



School Reform News

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D.C. Mayor Advocates School Restructuring



District of Columbia Mayor Adrian M. Fenty, shown here on December 18, 2006 while still a member of the city council, sponsored one of many town hall meetings at Bruce Monroe Elementary School to discuss with residents topics ranging from education to economic development.

By Kate McGreevy

Adrian Fenty, the newly elected mayor of the District of Columbia, is the latest city leader to propose a dramatic governance overhaul of Washington's struggling public school system.

On January 4, just two days after taking the oath of office, Fenty unveiled the District of Columbia Public Education Reform Amendment Act of 2007. At press time, the city council was scheduled to vote on the measure in April.

Seeking Authority

Fenty needs a majority of the D.C. City Council to approve the plan. If successful, he will join the ranks of New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley, and a handful of others nationwide who have wrested governance powers from city boards of education.

"Schools have always been a big priority for Mayor Fenty," said Carrie Brooks, Fenty's spokeswoman. "As a member of the city council, he helped push through legislation for schools. He's always been concerned with both poor performance and facility disrepair. Mayor Fenty knew that if he had the chance to serve as mayor, he wanted dramatic changes, and traveling around to other cities following similar models, he saw successes."

Shifting Governance

Fenty, who as a councilman opposed the restructuring proposed by previous mayor Anthony Williams, would shift ultimate accountability to the mayor's

MAYOR p. 11

Utah Voucher Opponents Move to Block Program

By Aricka Flowers

In early April, opponents of Utah's new universal voucher law announced they had enough petition signatures to place on the ballot a referendum to repeal it.

An alliance of teacher unions and some parents, Utahns for Public Schools, announced April 9 they had collected 130,000 signatures. The minimum required to put the anti-voucher referendum on a statewide ballot was 92,000.

State Attorney General Mark Shurtleff (R) released an opinion March 27 saying

UTAH p. 6

Calif. Report Card Shows Dismal Results

By Vicki Murray

A February 15 report card from the Pacific Research Institute (PRI), a free-market think tank based in California, evaluated and graded 17 aspects of California's K-12 education system, finding the state's performance disastrously poor.

Among the factors evaluated are the state's education accountability system,

CALIFORNIA p. 13

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Special-Needs Vouchers Fail in Committee of Va. Legislature

By Lori Drummer

The Virginia House Appropriations Committee defeated Senate Bill 1419, the Tuition Assistance Grants for Children with Disabilities Act, by a 13-7 vote on February 16.

For the third consecutive year, the

Virginia General Assembly failed to pass legislation that would allow special-needs students to attend schools of their parents' choice. The hard-fought battle continued until the close of the two-year legislative session, but the teach-

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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

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

Elizabeth Ow, Amy McIntyre

ADVERTISING MANAGER

Nikki Comerford

CIRCULATION MANAGER

Latreece Vankinscott

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

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

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Lawmakers Push for More State, Local Flexibility Under NCLB

By Dan Lips

As Congressional committees opened hearings on reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in mid-March, conservative lawmakers on Capitol Hill unveiled a proposal to give states greater freedom and flexibility in how federal funds for education are used.

At a March 15 news conference, U.S. Sens. Jim DeMint (R-SC) and John Cornyn (R-TX) and Rep. Pete Hoekstra (R-MI) announced their introduction of the Academic Partnerships Lead Us to Success, or A PLUS, Acts.

"States should be given the flexibility to design educational programs that fit the local needs of individual districts, parents, and children," Cornyn explained. "This bill will reduce the bureaucratic red tape that often stands in the way of results, accountability, and superior schools."

DeMint suggested greater flexibility and state control are necessary to spur needed reforms.

"While No Child Left Behind measures and confirms the failures of public schools, it is not doing enough to improve them," DeMint said.

Five-Year Contracts

The Cornyn-DeMint A PLUS legislation (S. 893) would give states the opportunity to establish a five-year performance

agreement with the U.S. Department of Education. Under the contract, states would be free to consolidate funds from federal education programs and redirect that funding toward state-level initiatives.

In exchange for this freedom, states would maintain state-level testing and establish academic goals. States would have to meet those goals in order to continue the performance agreement at the end of the term.

The proposal marks a distinct shift from NCLB's current accountability measures. States would have greater freedom to design and implement their own state tests, although they would still be required to test students annually, report information to parents and the public, and disaggregate data for student subgroups.

House Proposal

Hoekstra, lead sponsor of companion legislation in the House of Representatives (H.R. 1539), stated his bill aims to end the trend toward greater centralization in education.

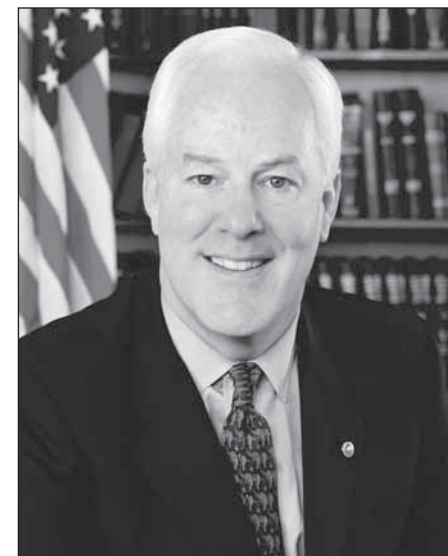
"Congress has gone from overwhelmingly voting against national testing in 1998 to the largest intrusion into education since the Department of Education was created in 1979 in No Child Left Behind," Hoekstra noted. "The federal government cannot continue to impose more testing, more costly mandates, and more penalties."

The House version of the A PLUS plan would give states the opportunity to make a declaration of intent to reclaim autonomy of education policymaking authority. Under that declaration, the state would be free to use its share of federal funding on local initiatives with basic guidelines from Washington.

Capitol Hill Prospects

The joint news conference was held days after a bicameral committee hearing that began the Congressional NCLB reauthorization process. Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and Rep. George Miller (D-CA) have stated they intend to move the reauthorization process forward this year.

The Cornyn-DeMint A PLUS plan was introduced with five original sponsors in the Senate, including Sens. Mel Martinez (R-FL) and Sam Brownback (R-KS), who spoke at the Capitol Hill news conference. In the House, 52 Republicans are sponsoring the Hoekstra plan, including



"This bill will reduce the bureaucratic red tape that often stands in the way of results, accountability, and superior schools."

JOHN CORNYN (above)
U.S. SENATOR - TEXAS



While No Child Left Behind measures and confirms the failures of public schools, it is not doing enough to improve them.

JIM DEMINT (above)
U.S. SENATOR - SOUTH CAROLINA

Minority Whip Roy Blunt (R-Missouri).

With Democratic leaders and the Bush administration advocating renewal of NCLB, it is uncertain whether a fundamental reform approach will have any chance during the reauthorization process.

But Hoekstra is confident in the process, noting voters are being given the opportunity to change the political dynamics by speaking out in favor of restoring state and local control in education.

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

Tell me what you think!

Write to me at:
Karla Dial
Managing Editor
School Reform News
The Heartland Institute
19 South LaSalle Street #903
Chicago, Illinois 60603

Or drop me an email:

kdial@heartland.org



INTERNET INFO

"A Better Answer for Education: Reviving State and Local Policymaking Authority," by Sens. John Cornyn and Jim DeMint, *Heritage Lecture #994*, February 20, 2007, <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Education/hl994.cfm>

Virginia

Continued from page 1

ers union and Virginia School Boards Association (VSBA) were successful in stopping legislative momentum.

"There are special-education students in Virginia who are not getting the education they deserve," said Christian N. Braunlich, vice president of the Virginia-based Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy. "When the money follows the child, it benefits both public education students and those who choose to attend private schools."

The bill, sponsored by Senate Majority Leader Walter Stosch (R-Glen Allen), would have provided a tuition assistance grant for public school students to attend a private school if their parents are dissatisfied with their children's educational progress. Participating private schools would have to be non-religious and licensed to teach students with disabilities. Fewer than 100 schools in Virginia currently meet these standards.

The scholarship amount was to be limited to the state's share of the child's public school education and could not exceed \$10,000 per year.

Arguing Money Issues

The VSBA did not return calls seeking comment, but in a February 16 post on the Virginia Education Association

teachers union Web site, a blogger wrote:

"Senator Stosch's SB1419 bit the dust in a contentious meeting of the House Appropriations Committee. ... Delegates Phillips and Joannou revealed the legal problems the bill would pose for public schools. Phillips was relentless. ... Delegate Landes pointed out that SB1419, despite Stosch's assertions to the contrary, is a voucher bill.

"The result is that we, with your help, appear to have kept Virginia voucher free for another year."

Braunlich called the claims against the bill "illogical and untrue."

"They claim that this program bleeds public education funding dry, but considering Virginia's school funding system, special-education scholarships actually help the public schools financially because only the state education funding will follow the child, and the local dollars remain with the local public schools," Braunlich said.

Retaining Funding

While the maximum scholarship would have been capped at \$10,000, the Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy estimates the average grant would likely have been about \$5,000.

According to the Virginia Department of Education, the average cost of educating a student with disabilities is \$16,000. A significant portion of the average per-pupil expenditure would stay with the public schools. An average of \$4,500 of

local funding per pupil and an average of \$850 per pupil of the state retail sales and use tax distribution would remain in each school system. Additionally, more than 85 percent of federal funds would have remained with the local public school system, which averages \$560 per pupil.

