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# School Reform News

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THE MONTHLY NEWSPAPER FOR SCHOOL REFORMERS

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## California Law Changes the Rules for Bad Teachers



On September 28, California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) signed S.B. 1655, sponsored by state Sen. Jack Scott (D-Altadena), at Pasadena's John Muir High School. The new law will give school districts statewide the ability to turn away inept teachers transferring from other districts, regardless of their seniority.

By Deepa Ranganathan

**I**t can take years to fire a bad teacher. So some principals don't even bother trying.

Instead, they make a deal. The principal asks the teacher to look for a job elsewhere in the district. In exchange, the teacher gets a good evaluation.

Now here's the rub. Since there's plenty of competition for plum jobs

at affluent schools, the bad teacher gets funneled to a struggling school serving a needy population.

School administrators call it the "dance of the lemons," and it's surprisingly common. More than a quarter of the principals surveyed in San Diego Unified School District, for instance, admitted to coaxing an underperforming teacher to transfer elsewhere, according to a national

study released last year by the New Teacher Project, a New York-based nonprofit organization.

A whopping 47 percent confessed they had hidden vacancies to avoid accepting such teachers. Meanwhile, 65 percent of the district's schools had no choice, or limited choice, in filling at least one position.

New legislation could change that

CALIFORNIA p. 4

## Supreme Court to Consider Wash. Union Case

By Michael Coulter

**O**n September 26, the United States Supreme Court announced it would accept an appeal of a Washington State Supreme Court decision that could greatly affect all labor unions in the Evergreen State.

"We were delighted that the Supreme Court agreed to hear the case, but we are not guaranteed a victory," said Michael Reitz, director of labor policy at the Evergreen Freedom Foundation (EFF), a Washington state-based public

WASHINGTON p. 5

## Opponents Sue to Block Arizona Scholarships

By Neal McCluskey

Just a few days before it was scheduled to go into effect in mid-September, Arizona's new corporate scholarship program was taken to court.

On September 19, the Arizona School Boards Association (ASBA), American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Arizona, and several other organizations filed a lawsuit against the new program in

ARIZONA p. 8

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## Mich. School Funding Measure Goes to Voters

By Ben DeGrow

Michigan voters will decide November 7 whether to approve Proposal 5, a statutory change to guarantee annual funding increases for elementary, secondary, and

higher education institutions at the rate of inflation.

On August 25 the State Board of Canvassers approved ballot language that included the Michigan Senate Fiscal Agency's projected first-year cost of \$565 million for the proposal.

Supporters of the measure initially balked at including the \$565 million figure.

At the August 25 hearing, Sandra

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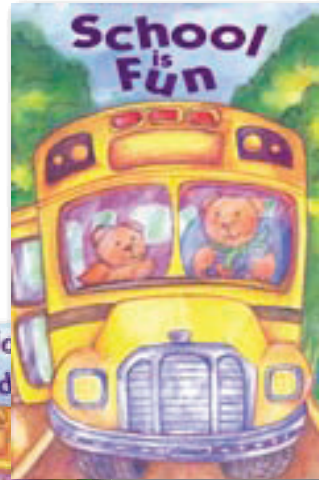
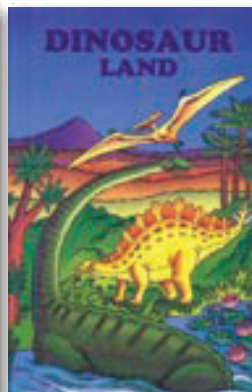
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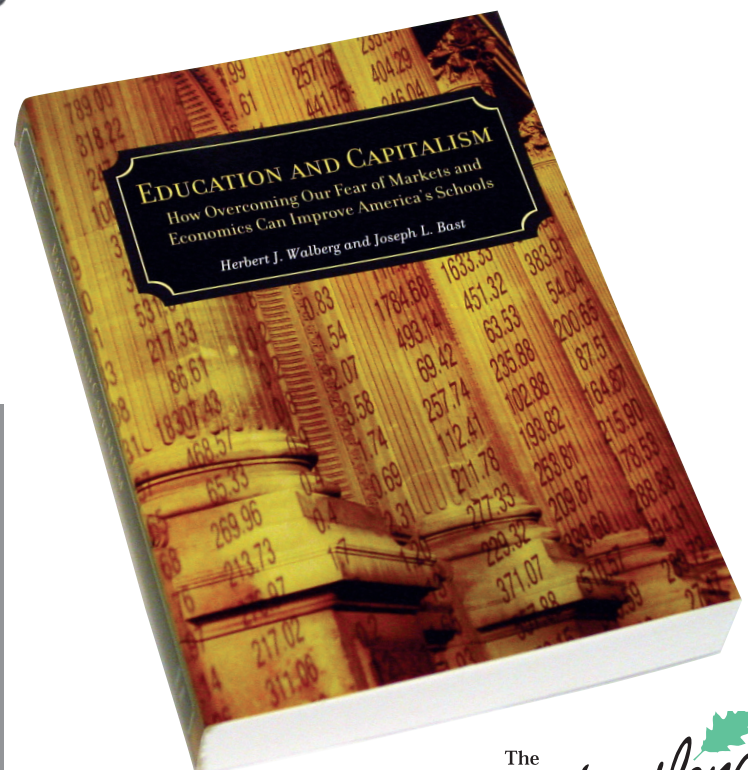


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## The Heartland Institute

19 South LaSalle Street #903  
Chicago, Illinois 60603  
312/377-4000 voice • 312/377-5000 fax

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## PUBLISHER

Joseph L. Bast

## ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER

Nikki Comerford

## EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Diane Carol Bast

## SENIOR EDITOR

S.T. Karnick

## MANAGING EDITOR

Karla Dial  
[dial@heartland.org](mailto:dial@heartland.org)

## DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Elizabeth Ow, Amy McIntyre

## ADVERTISING MANAGER

Nikki Comerford

## CIRCULATION MANAGER

Latrece Vankinscott

## CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Mike Antonucci, Robert Enlow  
Robert Holland, Krista Kafer  
David Kirkpatrick  
Nina Shokrai Rees (on leave)  
Paul Seibert, Lisa Snell,  
Don Soifer, Kelly Amis Stewart  
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Herbert J. Walberg Ph.D., Lee H. Walker

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## CAPITOL HILL BEAT

# House Votes to Increase Transparency of Federal Appropriations Process

*Measure could curb federal spending on education projects*

By Dan Lips

The U.S. House of Representatives voted in September to pass reform legislation to add greater transparency to federal spending.

The legislation, which passed 241-171, will require lawmakers to attach their names to earmark requests or federal funding for special projects. The transparency measure may dry up a growing source of federal spending for public education.

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) defines an earmark as "any designation in the annual appropriations report which allocates a portion of the appropriation for a specific project, locale, or institution."

According to the CRS, congressional earmarks have grown significantly over the past decade: from 4,155 in 1994 to 15,887 in 2005.

**"Earmark reform will end the secrecy that allows waste and abuse to proliferate. The end result is that federal money will be distributed more based on merit and less on political influence."**

ED FRANK

AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY

## 'Pork Barrel' Scandals

Americans for Prosperity (AFP), a grassroots organization that advocates limiting government spending, applauded the measure.

"While there's certainly more that needs to be done, these reforms will end the often-anonymous nature of pork barrel earmarks, and they'll provide taxpayers, bloggers, and grassroots organizations like ours with more transparency so we can work together to fight waste, fraud, and abuse," explained AFP spokesman Ed Frank.

Public concern about the federal spending process and pork barrel projects grew during the 109th Congress as several scandals came to light involving lobbyists, Congress, and government spending projects.

In March 2006, for example, Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham (R-CA) was sentenced to eight years in prison after pleading guilty to corruption charges. Among his crimes: receiving more than \$2



Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham was sentenced to prison in March 2006 for, among other things, receiving bribes in exchange for spending earmarks.

million in bribes in exchange for directing government spending to projects.

## Earmark Projects

The new transparency may affect education appropriations. In 2005, the U.S. Department of Education's annual budget included approximately \$400 million from an estimated 1,175 Congressional earmarks.

In 2003, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported federal funds earmarked for American colleges and universities had exceeded \$2 billion for the first time. Two-thirds of that funding came from the Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Education, and Transportation.

Citizens Against Government Waste, a nonprofit organization that opposes pork barrel spending, pointed to significant wasteful federal spending on education.

"In the fiscal 2006 Senate Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations bill, there were 51 pork projects costing a total of \$1.75 billion," explained Tom Finnigan, a spokesman for the group. "The Department of Education received the majority of earmarks in this bill. Despite the fact that President Bush [proposed cutting] 48 projects from the Department of Education [budget], appropriators chose to ignore the majority of those cuts, returning funding to 25 of the programs."

## Bridges to Nowhere

AFP and other organizations concerned about high government spending hope the new transparency will continue momentum for limiting government spending, including education programs.

"In the past year, we've been able to block pork barrel earmarks for Bridges to Nowhere in Alaska, a Railroad to

Nowhere in Mississippi, and other boondoggles," Frank explained, citing examples of federally funded transportation projects that were proposed as Congressional earmarks. "With these reforms, we're going to be able to fight even more wasteful projects like these in the future."

Finnigan agreed.

"At the very least, taxpayers will know who to blame for the most outrageous pork projects," Finnigan said. "Transparency will discourage members of Congress from directing earmarks toward campaign contributors and projects that benefit friends and relatives. This kind of abuse has become commonplace."

"Transparency will raise the bar for what qualifies for federal funding," Finnigan continued. "This could have a trickle-down effect and encourage states to re-prioritize their budgets and not run to Congress for every half-baked idea. Earmark reform will end the secrecy that allows waste and abuse to proliferate. The end result is that federal money will be distributed more based on merit and less on political influence. It will also make it easier for watchdog groups, the media, and taxpayers to expose conflicts of interest and other shenanigans."

Dan Lips ([dan.lips@heritage.org](mailto:dan.lips@heritage.org)) is an education policy analyst at The Heritage Foundation.

## INTERNET INFO

*Chronicle of Higher Education* earmark projects database, <http://chronicle.com/stats/pork/>

# California

Continued from page 1

in California. Senate Bill 1655—which Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger (R) signed into law on September 28—is the first in the nation to alter union contracts that protect experienced teachers but don't give low-performing schools enough freedom to hire the people they want.

## Right of Refusal

The bill, introduced by state Sen. Jack Scott (D-Pasadena), helps districts snag promising new teachers early in the year. It also gives struggling schools the right to refuse bad teachers whose seniority otherwise might guarantee them a spot on the faculty.

"I think this is very, very much a precedent-setter," said Michelle Rhee, chief executive officer of the New Teacher Project. "This could have a positive impact, not only in California, but nationwide."

The bill sailed through the Democrat-dominated Senate and Legislature with enormous majorities, despite opposition from two party allies: the California Teachers Association (CTA) and the California Federation of Teachers.

## Majority of Minorities

Several groups representing low-income and minority communities supported the bill—a factor that won over legislators despite union opposition, said Russlynn Ali, director of the advocacy group Education Trust-West.

