D in any other country."

Poll Showing Diminished Voucher Support Questioned

Critics say it's all in the question's wording

By Hilary Oswald

Public support for school voucher programs is waning, according to a survey released on August 22 by Phi Delta Kappa (PDK), a public school advocacy organization. But critics dismissed the poll's conclusions, citing an anti-choice bias in the poll's primary question about school choice.

The 38th annual poll, conducted in conjunction with the Gallup Organization, asked 1,007 adults, "Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose a private school to attend at

"Public support for school voucher programs is waning, according to a survey released on August 22 by Phi Delta Kappa (PDK), a public school advocacy organization. But critics dismissed the poll's conclusions, citing an anti-choice bias in the poll's primary question about school choice."

public expense?" Thirty-six percent of American adults surveyed said they support that option, down from 38 percent a year ago and 46 percent—the all-time high—in 2002.

The percentage of respondents who said they oppose school choice grew from 57 percent last year to 60 percent this year.

But Heritage Foundation education analyst and *School Reform News* contributing editor Dan Lips doubted the poll reflects the public's attitude toward voucher programs.

"Research evidence is confirming what we know," Lips said. "School choice boosts parental satisfaction and leads to academic improvement, without a doubt."

"Whenever we see school choice programs implemented, they are wildly popular," Lips added, citing the fact that more people apply to the two-year-old voucher program in Washington, DC than the program can handle. "There are approximately two students who want to participate for every one voucher."

Questionable Question

Critics mainly object to the wording of the question. From 1970 to 1991, PDK used a different question:

"In some nations, the government allots a certain amount of money for each child for his or her education. The parents can then send the child to any public, parochial, or private school they choose.

This is called the 'voucher system.' Would you like to see such an idea adopted in this country?"

Andrew Coulson, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, pointed out in an August 29 *Orange County Register* opinion piece that in 1970, 43 percent of respondents favored a voucher system and 46 opposed it. By 1991, support grew to 50 percent, and opposition fell to 39 percent. Subsequently, PDK changed the phrasing.

Coulson believes the new question emphasizes "public expense" while failing to mention that other nations use voucher programs, which save taxpayer dollars.

He cited a January 2006 Cato Institute study concluding the District of Columbia's voucher program saves the school district nearly \$8 million.

Different Results

To examine how a question's phrasing influences a poll's results, the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation, a school choice advocacy group in Indianapolis, commissioned a poll in August 2005 from market research firm Harris Interactive.

The Harris poll surveyed 1,000 American adults, asking half of them the most recent PDK poll question and the other half a question written to remove the perceived bias.

The adjusted question asked, "Do you favor or oppose allowing students and parents to choose any school, public or private, to attend using public funds?"

The wording made a huge difference. To the PDK question, 37 percent of respondents replied they favored school choice; 55 percent opposed it. But to the adjusted question, 60 percent replied they favored school choice, and opposition fell to 33 percent.

Ongoing Debate

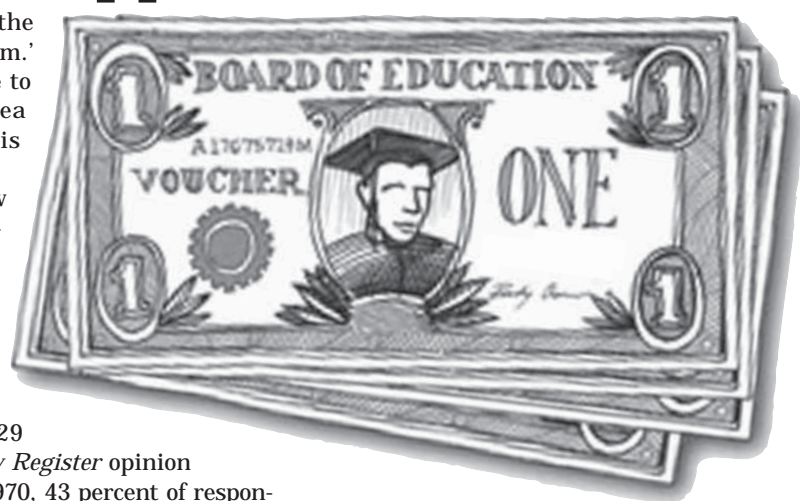
Dr. Lowell Rose, who has coauthored the PDK study for the past 13 years, said regardless of how pollsters ask the question, Americans no longer want voucher programs.

"Vouchers have had a good run," Rose said, but 50 years after the idea was conceived, they've failed to make significant inroads in American education.

"The public wants change in the public schools and expects that change to come through the public schools," Rose said, noting his poll showed strong support for charter schools, which are public schools.

Rose said the Harris poll yielded different results because the question emphasized choice, which Americans value.

Charges of bias, Rose said, flared up



"School choice boosts parental satisfaction and leads to academic improvement, without a doubt. Whenever we see school choice programs implemented, they are wildly popular."

DAN LIPS
EDUCATION ANALYST
THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

only in the last three years, as the poll showed diminished support for voucher programs.

Coulson denied that claim, pointing out he complained about the biased wording in his 1999 book, *Market Education*.

Hilary Masell Oswald (hilary_oswald@comcast.net) is a freelance writer in Evanston, Illinois.

INTERNET INFO

"The 38th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," by Lowell C. Rose and Alec M. Gallup, http://www.pdkmembers.org/e-GALLUP/kpoll_pdfs/pdkpoll38_2006.pdf

"Spreading Freedom and Saving Money: The Fiscal Impact of the D.C. Voucher Program," by Susan Aud and Leon Michos, January 31, 2006, http://www.cato.org/pub_display.php?pub_id=5424

"New Evidence Calls PDK School Choice Poll into Question," August 23, 2005, <http://www.friedmanfoundation.org/news/2005-08-23.html>

The Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation analysis, "Beware of Polls with Slanted Questions," 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 search for document #19713.

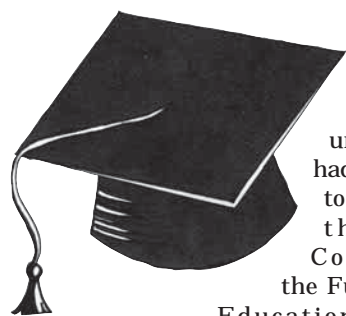
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Commission Recommends Higher Education Reforms



By Karla Dial

Libertarians and university groups had mixed reactions to a list of reforms the Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education sent to the

U.S. Department of Education in mid-September.

The department is conducting regional meetings this fall with college administrators to discuss how to implement the commission's recommendations by using a federal rule-making process, which bypasses having Congress pass legislation.

Among the recommendations:

- "that the U.S. commit to an unprecedented effort to expand higher education access and success ..."
- "that the entire student financial aid system be restructured ..."
- "the creation of a robust culture of accountability and transparency throughout higher education ..."

- "the development of a national strategy for lifelong learning ..."
- "increased federal investment in areas critical to our nation's global competitiveness."

Broad Scope

The aims of the recommendations are broad, but some of the details—including establishing a federal system that would track all students through college and beyond—are disturbing, critics say.

One of the commissioners, Dr. Richard Vedder, an economics professor at Ohio State University and policy advisor to The Heartland Institute, said he signed the final draft with some reservations.

"There's no discussion of political diversity or grade inflation, little discussion of whether we are challenging our students enough in our expectations," Vedder explained. "The reason I did sign it is it said several things that were critical of higher education and pointed out the inefficiencies that learning outcomes are not well-measured, that it's altogether too costly, that access has been denied to a lot of low-income students in order

to raise the rankings of universities that are concerned about that."

Increased Accountability

The commission faced a quandary on one point: increasing accountability for state-funded institutions.

"There's a big concern about the fact that when students go to college, we have no idea what they're learning," Vedder said.

"We have no measure of performance. On the one hand, it's ridiculous to give federal and state money to institutions that can't prove their students are learning anything—but if you put mandates on the schools, it violates the anti-regulation theory."

Instead of mandates, the commission recommended having colleges report on students' progress in a variety of other ways, including dropout rates and graduation rates after four, five, and six years, Vedder said, "things that will tell us what your chances of graduating in four years are, and what you learned."

Student Database Misgivings

The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (NAICU), a Washington, DC-based interest group, endorsed the recommendations but sent Charles Miller, the commission's chairman, a detailed letter in early August explaining what its members found to be good and bad about them.

According to the letter, NAICU praised:

- increasing low-income students' access to college education;
- recognizing the need for increasing state-funded institutions' accountability;
- increasing need-based financial aid;
- recognizing the need for more resources in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics;
- reforming education to produce "globally literate" graduates; and
- addressing "the need [to establish] important policies on international students wishing to study in the United States."

But the group objected to the notion of a federal student-tracking database.

"A centralized national database tracking college students, their academic progress, financial aid information, enrollment, and performance in their careers is profoundly counter to the democratic underpinnings of higher education and American society," NAICU President David L. Warren wrote. "Our members find this idea chilling."

Varying Endorsements

The Association of American Universities (AAU), another Washington-based interest group, approved the recommendations but said in an August 10 statement it shared some of the concerns cited by American Council on Education President David Ward, who was the only person on the 19-person commission not to sign the final report.

"The analysis offered by the report

and the solutions it recommends do not take into account the enormous range of institutions that comprise higher education," AAU President Robert M. Berdahl wrote. "The report also fails to acknowledge the variety of innovations initiated by college and university faculty to improve teaching and learning on our campuses."

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) endorsed the list of recommendations without reservation.

"The recommendations are solid and worthy of our support, they are good for higher education and good for the country. AASCU acknowledges the Commissions' [sic] concerns and will work to address them," the group reported on its Web site.

"Libertarians and university groups had mixed reactions to a list of reforms the Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education sent to the U.S. Department of Education in mid-September."

States' Role

Although the U.S. Department of Education is discussing ways to implement the recommendations through a federal rule-making procedure, Vedder said Congress and the states still have a role to play.

"Most public higher education is still a state and local responsibility," Vedder said. "The report will have no meaning unless there's some action on it."