"The VSBA wrongly claims that special education scholarships will lead to a skyrocketing increase in due process hearings leading to lawsuits against school systems, but the evidence shows that in Florida's McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities program, due process hearings have actually declined," said Braunlich.

Moving Forward

Another educational option measure that made limited progress through the Virginia General Assembly was Del. Chris Saxman's (R-Staunton) Public/Private Investment Tax Credit. The bill passed through the House of Delegates for the third year in a row, but the Senate Finance Committee did not vote on the measure before the close of the session on February 24.

The measure would have created income tax credits for businesses and individual taxpayers making contributions to eligible public school foundations and scholarship foundations.

"For the third consecutive year, the Virginia General Assembly failed to pass legislation that would allow special-needs students to attend schools of their parents' choice."

For individual taxpayers, the annual credit was to be 100 percent of the contribution, but could not exceed \$800 for individual taxpayers and \$1,200 for married couples. The amount of the annual credit for business entities would have been 90 percent of the contribution, with no limit on the dollar amount.

The bill had a \$20 million cap on total tax credits awarded annually, with \$10 million allocated for contributions made to public school foundations and \$10 million allocated for contributions to foundations that award scholarships to students to attend private schools of their choice.

The public school foundations accepting donations under the program would have been required to disburse 90 percent of the contributions annually for capital improvement projects approved by the local school board and for extracurricular activities. The scholarship foundations would be required to disburse 90 percent of their contributions for qualified educational expenses through scholarships.

Encouraged by Progress

"We should be encouraged by progress made this year on two very important school choice bills," said Anna Varghese Marcucio, director of state projects at the



A tuition tax credit bill introduced by Virginia Del. Chris Saxman passed through the House of Delegates for the third year in a row, but the Senate Finance Committee did not vote on the measure.

Alliance for School Choice, a national advocacy group based in Washington, DC. "Senator Stosch's special-needs scholarship was approved by the Senate for the first time this year, which is a remarkable step forward. And Delegate Saxman's tax credit scholarship bill was approved by the House of Delegates for the third time in as many years.

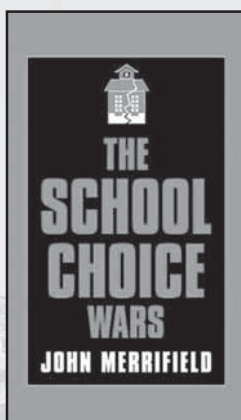
"The effort to change minds and create real educational reforms is gaining momentum, and we should continue to provide encouragement and support for the trailblazers in Virginia," Marcucio continued.

The 2007 Regular Session of Virginia's General Assembly adjourned February 24. Elections for the majority of state lawmakers take place this November.

Lori Drummer (ldrummer@verizon.net) is director of state projects at the Alliance for School Choice.

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."

—Joseph L. Bast, author of *We Can Rescue Our Children and Rebuilding America's Schools*, founding publisher of *School Reform News* and president of the Heartland Institute

"...a sharp, punchy, action-oriented book. The author...appears to have read — and cited — every article and study on school choice ever written."

—The Washington Times

"The book, citing up-to-date research, would be a valuable resource to administrators regardless of where they stand on the issue of school choice." —THE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

What does the term "school choice" mean to you? Opponents of parental choice have muddled its definition, misleading parents and educators and drawing public debate away from the core issues. In a book geared for anyone who wants to better understand this hotly contested topic, Merrifield clarifies the proposals in existence today, defining the key concepts related to choice. Arguing for a competitive education industry, he discusses policy and political strategy mistakes while suggesting corrections. This informative book covers government regulation issues, typical fallacies, diversity issues, private voucher initiatives, and experiments and empirical evidence about competition.

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Serious Questions and Real Answers About SB 1419 (Tuition Assistance Grants for Students With Disabilities), by Christian N. Braunlich, published in February 2007 by the Center for Legislative Analysis of the Thomas Jefferson Institute for Public Policy, 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 #20906.

Vouchers for At-Risk Students Proposed in Texas

By **Connie Sadowski**

On March 9, Texas state Sen. Kyle Janek (R-Houston) introduced Senate Bill 1506, which would allow the State Comptroller's office to give students vouchers to "escape poor-performing, inadequate, or unsafe schools."

The bill stipulates that no more than 5 percent of the students in each district may receive a voucher. Qualifying districts would include the Austin, Dallas, Edgewood, Fort Worth, Harlandale, Houston, North Forest, San Antonio, and South San Antonio independent school districts. Eligible students would have to be victims of bullying, at risk for dropping out, taking special-education courses, or have limited English proficiency.

To qualify, a student would have to live in a county with more than 750,000 people, and his or her current school district must have at least 90 percent economically disadvantaged students. Also, only current public school or first-time school attendees from low-income families would be eligible.

The receiving private schools would not be an agent of the government, the bill text continues, and schools would maintain autonomy to "allow maximum freedom" to provide for the educational needs of students "without governmental control or influence."

"Texas schools are not serving Texas students," Janek explained. "Are we supposed to just abandon the students who are in failing schools now while we work on long-term fixes?"

"Texas state Sen. Kyle Janek introduced Senate Bill 1506, which would allow the State Comptroller's office to give students vouchers to 'escape poor-performing, inadequate, or unsafe schools.'"

Steadfast Opposition

Janek believes the bill will "make public schools happy" because 10 percent of the per-student funding would stay with the public school the child left. But many public school lobbyists are not educating their members on the actual merits of vouchers, he said.

The Texas Federation of Teachers (TFT), representing more than 56,000 teachers and support personnel, steadfastly opposes any voucher program. In a March 3 e-mail, members were directed to contact legislators to oppose vouchers because "resources should be spent on improving educational opportunity in our public schools for all students, not serving a select few in private settings."

The TFT alert urged members to oppose SB 1000, a school choice bill for students with autism, but did not provide a Web link or an outline of the text of the bill for interested members

to read. Instead, it urged the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to pursue federal grants for autism training for public school teachers.

The Texas Freedom Network, a left-leaning think tank, claims on its Web site, "fly-by-night schools would open looking only to make a profit" and "the state would be powerless to prevent unaccredited unqualified schools from taking taxpayer funds."

Quality Measures

But according to SB 1506, each qualifying school would have to be accredited by an approved accrediting association. Additionally, each school would be required to administer a nationally norm-referenced test; voucher students would have to be tracked; and an evaluation and impact study of the program would be required—paid for by privately funded grants.

In a March 16 alert to members, Peggy Venable, Texas director of the national free-market group Americans for Prosperity, challenged education lobbyists to more adequately inform and poll their members about vouchers.

Venable says vouchers will help public schools, but believes legislators have "long been harassed by the educator lobby to avoid meaningful discussion of vouchers."

"It is time for legislators to show some leadership and put the schoolchildren of Texas first," Venable said, "not the self-serving education union lobby."

Tripled Spending, More Dropouts

Texas lawmakers have "tripled per-student spending, increased teacher salaries, and decreased class sizes," said Jamie Story, policy analyst for the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a free-market, Austin-based think tank. "Those reforms have led to little, if any, improvement in test scores, and they certainly have not helped [improve] the alarmingly low graduation rates of today."

"True graduation rates in Texas are around 67 percent," Story continued. "High school dropouts cost taxpayers money."

A modest school choice program that increases private school enrollment by less than 5 percent could save the state "\$55 million each year in increased tax revenue and decreased Medicaid and incarceration costs," Story said.

The Texas Freedom Network did not return calls for comment.

Sound Proposal

INTERNET INFO

SB 1000 by state Sen. Florence Shapiro (R-Plano), http://www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLookup/text.aspx?LegSess_80R&Bill_SB1000

SB 1506 by state Sen. Kyle Janek (R-Houston), http://www.legis.state.tx.us/BillLookup/Text.aspx?LegSess_80R&Bill_SB1506

According to the Institute for Justice, a public interest law firm defending civil liberties, the program set forth in SB 1506 is "consistent with the Texas Constitution, which has never been interpreted to forbid education programs simply because some might choose a religious option," said senior attorney Clark Neily.

"We are confident the program will survive any constitutional challenge by opponents of educational opportunity," Neily concluded.

David Contreras, spokesman for Confia, a group of Hispanic community leaders across Texas that encourages civic involvement, said he hopes teacher organizations will consider other cities' and states' success with vouchers and "do the right thing ... to improve education outcomes and decrease Texas's dropout rate" instead of trying to block the program.

The bill will "actually help educators because vouchers have proven to increase a student's academic outcomes by better engaging parents and their at-risk kids," Contreras explained. "This bill seeks to reduce discrepancies between the quality of schooling that children in disadvantaged areas are getting and the quality of schooling in the high-income areas."

"State officials, educators, and parents should embrace this voucher bill for the



Texas state Sen. Kyle Janek favors vouchers for at-risk students, because "Texas schools are not serving Texas students."

dollars it will save by increasing the number of students who will stay in school and succeed—all because they are given a choice," Contreras concluded.

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

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Utah

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the referendum is not enough to stop vouchers from being issued, but it may weaken the law's chances of withstanding a constitutional challenge.