"That's really unprecedented, isn't it?" Ali said. "You had a group of advocates that represent poor kids and kids of color saying, 'Enough is enough. We've got to make some headway on closing the teacher quality gap.'"

The law contains the seeds of dramatic change. For one, all districts will be allowed to hire new candidates as early as mid-April without considering their seniority.

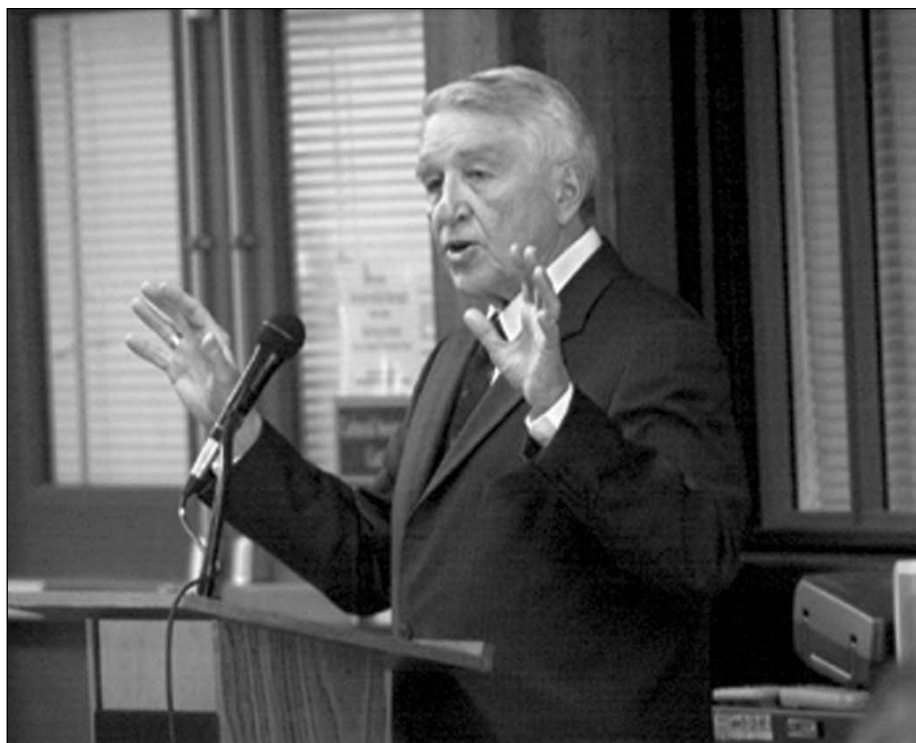
Currently, many urban districts must give their tenured teachers the first crack at vacancies well into the summer. By that point, many of the best novices have received job offers from suburban districts with less-restrictive contracts, proponents say.

## Left Hanging

In a 2003 survey of four urban districts nationwide, the New Teacher Project found aggressive recruitment yielded a glut of job applicants from outside the district—many of them new teachers who wanted to work with low-income students but "were left hanging in limbo for months." Between 31 percent and 60 percent withdrew their applications and went elsewhere, the majority citing the late hiring cycle as a cause.

"The longer you wait, the poorer the quality of the pool is," Scott said. "The suburban schools really are able to pick off better candidates."

The law also gives principals in very low-performing schools—schools ranked 1, 2 or 3 on the state's 10-point scale—the ability to turn down



California state Sen. Jack Scott sponsored S.B. 1655, which Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law on September 28. The measure will help school districts get quality teachers early in the year and give districts the right to refuse to employ bad teachers.

teachers who want to transfer from elsewhere in the district.

Not all teachers who want to switch schools are lemons, to be sure. "But when you are a school that is low-performing and you are trying everything you can possibly try, you need to be able to build a staff that will work well together," said Vernon Renwanz, principal of Creekside Elementary in north Stockton.

**"[California] Senate Bill 1655 ... is the first in the nation to alter union contracts that protect experienced teachers but don't give low-performing schools enough freedom to hire the people they want."**

## Teamwork Essential

Over the past six years, Creekside, a high-poverty school, has seen a steady rise in test scores. Renwanz credits his teachers' willingness to work together on schoolwide reforms. It's hard, he said, when the union contract forces him to accept a teacher who isn't interested in change.

"If you have someone who's uncooperative, it makes everyone uneasy," Renwanz said. "It doesn't promote the good teamwork that is essential for good performance."

Not everyone is a fan of the legislation. Barbara Kerr, president of the CTA, called it "premature and unnecessary," saying it would keep veteran teachers out of needy schools that disproportionately lack experienced faculty.

"The idea that a school administrator would have the power to block transfers of highly qualified and senior

teachers—that's very troubling, since many of those schools need experienced teachers," Kerr said.

Kerr said a CTA-sponsored bill—Senate Bill 1133—would do more to get veterans into those schools by offering incentives such as smaller class sizes.

Even proponents of Scott's bill acknowledge it's no panacea. The legislation deals only with teachers who seek to switch schools. Teachers who lose their jobs involuntarily—say, because the district closed their school—may still be given priority in hiring at any time and placed at schools over a principal's objections.

## No 'Magic Bullet'

As for delays in hiring, the law won't do anything to speed up districts that are mired in inefficiency.

"I can't make bureaucracies more effective," Scott said. "This is not a magic bullet that will solve every problem. ... But this allows students to get the best teacher, not the teacher who has been subtly forced out of another school."

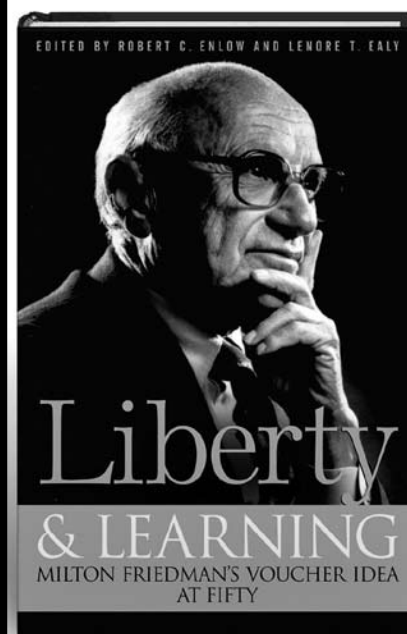
No analysis exists showing how many districts will be affected. But large, urban districts such as San Diego, Los Angeles, and Fresno will see changes in some of the hiring policies spelled out in union contracts, Rhee said.

Locally, both Sacramento City Unified and San Juan Unified school districts have teacher labor contracts providing schools limited choice in hiring, with some priority given to candidates with experience in the district. The new law allows those provisions to last only until April each year. The legislation takes effect as existing union contracts expire.

*This story originally appeared in the September 25 edition of the Sacramento Bee. Modified to reflect recent events and reprinted with permission.*

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# Washington

Continued from page 1

policy research organization. “We only celebrated briefly as we immediately got ready for the next round.”

On March 16, 2006, Washington’s highest court declared unconstitutional a state law prohibiting labor unions from using non-members’ “agency fees” for political purposes without direct authorization by the individuals involved. Attorney General Rob McKenna (R) appealed the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

**“On September 26, the United States Supreme Court announced it would accept an appeal of a Washington State Supreme Court decision that could greatly affect all labor unions in the Evergreen State.”**

## Non-Member Union Fees

The case, known as *Washington v. Washington Education Association*, involves the Washington Education Association’s (WEA) manner of collecting and using fees collected from non-members. The EFF played a crucial role in jump-starting the case, filing complaints with the state attorney general’s office and Public Disclosure Commission asserting the WEA was violating state law.

Washington is one of 28 states that require non-members of unions to pay agency fees to labor unions to cover the costs of general activities such as collective bargaining.

“I’m a bit surprised that [the U.S. Supreme Court] agreed to hear it because it affects only Washington State residents,” said WEA general counsel James Painter. “The WEA spends very little on political fees, and all of that is paid for with members’ dues.”

## Affirmative Authorization

The requirement of “affirmative authorization” in Washington came from I-134, an initiative known as the Fair Campaign Practices Act, which was passed by Washington state voters in 1992 with 72 percent of the vote.

According to the provision, “a labor organization may not use agency shop fees paid by an individual who is not a member of the organization to make contributions or expenditures to influence an election or to operate a political committee, unless affirmatively authorized by the individual.”

The Washington Supreme Court, which heard oral arguments on May 27, 2004, ruled 6-3 that the “affirmative authorization” provision placed too great an administrative burden on the WEA, thereby interfering with the group’s rights to free association and free speech.

Justice Faith Ireland wrote the majority opinion, asserting that while individuals have the right not to be forced to pay for political speech they oppose, the association must not be harmed in its political activities, either.

## Expressive Rights

In a relevant 1986 decision, *Chicago Teacher’s Union Local v. Hudson*, the United States Supreme Court ruled that individuals’ free speech rights could be balanced against the expressive rights of an association by allowing a non-member paying agency fees to request a refund of the portion used for political purposes. That was known as an “opt-out” provision.

The Washington Supreme Court’s majority ruled that the state requiring an “opt-in” provision presumed that non-members do not support the unions’ political activities.

Justice Richard Sanders, who wrote a dissenting opinion, rejected the argument that the opt-in provision harms the members of the association, because unions have “no constitutional right to compel membership, much less political support from non-members in the first place.”

Sanders also rejected the claim that creating an “opt-in” provision places an administrative burden on the WEA.

## Political Causes

In 2000, several people paying agency fees to the WEA approached the EFF, which then filed a complaint with the state’s Public Disclosure Commission in 2000. According to the EFF, then-Attorney General Christine Gregoire (D)—currently the state’s governor—filed a suit against the WEA for violating the Fair Campaign Practices Act.

In 2001, Thurston County Superior Court Judge Gary Tabor found the WEA guilty and imposed a fine of \$590,375 against the organization. Also in 2001, a group of teachers filed a class-action suit against the WEA, charging improper



collection of agency fees.

Cases filed by two individuals were consolidated into one. On June 24, 2003, the state Court of Appeals, Division II, ruled 2-1 that the law requiring affirmative authorization was unconstitutional. The combined cases were then appealed to the Washington Supreme Court.

## Widespread Attention

The case has attracted the attention of many organizations on the national level.

The National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation (NRTW), for example, has served as legal counsel for the teachers in the class-action suit. In a September 26 news release, the NRTW stated, “the ruling brought into focus

how difficult the paycheck protection regulatory approach is, and how ineffective it has been in protecting employees laboring under forced unionism.”

The EFF filed an amicus brief urging the U.S. Supreme Court to hear the case. It was joined in that effort by 11 other public policy organizations, including the American Legislative Exchange Council, a national organization of state elected officials; the Independence Institute, a free-market think tank in Oakland, California; and nine state-based organizations dedicated to promoting political freedom.