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

INTERNET INFO

The draft of the August 9, 2006 report of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education 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 search for document #19705.

National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, <http://www.naicu.edu>

Association of American Universities, <http://www.aau.edu>

American Council on Education, <http://www.acenet.edu>

American Association of State Colleges and Universities, <http://www.aascu.org>

Court Ruling May Force NEA Disclosures

By Steve Stanek

State affiliates of the National Education Association (NEA) may be required to disclose details of their operations, including financial information such as income and expenses, salaries and benefits, and election rules, according to a ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington, DC.

The court ruled in August that the U.S. Department of Labor may require the NEA's state affiliates to comply with the federal Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA). The Alabama Education Association and 31 other NEA state affiliates had challenged the disclosures in a case known as *Alabama Education Association v. Chao*. Elaine Chao is U.S. Secretary of Labor.

Unions consisting entirely of public-sector employees are exempt from federal disclosure requirements. But if they represent any private-sector employees, Department of Labor requirements apply. Therefore, the

Department of Labor argued LMRDA should apply to state chapters of teacher unions because a few include private members.

'Unprecedented Disclosure'

The Court of Appeals agreed, overturning a lower court ruling. "[W]e conclude the district court erred in holding the Department's new interpretation was inconsistent with the Act," wrote Chief Judge Douglas Ginsburg.

"The implications are huge," said

Michael Reitz, director of the Labor Policy Center at the Evergreen Freedom Foundation in Olympia, Washington. "If state affiliates are required to comply with federal law, we'll have unprecedented disclosure for teachers and other public employees."

Reitz said the Court of Appeals directed the Department of Labor to reissue its policy analysis before the new rules can take

effect.

An NEA spokesperson said the group would have no comment on the situation.

Steve Stanek (stanek@heartland.org) is managing editor of Budget & Tax News.

"State affiliates of the National Education Association (NEA) may be required to disclose details of their operations, including financial information such as income and expenses, salaries and benefits, and election rules ..."

Campus Bill of Rights Provokes Debate

By Hilary Masell Oswald

The three-year-old Academic Bill of Rights (ABR) is an innocuous-looking document setting a basic definition of academic freedom—a mechanism for protecting university students and faculty from “the imposition of any orthodoxy of a political, religious, or ideological nature.” It emphasizes students’ and faculty members’ free-speech rights and the value of intellectual diversity on college campuses.

But it is sparking debate about whether political bias is rife in university classrooms and, if so, who should respond to eliminate it.

Supporting Strongly

Malcolm Kline, executive director of Accuracy in Academia, a nonprofit research group that tracks and publicizes political bias in education, said “liberal groupthink” prevails in the academy, undermining the intellectual rigor that should pervade college campuses.

“Every month we fill a newsletter and two Web sites with examples of how [colleges] don’t uphold their end of the academic bargain,” Kline said.

In August, Kline reported that the University of Wisconsin-Superior refused to acknowledge a Christian student organization because it doesn’t allow

non-Christians to serve in leadership positions.

Several university speech codes have been ruled unconstitutional by courts over the past few years, Kline said, because they work so hard at being politically correct that they actually infringe on students’ First Amendment rights.

Considering Bills

Over the past three years, 20 state legislatures have considered resolutions echoing the ABR’s language. That has prompted critics to contend the government should not intervene in college classrooms. None of the bills has been signed into law.

One of loudest critics of the ABR is the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the nation’s largest higher education union. At its biennial convention in Boston in July, the AFT passed a resolution opposing the ABR at federal, state, and university levels.

The resolution says, in part, that the AFT believes the legislation “would result in government intervention to ensure that more right-wing content is inserted into the college curriculum.” It also contends college professors “are constantly evaluated by their peers on the basis of the quality of their scholarship,

teaching and service.”

Craig Smith, associate director of AFT Higher Education, said the group opposes government intervention in college and university classrooms.

“The limitations [the bill places] on faculty and students are inappropriate,” Smith said.

He called the document and any legislation it inspires “a vicious attack on higher education.”

“The three-year-old Academic Bill of Rights (ABR) is ... sparking debate about whether political bias is rife in university classrooms and if so, who should respond to eliminate it.”

Calling for Change

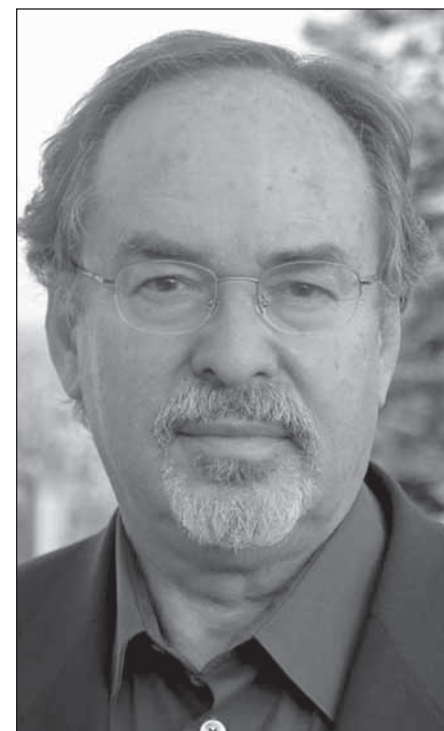
Sara Dogan, national campus director for Students for Academic Freedom (SAF), a coalition of campus watchdog groups founded by ABR author David Horowitz, said contrary to critics’ claims, her organization’s main goal is not to inspire legislation or government interference in classrooms.

“We view legislation as a last resort,” Dogan said. “We realize that any lasting change must come from the universities.”

She lauded the July decision by Temple University’s Board of Trustees to adopt a university-wide policy protecting students from ideological abuses in the classroom and publicizing a specific procedure for filing grievances if they believe their academic freedom has been violated.

Previously, the university published its policy on academic freedom only in the faculty handbook, Dogan said.

The university’s decision was made after the Pennsylvania legislature



David Horowitz, author of the Academic Bill of Rights, gave animated testimony on January 10, 2006 before the Pennsylvania state House Select Committee on Academic Freedom in Higher Education, which held hearings over two days on the campus of Temple University in Philadelphia.

held hearings on academic freedom in the state earlier this year, at which Horowitz testified alongside professors and students from the state’s public universities.

Promoting Diversity

In March 2004 the Colorado university system voluntarily adopted a policy on academic freedom in exchange for state legislators withdrawing a formal but nonbinding resolution. In October 2005, the Ohio university system followed suit.

Smith called the SAF’s claims that the organization’s primary aim is not to inspire legislation “disingenuous.” He said state legislatures are hesitant to pass formal legislation that echoes the ABR because “it comes down to a moment when lawmakers say, ‘This is the business of an institution of higher ed.’”

Smith noted none of the 20 legislatures to consider formal legislation so far, even in politically conservative states, has passed it.

Dogan said SAF is simply working to help college students—liberal and conservative—understand the nature of academic freedom and know what they can do if their rights are violated.

“Our goal is to promote intellectual diversity in the classroom,” Dogan said.

Hilary Masell Oswald (hilary_oswald@comcast.net) is a freelance writer in Evanston, Illinois.



INTERNET INFO

“Academic Bill of Rights,” Students for Academic Freedom, <http://www.studentsforacademicfreedom.org/abor.html>

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Maine

Continued from page 1

Because many towns in Maine are too small to run their own high schools—and sometimes even elementary schools—the tuitioning program allows parents to send their children to nonsectarian private schools wherever they choose, even out of state. The “sending” town pays each child’s tuition to the “receiving” school or district.

But for the past eight years, a court battle has been waged by parents who, like Guay, want to send their kids to private religious schools.

In late July, the Institute for Justice (IJ), a Washington, DC-based public interest law firm that represents families such as Guay’s in *Anderson v. Town of Durham*, the case in question, filed its appeal with the Supreme Court after a defeat at the Maine Supreme Judicial Court in April.

Guaranteeing Education

Since 1873, many Maine towns have given residents a choice about the schools their children attend, while others have contracted with the nearest school to educate their children.

In 1903, Maine guaranteed all students would have access to a high school education, leading more communities to join the tuitioning program.

According to the Milton & Rose D.

Friedman Foundation, a school choice advocacy group based in Indianapolis, during the 2003-04 school year 113 towns in Maine used the tuitioning program, and 33 contracted with the school closest by.

Tuitioning at private religious schools in Maine was commonplace during most of the twentieth century. But in 1980, Maine Attorney General Joseph Brennan issued an advisory opinion saying tuitioning to private religious schools violates the U.S. Constitution’s Establishment clause. In 1982, the legislature signed that opinion into law.

“Jill Guay of Minot, Maine ... is seeking to overturn a Maine policy preventing parents from using the state’s 133-year-old Town Tuitioning Program for a private religious school.”

Seeking Choice

Guay said Minot students can choose to attend either Poland High, a local public school, or Hebron Academy, a nonsectarian private school. Under the 1982 law they cannot choose St. Dominic’s Regional High School, a private religious school in nearby Auburn.

Guay originally joined the case as an appellant in 1998, when her oldest daughter was entering high school. She now has another daughter attending St. Dominic’s.

“I feel that if a student is going to be tuitioned, why shouldn’t we have the school of our choice? I’d like to send them to a school of our choice, which happens to be religious,” Guay said.

Guay said her older daughter tried attending Poland High during her freshman year but it wasn’t a good fit. Minot could save the government money by sending her younger daughter to St. Dominic’s rather than Poland, because the tuition at the Catholic school is less than at the neighboring public school.

Excluding Religious Schools

“The most fundamental question is whether a government can exclude a religious option from an otherwise neutral scholarship program simply because [it is religious],” said Clark Neilly, an IJ senior attorney and the lead attorney on *Anderson v. Town of Durham*.