At press time, the lieutenant governor's office was working to verify the signatures by April 30. Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. (R) has said he will hold a special election in June to bring the referendum to voters, provided the signatures are valid. Otherwise, the program is scheduled to take effect this fall.

Protecting Status Quo

"We're disappointed that [school choice opponents] have gone to this length to block the program from going into effect this year," said Elisa Peterson, executive director of Parents for Choice in Education (PCE), a Utah-based advocacy organization.

However, "this program is a crack in the dyke in the teachers union's monopolistic control of the system," Peterson said, "so it's not surprising that they go to this length to stop it."

Because Utah already has a voucher law in place, awarding scholarships to disabled students, limited school choice will be available in the state regardless of the petition effort's success.

However, any provisions in the universal voucher law that are not also in the disabled students voucher program could

be vulnerable in court. For example, the universal voucher would be available to students who attend private sectarian schools, while the disabled students voucher is not.

Utahns for Public Schools spokesperson Marilyn Kofford said the group wants a referendum because of the drastic impact they say the universal voucher program could have on the public school system.

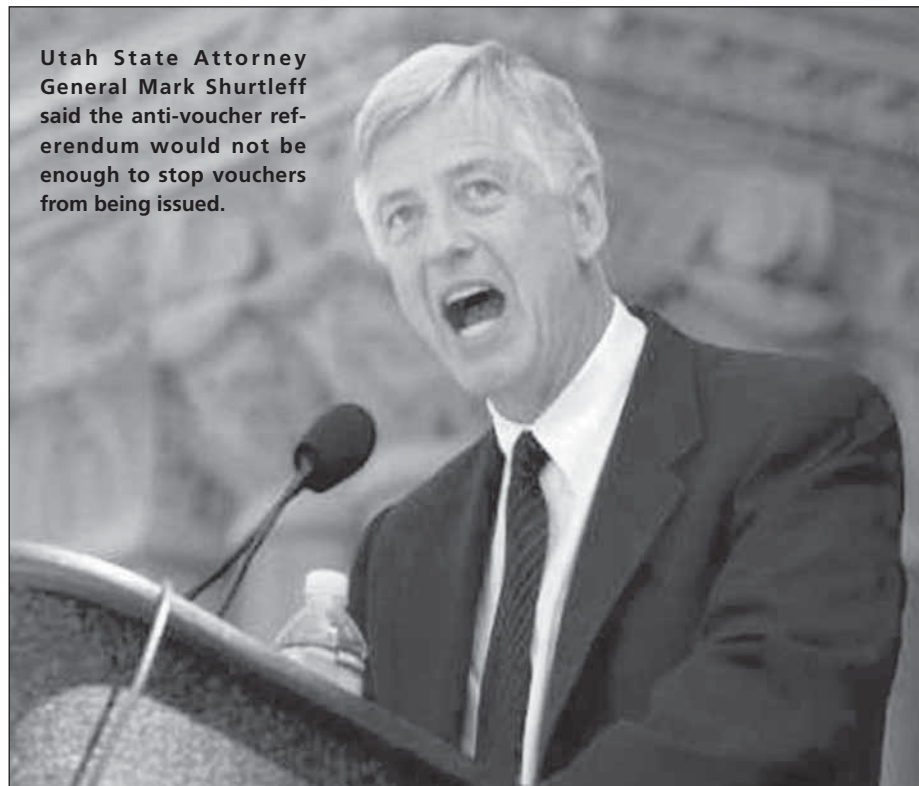
"The bill passed in the House by one vote," Kofford said. "We don't think that is an overwhelming show of support for the voucher program. So we feel that every person should have the chance to vote on this, since it would create such a big change in the way our school system works."

"In early March, opponents of Utah's new universal voucher law began working on a referendum to repeal it."

The universal voucher program, the Parent Choice in Education Act, would provide every Utah public school student with a voucher for private school education ranging from \$500 to \$3,000, depending on household income. Low-income students already attending private school also would be eligible.

Challenging Wrong Law

Clark Neily, senior attorney for the



Utah State Attorney General Mark Shurtleff said the anti-voucher referendum would not be enough to stop vouchers from being issued.

Institute for Justice, an Arlington, Virginia-based public interest law firm, said the referendum effort may not work as the law's opponents would like: The voucher measure may have passed the legislature with a referendum-proof majority.

"They have a huge problem because they have challenged the wrong law," Neily said.

"The voucher program was originally in House Bill 148, which squeaked through the legislature," Neily explained. "Provisions, like additional oversight for schools, were added. Most of the provisions of the bill were rewritten into House Bill 174, which was then voted on by the legislature and passed with 72 percent of the House vote and 79 percent of the Senate.

"This is significant because the statute opponents are depending on for the referendum exempts bills that have passed by more than two-thirds of the legislature," Neily explained. "They challenged House Bill 148, not 174, which is immune from a referendum. There really isn't much left of House Bill 148 in 174 because most of the provisions were amended and superseded in the latter bill. My gut feeling is that ultimately the teacher unions are going to lose this one."

Forcing Delay

Peterson said the petition drive is likely to succeed in forcing a referendum because school choice opponents have found strategic ways to get signatures for the petition.

"They've enlisted all the teachers and the Parent Teacher Association," Peterson said. "There are a lot of interesting arguments and false claims being made about the program to convince people to help gather signatures and sign the petition. Some include statements like 'The legislature was pressured to vote for this [by PCE] even though they didn't want to.' Legislators laughed at this and said, 'You want to talk about pressure, then talk about the teachers union pressuring us not to support this.'"

Kofford said voucher opponents were

specifically told not to bully or pressure anyone into signing the referendum petition.

Claiming Tax Hikes

Another false claim, Peterson said, is that the program will raise taxes to make up for money being drained from public schools.

"This program is a crack in the dyke in the teachers union's monopolistic control of the system, so it's not surprising that they go to this length to stop it."

**ELISA PETERSON
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
PARENTS FOR CHOICE IN EDUCATION**

"Fiscal analysis done by the legislature and other researchers show this will save money for public education," Peterson said. "It does not take money from the uniform school funds, but rather the general fund. No money [is] taken from the school system, and they get money for kids that leave. Add that to the fact that they have just gotten a historic funding increase for education, and this is the thanks the legislature gets."

In the 2008 budget, the Utah legislature allocated an additional \$500 million to public education. The voucher law provides that each public school will continue to receive, for five years, the per-pupil funds for each child who leaves the system.

Anticipating a successful petition drive that will put the universal voucher program's fate in the hands of Utah voters, PCE is currently working to educate the public on the merits of the voucher law. The organization expects a hard fight, but Peterson said she believes Utahans will not vote to repeal the law.

Aricka Flowers (atflowers@hotmail.com) writes from Chicago.

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THE NEW INDIVIDUALIST

Missouri House Rejects Two School Choice Measures

By Aricka Flowers

In March, the Missouri House of Representatives rejected a school choice bill that would have created tax credits for individuals and businesses. The vote was 96-62.

House Bill 498, sponsored by Rep. Ed Robb (R-Columbia) would have launched the Milton Friedman "Put Parents in Charge" Education Program, giving academically struggling or low-income students scholarships to private schools or public schools outside their home districts.

A similar bill, House Bill 808 sponsored by Speaker Pro Tem Carl Bearden (R-St. Charles), also was defeated 96-62 on March 7.

HB 808 would have established the Betty L. Thompson Scholarship. Under the program, tax cuts would have been given to any taxpayer contributing to a scholarship-granting organization, which would provide vouchers worth an average \$5,000 to students until it reached a cap of \$40 million per year.

Scant Chance

Brian McGrath, director of programs and state relations at the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, an Indianapolis-based school choice organization, said he hadn't expected HB 498 to pass, even though school choice opponents tend to be more comfortable with tax credits than with other forms of choice, such as vouchers.

"I thought it was unlikely that HB 498 would go anywhere," McGrath explained. "That type of bill basically lets you direct your tax dollars to educational reform. It gets businesspeople involved and appeals to people who oppose vouchers because it puts a layer between the government and the funding."

"It's a good attempt, but I still prefer vouchers," McGrath continued. "They are easier to do and don't involve dealing with tax codes. Plus, it's more of an efficient way for everyone to get a piece of the education pie."

"In March, the Missouri House of Representatives rejected a school choice bill that would have created tax credits for individuals and businesses."

Too Little

Though HB 498 would have allowed some parents to send their child to any school they desire, some school choice advocates say it wouldn't have been enough.

"It is a very limited choice because it depends on how many people donate private money," explained Mae Duggan, president of Citizens for Educational Freedom (CEF), a Missouri-based school choice organization.

"It is also limited to poor children



who receive the scholarship from private foundations," Duggan continued. "Vouchers are a much broader choice. The tax credit plan is hardly a choice for parents because all they can do is apply. The private foundations decide who gets the money."

But vouchers would be difficult to achieve in Missouri because of current laws and the political climate, said McGrath. Missouri's constitution contains a Blaine amendment, which forbids using state funds at "sectarian" schools.

"The teachers association is also playing a big role in impeding school choice measures," McGrath added. "The Kansas City and St. Louis school districts are horrible, but the people who work in them are protecting their jobs. The people in rural Missouri have a superintendent that is leaning on them to stay out of it because it may mean that some of the kids would come to their schools and they worry about preserving their superior school system."