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

## INTERNET INFO

*State Ex Rel Public Disclosure Comm., Respondent, v. Washington Education Assoc., Appellant* (majority opinion), March 16, 2006, [http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=wa&vol=2006\\_sc/742685MAJ&invol=4](http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=wa&vol=2006_sc/742685MAJ&invol=4)

*State Ex Rel Public Disclosure Comm., Respondent, v. Washington Education Assoc., Appellant* (minority opinion), March 16, 2006, [http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=wa&vol=2006\\_sc/742685DI1&invol=4](http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?court=wa&vol=2006_sc/742685DI1&invol=4)

*Chicago Teacher’s Union Local 1 v. Hudson*, <http://caselaw.lp.findlaw.com/scripts/getcase.pl?navby=case&court=us&vol=475&invol=292>

Evergreen Freedom Foundation, <http://www.teachers-vs-union.org/>



*“But, sweetie, children are the backbone of our educational system.”*



# School Choice Gains in N.J.

By Kate McGreevy

New Jersey residents strongly support corporate tax credit-funded scholarships, according to a poll conducted by the Monmouth University Polling Institute (MUPI) released in late September. Legislation that would pilot such a program, called the Urban Schools Scholarship Act, is currently in motion in Trenton (see sidebar).

The poll and legislation come on the heels of a class-action lawsuit filed July 13 by parents of children attending failing public schools.

Excellent Education for Everyone, known as E3, commissioned the poll, which was conducted by phone in July and released on September 27. E3 is a statewide nonprofit advocate for school choice.

The poll reveals strong support for corporate tax credit scholarships and vouchers in general.

## Support Broadening

Dan Gaby, executive director of E3, said he believes the poll reflects the growing bipartisan, broad support that school choice enjoys in New Jersey.

"By far, the constituencies that supported these concepts were urban, poor minorities, all previously hostile," Gaby said. "In addition, we are moving rapidly away from the former reality that Democrats aren't interested in school choice."

The school choice option receiving the strongest support in the poll was corporate tax credit scholarships, with 74 percent of respondents in favor. Democrats and Republicans alike supported the program (at 80 percent and 74 percent, respectively).

Minorities' support for the measure, at 88 percent, was particularly substantial.

Support for vouchers was lower, experiencing a 12 percent drop since the 2003 poll. Nevertheless, a majority of respondents, 54 percent, reported supporting the voucher option. Sixty-six percent of all parents and 62 percent of black and Hispanic respondents supported vouchers.

## Choice Flexible

The poll also measured support for amending the state's current school financing formula. More than 50 percent of respondents agreed funding should be attached to the pupil and not doled out to districts in a lump sum. School choice advocates consider the former formula much more desirable, as it allows for more flexibility for individual students.

MUPI Director Patrick Murray, who designed the poll, said the methodology, which included polling a random sample of 802 New Jersey residents, was created to gauge the depth of support for the three issues statewide.

"This poll shows support for school choice in urban and suburban areas, among different races, and even different political parties," Murray said. "People like choice, and parents, in particular, like choice in education for their children."



## Support Decreased

Steve Wollmer, spokesman for the New Jersey Education Association, challenged the design of the poll's questionnaire, calling it misleading.

"This is becoming an annual E3 ritual," Wollmer said, "and just another attempt to drive policy through polling."

Murray defended the poll design and noted that, absent a legislated voucher program, the response to the questionnaire will always rely in part on a citizen's understanding of vouchers.

## Lawsuit Filed

As the Urban Schools Scholarship Act idled, a class-action lawsuit filed July 13 by 12 New Jersey parents (*Crawford v. Davy*) was underway at Superior Court of New Jersey.

The parents contend their children's public schools are chronically failing. Therefore, they say, they should be able to remove their children from their failing schools and take with them the per-pupil funding allotment to apply to another public or private school.

According to the 2006 Comparative Spending Guide, published annually by the New Jersey Department of Education, in 2004-05 that per-pupil allotment averaged \$11,237 for each K-12 student statewide. Petitioners in the suit say they represent more than 60,000 New Jersey public school students.

Kate McGreevy ([mcgreevy@gmail.com](mailto:mcgreevy@gmail.com)) is a freelance education writer residing in Washington, DC.

## INTERNET INFO

"Statewide Poll Offers Findings on New Jersey Citizens' Opinions on Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship Program, School Funding Options, and School Vouchers," E3, September 27, 2006, [www.nje3.org](http://www.nje3.org)

The text of *Crawford v. Davy* is available through *PolicyBot™*, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.policybot.org> and search for document #19830.

"Comparative Spending Guide, March 2006," New Jersey Department of Education, <http://www.state.nj.us/njded/guide/2006/>

# Opponents Thwart NJ Choice Bill

At press time, New Jersey state legislators were awaiting a hearing for the Urban Schools Scholarship Act (A-257, S-1332). Led by Democrats in both the state assembly and senate, the bill proposes creating a five-year corporate tax credit pilot program in Camden, Newark, Orange, and Trenton.

Modeled after similar corporate tax credit legislation in Arizona and Pennsylvania, the bill would provide low-income students living in these districts with the opportunity to apply for funds from nonprofit scholarship organizations. Corporations that donate to the scholarship organizations would receive a dollar-for-dollar tax benefit.

Democratic support is critical in New Jersey, and in this instance it is a clear response to citizen demand, said Dan Gaby, executive director of Excellent Education for Everyone (E3).

"E3 has succeeded in informing and mobilizing those most affected by [the Urban Schools Scholarship Act] bill,"

Gaby said. "The system as presently constituted is destroying their choice. We have to put competitive pressure on the public schools to reform. School choice is being resisted by those with the capacity to move to better districts. Making this known forces the Democratic party to respond or pay the price at the polls."

## Partisans Blocking

Even so, Gaby lamented that partisan politics have blocked the bill.

"The bill has been filed with the education committees of both the Assembly and the Senate, and it awaits a hearing," Gaby explained. "We believe that there is substantial support on the floor, but the chairs of the two committees are holding it up under pressure from the teachers' unions."

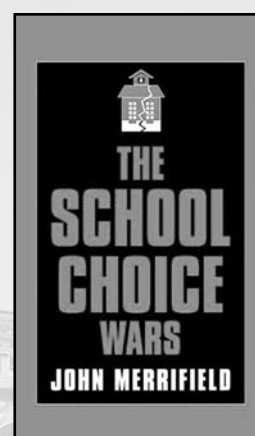
"We believe we have majorities in both houses," Gaby said. "So, basically, two individuals are thwarting the will of both legislative bodies."

— Karla Dial



## THE SCHOOL CHOICE WARS

John Merrifield



"...my early favorite for Best School Reform Book of 2001. Even school reformers committed to an incrementalist approach will benefit from Merrifield's instructions on the proper use of rhetoric and the importance of communicating the goal of creating a true competitive education industry."

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# Racial 'Digital Gap' Report Sparks Controversy

By Daschell M. Phillips

According to a study released in September by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), a research arm of the U.S. Department of Education, a digital divide between white, black, and Hispanic students nationwide exists and is getting deeper.

Predictably, some education reformers are calling for government action to close it. Others, however, contend it will take a real national school choice effort to close the gap created by socioeconomic status.

The study, *Computer and Internet Use by Students in 2003*, tracks and compares computer and Internet use by students from preschool through 12th grade, by race, in school and at home. The digital gap between white students and African-American and Hispanic students in using computers at home is wide, according to the report: 78 percent of white students, 48 percent of Hispanics, and 46 percent of African-American students reported using a computer and the Internet at home.

The report says differences in the rates of computer use are smaller at school: 85 percent of white students, 82 percent of African-Americans, and 80 percent of Hispanics reported having computer and Internet access at school.

## Racial Inequality

Mark Lloyd, a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, a Washington, DC-based educational research institute, said the gap in home computer and Internet use between students of different races stems from other inequalities.

**"According to a study released in September by the National Center for Education Statistics, ... a digital divide between white, black, and Hispanic students nationwide exists and is getting deeper."**

"In America, there is a very strong gap between the economically oppressed and the educationally oppressed [and those who are not oppressed], with the largest gap being between Hispanics and African-Americans to whites," Lloyd said. "Because of the historical [oppression] that Latino and African-Americans faced, currently they just don't have the same networks that whites have to jobs and other opportunities. This adds up to less money to spend at home."

Lloyd said that in order to bridge

the digital divide, policymakers must address the issue nationally.

"Programs such as Link-Up [a federally funded telephone discount program] should not be reserved just for extremely poor families," Lloyd said. "The [Link-Up] program should not only provide support for telephone service, but for broadband service as well."

## Underlying Problem

But Andrew Coulson, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, said the racial digital divide is only a symptom of the real problem, and having the government address it with a technology program will hasten the rate at which the gap is closed by a year or two at best, because technology prices are falling continually.

"If we really want to reduce our nation's racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps, there are far better solutions than expanding the government's role in education," Coulson said. "Both the test scores and graduation rates of students participating in private school choice programs exceed those of similar students trapped in the public schools. And these gains are most noticeable for African-American children—those that the NCES study finds to have the least access to the Internet at home."

"Empowering parents by expanding access to school choice would thus have

a far more dramatic impact on the lives of disadvantaged children than a subsidy for Internet access," Coulson said.

Coulson pointed out the lack of choice widens the gap: "Hastening the spread of Internet use by a year or two will have no long-term effect on our achievement gaps, because it would not address the root cause of those gaps: The wealthy already have at least some level of school choice in this country, only the poor do not," he noted.

"Until we address that fundamental inequity," Coulson said, "everything else amounts to reupholstering the deck chairs on the sinking Titanic."

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

## INTERNET INFO

"Computer and Internet Use by Students in 2003: A Statistical Report," issued by the National Center for Education Statistics, Institute for Education Sciences, in September 2006, is available through *PolicyBot*™, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.policybot.org> and search for document #19826.

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# Arizona

Continued from page 1

Maricopa County Superior Court, with the intent of blocking its implementation.

The program gives corporations tax credits for donations they make to organizations that provide private school scholarships to low-income students. In the program's first year the cap on total donations is \$10 million, a ceiling that is supposed to rise 20 percent each year thereafter.



Alessandra Soler Meetze

Meetze, executive director of the ACLU of Arizona.

## Not Public Money

The plaintiffs contend the program diverts money from the state's public schools, violates state constitutional provisions forbidding public funding of religious schools, and keeps the state

from furnishing a constitutionally mandated "general and uniform public school system."



Tim Keller

Tim Keller, executive director of the Arizona chapter of the Institute for Justice, which is defending the program, disagrees with the charges. In e-mailed comments for this article, Keller noted the corporate scholarship program does no more to divert money from public education than any other tax break, and that the "general and uniform" clause in the Arizona constitution simply sets a "floor" upon which the state is free to provide additional educational options."

**"Just a few days before it was scheduled to go into effect in mid-September, Arizona's new corporate scholarship program was taken to court."**

Ultimately, Keller argues, from a legal standpoint the corporate program is indistinguishable from individual credits the state's supreme court found

constitutional in 1999.