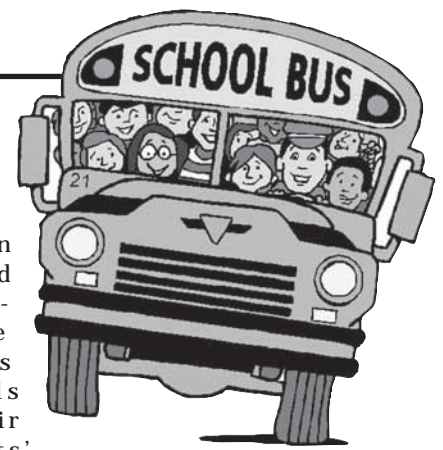
“In 1980 [Maine] made a decision to change a century of religion-neutral policy and suddenly exclude religious options. They had a mistaken belief that the United States Constitution required it,” Neilly continued. “In 2002, the [U.S.] Supreme Court said that was wrong.”

In the 2002 case, *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris*, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of a voucher program operating in Cleveland, Ohio, which

pays for some children to attend the private religious schools of their parents’ choosing.

The court ruled the program supported parental choice, not religious establishment.

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



INTERNET INFO

The Maine Supreme Judicial Court’s April 2006 decision in *Anderson v. Town of Durham* 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 search for document #19706.

The U.S. Supreme Court’s June 2002 decision in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* is also available through PolicyBot™. Search for document #9459.

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More Black Families Choosing Homeschooling

By Daschell M. Phillips

The number of African-American parents choosing to homeschool their children is increasing, according to industry researchers and advocates.

While no formal studies of the trend have been released, Dr. Brian Ray, president of the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), said his work indicates the numbers are increasing. Between 110,000 and 140,000 African-American children in grades K through 12 were homeschooled during the 2005-06 school year, the only year for which hard figures are available.

"African Americans, like so many others, are quickly coming to recognize the myriad benefits of parent-led home-based education," Ray said.

The trend has spawned several new support groups, including organizations such as the National African-American Homeschoolers Alliance (NAAHA) and the National Black Home Educators Resource Association. Web sites and magazines targeted specifically at African-American homeschooling parents likewise indicate an increase of interest on the part of black parents.

Many Reasons

NAAHA Director Jennifer James said many black families find their local public schools unacceptable.

"The number one reason black parents are choosing to homeschool their children is because they have run out of options," James said. "Parents across the country tell me that they want to make sure that students are learning, and the local public schools are not getting the job done."

Chris Klicka, senior counsel of the Home School Legal Defense Association, a nonprofit advocacy group based in Purcellville, Virginia that represents all racial groups, said minority children get an especially poor education in the public school system.

"People are disgruntled with the public school system," Klicka said. "When you look at test scores in the public school system, there is a gap between white students and black students. Statistics show that homeschooled children do better academically than public school children, no matter what their race."

Higher Scores

According to a 2003 NHERI study, home-educated students generally score at the 65th to 80th percentile on achievement tests—15 to 30 percentile points higher than those in public schools.

"More African-American parents are homeschooling their children because they don't want their children to be a statistic of failure academically," Klicka said.

Voddie Baucham, who pastors a church in Magnolia, Texas where 90 percent of the congregation homeschools their children, said he and his wife Bridget decided to do so because his wife—a former public school teacher—thought they'd do a better job than the local school system.

"When African-Americans were fighting for equal rights in education, we were not fighting to have our children placed in an inferior educational system," Baucham said. "I think the homeschool alternative is the best thing that happened to African-Americans in a long time. As homeschool parents, we get an education too, and we realize that the public school system gave us a poor education."

"The number of African-American parents choosing to homeschool their children is increasing, according to industry researchers and advocates."

Lasting Legacy

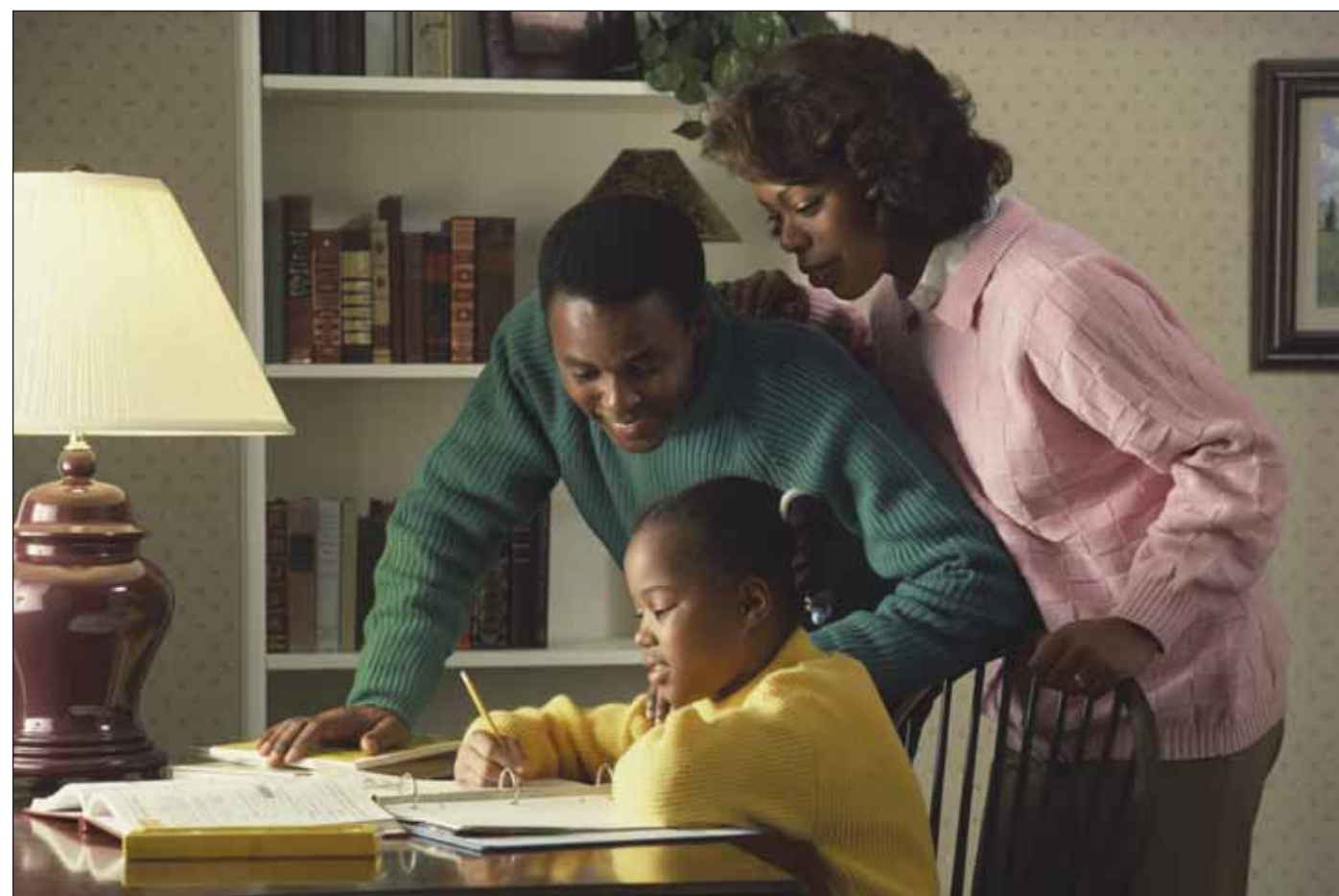
Glen Jackson of Prince George's County, Maryland said he and his wife Laurie decided to homeschool their two children because they wanted to give them more than an education.

"Homeschooling is not just educating your kids—this is your legacy," Jackson explained. "You are instilling things in them that money cannot buy, and science and technology cannot fix."

Daschell M. Phillips (dashwriter@aol.com) is a freelance writer in Chicago.

INTERNET INFO

Academic Statistics on Homeschooling, Home School Legal Defense Association, October 22, 2004, <http://www.hslda.org/docs/nche/000010/200410250.asp>



When Teaching Teachers, Experience Matters

By Ben DeGrow

Dr. Erika Pierce has set out to prove that preparing tomorrow's teachers can best be done by current teachers with fresh, hands-on classroom experience.

That the teacher-education community still considers what she does to be strange and unorthodox reflects how disconnected its professors are from the needs of today's K-12 classrooms, said one education expert.

Pierce began teaching at Charlottesville High School in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1996. While continuing to teach, she earned her master's degree in administration and supervision (2002) and her Ph.D. in social studies education (2004) from the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education.

But Pierce has charted a different course from all her university colleagues: Even after taking a faculty position at the university in 2004, she still spends three mornings a week teaching United States history to high school juniors, mostly minority students considered to be at risk.

Ivory Tower Educators

This fall, Pierce's tenth as a high school teacher, is also her last instructing teachers as part of a three-year grant through the Teachers for a New Era initiative funded by the Carnegie Corporation, Annenberg Foundation, and Ford Foundation. The grant will not be renewed beyond 2007.

To perform her dual educational role, Pierce has had to overcome skepticism from some of her university colleagues.

She has made a strong case that her continued high school teaching contributes value to her college-level work, but not enough support has emerged to continue or expand the practice.

George Clowes, senior fellow for education policy at The Heartland Institute, said that attitude gives schools of education a negative distinction.

"In other disciplines—chemistry and music come to mind immediately—a college professor would be considered a dilettante if he or she wanted to teach a subject but not practice it," Clowes said.

Unlearned Lesson

Pierce's case illustrates how little progress

has been made in connecting schools of education to the K-12 world since the release of two significant reports nearly a decade ago. A 1997 Public Agenda survey revealed one in six education professors had no K-12 classroom experience, and more than half had not taught K-12 in the previous 15 years.

"Public Agenda surveyed education professors and found their views on education—particularly those on practical classroom management—out of touch with those of school teachers, students, and the general public," Clowes said.

"It's a reflection of how out-of-touch education professors still are when they are skeptical of Pierce teaching in high school while training prospective teachers to teach in high school," Clowes noted.

Also in 1997, Mark C. Schug and Richard D. Western wrote in a report for the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute that new teachers learned considerably more from their student teaching mentors than from education professors.