Too Much

According to a March 2006 study conducted by the Friedman Foundation, Missouri high school dropouts take a toll on taxpayers' pocketbooks. Dropouts from the class of 2005 will cost the state \$71 million every year of their lives in Medicaid, incarceration, and lost tax revenue.

McGrath said people in rural areas of the state need to realize they are just as affected by failing public schools as the students who attend them.

"In rural Missouri you may not be concerned about what is going on in the inner city, but you should be," McGrath said. "You are paying not only for the dropouts, but are also putting tax dollars into a poor system."

INTERNET INFO

"Missouri's 2005 dropout class will cost taxpayers \$71 million dollars every year," Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation, March 20, 2006, <http://www.friedmanfoundation.org/news/2006-03-20.html>

that would be constructed according to the school. Religion could be added by parental choice, in the case of Catholic schools. Parents would be able to negotiate with schools to create a plan that works well for them.

"The tax credit plan is hardly a choice for parents because all they can do is apply. The private foundations decide who gets the money."

MAE DUGGAN
PRESIDENT
CITIZENS FOR EDUCATIONAL FREEDOM

New Strategy

Duggan said CEF is devising a promotional strategy for school choice in Missouri. Although legislation like HB 498 would lead to some degree of choice, she believes a better solution would be to repeal the state's Blaine amendment.

"The best way toward really having school choice is to have a basic-education student tuition plan," Duggan said. "I think that rather than all these gimmicks, the basic education of reading, writing, and arithmetic should be provided with the help of a basic grant

"The St. Louis public school system is spending \$11,000 per child each year, the kids don't get educated, and the schools are physically dangerous," Duggan added. "I think parents would be glad to get \$500 or \$1,000 and arrange for any extra help they can get. Many times, parents are able to work with the schools which provide additional help to low-income children."

Aricka Flowers (atflowers@hotmail.com) writes from Chicago.

OKLAHOMANS WANT TO KNOW THE TRUTH

September 2006

Hot Air
How Oklahoma Inflates Its Educational Progress Under No Child Left Behind
By Kevin Carey

Just released: Fall 2006

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Colorado Divided Over Systemic Education Reforms

By Ben DeGrow

Democratic Party leaders in Colorado are proposing an overhaul of the state's education system, but the national report that stirred the discussion has evoked significant skepticism.

House Speaker Andrew Romanoff (D-Denver) wants to reshape the education debate in Colorado as he looks to formulate a plan that focuses the state's energy on common reform objectives.

Immediately upon the December 2006 release of the national report *Tough Choices or Tough Times* by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE), Romanoff touted the report as a blueprint for change that Colorado should embrace to create a highly skilled twenty-first century workforce.

Centralizing Reform

The systematic changes *Tough Choices* urges for American schools include improving and narrowing test standards, issuing mandatory high school board exams, trimming teacher pensions to free money with which to recruit and reward high-quality instructors, giving management of schools to independent contractors, increasing contributions to early childhood education, and allotting funds directly to schools based on students' learning needs.

"I think there's something for everyone to love in this proposal and something for everyone to hate," Romanoff said.

Bob Schaffer, vice chairman of the Colorado State Board of Education, agrees with the report's diagnosis but believes the proposed remedy is entirely wrong.

"It seeks a highly centralized approach to school reform, rather than a market-oriented, decentralized approach that appeals to consumers," Schaffer said.

Romanoff does not insist the report's specific proposals are the necessary prescription for Colorado, but he believes it provides a concrete starting point to bridge the ideological divide between school choice reformers and establishment advocates who plead for more funding.

"I think this proposal offers us a chance to break that deadlock," said Romanoff.

Seizing Momentum

Gov. Bill Ritter (D) has taken no public stance on the *Tough Choices* report. But Sen. Nancy Spence (R-Centennial), the ranking minority member of the Senate Education Committee, believes he wants to push the education reform discussion in another direction.

"I think Governor Ritter is interested in establishing his own mark on education, and it's not going to be [by] accepting a report from Washington," Spence said.

NCEE operates out of Washington, DC under the direction of former Clinton appointee and influential education standards advocate Marc Tucker.

The creation of a "P-20 Council" is a keystone of Ritter's education agenda, outlined in his "Colorado Promise" cam-



Colorado House Speaker Andrew Romanoff has sparked debate over the direction of school reform.

paign document. The council's goal will be to bring K-12 and higher education stakeholders together to help ensure the system's graduates have "the skills needed to enter a modern workforce."

Among Ritter's ambitious goals for public schools is to cut the state's dropout rate in half within the next decade. The P-20 Council, he hopes, will channel and coordinate the growing drive for significant education reform to achieve that end.

"There's a lot of energy in the state around new ideas for education," said Matt Gianneschi, Ritter's senior policy analyst. "The idea for a P-20 Council is to capitalize on the momentum of recent years of how to engage students to achieve the most in our education system."

Pushing Buttons

Still, much focus remains on the *Tough Choices* blueprint for reform.

A hot button for early discussions has been the report's call to use state board examinations to help determine whether high school sophomores should move on to a four-year university, community college, or trade school.

Schaffer said the report's proposals resemble Germany's state-centered model for education. "It indoctrinates children in the philosophy that public schools steer them toward careers and jobs that are determined to be important by government planners," he said.

Others share that skepticism.

"I've heard from many parents and school board members," Spence said. "Tracking kids after 10th grade is not going to fly with this state or its students."

Measuring Performance

Romanoff says this depiction of *Tough Choices* is a caricature because students would not be forced "to make a life-or-death decision" at age 16. Students could take the board exam as many times as necessary.

Romanoff says the focus should be on finding out what students have learned, not simply letting them pass on to the

next grade level because of their age.

"We ought to be measuring performance, not just seat time," Romanoff said.

Challenging Local Control

If *Tough Choices* is to be the vehicle for change in Colorado, it could encounter a major legal obstacle.

Spence believes the report's proposals to diminish local school boards' oversight and to make all teachers state employees would "be in violation of the Colorado Constitution." Article IX, Section 15 gives local school boards "control of instruction in the public schools of their districts."

"Democratic Party leaders in Colorado are proposing an overhaul of the state's education system, but the national report that stirred the discussion has evoked significant skepticism."

Romanoff admitted the constitutional issue is "an especially serious concern" but shouldn't derail reform efforts. A

team of researchers is examining how the proposals will fit within Colorado's legal framework and will provide official recommendations, though at press time no deadline for their recommendations had been set.

"They may say it's okay, they may say it collides with our constitution, or they may say this is important enough that we should look at changing our constitution," Romanoff said.

Finding the Right Place

Spence expressed her skepticism about the report's future in the Rocky Mountain West. "There's not any reason to think that anyone from the East Coast can make decisions about our state. *Tough Choices* is out there, but it doesn't have solutions for Colorado," she said.

Nevertheless, Romanoff believes Colorado's highly educated citizens make it the right setting to debate the report's themes and proposals, and that Colorado is a more realistic venue than a state such as California.

"The state is still small enough that you can conduct a conversation," Romanoff said.

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

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U.S. K-12 Schools Fail to Prepare Students: Report

By Mary Susan Littlepage

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, American Enterprise Institute, and Center for American Progress jointly released a report at the end of February showing the poor state of public education nationwide.

"We are hopeful that the report will serve as a wakeup call" about the state of the education system, said Karen Elzey, senior director at the Institute for a Competitive Workforce. The institute is an arm of the Washington, DC-based U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which works to ensure businesses have access to an educated, skilled workforce. "Hopefully it will lead to increased student achievement and more young people will be better prepared for both postsecondary school and the workforce."

The report, "Leaders and Laggards: A State-by-State Report Card on Educational Effectiveness," concludes the nation's schools aren't preparing children well for today's economic and social challenges or the rigorous demands of the modern, Internet-connected workplace.

Performance Data Lacking

Student achievement is low, even as education spending increases, the report says.

The study found America's school systems could benefit greatly by partnering with the business community to focus on business concepts such as accountability, efficiency, flexibility, innovation, and a focus on achievement.

According to the report, "the lack of reliable and available data on state performance is alarming and created serious challenges in evaluating results on a state-by-state basis. ... The data must be compiled and monitored if we are to succeed in improving student performance nationwide. No responsible publicly or privately held firm could operate successfully with such a lack of data."

Excuses Refuted

Other major findings include:

- Return on investment varies greatly state by state. Utah and North Carolina seem to spend their education dollars more wisely than other states.
- Some states with a high percentage of low-income and minority students score much better on achievement tests than other states with similar demographics. High-achieving states with large percentages of normally low-scoring groups include Florida, Kansas, Texas, and Virginia.
- Forward-looking states, such as Arizona and Colorado, are nurturing innovation by encouraging charter school legislation and online schooling.

Positive Feedback

The report's authors write, "the goal must be that each and every student completes high school equipped for college or for a skilled, rewarding position in the workforce."

The groups involved with creating the

report have received "very positive feedback" from people in government, Elzey said, adding that the business community particularly wants to help implement improvements in education for kindergarten through 12th grade.

Determining Effectiveness

Don Soifer, executive vice president of the Lexington Institute, a free-market think tank in Arlington, Virginia, called "Leaders and Laggards" "an important snapshot" of the country's education system and "a good, thoughtful report."

"Return on investment is a healthy way to start the conversation" of evaluating school systems, Soifer said.