"The Arizona Supreme Court has ruled definitively that tax credits are not public money," Keller wrote. "In *Kotterman v. Killian*, they said, 'No money ever enters the state's control as a result of this [the individual] tax credit. Nothing is ever deposited in the state treasury or other accounts under the management or possession of governmental agencies or public officials. Thus we are not dealing with 'public money.'"

## Opponents Cite Cap

Opponents of the corporate program counter there is an important distinction between the corporate and individual tax credits. While the corporate program requires the state to pre-approve donations in order to ensure the total amount of credits stays under the cap, the individual program has no such provision. The cap, opponents argue, is tantamount to an appropriation of public funds, and makes the state an important actor in providing the scholarships, thus rendering the program unconstitutional.

"The corporate tax credit actually involves the state intimately," explained ASBA Executive Director Panfilo Contreras.

Keller finds such assertions highly dubious.

"When you think about it, this argument is absurd," Keller noted. "It would mean that an unlimited tax credit, like Arizona's individual scholarship, is perfectly constitutional, but a limited pro-

gram such as the one challenged here, is unconstitutional!"

The corporate scholarship program has taken effect despite the suit and, according to an October 5 *Arizona Republic* article, 63 businesses have already applied to contribute a total of \$3.5 million. At press time, the court had not announced when it might consider the case.

Neal McCluskey ([nmcccluskey@cato.org](mailto:nmcccluskey@cato.org)) is a policy analyst at the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom.

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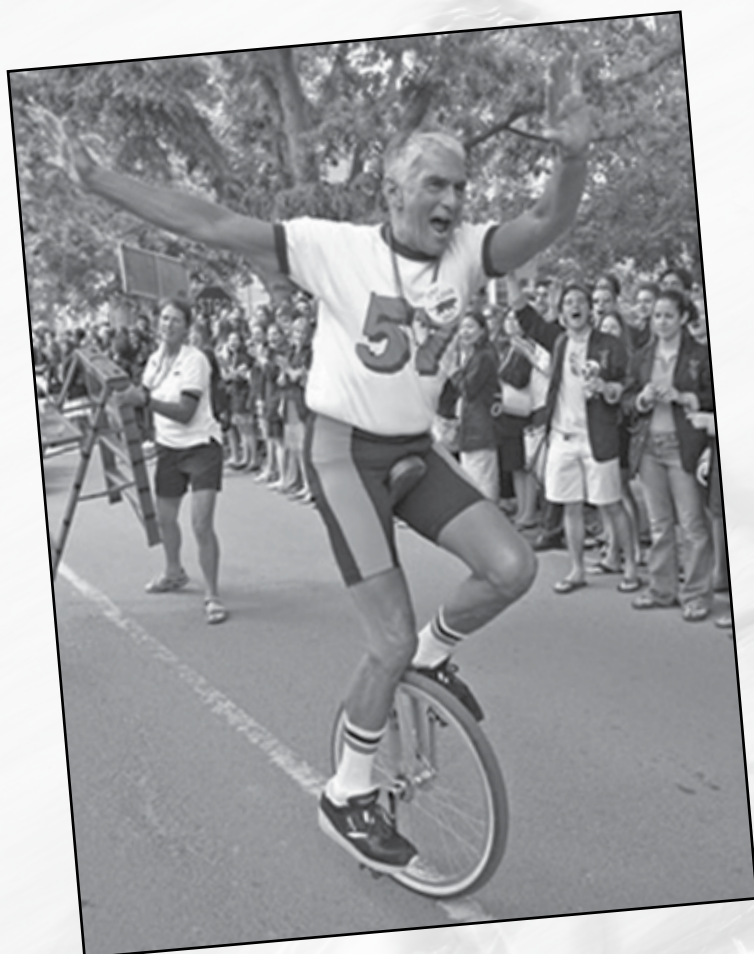
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The 70-something Lehr has completed the Hawaiian Ironman Triathlon Championship in Kona nearly a dozen times; has more than 1,200 skydives to his credit; and recently attempted a rim-to-rim double hike across the Grand Canyon (and had to be airlifted out). Three weeks later, he succeeded in bicycling across the Rocky Mountains.

Lehr is available through The Heartland Institute for a limited number of speaking engagements across the country.

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# Federal Data-Sharing Program Raises Student Privacy Concerns

By David Salvo

On September 1, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and other media outlets reported a student at Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, working with The Associated Press, had uncovered a little-known data-sharing program conducted by the FBI and U.S. Department of Education. The program was disbanded shortly after the story broke.

According to those sources, the program—termed “Operation Strike Back”—was initiated after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, targeting current or potential terror suspects who may have been using student identification and federal or commercial student loan funding for illicit purposes. The FBI sought and received from the Department of Education personal data about several hundred college students. Federal authorities say terror suspects often receive education in the United States and travel on student visas.

## Classified Data

In a September 1 *USA Today* article, FBI spokeswoman Catherine Milhoan said the agency received information about “a small, select list of a couple of hundred names associated with ongoing investigations.” Compromised data may have included income information and Social Security numbers, according to Jurist Legal News and Research, a Web site published by the University of Pittsburgh School of Law.

Joe Shaulis, publisher and editor-in-chief of Jurist Legal News, wrote on September 1, “the Education Department checked names sent by the FBI against the 14 million records in its student aid database. Matching records ... were then forwarded to the FBI.”

Student income data and Social Security numbers are generally considered classified. The Associated Press reported the FBI requested such information from the Department of Education as recently as February 2006.

Sean Parnell, vice president of external affairs at The Heartland Institute, said the use of student records wasn't as severe a violation of privacy in this instance as it might otherwise be. “A small, narrowly targeted program that concerns itself only with suspected terrorists who come to this country posing as students is probably a wise use of scarce resources,” Parnell said. Still, he recommended caution and oversight.

“Anytime the government starts collecting information on citizens and guests, there is reason to be concerned,” Parnell said. “Strong protections should be included to reduce the likelihood that this program will engage in ‘fishing expeditions’ or be used to attack students with unpopular ideas.”

## Effects on Lenders, Businesses

The release of such sensitive and previously confidential material raises concerns

about civil liberties and personal privacy, and the program's potential ripple effects on universities and commercial loan guarantors are unclear. Student loan providers such as Sallie Mae find themselves in the awkward position of finding their own security apparatuses circumvented.

A Sallie Mae spokesperson said the company still hasn't determined whether its position as the nation's largest underwriter of educational loans has been compromised.

Parnell said damage to lenders is unlikely.

“As long as the financial community has confidence that this program isn't being used in unethical ways, there shouldn't be much in the way of disruptions to the student loan business, because foreign students tend to rely less on loans issued by American institutions,” Parnell explained.

**“The FBI sought and received from the Department of Education personal data about several hundred college students.”**

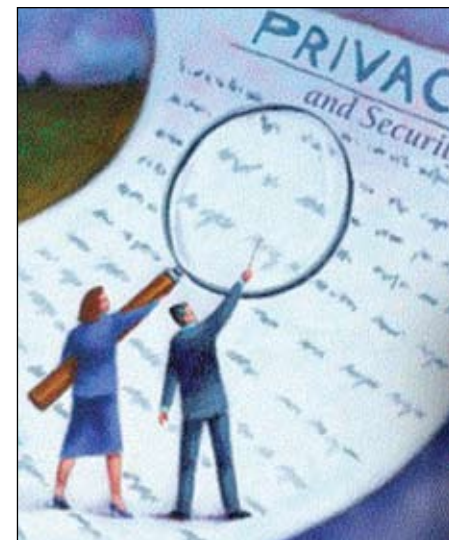
## Planned Database

The program's discovery has intensified already-strong opposition to other projects planned by the Department of Education. Earlier this autumn, the Commission on the Future of Higher Education recommended the U.S. Department of Education create a national higher education student-tracking database designed to foster accountability for student performance. On September 26, Education Secretary Margaret Spellings announced plans to follow that recommendation—a move Parnell said is redundant.

“Accountability in higher education already exists, thanks to a largely market-driven system where students and families choose their own schools and have to pay at least part of the costs as tuition,” Parnell said. “The federal government has been measuring and reporting on failure in the public K-12 system for decades. It's hard to imagine that tracking student performance in higher education will lead to improvement.”

Parnell isn't alone in that opinion. Following the release of the commission's recommendations, other organizations expressed wide-ranging concerns about the proposal, some citing growing unease over the government's sometimes inept handling of sensitive information.

“Revelations about the FBI's mining of student loan information, as well as a recent high-profile exposure of private student data on a Department of Education direct loan Web site, has made people increasingly hesitant about the proposed federal unit-record data system for higher education,” said Neal McCluskey, an edu-



cation analyst at the Cato Institute and a frequent contributor to *School Reform News*.

## Valid Concerns

The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities also voiced “serious concerns” about compiling such information, saying it's just a toe in the door to further releases of student information—a concern McCluskey said is valid.

The proposed database would “gather more information on more students than any federal database currently in use,” McCluskey said, “and is rightly being opposed by many policymakers and college groups who fear for increasingly compromised student privacy.”

Similarly, Parnell sees as dangerous the potential for politicians to use private information for political gain, saying it would damage smaller, private schools and give politicians too much control over sensitive material.

“This would be just one more unfunded mandate that the government would impose, a mandate that would be felt hardest at private colleges because they tend to have smaller enrollments. Also, there is ample evidence of supposedly private information, kept by the government, being leaked to the public by politicians and bureaucrats with an axe to grind,” Parnell said. “Allowing the government to keep track of college grades would just present too much temptation for those with access to the information.”

David Salvo ([groundswell42@gmail.com](mailto:groundswell42@gmail.com)) is a freelance writer in Indiana.

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# Textbook Ruling Handed Down in Texas

By Connie Sadowski

On September 18, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott (R) issued an opinion on Texas's textbook content review process, setting aside a 1996 decision by then-Attorney General Dan Morales. Abbott determined the 15-member State Board of Education (SBOE) has "significant statutory authority" over the content of textbooks and supplemental items used in public and open-enrollment charter schools.

SBOE member Terri Leo (R) had asked Abbott in January to determine whether the Texas Education Code authorizes the SBOE "to adopt a rule requiring textbooks to meet general textbook content standards as a condition of SBOE approval."

Leo also asked Abbott if the term "textbooks" includes supplementary or ancillary items sold with the texts, such as workbooks, videos, maps, teachers' editions, and charts.

Upon reviewing the process set forth in the state education code, Abbott confirmed the SBOE's authority to judge textbook and supplemental item content based on essential knowledge and skills; to determine whether the items have factual errors; and to ensure books meet binding standards and that they teach United States and Texas history and about the free-enterprise system.

## Media Complain

State textbook standards have been controversial for the past 10 years, as everyone from Texas Education Agency lawyers, textbook publishers, and "liberal activists and media" have complained some SBOE members want unrestricted power to set textbook content standards, Leo said.

But textbook review is not about members' plans to set forth "personal and political agendas, as some have con-



tended," said Leo.

Rather, the process seeks to ensure, by majority vote, that textbooks and ancillary materials are factual, contain essential knowledge and skills, and "foster an appreciation for the basic democratic values of our state and national heritage" as the legislature intended, Leo said.