Two Worlds

Those reports appear not to have convinced Pierce's faculty colleagues, who administered her grant.

"It was important in their minds to keep [teacher training and classroom experience] separate," Pierce said.

And at first, she tried to do that, but now she can hardly imagine keeping the two worlds apart. Not only does she take her university students to Charlottesville regularly to observe her teaching, Pierce also invites her history students to attend her evening education classes at the university.

"It boosts their self-esteem and gets them excited about coming to college," Pierce explained.

Last year, more than half of her 23 high schoolers came to at least one session, while several students attended more than half the semester.

Candice Stafford, now a senior at Charlottesville High, said her visits to last year's evening sessions have



(left) "[Erika] Pierce's case illustrates how little progress has been made in connecting schools of education to the K-12 world since the release of two significant reports nearly a decade ago."

removed much of her fear of college.

Program Connections

While Virginia's Ph.D. program equipped Pierce with more tools and strategies to reach kids with different aptitudes, last year she came to realize she needed to build stronger personal connections with her high schoolers to make a real difference.

In 2005, her husband, James, became principal of Charlottesville's Clark Elementary. He walked door-to-door to meet with the parents of every student in his school. That influenced Pierce to meet personally with all of her history students' families.

"If I want them to be successful, I need to forge that relationship first," Pierce said.

Pierce's personal outreach has influenced her education students.

Lija Diem, a middle school language arts teacher in Lititz, Pennsylvania, has adopted her former instructor's practice of calling or visiting all of her students' homes before the first day of school.

"It keeps the line of communications open and positive, and right off the bat," Diem said.

Current, Future Colleagues

Pierce's education students primarily are the "late deciders," those who steered into the teaching program later and are still weighing their career options. Many get practical urban instructional experience through alternative licensure programs such as Teach for America and D.C. Teaching Fellows. Others are current instructors working on graduate degrees.

Regardless of whom Pierce is teaching, the impression she leaves is tremendous.

"She sets an example in class at UVA that she clearly follows at her high school," Diem said. "One of the most valuable things about her as a professor is that you know she applies those things herself."

For Pierce, a strong and sincere passion overwhelms the busy demands of her innovative dual role.

"It's a monster, but it's a great monster," Pierce said. "I wish I could do what I'm doing forever."

Ben DeGrow (ben@i2i.org) is a policy analyst for the Independence Institute, a free-market think tank in Golden, Colorado.

States' Teacher Quality Reports Unacceptable: Study

By Krista Kafer

In early August the Education Trust, a Washington DC-based education advocacy organization, criticized the 2006 teacher equity plans submitted by states and the District of Columbia under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), because all but three states failed to collect the required data.

Missing the Mark: An Education Trust Analysis of Teacher-Equity Plans, by Heather G. Peske, Candace Crawford,

and Brian Pick, revealed 47 states didn't measure the distribution of unqualified, inexperienced, and out-of-field educators teaching poor and minority students.

Only two states—Nevada and Ohio—provided both the requisite data and plans to decrease the number of new and unqualified teachers in classrooms of high-need students.

On August 16, the U.S. Department of Education issued recommendations to the states regarding their teacher

quality plans, noting 41 states did not meet all of the agency's criteria. The Education Trust maintains the department should give the states additional guidance.

"There are great variations in the state plans, and most have no data on the distribution of inexperienced teachers among poor and minority students," said Peske, Education Trust senior associate and lead analyst on the project. Although the Department of Education

deserves credit for requiring states to comply with the equity requirements they ignored, she said, the agency should require states to provide all the data mandated by law.

The Department of Education gave the states a September 29 deadline for submitting revised plans.

Data Collection

Under NCLB, states must meet several

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teacher quality criteria, including:

- All teachers must be “highly qualified”—i.e., have a bachelor’s degree, state certification, and proof of subject-level mastery.
- A state must specify steps it will take to ensure schools serving low-income students have highly qualified teachers.
- States must provide a plan to “ensure that poor and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers,” and also to detail “the measures that the State educational agency will use to evaluate and publicly report the progress of the State educational agency with respect to such

steps.”

According to the Education Trust report, most states did not collect data for all four components of the law, particularly regarding whether low-income students are more likely to be taught by unqualified, inexperienced, or out-of-field teachers than their wealthier peers.

The paper concluded all but three states—Nevada, Ohio, and Tennessee—did not report on all four components. Thirty-four states collected data on one area of analysis. Four states have yet to submit a plan. Twenty-seven states claimed they complied by ensuring everyone in their teaching forces has a bachelor’s degree, state certification, and proof of subject-level mastery, but did not address the other teacher quality components.

Inexperienced Teachers

The Education Trust stated merely meeting the “highly qualified” requirements “misses the mark” because “it ignores inequity in the distribution of inexperienced teachers,” those in their first or second year.

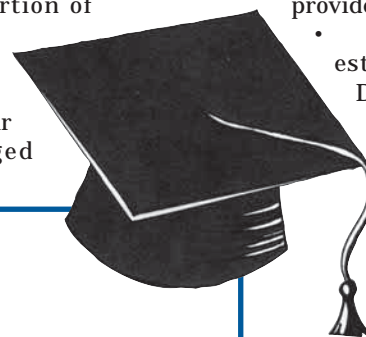
The report contends such teachers are not as effective as more experienced ones. Students perform better in schools with a balanced mix of new and seasoned teachers, the report found. Too often, however, schools serving low-income and minority students receive a greater proportion of inexperienced, out-of-field, and unqualified teachers than their more advantaged

peers, putting them at an even greater disadvantage.

Five Recommendations

The Education Trust makes five recommendations in the report:

- The U.S. Department of Education should reject most of the plans and issue explicit guidance on the type of data, analysis, and planning the law requires.
- States should include advocates for low-income and minority communities in the planning process, set clear, measurable goals for improvement, and provide a process for public reporting.
- The Education Secretary should establish a new position at the Department of Education to focus on these issues.
- The department should withhold administrative funds in cases of noncompliance.
- States should upgrade their data systems to calculate equity analysis.



Kalamazoo Promises College Scholarships to Public School Students

By Mike Scott

Maintaining high enrollment levels to ensure adequate state funding can be a challenge for many school districts. So school administrators and superintendents across the country are likely to closely follow the Kalamazoo Promise project.

The Kalamazoo, Michigan school district, which enrolled more than 5,000 students in 2005, instituted a program last year that provides the majority of its high school graduates with four-year scholarships to a state-based university, thanks to an anonymous donor.

Kalamazoo Public Schools graduated 453 students last spring, excluding exchange students and others who received special degrees. Of those, 382 were eligible for “The Promise,” which pays up to 100 percent of tuition at any state-funded university or community college for graduates who live in and have attended district schools since at least ninth grade.

The Class of 2006 comprised the program’s first recipients.

Funded Privately

Private funding from anonymous donors will allow recipients up to 10 years to complete their bachelor’s degrees. Funding through the Kalamazoo Promise is available until a student earns a bachelor’s degree or 130 credit hours, or until the 10-year time limit runs out.

To remain eligible, students must attend the university full-time during the semesters they are receiving Promise funds, and they must maintain at least a 2.0 grade point average.

Kalamazoo Public Schools Superintendent Janice Brown said

during a November 2005 school board meeting, “There is no doubt in my mind that this will spur housing sales, attract new business development, and add to an already solid quality of life in Kalamazoo. I believe we are the first and only school system in the nation where all resident graduates are promised funding for college through a private donation.”

“Private funding from anonymous donors will allow recipients up to 10 years to complete their bachelor’s degrees.”

Drawing Students

Brown’s comments were prescient. The Promise is so popular that some families are moving to Kalamazoo from outside the district so their children can receive full scholarships. Sheree Walker found it so attractive she recently moved back to her hometown of Kalamazoo from Atlanta with her husband and 5-year-old son.

“It wasn’t a hard decision,” Walker told the *Kalamazoo Gazette* in early August.

Kalamazoo Public Schools Deputy Superintendent Gary Start estimated 450 more students would attend schools in the district this year than in fall 2005, three months before the Kalamazoo Promise was announced.

Based on how Michigan’s school districts receive state funding, those new students would raise the state’s contribution by nearly

\$3.5 million. For each new student, the state gives a district \$7,556. Under Michigan law, which allows students to attend schools in the districts neighboring their own for a set annual fee, Kalamazoo stands to draw even more.

“We have seen a large increase in new students, which no question is due in part to the Promise,” said Start. “But the increased funding we receive will also help us to significantly improve the services our school offers.”

Moving On

A further potential benefit of the plan is that more students and better schools will increase the number of graduates that go on to college. But even if the majority of high school seniors want to go to college, they still have to get into those schools.

“College isn’t a privilege anymore, it’s really a necessity,” said Debbie Hedges, whose 7-year-old daughter attends first grade in the Kalamazoo school district. “This might be a way to help my daughter and other kids become motivated about going to college.”

For The Promise to succeed, experts agree, parents will have to do their part by providing support and encouragement. A survey released last fall by the Michigan Education Association and a coalition of other education groups found young adults whose parents “insisted” on their college attendance were twice as likely to pursue higher education as those whose parents merely “suggested” it.

Mike Scott (mas1774@yahoo.com) is a freelance writer in White Lake, Michigan.

‘Guinea Pigs’

“The Education Trust report only looked at one aspect of teacher quality, and we made our determinations on the entirety of the state plans. [The Education Trust is] free to make recommendations, but we are charged with enforcing the law,” said U.S. Department of Education spokesman Chad Colby.

“We have a lot of commonality with the Education Trust,” Colby said. “We need to do more from federal and state government down to the school level. We know that getting a highly qualified teacher in front of students with the most need is the most effective way to raise achievement.”

Said Michael J. Petrilli, vice president for national programs and policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, an education reform group based in Washington, DC, “On the one hand, this is exactly the type of paperwork exercise that has made NCLB a four-letter word in many circles. But at the same time, the NCLB requirement to close the ‘teacher quality gap’ and Education Trust’s advocacy on its behalf is forcing a long-overdue conversation.