Soifer said it is important to track progress state by state. Although the U.S. Chamber of Commerce is looking at federal policy findings, Soifer said more scrutiny of state education policies helps determine whether or not they are misguided; policymakers need to look at whether their student achievement standards are too high or too low.

"This report is an important tool to help facilitate that," Soifer said.

Following Up

The report concludes that restructuring American education will require "raising standards for all students and changing how teachers are hired and compensated," as well as rewarding principals who manage schools effectively.

Soifer said states should try to attract



U.S. Chamber President and CEO Tom Donohue held a news conference in Washington, DC on February 28, 2007 to release the "Leaders and Laggards" report.

the best possible teachers and consider including mid-level professionals as possible high school teachers if they have real-world subject matter expertise, even if they lack teaching certificates.

Mary Susan Littlepage (mslp@mylittlepages.com) writes from Chicago.

INTERNET INFO

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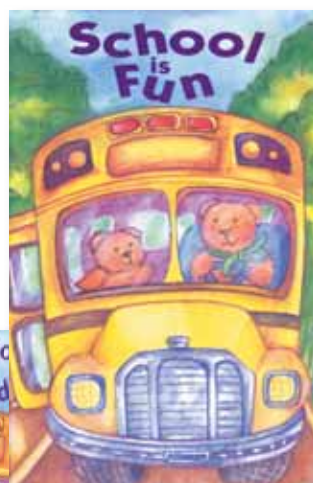
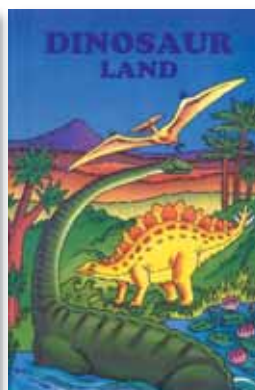
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Local Wisc. School Superintendent Wants Charter School for His District

By Daschell M. Phillips

When Ken Bates became superintendent of the Green Lake School District in central Wisconsin last July, he inherited a huge problem—a financially struggling school system with little state aid and steadily declining enrollment.

Fortunately, Bates also had an idea for a solution: Add at least one charter school to the district.

“Charter schools are flexible, and they would have freedom from state regulations,” Bates said. “It would also give staff the opportunity to think creatively” about curriculum design.

The Green Lake school board was scheduled to begin formal discussions about implementing charter schools in April. A final proposal will be completed this summer, and the charter may start

in the 2008 school year. Other details have yet to be determined.

Good Option

The charter school, which may include grades 7-12, will focus on environment studies, Bates said.

“We want to use the lake as a classroom and give the students hands-on experience,” Bates said.

Senn Brown, executive secretary of the Wisconsin Charter School Association, a statewide charter school advocacy group in Madison, said charter schools are proving to be great alternatives for parents and children, as well as a good way to increase enrollment and funding in school districts.

“The interaction between charter and state schools allows children to take part in an open-enrollment charter school

policy,” Brown said. “Charter programs attract families from neighboring districts and the funding follows the child to whichever school they attend.”

“[C]harter schools are proving to be great alternatives for parents and children, as well as a good way to increase enrollment and funding in school districts.”

Union Concerns

John Horn, director of Three Rivers United Educators, a teachers union based in Madison, said teachers are open

to any renovation of the district that will provide quality education to students and has positive outcomes for parents and teachers.

But in general, teachers unions oppose charter schools, and at press time Three Rivers union members were vigilantly attending meetings, participating in discussions, and asking many questions about the logistics of the Green Lake program, such as how a charter would work in a school district with only 353 students.

“It is our understanding that this is the superintendent’s response to state revenue controls,” Horn said. “We are willing to work with the district to get rid of revenue controls.”

Horn said the district has been very good at working with the teachers and answering most of their questions.

“It is our understanding that the school district will run with current staff and the teachers will continue to be represented by the union,” Horn said.

Daschell M. Phillips (dashwriter@aol.com) writes from Chicago.

Arizona Voucher Foes Try Again

By Hilary Masell Oswald

In another round of legal battles over Arizona’s newest school choice legislation, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and several other organizations and individuals filed a lawsuit in trial court on February 20, alleging the two new voucher programs illegally divert public funding to private and religious schools.

Each program—one for foster children, the other for disabled children—provides \$2.5 million in state-funded scholarships annually for students to attend the schools of their families’ choosing, public or private.

The suit came just a month after the Arizona Supreme Court declined to hear a special-action lawsuit against the programs, filed in November by many of the same challengers.

“[Vouchers] are bad policy, bad education policy, bad economic policy,” said

John Wright, president of the Arizona Education Association (AEA), a union representing educators and other public school employees. The AEA is one of the plaintiffs in the new suit.

Subsidizing Parents

“We have private, independent and religious, church-affiliated schools. Those institutions and schools can find ways to make themselves as affordable as possible,” added Wright, who has been a foster parent since 1994. “But it’s not the business of the state of Arizona to enhance their enrollment.”

Critics of the new programs, which were passed in the 2006 legislative session and signed into law by Gov. Janet Napolitano (D), say the programs violate the state constitution’s Blaine amendment, which holds, “No tax shall be laid or appropriation of public money made in aid of any church, or private or sectarian school, or any public service corporation.”

But supporters insist the state is not directing funds to religious or sectarian schools, because parents and students, not the schools, receive the money and are the beneficiaries of these programs.

“The state supreme court has already decided that the Blaine amendment is designed to ensure the state operates in a neutral fashion,” said Tim Keller, executive director of the Arizona chapter of the Institute for Justice

(IJ), which represents parents who want to use the state-funded scholarships for their children.

In the new voucher programs, Keller noted, “not a dollar goes to private schools absent the choice of parents to enroll students.”

Offering Hope

Keller pointed to client Andrea Weck, whose five-year-old daughter Lexie has cerebral palsy, autism, and mild retardation. After two years in an early childhood program at her neighborhood public school, Lexie hadn’t made the progress her parents or teachers expected. Weck enrolled Lexie in Chrysalis Academy, a private school in Tempe that specializes in educating children with autism and related disorders.

Weck reports marked strides in Lexie’s academic and social skills. Lexie received a scholarship for the 2006-07 academic year at Chrysalis through the new voucher program for disabled children. If the trial court overthrows the law, Lexie’s family will be unable to afford her private education.

“One of the most aggravating aspects of this lawsuit is that nine other children are at Chrysalis on public funds,” Keller said. “But the difference is that bureaucrats had a hand in the placements [through individualized education plans or similar programs]. Because my client exercised parental choice, [the plaintiffs in the lawsuit] want to take that away from her.”

Families like the Wecks are keeping a close eye on the case, in part because the plaintiffs asked the court for a temporary injunction, which would bar the state from distributing the scholarships for disabled children. The court will hear oral arguments on June 4. IJ attorneys don’t expect the judge to rule on the

injunction before then.

The program for foster children is slated to begin in the 2007-08 school year.

Attacking Tax Credits

A few weeks after the ACLU and other plaintiffs filed suit against the voucher programs, a Maricopa County Superior Court judge dismissed a lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of Arizona’s corporate tax credit program.

The legislation allows dollar-for-dollar tax credits up to \$10 million this year for corporations that donate to groups providing grants for private school tuition to children who meet basic criteria. The \$10 million cap will increase by 20 percent each year.

In her written opinion, Judge Janet Barton said the program is “legally indistinguishable” from the individual tax credit program upheld by the Arizona Supreme Court in the 1999 *Kotterman v. Killian* case, which determined tax credits are not public money and therefore not subject to the state’s Blaine amendment.

Furthermore, the judge ruled, because parents—not the state—determine where the funds go, the program is constitutional. The ACLU and the Arizona School Boards Association filed the suit against the corporate tax credit program in September.

Hilary Masell Oswald (hilary_oswald@comcast.net) writes from Illinois.



INTERNET INFO

Penny Kotterman and Others vs. Mark W. Killian, Lisa Graham Keegan, and Others, decision of the Arizona Supreme Court, <http://www.heartland.org/Article.cfm?artid=19824>

Mayor

Continued from page 1

office under the plan.

The main features of Fenty's proposal include:

- establishing an independent school construction authority that would manage building improvements, financing, and consolidation;
- shifting the elected school board's functions to mirror a state board of education, requiring it to focus on issues such as academic achievement and teacher policy;
- granting the D.C. Council line-item veto authority over the school budget, which would be proposed by the mayor; and,
- shifting oversight of D.C.'s substantial charter school community from two authorizers, one being the Board of Education, to one authorizer, the D.C. Public Charter School Board.

Brooks said student achievement is Fenty's bottom line concern, noting D.C. often occupies the lowest rung of the test score ladder nationwide.

Targeting Achievement

According to the 2005 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 67 percent of D.C. fourth-graders scored below basic levels in reading and 55 percent below basic in math. Eighth-grade NAEP scores showed similar trends.

"In other cities [where mayors have taken control], there have been improvements in test scores, and that is what it's all about," Brooks said. "We are at the bottom of the testing world—the worst in the country."

The D.C. Board of Education, composed of five elected members and four mayoral appointees, responded to Fenty's proposal with a counter-initiative on January 29.

The Emergency Student Achievement Act of 2007 calls for creation of a procurement authority to oversee contracts, flexibility with teachers unions, a different budget process, more funding for special education, and a District of Columbia Department of Education that would function much like a state department of education.