## Texas a Key State

Texas's standards for textbook approval are pivotal, because many other states will use the same textbooks, said Neal Frey, a textbook analyst who works for the Longview, Texas-based nonprofit group Educational Research Analysts.

Frey also noted the state-level review process helps individual school districts in Texas that may lack leverage with publishers because they buy too few textbooks to have market power over content.

Frey—who has been reviewing textbooks since 1982—supports the state's textbook adoption process and said the "elected SBOE is the people's voice." Ensuring textbooks meet standards set forth in the education code doesn't amount to "censorship," nor does the pro-

[left] "On September 18, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott (R) ... determined the 15-member State Board of Education has 'significant statutory authority' over the content of textbooks and supplemental items used in public and open-enrollment charter schools."

cess give the SBOE unrestricted power, he noted.

"The [attorney general's] opinion will help our SBOE combat viewpoint discrimination in textbooks," Frey said. "Opponents of the review process fear losing their oligopoly of textbook content and being made to include other perspectives."

## Process Is Thorough

Textbook adoption is a lengthy process that takes about two years from start to finish in Texas. The SBOE issues a call for new instructional materials to all registered publishers at least 24 months before scheduled adoption.

During the initial review phase, a panel of citizen and staff experts, with no ties to textbook publishers and assigned by the Texas Education Association's commissioner of education, reviews potential texts and determines whether they conform to the state-defined Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills set (TEKS) or rejects them outright. By law, texts are determined to be non-conforming if they contain only half the TEKS items.

## Process Provides Accountability

A period of public review, followed by a public hearing, provides interested citizens "access and the right to review textbooks, as well as ancillary materials," Leo said.

After public input, SBOE members finalize the lists of approved texts by a majority vote. The ultimate decision of which textbooks to purchase from the approved list is left to each school district's board of trustees.

Having textbooks without factual or editorial errors, said Frey, is a responsibility not to be taken lightly, because "public money buys textbooks and captive student populations use them."

The SBOE's textbook review and adoption process is "a necessary democratic counterpoise on otherwise-unaccountable editors and isolated authors," Frey concluded.

Connie Sadowski ([connie@ceo.austin.org](mailto:connie@ceo.austin.org)) directs the Education Options Resource Center at the Austin CEO Foundation.

## INTERNET INFO

Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott's Opinion GA-0456, issued on September 18, 2006, is available through *PolicyBot™*, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.policybot.org> and search for document #19828.

A sample of textbook errors with corrections, issued on November 6, 2003 by the Texas Commissioner of Education Report to the State Board of Education, is also available through *PolicyBot™*. Search for document #19829.

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# NCES Comparison Invalid: Critics

By Daschell M. Phillips

A study released in August by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) claimed charter school students don't perform as well academically as public school students. But education reform advocates said the researchers' choice of comparisons doesn't accurately reflect charter schools' performance.

The study, "A Closer Look at Charter Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Model," is based on a 2003 comparison of academic achievement for fourth-graders enrolled in charter and traditional public schools.

According to the reading comparison, charter schools scored an average of 5.2 points lower than other public schools on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). After adjusting for multiple student characteristics, the average difference was 4.2 points. In math, charter schools averaged 5.8

points lower than public schools; after adjusting for student characteristics, the average difference was 4.7 points.

The study sample included 150 charter schools and 6,764 public schools. School participation rates for the NAEP tests were 100 percent for both charter and public non-charter schools; student participation rates were 92 percent for charter schools and 94 for public non-charter schools.

The NCES is a research arm of the U.S. Department of Education.

## Wrong Model

Robert Enlow, executive director of the Indianapolis-based Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, said the study was invalid because it did not actually compare schools. Instead, he said, it compared types of students. A hierarchical linear model examines differences between two different types of subjects being studied,



Robert Enlow

whereas in a longitudinal study the same subjects are observed over multiple time periods.

"Since charter schools seek out the students that public schools can't handle, the study would have been more substantial if it were a longitudinal study," Enlow said. "The NCES did not take a bad study—they just didn't say anything about the quality of the schools."



Jeanne Allen

Jeanne Allen, president of the Center for Education Reform in Washington, DC, agreed, saying this particular interpretation of government data adds nothing to the question of how well

students perform in charters compared to other schools.

"The education establishment—teachers, unions, school board associations—tout these flawed studies in an attempt to discredit new school opportunities for parents," Allen said. "My message to any parent, especially those with children attending charter schools, is to look at state-level assessments and get a real picture of student achievement. It's there that charter school students shine like the true stars they are."

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

## INTERNET INFO

"A Closer Look at Charter Schools Using Hierarchical Linear Model," National Center for Education Statistics, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2006460>



# Voucher Programs Better Integrated than Public Schools, New Report Finds

By Hilary Oswald

School voucher programs in Cleveland, Milwaukee, and Washington, DC are moving students into private schools that are more racially integrated than the local public schools, according to a report from the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation released October 3.

The report examines seven empirical studies that have compared segregation levels in public schools and in private schools that participated in voucher programs over the past seven years.

"The fact that all of the scientifically

valid studies reach the same conclusion is very striking," said Greg Forster, the report's author and a Friedman Foundation senior fellow. "When we're dealing with controversial questions, it's rare for all the empirical research to be pointing in one direction."

The seven studies were chosen because they use scientifically valid methods, Forster said. Other studies compare dissimilar grade levels or fail to use standardized definitions of segregation.

## Refuting Criticisms

Critics of school choice programs often

contend vouchers will increase segregation. A similar objection is that private schools are more racially segregated than their public counterparts. The latter claim is also refuted by the Friedman report: A review of three studies shows no substantial difference between segregation levels in public and private schools.

One of those studies, conducted by Jay Greene in 1998 for The Brookings Institution, found public school classrooms are more likely than private school classrooms to be racially homogeneous.

"These findings can help provide an entrée for liberal education reformers to support school choice," said Clint Bolick, president and general counsel of the Alliance for School Choice, a Phoenix-based advocacy group.

Bolick pointed to an article published in the November 2005 issue of the *Fordham Law Review*, in which civil rights supporter and law professor William L. Taylor endorsed selective school choice as a means of reducing racial segregation.

## Recognizing Limitations

The Friedman Foundation report observes public schools are limited by geographic boundaries, which tend to homogenize student populations. And while private schools tend to draw from larger geographic areas than public schools, financial barriers can keep families from enrolling their students.

"School vouchers empower parents to enter the private school market, breaking down the monetary barrier and making it easier for them to seek schooling across geographic boundaries," Forster states in the report. "This would result in a greater mixing of students of different races."

Bolick said he's not surprised by the report's conclusions.

"It confirms what we've already seen," Bolick said. "These findings tend to surprise people, but that's only because most people don't understand how stratified inner-city public schools are."

## Following Up

Because the studies reviewed by the Friedman Foundation examined data taken from single points in time, the results do not suggest vouchers directly reduce segregation levels. However, said Forster, they do show that today's students who use vouchers attend less racially segregated schools.

"Once you have the data, the question becomes 'Why is that?'" Forster said. "The plausible answer is that private schools break down neighborhood boundaries by drawing students together across a wider geographic area, and that, in turn, will reduce segregation."

Hilary Masell Oswald ([Hilary\\_Oswald@comcast.net](mailto:Hilary_Oswald@comcast.net)) is a freelance writer in Evanston, Illinois.

## INTERNET INFO

"Freedom from Racial Barriers: The Empirical Evidence on Vouchers and Segregation," by Greg Forster, published by the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation on October 3, 2006, is available through PolicyBot™, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.policybot.org> and search for document #19825.

## Faith First Awards Scholarships in Two States

By Karla Dial

Faith First Educational Assistance Corporation, a privately funded three-year-old institution, awarded nearly 100 school choice grants to low-income children in two states in September.

On September 29 the group gave a record-high 85 \$500 scholarships to low-income children attending Christian schools in Pennsylvania—one more than founder Dr. Alberta Wilson actually had money to fund.

"I had a parent e-mail me who said, 'There must be some mistake. Maybe you overlooked our name, because we haven't gotten a letter from you to tell us we got an award,'" Wilson said.

"I e-mailed her back and said I was so sorry, we just were out of money. She began to tell me how after losing her husband six years ago, she's been pinching off his life insurance policy to keep her child in a Christian school and pay the car insurance, that sort of thing, but she just couldn't take him out of that school because he needs the environment. My heart went out to her, but I had no more money."

## Additional Donations Acquired

Wilson invited the woman to tell her story at the September 29 scholarship awards ceremony, with the possibility that someone there might donate the funds after hearing it.

And someone did.

"I thank you for giving me the opportunity to give my testimony. I hope I didn't take up too much time," Tonya Jones wrote in an October 2 e-mail to Wilson. "I just can't tell you how grateful I am. I can't stop crying!"

## Virginia Effort Grows

A few weeks earlier, on September 16, the group gave scholarships to

14 students in Virginia to attend Christian elementary and high schools. Attending the event was state Del. Chris Saxman (R-Staunton), who championed a school choice bill in the General Assembly in 2004 and 2005.

"I thought the event was wonderfully uplifting, to see the children and their families recognize that their lives might possibly be transformed by attending the school of their choice," Saxman said later. "That's why I've been pushing school choice for all of Virginia."

**"Faith First Educational Assistance Corporation, a privately funded three-year-old institution, awarded nearly 100 school choice grants to low-income children in two states in September."**

Though the bill passed the General Assembly both times, it has yet to pass the Senate. Saxman intends to reintroduce it when the Assembly reconvenes in January.

In late July, Faith First—which is based in Philadelphia and has been an approved scholarship organization under the state's Educational Income Tax Credit program since 2003—opened its second office. Thanks to the generosity of a Suffolk lawyer who donated his old office furniture, bought Faith First a computer system, and rents them space in his office for \$1 a month, the group has been operating in Virginia since July 28.

## Grassroots Work Successful

Faith First is the only school choice group in the Commonwealth consistently making grassroots outreach efforts to educate parents. Though it awards scholarships only to children attending Christian schools, Faith First holds "parent engagement" meetings twice a month in Pennsylvania and once a month in Virginia, educating parents and school administrators of all varieties about the benefits of school choice.

"People here don't even have a clue what school choice means," Wilson said of Virginia. "But at those meetings, we help people whether they're public, private, Christian, whatever. We just want people to be empowered to be involved in their children's lives educationally, whatever choice they might make. It's a parent's right to make that choice."

"The people who came to the [September 16 ceremony] had no clue other states were allowing parents to make a choice. We've given them an object lesson by awarding these scholarships," Wilson continued. "Here's what can happen with a bill, only on a much larger scale. You can't just give them the money without the empowerment and education. The two have to go hand in hand."

Faith First plans to open a third office, in San Diego, in 2008.

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

## INTERNET INFO

Faith First Educational Assistance Corporation, <http://www.faithschoice.org>



# SCHOOL CHOICE ... IN YOUR FAVORITE NEW MEDIA FORM!

## School Choice on Audio

Audio recordings from the 2006 Educational Choice Speaker Series are now available online.