“It’s quite simple,” Petrilli concluded. “Poor and minority students should not be used as guinea pigs every year for first-year teachers or for ‘lemons’ that the more affluent schools don’t want.”

Krista Kafer (kristakafer@msn.com) is a freelance writer in Denver, Colorado.

INTERNET INFO

“Missing the Mark: An Education Trust Analysis of Teacher-Equity Plans,” by Heather G. Peske, Candace Crawford, and Brian Pick, 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 search for document #19704.

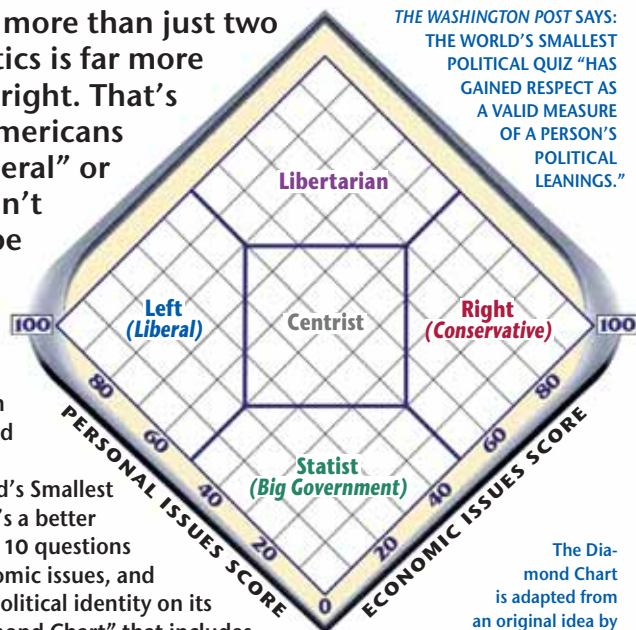
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by the *Washington Post*, and more than 7.7 million people have taken it online. What's your real political identity? Take the Quiz. For each statement below, circle A for agree, M for maybe/not sure, and D for disagree. Then find your position on the chart.

How do you stand on PERSONAL issues?

- | | | | |
|--|----|----|---|
| ◆ Government should not censor speech, press, media or Internet. | 20 | 10 | 0 |
| ◆ Military service should be voluntary. There should be no draft. | A | M | D |
| ◆ There should be no laws regarding sex between consenting adults. | A | M | D |
| ◆ Repeal laws prohibiting adult possession and use of drugs. | A | M | D |
| ◆ There should be no National ID card. | A | M | D |

PERSONAL SCORING: Take 20 for every A, 10 for every M, and 0 for every D: _____

How do you stand on ECONOMIC issues?

- | | | | |
|---|----|----|---|
| ◆ End "corporate welfare." No government handouts to business. | 20 | 10 | 0 |
| ◆ End government barriers to international free trade. | A | M | D |
| ◆ Let people control their own retirement: privatize Social Security. | A | M | D |
| ◆ Replace government welfare with private charity. | A | M | D |
| ◆ Cut taxes and government spending by 50% or more. | A | M | D |

ECONOMIC SCORING: Take 20 for every A, 10 for every M, and 0 for every D: _____

Find Your Place on the Chart

Mark your PERSONAL score on the lower left scale; your ECONOMIC score on the lower right. Then follow the grid lines until they meet at your political position. The chart shows the political group that agrees with you most. LIBERALS tend to value personal freedom. CONSERVATIVES tend to value economic freedom. LIBERTARIANS value both. STATISTS are against both. CENTRISTS tend to hold different values depending on the issue.

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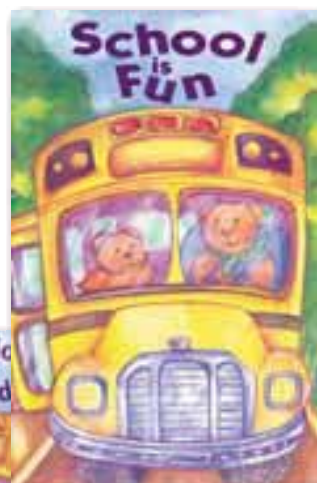
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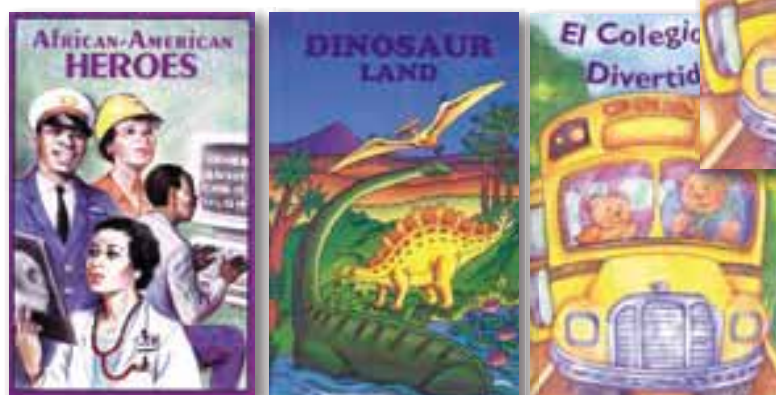
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Denver

Continued from page 1

poverty, need for special education, and limited English proficiency.

Urban school districts in Cincinnati, Houston, and Seattle already use forms of weighted student funding.

Grounded in research by University of Washington education professor Dr. Marguerite Roza, MOP's report on "Unraveling the DPS Budget" notes the school district's allocation of resources needs greater equity and its budgeting process requires greater transparency. The report finds the current system shortchanges many students in Denver's high-poverty and bilingual schools.

"There isn't rhyme or reason to why some schools get more," said MOP Executive Director Mike Kromrey.

Giving Voice

For the past few years, MOP leaders have enthusiastically advocated the ideas behind an innovative school funding model in Edmonton, the capital city of Alberta, Canada, as presented in *Making Schools Work* by Dr. William Ouchi, a professor in UCLA's Anderson School of Management. Edmonton schools not only have a sophisticated system of student funding weights but also grant each principal direct control over more than 80 percent of his school's budget.

"We liked the local school control approach, the entrepreneurial values," said Kromrey. "Our members thought it made common sense."

Influenced by Ouchi, a Colorado state legislator attempted to import the Edmonton model but came up short. In 2005, state Rep. Keith King (R-Colorado Springs) introduced legislation to direct school districts to distribute money based on a weighted student formula. Though the bill died in committee, King still strongly supports the idea.

"Weighted student funding puts the resources in the school where the student is being educated," King said. "With the appropriate funding, the student, teacher, and principal can concentrate on having a full year of academic growth."

Following Students

Jessica Buckley, an active MOP member and a teacher at Denver's Harrington Elementary, has helped to champion the change toward weighted student funding. Ninety-six percent of Harrington students received free or reduced-price lunches, an official measure of poverty, in 2004.

Under weighted funding plans, "The money follows the student and allows those who need it to receive the support," Buckley said.

Kromrey said MOP changed its expectations about implementing weighted student funding in Denver after meetings earlier this year with superinten-



dent Michael Bennet, members of the Board of Education, and representatives of the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA). The group still supports immediate implementation of what it considers an equitable student funding formula, but it has postponed the idea of giving greater budget autonomy to schools.

"We were pushing for a rewards-based process where if principals succeeded they could be given more control," said Kromrey. After the discussions with system representatives, however, "We were convinced our idea was moving too fast."

Simplifying Processes

The DPS Board of Education is working to simplify the district's budgeting process. The board is scheduled to meet to discuss proposed changes in January and February of 2007.

"Everyone can get behind transparency instead of a 60-page budget," Kromrey said.

The superintendent's office is working on a more detailed proposal to address possible long-term funding changes.

Beyond the 2006-07 year, MOP leaders hope to adjust the funding formula to dedicate more resources to students with special needs.

"My hope is that in two to three years we can begin to increase the weights and really put the money where it's needed," Buckley said.

Overcoming Challenges

DPS board member Bruce Hoyt said while he supports the weighted student funding concept, matching personnel costs to student needs will be a challenge. The combination of reliable skills, high energy, and middle-range salary requirements for teachers with six to 10 years of experience would put them in high demand, he said.

"Getting schools to formulate budgets to match these needs would be a logistical nightmare," Hoyt said.

Hoyt said DPS's new financial reward for teachers who take on tougher assignments could make the potential alignment "more feasible." The reward is a feature of Denver's Professional Compensation System for Teachers, or ProComp, implemented in 2005.

"A coalition of parents and community groups has pushed Denver education officials toward revamping the way local schools are funded."

MOP members' sights are set higher. "Our best take is that ProComp is a beginning but not enough," Kromrey said. "When you look at the aggregation of what teachers are paid in economically fairly well-off schools, where more students speak English and are higher-performing, in real dollars those schools are getting more."

MOP has pushed education reform since 2001, when it engaged parents to advocate for safer schools. "Families started to realize they could get something done and that their voice could be heard," Kromrey said.

Ben DeGrow (ben@i2i.org) is a policy analyst for the Independence Institute, a free-market think tank in Golden, Colorado.

INTERNET INFO

"Unraveling the DPS Budget," Metro Organization for People, <http://www.mopdenver.org>

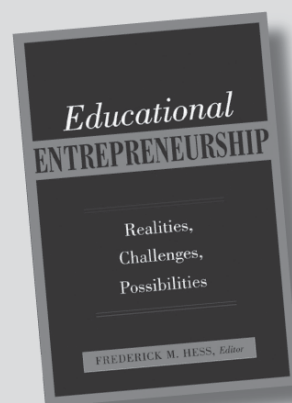
To learn more about weighted student funding, visit <http://www.100percentsolution.org>

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FREDERICK M. HESS is
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Texans Press for School Choice in 2007

By **Connie Sadowski**

In January 2007, when the Texas Legislature opens its next regular session, the state will have a publicly funded school choice program ... if a new grassroots organization gets its way.