Opposing Measure

Carol Schwartz (R), an at-large councilmember, has been vocal about her opposition to the mayor's plan, saying D.C. finally has a capable superintendent and a fresh board of education.

"I do not believe that the mayor's proposed plan is the answer. For starters, it is largely based on the New York model, which was set up to address

a set of problems, including multiple school boards, which we do not have," Schwartz said. "Also, I am concerned that we would be turning over an entire school system to our new mayor before he has shown us that he can improve the broken systems currently under his jurisdiction."

Brooks said Fenty believes the feedback he received while campaigning door-to-door is mandate enough to move forward.

"He feels strongly that he has a mandate from the people. The top two things

people said to him were fix the schools and create better jobs, and of course, these initiatives are interrelated," Brooks said.

Gauging Public Opinion

While Fenty appears to have the necessary support from the D.C. Council, Brooks noted it is not being taken for granted. Fenty is meeting with the council regularly, and public hearings were held throughout February by the council to elicit public opinion.

Critics and allies alike will keep a

close eye on Fenty's progress. All agree the political risk appears formidable.

"When Mayor Bloomberg came down a few weeks ago when we first took office, a member of his team said, 'The worst is that things stay the same, which is pretty bad,'" Brooks said. "But most likely, things will improve. Mayor Fenty is staking his entire term on this issue. And it's pass or fail."

Kate McGreevy (mcgreevy@gmail.com) writes from Washington, DC.

Detroit Mayor Mulls Expanding School Options



By Kate McGreevy

Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick's (D) State of the City address in March provided hope that he may soon expand support for several types of schools in addition to government-run schools.

"Education in the city of Detroit cannot continue to be looked at as the Detroit Public Schools only," Kilpatrick said in his March 13 address. "Our children attend charter schools. Our children attend private schools. Our children attend parochial schools. Our children attend inner-ring suburban schools. There is even an emerging homeschool base growing in our city."

After a first term scarred by Kilpatrick and Gov. Jennifer Granholm's (D) joint rejection of a \$200 million philanthropic gift targeting charter schools, skeptics did not expect Kilpatrick to consider broad reform efforts in the Motor City.

But Harrison Blackmond, president and chief executive officer of the Detroit chapter of the Black Alliance for Educational Options, said Kilpatrick has always been open to supporting various educational options. He said the mayor sends his own children to charter and private schools.

"He has consistently supported educational options and other reforms as a way to provide quality education for Detroit children," Blackmond said. "A former Detroit Public School

teacher himself, the mayor, while a state legislator, was instrumental in establishing the so-called Detroit reform board of education in 1999."

Mass Exodus

While it is unclear whether Kilpatrick will attempt to take control of the public schools—as New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, and others have done—he followed his State of the City address with a visit to the University Preparatory Academy charter school on March 26.

"There are others who want to open up [charter] schools," Kilpatrick told the *Detroit Free Press* during his visit. "I'm also talking to some of the private schools to open up satellite places in Detroit."

Kilpatrick may be responding to the steady departure of students from traditional public schools in Detroit to city and suburban charter, private, and parochial options.

Nearly 51,000 students, or roughly one-third of the city's schoolchildren, are currently enrolled in charter schools or public schools in neighboring suburban districts, according to a January 15 *Detroit News* report. Last fall alone, 5,000 students left Detroit's public schools for other options—a trend Blackmond said Kilpatrick is keenly aware of.

"Middle- and working-class residents who have school-age children

and who want them to attend good schools cannot afford to continue to send their children to failing schools, or private and parochial schools," Blackmond explained. "These families represent a significant tax base for the city, and everyone that leaves takes not only the state foundation grant for the schools, but also income and property taxes for the city."

Expanded Role

With New York City and Chicago showing promising returns from increased mayoral control of public schools, and the District of Columbia considering joining them, a small ripple effect could be generating across the country.

Martin Chavez, Albuquerque's first-term mayor, has been actively pursuing the support he would need in the New Mexico legislature for increasing his control of the city's schools, though so far without success.

In Hartford, Connecticut and Los Angeles, mayors are finding creative ways around resistance to their control.

Hartford Mayor Eddie Perez appointed himself to the city's school board, and Villaraigosa is backing school board candidates who will support his plans.

Kate McGreevy (mcgreevy@gmail.com) writes from Washington, DC.

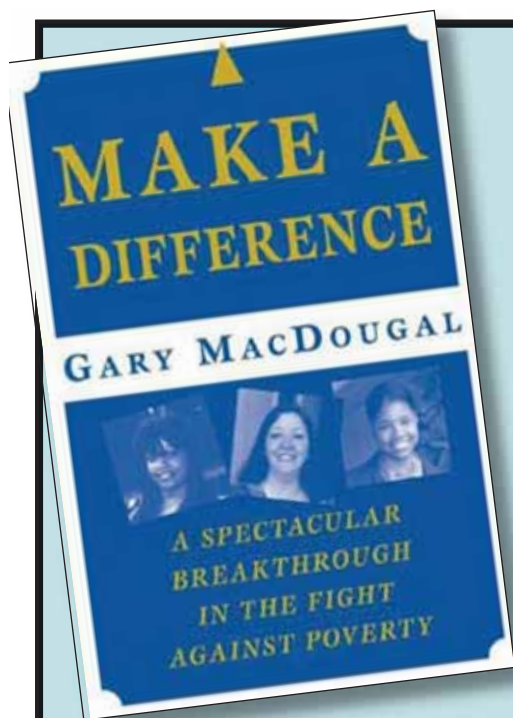
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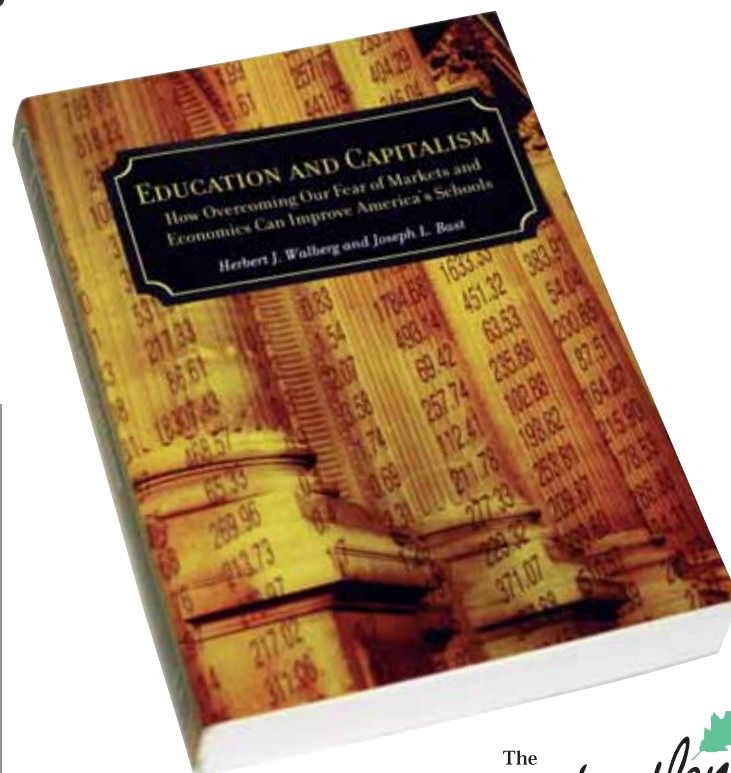
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California

Continued from page 1

standards tests, graduation rates, coursework, and school finance system.

Although many people suspect the state's public education system is not performing well, the reality is far worse than they imagine, according to the report. The state scored six Fs, five Ds, four Cs, one B, and just one A.

"This is not a report card that any student would want to bring home to his or her parents, and it's not a report card that I am proud to deliver to the California taxpayer," said Lance T. Izumi, PRI's director of education studies.

PRI's 2007 *California Education Report Card: Index of Leading Education Indicators* is the fourth edition of a report the group first issued in 1997.

"Although many people suspect [California's] public education system is not performing well, the reality is far worse than they imagine. ... The state scored six Fs, five Ds, four Cs, one B, and just one A."

Grades Are In

According to the report, increased funding has accompanied poor student performance:

- **School Accountability System = F.** It will take decades for many low-performing schools to raise performance to proficient levels on the state's Academic Performance Index (API), and most low-performing schools are not subject to any accountability whatsoever.

- **California Standards Test = F.** Only about four in 10 students in grades two through 11 scored at or above the proficient level in English language arts and math in 2006.

- **Finance System = F.** Inflation-adjusted funding per pupil has increased 27 percent over the past decade, but too much money is being wasted on state programs that have yet to show success. Also, the state continues to create new education programs, most of which have no accountability mechanisms to prove their worth.

- **Dropout and Graduation Rates = D-.** About three in 10 California high school students entering ninth grade fail to graduate four years later, and more than four in 10 African-American and Hispanic students fail to graduate.

- **Course Difficulty = D.** Fewer students in California are taking difficult math and science courses compared to the national average and to other large states such as Texas. A large majority of students are not taking university preparatory courses.