The luncheon series is hosted by the Illinois School Choice Initiative (ISCI), a project of The Heartland Institute. The mission of the initiative is to enable all parents in Illinois to choose quality schools for their children. For more information, please contact ISCI Executive Director Phylcia Lyons at 312/377-4000, email [lyons@heartland.org](mailto:lyons@heartland.org).

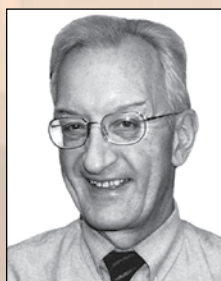
Since January, the ISCI has hosted a monthly luncheon at the Metropolitan Club of Chicago, where business and civic leaders and school choice supporters have heard from some of the

movement's most important leaders, including Robert Enlow of the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation, Rebeca Nieves-Huffman of the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options, and Lawrence Patrick III of the Black Alliance for Educational Options.

The audio recordings can be listened to online or downloaded to an iPod or MP3 player by subscribing to the Educational Choice Speaker Series Podcast. Visit The Heartland Institute's online audio center at <http://www.fromtheheartland.org/live/audio.html> and scroll down to the ISCI Educational Choice Speaker series.



## THE FOLLOWING PRESENTATIONS ARE AVAILABLE:



### **JANUARY: George Clowes, The Heartland Institute**

On January 19, Clowes kicked off the new monthly Educational Choice Speaker Series with a talk titled, "Competition as an Effective Education Reform: What Works and What's Ahead."



### **FEBRUARY: Ken Johnson, Milwaukee Public Schools**

On February 16, Kenneth L. Johnson, Milwaukee School Board president, addressed "Milwaukee Public School Reform: Rethinking of Parents as Our Customers."



### **MARCH: Virginia Gentles, Florida Department of Education**

On March 16, Virginia Gentles, executive director of the Florida Department of Education's Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice, described the

school choice programs available to parents in the Sunshine State.



### **APRIL: Lawrence Patrick, BAE**

On April 20, Lawrence Patrick III of the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) addressed the need for educational choice for black parents and students.



### **MAY: Rebeca Nieves-Huffman, Hispanic CREO**

On May 18, Rebeca Nieves-Huffman addressed the education crisis and how it affects Hispanic children. Huffman is president and CEO of the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options (Hispanic CREO).



### **JUNE: Robert Enlow, Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation**

On June 15, Robert Enlow, executive director of the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation, gave an overview of the school

choice movement, assessing the strength of the movement.



### **JULY: Lisa Snell, Reason Foundation**

On July 27, Lisa Snell, director of education and child welfare at the California-based Reason Foundation, spoke about the pitfalls of universal preschool and the benefits of weighted student funding as a viable and effective K-12 reform.



### **SEPTEMBER: David Brennan, White Hat Management**

On September 21, David Brennan's speech, "The U.S. Education System Is Perfectly Aligned with Cuba and North Korea: Do We Really Treasure Individual Rights? Don't We Value the Power of Consumer Choice?" stressed the importance of innovation in our education system.



### **OCTOBER: Clint Bolick, Alliance for School Choice**

On October 19, Clint Bolick closed the ISCI's

2006 Educational Choice Speaker Series with a discussion of school choice cases currently in the courts, and what the future holds.



## SCHOOL CHOICE ON DVD

DVD recordings from the 2006 Educational Choice Speaker Series are also available for purchase.

## SCHOOL CHOICE ON CABLE TV

"School Choice," a cable program featuring presentations from the ISCI's luncheon series, is broadcast on Comcast's public access channel in the following suburban Chicago, Illinois communities:

Channel 19: Buffalo Grove, Elk Grove Village, Hoffman Estates, parts of Inverness, Lincolnwood, Maine

Township, Morton Grove, New Trier Township, Niles, Northfield, Northfield Township, Palatine, Rolling Meadows, and Wilmette

Channel 35: Arlington Heights, Bartlett, Des Plaines, Glenview, Golf, Hanover Park, Mount Prospect, Northbrook, Park Ridge, Prospect Heights, Schaumburg, Skokie, Streamwood, and Wheeling



# Teacher Education Is Flawed: Report

By Karla Dial

A report by the former president of Columbia University Teachers College, one of the nation's premier institutions of teacher training, released September 18, cited serious flaws in the way young teachers are currently being trained for the classroom. The author called for an overhaul of the system.

But education reformers are concerned that similar calls to revamp teacher training have been issued in the past and resulted in ineffective bureaucratic changes, not new paradigms that lead to greater student achievement.

## Flaws Identified

In "Educating School Teachers," former Teachers College President Arthur Levine concluded most education schools' curricula are seriously disorganized and the faculty is disconnected from actual classrooms.

"Like [Dodge City], it is unruly and chaotic," Levine wrote of current teacher-prep programs. "There is no standard approach to where and how teachers should be prepared, and the ongoing debate over whether teaching is a profession or a craft has too often blurred the mission of education schools that are uncertain whether to become professional schools or continue to be grounded in the more academic world of arts and sciences."

According to the report:

- approximately 60 percent of teacher education alumni reported their schools did not prepare graduates well to cope with the realities of today's classrooms;
- less than one-third of principals reported schools of education prepare teachers very well or moderately well to address the needs of students with disabilities, diverse cultural backgrounds, or limited English proficiency; and
- fewer than half of the principals said education school alumni are very or moderately well prepared to use technology instruction, employ student performance assessment techniques, or implement curriculum and performance standards.

## Solutions Proposed

To solve those problems, Levine suggests:

- transforming education schools into professional schools focused on classroom practice;
- closing failing programs, expanding quality programs, and creating the equivalent of a Rhodes Scholarship to attract the best students to teaching; and
- making student achievement the primary measure of teacher education program success.

## Outside Factors Blamed

John E. Stone, president of the watchdog group Education Consumers Clearinghouse and a professor of human development and learning at East Tennessee State University, said Levine "is calling for another round of rearranging the deck chairs."

Stone cited a 1996 report from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF), which issued similar findings and recommendations following a two-year study. The report found major flaws in teacher preparation, and it suggested closing inadequate schools of education.

"Levine's report follows the trajectory of the earlier NCTAF report," Stone said. "It opens by being critical of teacher education and admitting to a list of problems. Then it blames most of said conditions on factors outside of teacher education."

## Public, Teachers Disagree

The core issue Levine reports, Stone said, is that "most of today's teachers have been trained for process-oriented schooling instead of the results-oriented schooling the public now wants. What his analysis fails to note is that the old-style, process-oriented schooling that he says must be changed is nothing other than the 'best practice' schooling that teacher educators have for decades been

promoting as the most effective methodologies known to science.

"Moreover, the public has not changed. It has wanted student achievement gain all along," Stone noted.

The programs Levine highlights in his report—including the Stanford University STEP program and Alverno College—were also mentioned in the 1996 NCTAF recommendations.

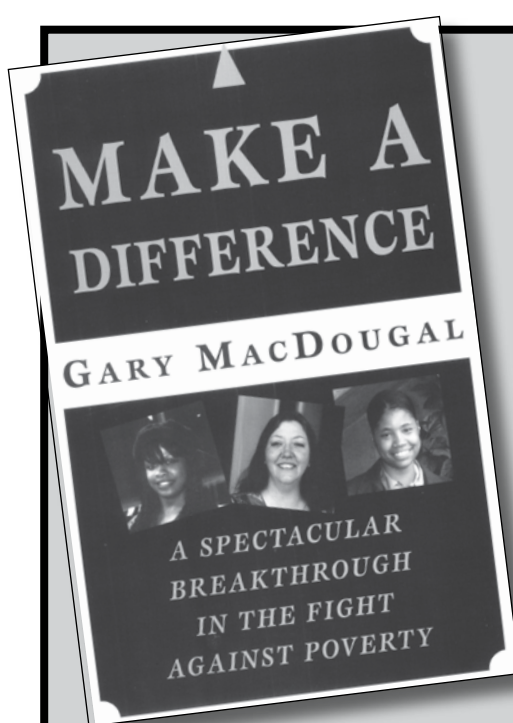
"None of these model programs can show data that their teacher-graduates are able to produce superior gains in student achievement," Stone said.

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

## INTERNET INFO

"Educating School Teachers," by Arthur Levine, September 18, 2006, [http://www.edschools.org/teacher\\_report.htm](http://www.edschools.org/teacher_report.htm)

"What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future," published by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future in September 1996, is available through PolicyBot™, The Heartland Institute's free online research database. Point your Web browser to <http://www.policybot.org> and search for document #19827.



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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.



## COMMENTARY

# Conservatives Should Oppose National Standards

*School choice, not centralized control, is the best path*

By Neal McCluskey



Neal McCluskey

For decades, political conservatives stood against big-government intrusions into American education. They defended local control of schooling, championed parental choice, and pushed to abolish the fed-

eral Department of Education.

But then, tragedy struck: Republicans took power in Washington, and conservatives suddenly learned to love big government. Some are now so enamored of it they are proposing what was once unthinkable: Having the federal government set curricular standards for every public school in America.

A few weeks ago, the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, a leading conservative education group, launched a major campaign to get this done. In the report they released to kick off their initiative—titled “To Dream the Impossible Dream”—the Fordham folks pointed out that states have proven incapable of imposing high standards on themselves, and that the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has precipitated a standards “race to the bottom.” Fixing these problems, they argue, will require uniform federal standards.

On September 21, their idea got two huge endorsements. In a *Washington Post* op-ed, former U.S. secretaries of education William J. Bennett and Rod Paige seconded Fordham’s call for national standards and tests, paradoxically arguing, like Fordham, that because current federal policy is broken, we need much more federal control.

**“[P]erhaps because they are desperate for change, Paige, Bennett, and Fordham are all wearing massive political blinders.”**

## Compromised Ethics

Unfortunately, perhaps because they are desperate for change, Paige, Bennett, and Fordham are all wearing massive political blinders.

Quite simply, national standards—or government-imposed education standards at any level—are at best doomed to bring mediocrity. The way government shapes policy preordains failure.

For one thing, the compromise demanded by democratic politics will always require the nation’s numerous

ethnic, religious, pedagogical, and other groups be accommodated in the creation of standards. This is perhaps as it should be, but it inevitably pushes standards to lowest-common-denominator levels.

Education historian Diane Ravitch—another conservative supporter of national standards—shows this brilliantly in her book *The Language Police*, which demonstrates how textbooks adopted by state governments are hopelessly politicized and, as a consequence, hopelessly banal.

**“School choice—giving parents the ability to take education money to schools that work, and away from those that don’t—is the only hope.”**

## Vested Interests

Even more debilitating, however, is that government standards always have to pass through vested interests such as teacher unions and education administrators, who have strong incentives and heaps of political power to keep standards weak.

Indeed, if there’s just one lesson decades of failed big-government education should have taught conservatives, it’s that groups like the National Education Association have almost endless time, money, and incentives to get their political way, while parents, children, and conservatives do not.