Since mid-August, Texans for School Choice (TSC)—a group founded earlier that month by philanthropist and political donor Dr. James Leininger—has been waging a radio and billboard campaign encouraging people in Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio to “Give parents a choice, give kids a chance.”

The advertisements mention a toll-free information hotline and a Web site that encourages parents to recruit their friends and to contact elected officials with the message that “parents cannot wait for failing schools to improve.”

No Threat

Leininger, who has founded several privately funded school choice programs in San Antonio since 1993, said in an August 20 news release the school choice debate has two sides.

“On one side are those who believe politicians and government are best suited to make decisions for our children,” Leininger wrote. “On the other are people who believe parents are best suited to choose what is best for their children.”

Leininger said parental choice would not adversely affect public schools. Any



Philanthropist Dr. James Leininger founded Texans for School Choice, which is urging Texas parents to demand school choice.

legislation TSC advocates “would give parents in large urban school districts the option of changing schools if they prefer and if seats are available,” he wrote.

Leininger assured school choice critics, “if parents do not want to change [schools] or there are no seats available at other public or private schools, everything simply stays as it is today.”

Another Try

TSC’s campaign is the largest school choice effort waged in Texas to date. The limited success of previous attempts to pass school choice legislation has not discouraged Peggy Venable from advocating it. Venable is Texas director of Americans for Prosperity, a grassroots organization supporting taxpayer rights.

Venable welcomed TSC’s effort to organize parents for school choice. Previous attempts failed because “the Texas legislature listened more to the taxpayer-funded lobby than to their own constituents,” she said.

Current Texas law, Venable said, is friendlier to lobbyists than to parents.

“Parents are working to earn a living, raise their children, and pay their taxes,” Venable explained. “The same tax dollars are then going to fund organizations which lobby against parents’ rights to decide the educational environment where their children have the greatest opportunity to learn.”

“Since mid-August, Texans for School Choice ... has been waging a radio and billboard campaign encouraging people in Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio to ‘Give parents a choice, give kids a chance.’”

More Options

Parental involvement is paramount to a child’s success in learning, according to the TSC Web site.

Spokesperson Ken Hoagland said he’s confident the group will recruit “thousands of desperate parents who will talk earnestly with state legislators about the importance of enacting a school choice program in the coming session of the legislature.”

Hoagland concluded that for children to succeed, “we must enable and empower parents to be fully engaged in the education of their children. Such empowerment can only be achieved by giving parents access to all available options.”

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

INTERNET INFO

Texans for School Choice, <http://www.TexansforSchoolChoice.com>

“Money Talks,” by Evan Smith, *Texas Monthly*, June 2006, <http://www.texansforschoolchoice.com/news/v1>

School Choice Advocate Beats Incumbent Congressman



Tim Walberg defeated incumbent Joe Schwarz in the Republican primary for U.S. Representative in Michigan.

By **Karla Dial**

An incumbent congressman from Michigan lost his seat in the U.S. House of Representatives on August 4 in his state’s Republican primary race. Rep. Joe Schwarz was defeated by political unknown Tim Walberg, who received 53 percent of the vote.

Schwarz, a medical doctor from Battle Creek, was elected to Congress in 2004.

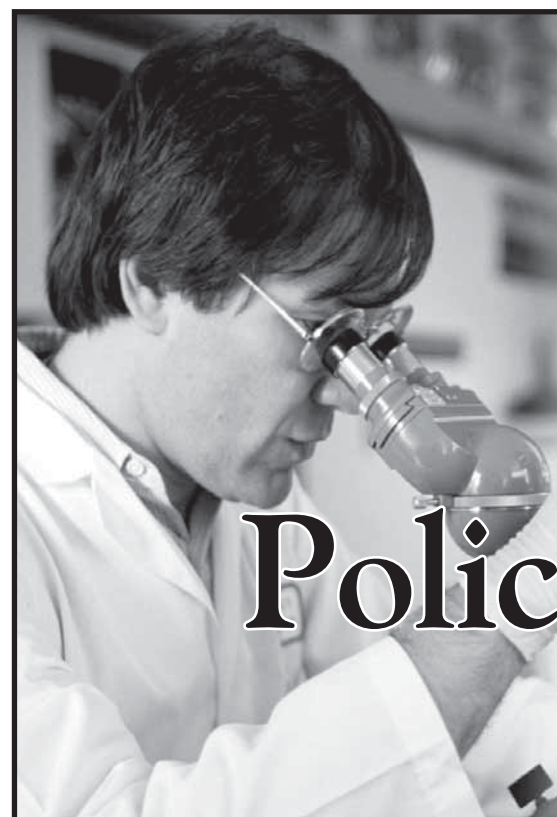
Walberg, a former church pastor from Tipton (shown on his campaign Web site clad in jeans and sitting astride a motorcycle), is “strongly pro-life” and “believes the federal government is too large and that taxes are too high because politicians spend too much,” and that educational tax credits or vouchers are every family’s right.

The fact that an unknown could unseat an incumbent congressman in the primary means “the conservative base is tired of big-government Republicans,” John Berthoud, president of the National Taxpayers Union, wrote in an August 9 editorial published by *Human Events*.

“The key to Walberg’s win lies in the conservative base, which recognized that as poor a record as Schwarz had compiled in his first term, it would only get worse if he beat back the expected primary challenge for his sophomore term. Schwarz’s support for more spending and bigger government would only have grown in succeeding years,” Berthoud wrote.

In November’s election, Walberg will face Sharon Renier, an organic farmer from Munith who defeated three other Democrats with 53 percent of the vote in Michigan’s Democratic primary.

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



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Educators Ignore Proven Method of Improving Students' Learning

By David Ziffer

Imagine for a moment that we have a cheap cure for cancer. Now imagine the medical establishment is doing everything possible to discredit the cure and prevent its use, so doctors who treat (but don't cure) cancer can keep their jobs.

Imagine millions of patients continuing to suffer and die because nobody—including most doctors—knows about the cure.

This is a picture of something that's really happening in education. But to understand our almost-unknown educational "cure," you have to know about Project Follow Through (PFT).

PFT is the world's largest-ever education research project, conducted between 1967 and 1977 by the U.S. Department of Education. Its results indicate there is a replicable, systematic curriculum that dramatically improves the quality of education in poor urban schools—one that can raise poor urban students' test scores to suburban levels.

But almost no urban schools are using this curriculum, because our educational establishment has effectively suppressed information about PFT.

Maintaining Gains

PFT's purpose was to maintain the gains made by low-income Head Start students after preschool. Rather than simply funding methods that weren't proven to work, the U.S. Department of Education commendably decided to research which curricula and classroom techniques are effective in improving student performance.

PFT researchers selected 180 low-income urban and rural school districts nationwide in which elementary school performance was at approximately the 20th percentile. Nine different educational models were each allocated to some schools in approximately 20 districts, with the remaining schools functioning as controls.

Students were pre-tested to determine initial performance differences between PFT-model schools and control schools, so the final analysis could compensate for initial variances. At the conclusion of the project, two independent agencies were hired to collect and analyze the data.

The results were shocking—but to understand why, you have to understand our education establishment.

Opposing Views

There are two opposing views regarding best classroom practices.

In the early 1900s, the prevailing idea was that teachers should thoroughly teach basic skills, which would then serve as the foundation for future learning.

But since the 1930s, an alternate view called "constructivism" has dominated. Constructivists believe teachers should "facilitate" children as they pursue their own learning. By the late 1960s, constructivism was a "given" in American teachers' colleges.

PFT reflected that dominance. Of PFT's

nine curriculum models, five were firmly constructivist and three were indeterminate. Only one model—Direct Instruction (DI)—firmly embraced the idea of teaching basic skills.

Reducing Performance

Nobody was more surprised than the constructivist curriculum authors when PFT demonstrated two things.

First, the basic-skills-oriented DI far outperformed both the control groups and the other models.

Second, the five constructivist-style curricula actually reduced school performance in districts that were already among the lowest performers nationwide.

"[The results of Project Follow Through] indicate there is a replicable, systematic curriculum that dramatically improves the quality of education in poor urban schools—one that can raise poor urban students' test scores to suburban levels."

DI even outperformed the constructivist models in areas in which they were supposed to excel.

Three tests of success were employed: academic (students' ability to answer questions correctly), cognitive (students' ability to reason for themselves), and affective (students' feelings about themselves).

With names like Cognitive Curriculum and Self-Esteem, the constructivist curricula were supposed to boost higher-order thinking and self-opinion.

According to PFT, they actually reduced both.

Hoarding Funds

With an orthodox ideology and billions of dollars' worth of future revenues to defend, the constructivists responded quickly. The Ford Foundation (one financier of constructivist programs) commissioned an unofficial second evaluation, which used abnormal analysis methods to minimize the enormous performance differences.

That evaluation further sought to discredit PFT by claiming its purpose should not have been to compare models but to study how each of the models works (as if any of the constructivist models had actually worked).

Other attackers sought to confuse readers with irrelevant statements, attacking PFT and DI because DI didn't agree with the attackers' own preconceived constructivist notions.

One critique, for example, said PFT was invalid because the PFT tests were

"more appropriate for middle-class populations"—as if it were inappropriate to expect low-income students to do well.

Maintaining Status Quo

The purpose of these attacks was to prevent a mutiny among the constructivist academics running most university education departments, and to retain control of the purse strings at foundations and in the federal government.

The propaganda barrage was successful. The PFT constructivists retained the lion's share of the remaining \$500 million the Department of Education distributed to PFT from 1978 to 1995—which in part explains why today's classrooms are awash in constructivism.

Since PFT's conclusion, DI has been successfully implemented in many districts, but such uses often end quickly under disturbing circumstances.

For example, one Rockford, Illinois elementary school using DI from 2001 to 2003 was showing extraordinary results until a new superintendent was hired. Over parents' objections, the DI program was removed, the principal demoted, and her integrity impugned, ironically because of her apparent success.

The claim was typical: The DI results were so good they had to be the result of cheating. Similar stories have played out in other districts. DI is so un-PC that pro-DI teachers and principals literally risk their careers if they implement it.