- **English Language Learners = D+.** California has no methodologically sound way of comparing year-to-year student progress on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT),



the state's main instrument for determining the fluency of English Language Learners (ELLs). Also, because of perverse financial incentives, many school districts don't reclassify ELLs as fluent when they meet CELDT proficiency standards. Significant numbers of ELL students are not reclassified for 10 years.

- **Standards = A.** California has one of the best sets of academic content standards in the nation. The problem is they are inconsistently implemented in the classroom.

Teachers Want More Money

The California Teachers Association (CTA), the state's largest teachers union, says the state's public schools are doing just fine.

"California public schools have been making progress. Reading and math scores are up," CTA President Barbara Kerr said in a radio ad broadcast this spring. "But further progress will be tough without more resources."

Izumi disagrees.

"Spending on public education has gone up dramatically, but the way that tax dollars are spent has not changed much over the years," Izumi said. "And on some programs, California Department of Education officials still have no idea where the money goes or what it does."

More Money No Solution

The PRI report card is intended to help

fill that void. It "provides us a meaningful examination of today's education system and dares us to tackle the difficult questions people are afraid to ask," said state Assemblyman Martin Garrick (R-San Diego), vice chairman of the Assembly Education Committee.

Policymakers and newspaper editors alike are beginning to realize education reform involves more than just spending more money.

According to a March 6 editorial in the *Orange County Register*, "when aspirations and striving still earn F's and D's

after years of increased funding and 'reforms,' we believe the solution lies elsewhere. ... We suspect parents allowed to spend vouchers for their children's education won't settle for schools earning D's and F's. They're likely to shop for schools where their vouchers buy a better education. That's missing in California's D- and F-heavy public schools."

Izumi agreed.

"California has one of the best sets of academic content standards in the nation. The problem is they are inconsistently implemented in the classroom."

"Californians need to spend less time debating how much should be spent on public education and should spend more time focusing the discussion on what works in raising student achievement," Izumi said. "Finding effective answers to this question will lead to improvements in the quality of education services, the performance of students, and ultimately the future of the Golden State."

Vicki Murray, Ph.D. (vmurray@pacificresearchinstitute.org) is a senior fellow in education studies at the Pacific Research Institute.



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2007 *California Education Report Card: Index of Leading Education Indicators*, written by Lance T. Izumi and Rachel Chaney and published by Pacific Research Institute, 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 #20907.

"State Schools Earning Fs and Ds," *Orange County Register*, March 6, 2007, <http://www.pacificresearch.org/press/clip/2007/clip-03-06-07li.html>

FIELD NOTES

Teacher Credentials Are Certifiably Inane

By Brian Kisida and Brent Riffel

It worked for the Scarecrow. At the end of his journey, the great and powerful Wizard of Oz gave him a piece of paper, and he miraculously showed off his newly bestowed intelligence by rattling off the Pythagorean Theorem. He had gone in search of a brain, but was ultimately helped by academic credentials.

The simple interpretation: Credentials matter. But how does that theory hold up outside of Oz?

Research tells us teacher certification and other formal credentials matter very little in the quest to gather the most qualified people in the field. Yet formal requirements are often the yardstick by which administrators measure potential prospects.

Lacking Measures

The debate over the effect of teacher credentials strikes at a larger issue in education policy. Policymakers care about certification and other inputs, such as funding formulas, because they have a measure of control over what they put into the education system.

Of course, what is sorely lacking is control over outcomes. Hence schools have traditionally relied on measuring inputs such as certification, because they have failed to develop a rigorous means of assessing job performance in the classroom.

Following the same trend, the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandates all teachers be “highly qualified and effective,” a categorization that includes teachers who have undergone certification procedures and demonstrate competence in their subject area by, for example, taking additional coursework or obtaining a master’s degree.

Mounting Evidence

In the academic world, however, a consensus is mounting. Almost every evaluation indicates advanced degrees and certification requirements are poor indicators of effective teachers. Within the past 18 months, some of the most rigorous research in the field has been added to the growing body of similar findings.

A report from the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) in 2005 by Eric A. Hanushek, John F. Kain, Daniel M. O’Brien, and Steven G. Rivkin found advanced degrees had little effect on student test scores in a large Texas school district over a five-year period.

The researchers paid special attention to the effects of certification, prior experience, and master’s

degrees—especially important characteristics because they are linked to teacher compensation. They found the only

factor that seems to have any measurable effect on student performance is prior teaching experience, and this effect disappears after controlling for the first year of teaching.

Identifying Ability

Another study, conducted by Thomas J. Kane, Jonah E. Rockoff, and Douglas O. Staiger and released in 2006, looked at New York City teachers. The analysts compared reading and math test scores achieved by students with uncertified, alternatively certified, and traditionally certified teachers over a six-year period. Altogether, they examined more than 50,000 new teachers, with a healthy portion of each of the aforementioned categories represented because of New York City’s need to recruit from all available sources.

The authors found differences existed across categories. For example, students of certified teachers scored slightly higher in reading than students of non-certified teachers, while no difference was found in math scores.

The differences across teacher categories, however, were negligible when compared with differences within categories. Within-group differences were estimated as being almost 10 times greater than across-group differences.

In other words, the variation between effective and ineffective teachers, certified or not, is far greater than the difference between certified and uncertified teachers.

The researchers conclude, “teachers vary considerably in the extent to which they promote student learning, but whether a teacher is certified or not is largely irrelevant to predicting their effectiveness.”

Thus, while there is no question among researchers that students learn more effectively from good teachers than from

bad ones, figuring out how to measure what indicates a good teacher is still a sticky, politically charged debate in the education community.

“Research tells us teacher certification and other formal credentials matter very little in the quest to gather the most qualified people in the field.”

Rethinking Quality

The question of credentials’ relevance was echoed in a current proposal advocating on-the-job evaluations over an increased emphasis on certification.

According to a 2006 Brookings Institution analysis, “There are effective certified teachers and there are ineffective certified teachers; similarly, there are effective uncertified teachers and ineffective uncertified teachers.”

The authors point out uniform pay scales that are not tied to performance tend to promote an unequal distribution

of better teachers towards wealthier districts, which pose less of a teaching challenge.

“Even the best teachers at ... poor schools are typically paid no more, and sometimes less, than teachers at wealthier schools,” the authors noted. A better method, they argue, would be to emphasize rewards for teachers based on classroom performance and teaching in high-poverty schools.

No Guarantee

Truth be told, the story of the Scarecrow and his newfound “intelligence” was a lot like the research findings on academic credentials. Although he sounds extremely smart when he says it, the Scarecrow actually gets the Pythagorean Theorem wrong after the Wizard gives him his diploma.

Similarly, in light of the growing body of research, perhaps we should rethink what we require of teachers, since certification and advanced degrees are no guarantee of quality.

Brian Kisida (bkisida@uark.edu) is a research associate for the School Choice Demonstration Project, and Brent E. Riffel (briffel@uark.edu) is deputy director of the Office for Education Policy, both at the University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform.

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Energize Your School Choice Campaign!

LET'S PUT PARENTS BACK IN CHARGE!

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

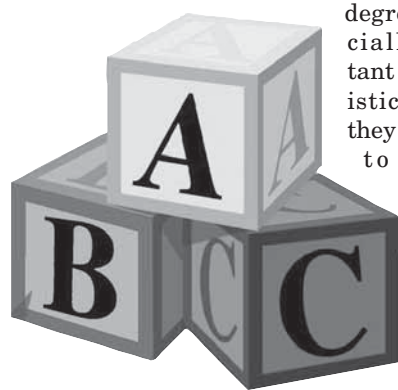
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School Reform Must Foster Competition

Public schools can't do it alone

By Robert Holland

If nothing else, the U.S. Department of Education proved earlier this year it can collect and report telling statistics about the condition of K-12 schooling.

What's seriously at question is the government's effectiveness in acting on such data to reform education.

"[T]he U.S. Department of Education proved earlier this year it can collect and report telling statistics about the condition of K-12 schooling."

Contradictory Findings

The Department of Education released two reports from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that were eye-opening when placed side by side.

One report found from studying transcripts that high school graduates in 2005 earned more credits, got higher grades, and took more challenging courses

than did their counterparts 15 years ago.

Unfortunately, the second report showed reading scores of high school seniors in 2005 had declined significantly since the early 1990s. Only 35 percent were proficient readers, down five points from 1992.

As for math, NAEP launched a new test in 2005, the results of which could

not be compared fairly to previous years. However, it was scarcely encouraging that only 23 percent scored at the proficient level on the new math test.

The juxtaposition of these results—ever-higher grades for ever-less performance—helps explain why U.S. students lead the world in self-esteem while lagging in actual achievement.

Lagging Achievement

The juxtaposition of these results—ever-higher grades for ever-less performance—helps explain why U.S. students lead the world in self-esteem while lagging in actual achievement.

A Brookings Institution study last fall found U.S. eighth-graders were six times likelier to express confidence in their math skills than were Korean eighth-graders, but Koreans' math scores were far higher.

The lack of academic improvement over the past 15 years raises serious questions about the federal role in education reform as Congress begins considering reauthorization of the five-year-old No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Some Washington insiders are calling for imposing tighter NCLB controls on high schools, or even setting national standards.

That is shortsighted because federal involvement in K-12 schooling has been expanding steadily since passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) 42 years ago (NCLB is merely the latest version of ESEA), and the return on the billions already spent has been scant.