In light of that political reality, greater federal control over schooling is a hopeless solution to our education problems. Bennett and Paige almost admit as much in their *Post* piece, conceding they are “painfully aware that national standards and tests are hard to get right and even harder to get through Congress.”

## Constitutional Conflict

Perhaps that pain needs to become a little more acute, because no matter how much conservatives wish it weren’t so, decades of monopolistic public schooling have proven government will never provide desirable standards. Indeed, the numerous inherent problems of government are among the many reasons the framers of the Constitution gave Washington no authority over education.

They are also good reasons why Paige and Bennett should not simply dismiss the Constitution, as they did in their op-ed, on the grounds that even though “the Constitution says nothing about education, in a world of fierce competition we can’t afford to pretend that the current system is getting us where we need to go.”

Of course the current system isn’t getting us where we need to go. But

government control isn’t the solution; it’s the problem.

## Parental Choice

Thankfully, we can still get high standards, but to do that conservatives will have to give up on doing good through government, and return to fighting for the principles they once championed. School choice—giving parents the ability to take education money to schools that work, and away from those that don’t—is the only hope.

Only choice will obviate the need for constant political compromise, avert the gate-keeping power of special interests, and impose real accountability on schools by forcing them to attract and keep customers.

As Congress moves inexorably closer to next year’s scheduled reauthorization of NCLB, conservatives must reject calls for federal standards and tests, and remember the principles they once held dear. Politically compromised, big-government policies will simply never provide the education our children need

and deserve.

Only pulling government out of education, and empowering parents and families with school choice, will do that.

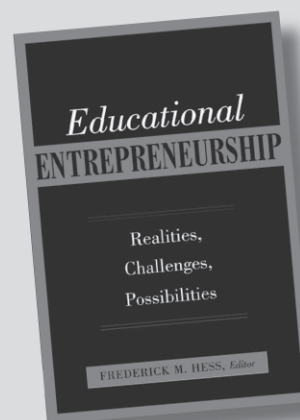
Neal McCluskey ([nmccuskey@cato.org](mailto:nmccuskey@cato.org)) is an education policy analyst at the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom. © 2006 by National Review Online, [www.nationalreview.com](http://www.nationalreview.com). Reprinted by permission.

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CHARTER SCHOOLS

FREDERICK M. HESS is  
director of education policy stud-  
ies at the American Enterprise  
Institute.



## New Web Site Promotes Individual Liberty, Personal Responsibility

This autumn, George Mason University's Institute for Humane Studies announced the launch of a new Web site, iLiberty.org, dedicated to celebrating and examining challenges to individual liberty and personal responsibility.



Amy Phillips

Individual Liberty project director Amy Phillips described the site as "an excellent resource for education and exploration of concepts such as paternalism, the 'nanny state,' and a wide range of individual and civil liberties

issues."

The group is currently conducting a \$5,000 essay contest for students, encouraging them to consider the impact and consequences of legislation designed to protect individuals from themselves.

"We've found essay contests such as this to be an excellent way of encouraging students to think critically about important issues," Phillips said.

"iLiberty.org is one of the Think for Yourself projects sponsored by the Institute for Humane Studies at George Mason University," Phillips continued.

"Through these projects we seek to engage students who think critically, care passionately about effecting change, and want to explore new solutions to social problems. Our Web site and essay contests are among the ways we hope to accomplish this."

**"[The Institute for Humane Studies is] conducting a \$5,000 essay contest for students, encouraging them to consider the impact and consequences of legislation designed to protect individuals from themselves."**

The essay question examines the effectiveness of legislation designed to protect individuals from themselves, and the potential consequences that arise from such regulation.

For more information about the contest, go to <http://www.iLiberty.org/essay>. All contests are open to full-time students of any nationality and age, as well as anyone 25 or younger. The deadline for submissions is December 1, 2006.

## School Fuel: Kids' Healthy Morning How-Tos

Getting kids off to school in the morning with a tummy full of healthy food will do wonders for their health. And a well-balanced breakfast can even help children achieve good grades, because food stabilizes blood sugar levels, which in turn increases brain function—including the classroom-critical, too-often-elusive attention span.

Here are a few easy ways to give your children a healthy head start each day, from the experts at HealthyKidsCatalog.com:

- Turn off the TV while eating breakfast, as studies show those who watch TV while eating consume higher amounts of fat and calories, as they are more inclined to eat "mindlessly."
- Small changes at breakfast equal big results. Skim milk instead of whole, wheat toast vs. white, egg whites or egg substitute vs. whole eggs, lean ham vs. bacon, sliced tomatoes vs. hash browns, whole-grain cereal or oatmeal vs. the sugar-laden kinds, whole-wheat waffles with a touch of honey vs. a toaster pastry—you get the idea.
- Parents can make healthier cereals just as exciting to children as the sugar-stuffed varieties by putting their own candy choice into the box as a prize. You can also add dried or dehydrated fruit such as raisins, apricots, pears, and

apples to healthier cereals to increase their "curb appeal" and flavor.

• Fresh fruit is always a crowd pleaser, and every child is apt to love at least one type. Allow your children to make "special fruit requests" and honor them. Try implementing a "fruit of the week" plan. Take the opportunity to discuss the health benefits of each week's selection.

• No time for a sit-down? In a pinch, cereal bars can be a life saver. Seek those in which the first ingredient listed is whole grain, with less than 10 grams of sugar per bar and a maximum of three to four grams of fat.

• Commend your child when he or she makes a healthy food choice by proclaiming how strong, fit, and healthy you bet the child will be that day for eating such healthy food. It's also fun to tell younger children healthy food will help them grow an inch. Measure the top of their heads against the wall to help you "prove" it.

For more healthy tips, visit <http://www.HealthyKidsCatalog.com>.



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# Michigan

Continued from page 1

Cotter, an attorney for Citizens for Education—a committee formed by the Michigan K-16 Coalition, a league of pro-Proposal 5 groups representing education employees, agencies, and officials—said the cost estimate was “speculative.” But an opposition group of organizations that represent businesses, taxpayers, municipal governments, and health care providers felt including the cost was necessary.

“It isn’t a policy statement, it’s an appropriations bill. And people need to know what the appropriation is,” said Dave Doyle, spokesperson for the opposition group, Coalition to Stop the K-16 Mandate.

## Estimated Costs

Though generally cheered by the Board of Canvassers’ decision to approve including the price tag in the ballot proposal, opponents of the measure pointed out the cost figure is a conservative estimate. A September report by the nonpartisan Citizens Research Council of Michigan tagged the first year’s cost at anywhere from \$565 million to \$707 million.

Ken Braun, a policy analyst for the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a nonpartisan policy research group in Michigan, said the lower figure assumes

that as much as \$142 million in education spending unprotected by the ballot measure, including adult and vocational programs, would be cut.

Advocates of the proposal would have preferred to omit the cost from the ballot, but Michigan K-16 Coalition spokesperson Ken McGregor hopes including it will persuade voters to see the amount in a broader context. He said the proposed figure represents only 3.6 percent of the state’s \$14 billion budget.

## Investment Call

Proposal 5 supporters say the measure is needed to prepare the state for a changing economic and employment climate.

“We are trying to make Michigan a place for employers of the future,” McGregor said. “To do that, we’re going to have to make a steady investment in our education system from kindergarten to graduate school.”

Supporters argue the funding mandate is necessary to compensate for prior shortages. According to the K-16 Coalition Web site, K-12 school districts received no increases in state aid from 2001 to 2004, while budgets for community colleges and universities were cut 15 percent during the same period.

“Our funding level has dropped, and [Proposal 5] would provide a steady stream of funds to our schools to prepare the workforce,” said McGregor.

But Braun said there is no funding shortage: “The state’s basic per-pupil foundation allowance to local school dis-

tricts remained substantially unchanged in fiscal 2003, 2004, and 2005.”

## Spending History

Braun said the rate of spending growth merely slowed during the recession of the early 2000s, and he pointed to the state’s long-term trend of generous education funding.

“Michigan is a big-spending state when it comes to education. This is primarily because whenever money is around, the legislature has not been shy about sending it to education at all levels,” Braun said.

Braun also cited the absence of a relationship between high spending and student outcomes. According to the federal government’s National Center for Education Statistics, Michigan’s per-pupil spending in 2003 was ninth in the nation. The state’s fourth and eighth grade National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test scores placed it near the national average at 31st.

**“Michigan voters will decide November 7 whether to approve Proposal 5, a statutory change to guarantee annual funding increases for elementary, secondary, and higher education institutions at the rate of inflation.”**

## Funding Sources

Opponents of the spending plan are concerned about who will pay for Proposal 5.

“The \$565 million either comes from tax increases or cuts to other areas of the General Fund—corrections, health care, the money that goes to cities to pay for police and fire protection,” Doyle said.

McGregor disagreed.

“There is plenty of revenue available,” McGregor said. “Legislators are going to have to look to close tax loopholes. And of all of our services, education is essential.”

Doyle said the only specific loopholes that could be remedied were sales tax exemptions on groceries and pharmaceutical products, and voters would not support eliminating those exemptions.

The anti-Proposal 5 coalition also believes the measure is being advertised inaccurately.

“In no place in the proposal does it mention student achievement, classroom improvement, smaller class size, or anything to do with education,” said Doyle. “The only thing it mentions is that it shifts a portion of the cost of teacher retirements to the state of Michigan.”

## Focus on Pensions

Both the Michigan House and Senate Fiscal Agencies indicated that two-thirds of the projected cost (\$385 million) of Proposal 5 would be used to shore up the Michigan Public Employee Retirement System.

Braun said the benefits available to teachers are much more generous than almost any given in the private sector. “It’s an old-line pension system that’s just not sustainable anymore,” he said.

McGregor argued it’s time for the state to reassume neglected responsibilities.

“The legislature has passed off the pension costs to all the local districts, colleges, and universities,” McGregor said. “The state should pay these costs like it used to. The [non-pension] funding, when it goes to the local districts, actually enhances what they are doing in the classroom.”

## Dissenting School Board

While most local school district boards either voted to support the measure or had not issued their official position at press time, on September 19 the board of Michigan’s third-largest district voted 6-2 against Proposal 5. The *Grand Rapids Press* on September 20 reported many members of the Grand Rapids Board of Education questioned automatic funding mandates as state policy.

“I’m just amazed,” McGregor said of the unexpected dissent.

Braun said state law allows school districts to use official mail to inform voters of their positions on ballot proposals.

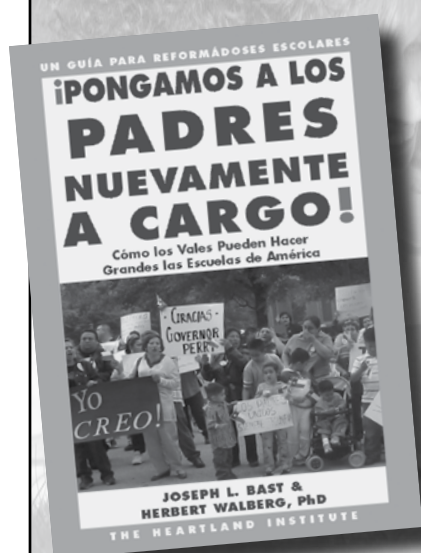
Throughout the summer and early fall, public opinion polls consistently showed broad support for Proposal 5. A late August survey of Michigan voters by the Iowa polling firm Selzer and Company identified 64 percent in favor of the funding mandate, with only 25 percent opposed—results McGregor said meshed with his group’s internal polling.