Silent Treatment

After the initial barrage of attacks, the constructivists adopted a new strategy regarding PFT: silence. The best news about failure is no news and, unlike their curricula, the constructivists' political strategy works.

You can gauge the success of the cam-

paign of silence for yourself: Ask any teacher or administrator you know about Project Follow Through, the world's largest education research project, and you'll most likely get a blank stare.

Engineering Defeat

Since public schools generally do not fear losing funds due to school failure or parental dissatisfaction, teachers and administrators are free to choose whatever curricula and methods they prefer.

This is convenient for constructivist curriculum authors, who are generally also professors at influential teachers' colleges. Constructivist orthodoxy is so dominant today it is almost impossible to get a teaching degree at most schools without openly subscribing to it.

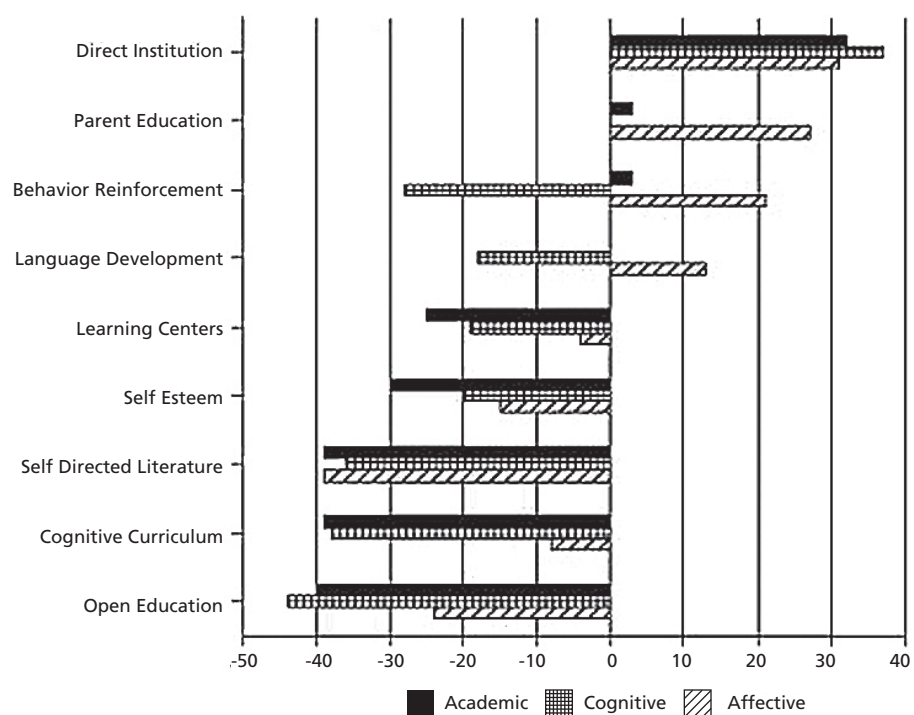
Each year, teachers' colleges crank out thousands of teachers and administrators determined to stamp out successful non-constructivist programs, such as DI, in an effort to ensure the continued flow of billions of dollars of grant money and curriculum sales into programs that are proven failures.

PFT's enduring lesson is that the American people, even acting through the federal government, are powerless against the entrenched interests of the education monopoly. Despite our intent to wage a "war on poverty," we have for decades unwittingly financed the engineers of our own defeat.

The only force capable of overcoming our educational dictatorship is the free market. If schools were forced to compete, and if parents were free to choose, entrenched academics would have little say in what gets implemented in our schools—and we wouldn't be spending billions of dollars funding research that teachers and administrators have been trained to ignore.

David Ziffer (daveziffer@projectpro.com) is a school choice activist who operated a Direct Instruction-based after-school reading program from 1997 through 2002. He has no current financial interest in Direct Instruction.

Project Follow-Through Results



Note: A missing bar denotes a value of zero

Preschool

Continued from page 1

increase on high income earners.

Despite an early lead in the polls and large financial investments from Hollywood activists and labor unions—including \$4 million from movie director Rob Reiner—voters became increasingly skeptical of the idea.

"The idea of large-scale, state-run, 'free' preschool programs is sweeping the nation, and so far this year three states have settled the question of whether it's right for them."

Since then, several California counties statewide have begun using tobacco-tax funds for universal preschool programs in their communities. And on September 7, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) signed into law A.B. 172, providing \$50 million

to expand preschool opportunities for low-income children.

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, that money will give an additional 12,000 to 17,000 4-year-olds statewide the chance to attend preschool.

Biased Study

Much of the California initiative's early momentum came from a study by the RAND Corporation, which found that for every dollar invested in preschool, Californians would gain between \$2 and \$4 in future savings from such factors as lower dropout and crime rates and increased college graduation rates.

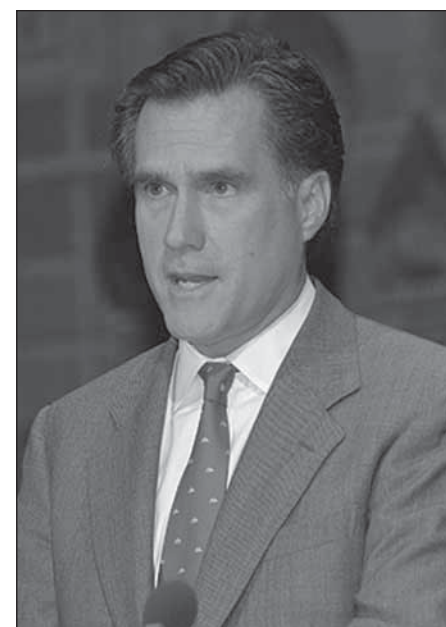
However, the RAND report ignored many of the costs associated with universal preschool and used biased assumptions to come up with future economic benefits in California, said Chris Cardiff, a San Jose State University economics professor who coauthored a critical analysis of RAND's study that was published by the Reason Foundation.

"On the surface, the RAND study looks like a credible, thoroughly researched document," Cardiff said. "But upon review, we found [it] fails to pass even the basic benchmarks of what can be considered a reasonable economic analysis."

Massachusetts Veto



(above) Recent studies of "universal" preschool programs have ignored the many costs associated with such taxpayer-subsidized programs. That's one reason Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney (right) vetoed a preschool proposal in his state, calling it "another expensive entitlement ... laying the groundwork for future tax increases."



On August 4, Romney vetoed universal preschool legislation in Massachusetts. The bill, unanimously passed by both legislative houses, would have created programs for all children between age 2 and kindergarten.

In a news release, the governor called the program "another expensive entitlement which by some estimates will cost taxpayers upwards of \$1 billion a year. By passing this bill, the Legislature is laying the groundwork for future tax increases."

The 2006 state budget includes \$4.6 million in new funding for pilot universal preschool programs in communities with at-risk preschoolers.

The governor argued the state should wait for results from the pilot program before expanding it statewide.

Illinois Law

Illinois' Preschool for All law amends the school code to authorize the use of state funds for pre-kindergarten services for children who are not at-risk.

Though it's theoretically universal, in practice the program will begin by targeting economically disadvantaged children.

The newest state budget includes an additional \$45 million for Preschool for All, to pay for 10,000 more 3- and 4-year-olds to attend preschool. The program restricts the way slots are filled, giving priority to children deemed at risk of failing in school.

The program sunsets in two years and will have to be reauthorized, making it unlikely ever to reach "all" children.

Lisa Snell (lsnell@reason.org) directs the Reason Foundation's education program.

Five Tips for Math Success

With 50 million K-12 students back in school, math expert Larry Shiller is offering teachers five easy but important tips for promoting math success in homes and classrooms.

"Starting with the right preparation and approach at the beginning of the school year can make a world of difference in math performance," said Shiller, who has a degree in mathematics from M.I.T. and is publisher of the acclaimed Montessori-based ShillerMath curriculum and author of *Software Excellence* (Prentice-Hall, 1990). Shiller is executive director of the Rising Stars Foundation, whose mission is to build positive roles models for kids in mathematics.

"The [United States] ranks in the bottom 20 percent among industrialized nations. These techniques are simple ways to help us improve that rating starting today," Shiller said.

- **Fill the holes before starting new curriculum.** Kids are often rusty after the summer. Spend a day testing last year's material, then take whatever time is appropriate to fill any holes found. Once students have a solid foundation they will make much faster progress. Free diagnostic

tests and answer keys are available at <http://www.shillermath.com>.

- **Use all the senses.** When a student doesn't get it with pen and paper, introduce activities that involve the major muscle groups, music, or vocalization. This works wonders, regardless of age.

- **Drill appropriately and individually.** Drilling when a student understands the lesson and wishes to move on is inappropriate—it is better to move on. Stopping drills when a student wishes to do more is also inappropriate—it is better to let the student drill until reaching closure.

And drilling when a student doesn't get it is inappropriate—it is better to put the lesson aside and reintroduce it a few days later.

- **Find mentors.** There's no better way to learn than to teach. Let the best students find ways to help struggling students. To build teamwork and cooperation, reward students based not only on individual performance but also on overall class performance.

- **Never say no.** When a student gives the wrong answer, saying so doesn't help. Instead, go back, one step at a time, until the student gets it right and move on only then.

"[F]ive easy but important tips for promoting math success in homes and classrooms."

INTERNET INFO

"Is Universal Preschool Beneficial? An Analysis of RAND Corporation's Analysis and Proposals for California," by Christopher F. Cardiff and Edward Stringham, published by the Reason Foundation in May 2006, 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 search for document #19211.

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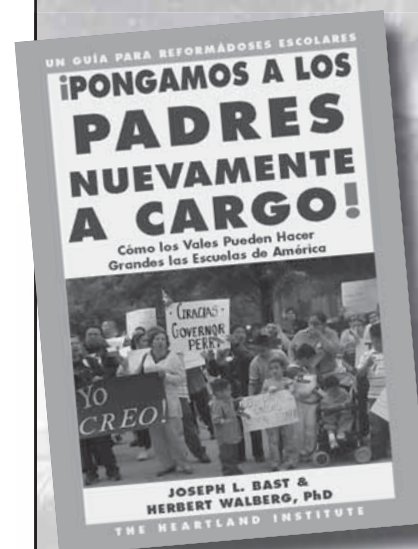
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New Bilingual Edition!