Different Approach

To be sure, some tinkering with NCLB could be useful. An Aspen Institute com-

mission is advocating assessing teachers according to the academic gains they help their students achieve, rather than their amassing of education credentials.

Unfortunately, teacher unions already are lining up to derail that sensible "value-added" proposal.

Therein lies the problem for any reform that relies on the cooperation of a change-averse public school establishment.

Rather than placing all bets on compliance with NCLB, Washington policymakers ought to adopt incentives that would enable parents to find good private schools for their children and thereby exert competitive pressures on public schools to improve.

To be most effective, school choice should be for all, not just for selected categories of need.

Good Start

A good starting point is Utah's universal voucher program, signed into law February 12 by Gov. Jon Huntsman Jr. (R).

Under the program, virtually all Utah families will be eligible for a means-tested voucher worth between \$500 and \$3,000 per child to use at a qualifying private school. That will help empower parents as consumers of education no longer at the mercy of an education establishment.

Nobel laureate economist Milton Friedman long championed the universal voucher as a means of sparking in education the competition that has driven innovations in many sectors of American life.

The Utah law is imperfect as a catalyst because of a "mitigation" provision that pays public school districts for up to five years for any students they lose to vouchers. However, it is one significant step toward choice for all.

State-Level Choice

Research by Harvard economist Caroline Hoxby found competition motivated Milwaukee public schools to improve, even though vouchers there are available only to low-income families. A choice system such as Utah's that empowers middle-income families as well could have even more dramatic impact.

With its adoption in 2002, NCLB gave parents the options of private tutoring or public school choice when their children were stuck in failing schools. However, school bureaucrats have dragged their feet in implementation, which is likely to be the fate of any worthy reform tacked onto NCLB.

Washington shouldn't try to impose Utah-style choice nationally, but it could do this: Allow states to opt out of NCLB and adopt genuine reforms such as universal choice. Under such a plan, as long as a state could show academic results, it would not lose federal aid.

The feds could then concentrate on issuing a Nation's Report Card, something they recently have done very well.

Robert Holland (holland@heartland.org) is a senior fellow for education policy with The Heartland Institute.

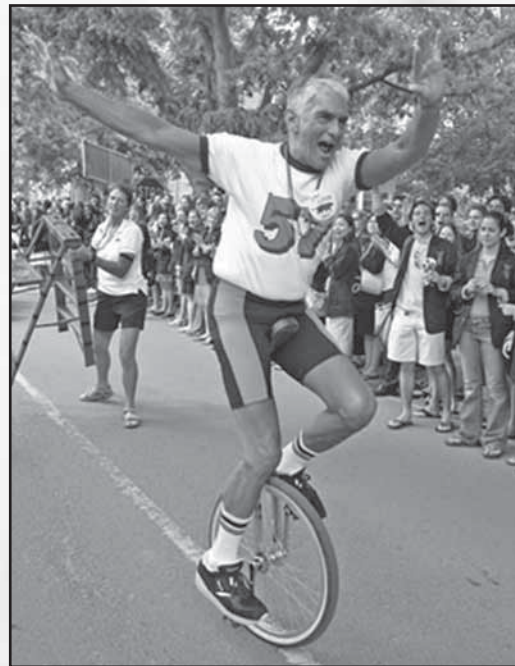


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School Choice by the Numbers

Getting Choice Right: Ensuring Equity and Efficiency in Education Policy
edited by Julian Betts and Tom Loveless
Brookings Institution Press, December 2005
255 pages, \$19.95 paper, ISBN 0-8157-5331-4

Review by Michael Coulter

It may be a cliché in book reviews to call a book “an important contribution,” but *Getting Choice Right* certainly is one. Editors Julian Betts and Tom Loveless have compiled a set of essays that present, as much as possible, the empirical reality of school choice, and suggest practical policies for developing a market in education.

The book includes a chapter on the economic argument for school choice, but most of the volume examines data about how choice has actually worked.

Though not an easy read—the chapters include discussions of studies and academic articles—it’s worth the effort. Despite its academic nature, the book keeps the social science jargon to a minimum, allowing laypeople to benefit.

Betts’ essay examines how education theoretically works as a market, albeit an imperfect one, having numerous suppliers offering generally similar products. Betts argues even imperfect competition yields broad benefits, and

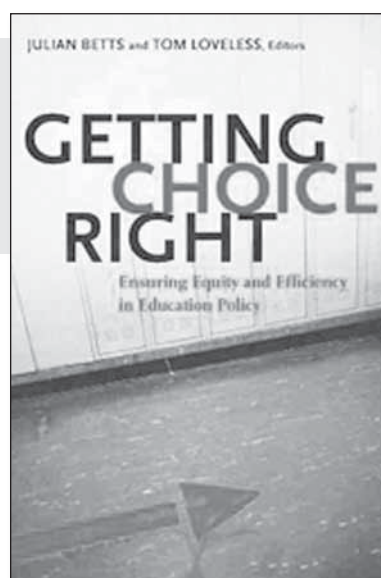
better benefits could be had if policymakers would encourage greater competition.

Empirical Data

In another essay, Frederick Hess and Loveless examine the scholarly literature and available data about the performance of students in choice programs. The data, they argue, show some improvements, but it is not always consistent.

School choice, they observe, is more like a new arrangement of hospitals than a new medication.

One of the arguments made against school choice is the concern that students who don’t use it will be left behind. Several essays in the book consider that question, recognizing that some choice arrangements could harm existing schools and that others will not respond to competition. The essays offer policy



recommendations to prevent that from happening where school choice is available.

Racial Neutrality

Two chapters discuss the impact of school choice on racial integration. Brian Gill (RAND) briefly touches on the empirical evidence collected so far, which he says is little, then proposes how data might best be collected

and analyzed to understand the impact of choice on integration.

Karen Ross (University of Michigan) offers a lengthy, data-filled chapter on the racial impact of charter schools in Michigan, finding they have essentially the same racial mixture as in neighboring public schools. Choice, she observes, has not increased “white flight” from existing public schools.

Political Values

The final two chapters consider the relationship between political values and

school choice. Patrick Wolfe (Georgetown University) considers the impact school choice has on students’ civic values. Wolfe argues the modest evidence to date suggests students in private schools have at least as much and sometimes more racial tolerance, political knowledge, social capital, and voluntarism as public school students.

“Editors Julian Betts and Tom Loveless have compiled a set of essays that present, as much as possible, the empirical reality of school choice, and suggest practical policies for developing a market in education.”

The thoughtful essays in this book are helpful for those considering school choice, and the many references to other studies are a virtue. Although this is not the final word on school choice, it’s arguably the most-informed single volume on the subject.

The book is the second volume by the National Working Commission on Choice in K-12 Education, a project of the Washington, DC-based Brookings Institution.

Michael Coulter (mlcoulter@gcc.edu) writes from Pennsylvania.

THERE’S MORE TO NUMBERS THAN ONE & TWO.

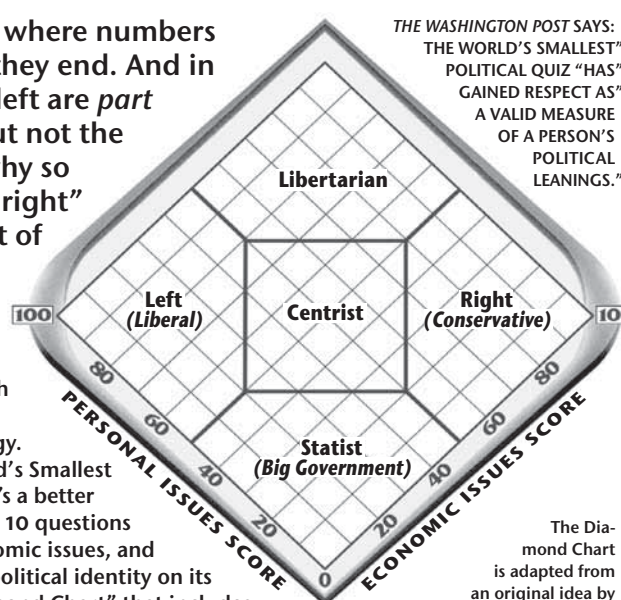
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by the *Washington Post*, and more than 7.8 million people have taken it online. What’s your real political identity? Take the Quiz. For each statement below, circle A for agree, M for maybe/not sure, and D for disagree. Then find your position on the chart.

How do you stand on PERSONAL issues?

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

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

How do you stand on ECONOMIC issues?

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

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

Find Your Place on the Chart

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

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Corrections, additions, deletions?

*Please contact
Health Care News
Managing Editor
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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 Michael Van Winkle, The Heartland Institute's legislative specialist for education policy, at 312/377-4000, email mvanwinkle@heartland.org.

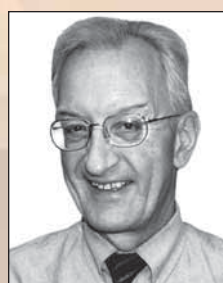
Since January, the ISCI has hosted a monthly luncheon at the Metropolitan Club of Chicago, where business and civic leaders and school

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

(Audio Only) 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, BAEO

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:

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2007 Editorial Calendar

January	Technology in Schools
February	School Safety
March	National History Month
April	Catholic Education
May	National Science Month
June	Higher Education
July	skip month
August	Literacy
September	Back to School
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