Doyle said when voters are provided with “a little information,” the percentage of those who express opposition climbs to 60 percent or higher.

At press time both sides planned to produce media campaigns to advertise their claims.

Ben DeGrow ([ben@i2i.org](mailto:ben@i2i.org)) is a policy analyst for the Independence Institute.

## 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](mailto:conner@heartland.org).

Individual copies can be ordered for \$5.95 in

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



## INTERNET INFO

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“An Analysis of Proposal 5: The ‘K-16’ Michigan Ballot Measure,” by Ken Braun, Mackinac Center for Public Policy, <http://www.mackinac.org/article.aspx?ID=7924>

“School Board Blasted for Not Backing Ballot Measure,” by Dave Murray, *Grand Rapids Press*, September 20, 2006, <http://www.mlive.com/news/grpress/index.ssf?/base/news-32/115876390545780.xml&coll=6>

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# Can 'Pioneer Democracy' Save Public Education?

Review of  
*Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy*  
David Mathews (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation Press, 2006)  
165 pages, softcover, ISBN 0923993169, \$9.95  
Available through Amazon.com

## Review by Neal McCluskey

It's almost guaranteed that a discussion about democracy and public education will be overflowing with rhetoric about how public schools have transformed millions of people—most steeped in ignorant, Old World ways—into democracy-loving, united Americans.

Thankfully, in *Reclaiming Public Education by Reclaiming Our Democracy*, former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare David Mathews largely avoids such myths as he examines ways to rejuvenate citizens' connections to their schools.

Indeed, for most of the book he turns on its head the notion that public education forged people into good democrats. He contends instead that American democracy created public education, and that to save our public schools we must recapture democratic practices of old.

To visit the democracy Mathews believes produced the best public education, one must look to the American pioneers, who gathered in small communities and undertook collective work

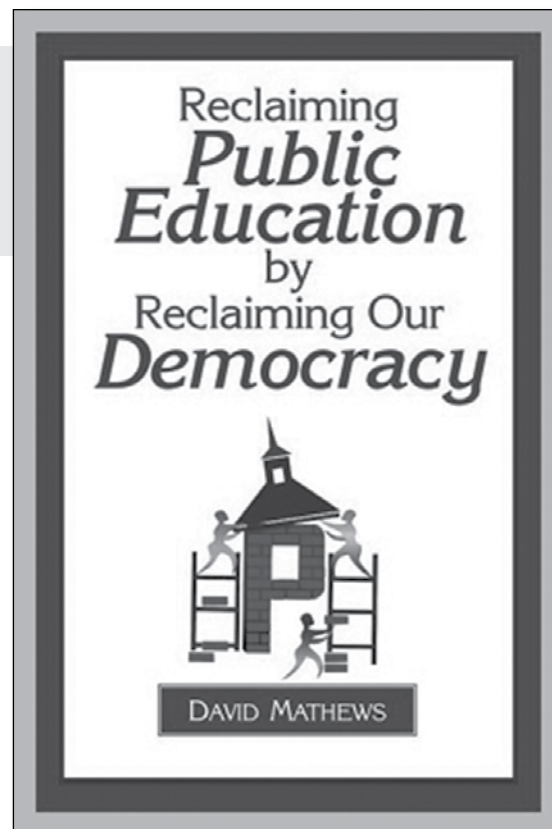
for the common good:

"After clearing land and putting up cabins, settlers turned to community building, which involved not only the construction of shops and streets, but also the creation of a way of life reflecting their highest values," Mathews writes. "Schools were among the first institutions people established because they were a means of creating the kind of society they wanted."

## Usurping Power

So, what happened between the pioneer era and today? When did truly community-centered public education morph into the current detached, bureaucratic system Mathews says has severely strained "the ties between the public and the public schools"?

*Reclaiming Public Education* traces the start of the process to the mid-1800s, when district and state authorities began to take educational control



away from individual communities.

The usurpation of authority became particularly acute around 1900, when progressive notions of scientific, "expert" public administration were dominant. Since then, power has become almost completely detached from local communities, with even the federal government setting substantial education policy.

To reestablish true public ownership of education, Mathews proposes a return to democratic control of schooling, much like that practiced on the American frontier. He wants communities, through concerned citizens hashing out collective solutions for common problems, to reassert control over their children's education.

## Transforming the System

Critical to this, Mathews declares, is that "citizens have to choose what they do; they can't be conscripted into public work." That makes sense: For people to truly feel they own something, they must willingly buy it.

But how can we transform our huge, bureaucratic system of public education into one run by the voluntary consent of all citizens?

Unfortunately, in answering this crucial question Mathews departs from the realism in much of the book and instead offers idealized notions about communal action:

"The power people truly own is generated when their experiences, insights, and talents are combined with the experiences, insights, and talents of others," Mathews writes. "This relational power is an innate and renewable resource; citizens regenerate it when they use it to do public work because the work fosters new relationships. This

self-reinforcing cycle continues and can expand, picking up energy like a benign hurricane."

## Working Together

Mathews' optimism notwithstanding, history has shown repeatedly that this sort of snowballing communal action does not occur, whether in the failed New Harmony settlement of the 1820s or the Soviet Union of the twentieth century. People simply never make lasting progress through "public work."

This does not mean individuals don't work with one another all the time—they do. Their ultimate goal, however, is not usually to do what's best for the "community" but for themselves. They constantly utilize each other's skills, assets, and talents to produce things they couldn't make on their own.

Thankfully, self-interest also promotes the "common good." We are all made better off, for instance, by self-interest-driven advancements in agriculture, electronics, and automobiles.

The same could apply to education were it rooted in individual action instead of "public work."

**"While Matthews asserts that collective educational work must be driven by the voluntary actions of individuals, he refuses to take the final leap and acknowledge that letting individuals make their own educational arrangements is the best way to promote true educational ownership."**

## Missing the Point


This brings us to the central fault in *Reclaiming Public Education*. While Matthews asserts that collective educational work must be driven by the voluntary actions of individuals, he refuses to take the final leap and acknowledge that letting individuals make their own educational arrangements is the best way to promote true educational ownership.

Mathews overturns many myths, but he cannot resist the unfounded conviction that when it comes to education, public is always preferable to private.

"Only a citizenry that rules itself can restore the public schools to their rightful place as democratic institutions still needed to complete the great work of our revolution," Mathews writes at the end of the book.

Sadly, he fails to learn the final lesson to which his work so clearly points.

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




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Managing Editor Karla Dial  
at  
**[dial@heartland.org](mailto:dial@heartland.org)**





# Berkeley High School Shows System's Inequities

## Review of

***Unfinished Business: Closing the Racial Achievement Gap in Our Schools***  
Pedro A. Noguera and Jean Yonemura Wing (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2006)  
318 pages, softcover, ISBN: 0-7879-7275-4, \$24.95  
Available through Amazon.com

## Review by Mike Scott

The topic of inequities in American public education isn't new, but few books have examined it as closely as *Unfinished Business*, a memorable case study of the dynamics of race and achievement at California's Berkeley High School (BHS).

The book highlights the challenges of maintaining a level playing field among all races and socioeconomic backgrounds in public schools.

In 1968, BHS became one of the first to integrate voluntarily. According to Noguera and Wing, Berkeley's diverse student population clearly illustrates the "achievement gap" phenomenon in our schools.

## Widening Gap

Despite the nation's "leave no child behind" push, test scores, grades, and dropout and graduation rates reveal a widening gap between white, African-American,

and Latino students. BHS is no different. To understand why, the authors spent four years investigating the school's dynamics—examining cultures, academic tracking, curricular access, and after-school activities, to name a few.

They concluded many school organization factors set students on predetermined paths of success or failure.

As in most school districts nationwide, student tracking and teacher assignments placed low-income students at a disadvantage, the authors found.

## Frank Discussion

Several former teachers and students contributed essays to the book, relieving it of an exaggerated academic tone, which makes it as suitable for parents as for educators.

The essayists frankly discuss claims of



sexism and racism and outline clear differences between ethnic groups' behavior. The authors suggest research shows minority students traditionally have been more interested in social activities than white students have been, causing one teacher to question whether his teaching methods were reinforcing

the racial achievement gap.

Despite BHS's well-publicized desegregation successes, locally it was also known for its "chaos, drug use, and permissive culture," the authors note.

The disparities between students were highlighted in the 1994 documentary film "School Colors." Two years later, the Berkeley High School Diversity Project was established to research inequalities, with the goals, the authors write, of critically examining the "organizational structure" of privilege and of empowering disadvantaged and marginalized students.

## Differing Treatment

One of the most fascinating chapters in the book details the differences between "privileged" and "disadvantaged" students. The privileged students had easier access to Advanced Placement (AP) classes, more direct access to the best teachers and college prep courses, and received more "favors" such as bending attendance rules for academic clubs and field trips.

Disadvantaged students were those who didn't have the same kind of access to AP classes or college information.

One Asian-American student with excellent grades and athletic ability had to search Publishers Clearinghouse for information on college scholarships because his guidance counselor wasn't helpful. He and many other "disadvantaged" students simply had less money, less influence, and sometimes less parental involvement and teacher support than other students.

At the end of the book, the authors make several suggestions they feel will help close the academic achievement gap. These include creating a detailed mentoring program, better advisory systems to allow students to choose the best academic courses for their development, and better alignment of the school's graduation requirements with state college systems' admission requirements.

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

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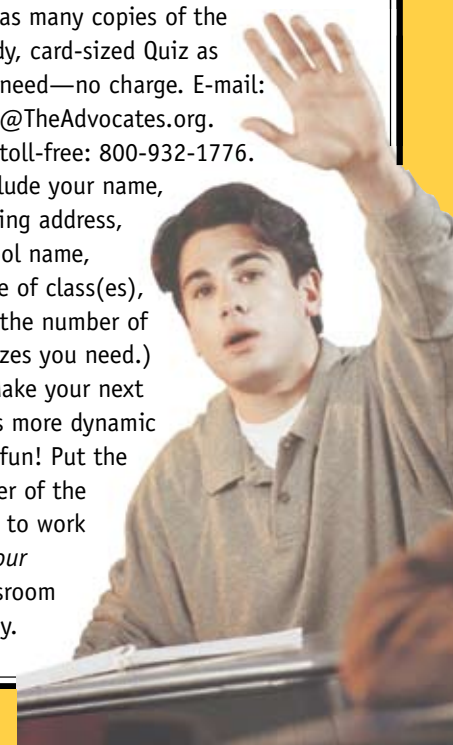
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