LET'S PUT PARENTS BACK IN CHARGE!

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

The Heartland Institute has 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.

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 70,000 copies have been distributed throughout the country by elected officials, education reform advocates, parent groups, and others.

Heartland is working 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 Government Relations Manager 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>.



The Once and Future Voucher

Liberty & Learning: Milton Friedman's Voucher Idea at Fifty
Robert C. Enlow and Lenore T. Ealy, editors
Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2006
166 pages, paper, ISBN: 1-930865-86-4, \$11.95

Review by Neal McCluskey

In 1955, when Milton Friedman penned his essay "The Role of Government in Education" and laid out for the first time his arguments for school vouchers, he could not have imagined the animosity his ideas would provoke among opponents, or the zeal among supporters, half a century later.

In at least one way, *Liberty & Learning: Milton Friedman's Voucher Idea at Fifty* is like Friedman in 1955—largely unaware of the great debates between those who love choice and those who despise it.

But that is not because the book's contributors really don't know about those battles. Indeed, most are regular combatants. No, the book is silent on the overall choice debates because its intent is to honor Friedman, and perhaps even more importantly, to examine differences within—not outside—the school choice movement.

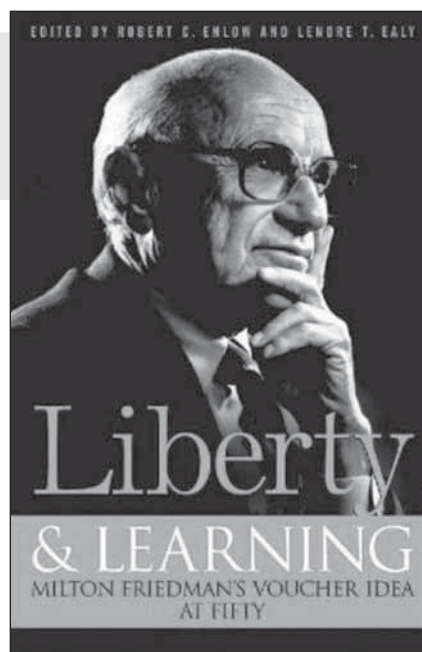
The book begins by easing into intra-choice differences, offering somewhat mild chapters that either gently chide choice supporters for some of their politi-

cal tactics, or that explore choice from angles other than pure economics.

Pervading Culture

In the first chapter, for instance, University of Southern California professor Guilbert C. Hentschke examines Friedman's proposal for universal elementary and secondary vouchers, and argues that to keep choice relevant today, supporters should focus not on universality but on such things as "circumstance-tested" vouchers and pre-kindergarten choice.

In another early chapter, Manhattan Institute senior fellow Abigail Thernstrom combines her school choice support with her work on culture in education, especially among African-Americans, to argue that a culture of choice—including choice in education—must pervade



African-American society for blacks to advance.

"There are no excellent big-city school systems—not one is successfully turning around the lives of inner-city kids," Thernstrom writes.

"Only schools whose mission is both academic and cultural can hope to

succeed in such a transforming project," Thernstrom continues. "But that dual mission cannot be accomplished except in schools in which choice permeates the educational culture."

Demanding Choice

Once eased into the school choice movement's self-examination, the second half of the book digs into the real heart of the intra-choice divide: How far should choice supporters go toward demanding

universal, unbounded, school choice?

That question is addressed most directly in chapters by Myron Lieberman, Andrew Coulson, and John Merrifield, all three of whom make it clear they are far from satisfied with the current state of the school choice movement.

Lieberman, chairman of the Education Policy Institute, begins his contribution by critiquing Friedman himself, regretting Friedman has tended "to bless every expansion of school choice, without any reservation or mention of [the expansion's] noncompetitive or anti-competitive features."

This proclivity of Friedman and others, Lieberman asserts, has confused people both within and outside the choice movement about what "school choice" really means. Is it any "equalitarian" program that helps a few parents pick their children's schools, or only initiatives that give everyone—both consumers and suppliers—as much freedom as possible?

Lieberman clearly favors the latter definition.

Creating Markets

In the next chapter, Coulson, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, marshals a great deal of evidence supporting "Friedman's conclusions that state-run schooling is unjustifiable in a free society and that education is best delivered through the private sector."

CONTINUED on right

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New Orleans Parents Shop for Public Schools

By Bruce Nolan

More than 100 parents, some with children in tow, browsed dozens of booths at the New Orleans Arena on August 5 in an exercise only an upheaval such as Hurricane Katrina might have created. They were shopping for public schools, viewing various schools' offerings as a grocery shopper might inspect melons.

In the wreckage left by Katrina's wind and water, public education in New Orleans looks entirely different in some ways, one year later.

The old geographic boundaries that once automatically assigned students to particular schools are gone, and the schools have been reorganized in a bewildering new landscape.

There now are three types of schools: those managed by the Orleans Parish School Board—a few; new charter schools managed by independent groups—more; and state-run schools managed by a new Recovery School District—the most.

So on Saturday dozens of schools set up booths in the arena to promote themselves like book publishers at a librarians' convention.

Wide Variety

Benjamin Franklin High School, a new charter, and McDonogh No. 35 High School, a traditional public school, were there. So were the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. School for Science and Technology in the 8th Ward, the Priestley School for Architecture and Construction in Carrollton, and Einstein Charter School in eastern New Orleans—all new charters.

In the city's confusing new educational world, some schools, such as charter schools in Algiers, [opened] as early as August 7. Other schools [opened] in mid-August, and others after Labor Day.

When the last students are seated in class, about 27,000 students are expected to be enrolled in 56 public schools, compared with about 60,000 in 128 schools before the storm, said Robin Jarvis, acting superintendent of the recovery district.

Educators in all the formats have been trying to help parents navigate the new system. For weeks, they have staged

Pop singer and actress Hillary Duff visits Nelson Charter School during a ceremony marking the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.



events inviting parents to get involved in choosing schools and registering their children at them.

Whether it was because those efforts already have worked, or because many parents still don't understand the new educational landscape, only a few hundred showed up for Saturday's event—instead of the several thousand Orleans Parish School Board member Phyllis Landrieu had thought the event might draw.

They were entertained by the McDonogh 35 marching band and given pep talks by Landrieu, acting Orleans schools Superintendent Darryl Kilbert, and others—all pledging to work cooperatively in the fractured landscape and promising success in the classrooms.

Involved Parents

Meantime, parents at the arena were on a variety of missions.

Some, like Patricia New, who hoped to get her 7-year-old, Donnesha, into second grade at Milestone/SABIS, a charter school, were trying to straighten out paperwork snags.

Pamela Morgan was looking for an alternative to Warren Easton, now a selective-admission charter high school, for her 14-year-old son, Terrance. He preferred Easton, but it appeared to be

full. Morgan said it seemed to her the schools advertising themselves at the fair might be a cut above the rest, so she wanted to browse them in search of an opportunity.

“More than 100 parents, some with children in tow, browsed dozens of booths at the New Orleans Arena on August 5 ... They were shopping for public schools, viewing various schools’ offerings as a grocery shopper might inspect melons.”

Shawn and Shanda Terrell were trying to find a good kindergarten for their 5-year-old, Vaughn. The Terrells live in Algiers, but nearby Alice Harte Elementary appears to be filled, so they came to the open house to look for alternatives.

Terrell said she liked what she saw of Medard H. Nelson Charter School, a school managed by the University of New Orleans that expects to enroll about 300

students.

The people at the Nelson booth couldn't have been nicer, answering every question with an eagerness that gave her a good feeling, she said. Moreover, “it's got small classes; it's diverse.”

Some Anxiety

But there was angst and uncertainty on the floor, too—a reminder that for many families, finding a school for a child is only part of restoring a sense of normalcy after Katrina.

Christine Lyons, a language instructor at Tulane University before the storm, pored over a pamphlet extolling the virtues of the New Orleans Free Elementary School for her son, Zachary.

“I'm shopping,” she said.

The difficulty was that Zachary on Saturday was in Amherst, Massachusetts and hoping to remain there for another year of school, even as his mother ached to find a way to return permanently to New Orleans.

“The schools up there are so good, and the people are kind and so PC it's unbelievable. But I don't know. My heart is so with New Orleans,” she said.

This story originally appeared in the August 6 edition of The Times-Picayune and is reprinted with permission.

CONTINUED from left

Coulson argues we should consider decentralizing education even further than the voucher systems Friedman's 1955 essay called for.

Merrifield, an economics professor at the University of Texas-San Antonio, ties Lieberman's and Coulson's arguments together, calling on choice supporters to stop celebrating constrained programs and to start explaining what's needed to create real education markets.

“Choice advocates must diplomatically explain that stymieing the positive effects of genuine competition hurts

everyone,” Merrifield writes.

Showing Proof

As clear as the calls are by Lieberman, Coulson, and Merrifield to unfetter choice, it is the book's last chapter that best makes the case for letting the market work. It does so by showing the free market is, right now, providing effective education to many of the world's poorest children.

“Charging very low, affordable fees, private schools are emerging that cater to some of the poorest people on this planet,” explains James Tooley, a professor at the University of Newcastle in the United Kingdom.

In several critical ways, Tooley says, these private schools “seem to be superior to state schools.”

“[T]he book is silent on the overall choice debates because its intent is to honor Friedman, and perhaps even more importantly, to examine differences within—not outside—the school choice movement.”

It is this finding, above all else, that best substantiates both Friedman's original voucher idea and the proposals to extend choice beyond what has been achieved so far. Now not only do we know that in theory the market is the best way to deliver education, we know it in practice.

What better tribute to school choice or to Milton Friedman could there be than that?

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

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June	National Science Month
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July	Literacy
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