Voucher Movement Alive and Well Despite Recent Setback in Utah

By Karla Dial

On November 6, the nation’s first statewide universal voucher program was defeated in Utah by a referendum vote. Since then, major newspapers and magazines have run stories questioning whether vouchers are dead as a form of school choice—and others have stated so outright.

After all, they claim, if the idea won’t fly in Utah—arguably one of the most conservative states in the union—it’s a lead balloon everywhere else.

Left-leaning organizations and their allies in mainstream media would love for legislators to believe that—but experts, legislators, and voters say nothing could be further from the truth.

According to a poll conducted November 5-6—the same day Utah voters decided their referendum—strong support for all forms of school choice exists at the grassroots level. The poll, conducted by YouGov/Polimetrix on behalf of The Economist, found:

• 53 percent of respondents favor vouchers;
• 90 percent say vouchers should be used at any school of a parent’s choice, religious or not;
• 69 percent would like vouchers to be available to everyone, not just

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Nevada Teacher Works to Oust NEA

By Ben DeGrow

A renegade teacher and a rival union are leading charges against one of the National Education Association’s (NEA) largest local affiliates, opening up a legal dispute and a debate over who best represents the interests of teachers.

Ron Taylor is circulating a petition to hold an election that would allow licensed teachers in Clark County, Nevada’s largest school district, to vote out the Clark County Education Association (CCEA) as their bargaining agent. A self-identified “union man,” Taylor claims CCEA provides teachers with inadequate representation.

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

School Choice on Audio

The Heartland Institute, through its Illinois School Choice Initiative project, hosted a series of luncheons in 2006 with some of the leading spokespeople for the school choice movement. Audio recordings from the 2006 Educational Choice Speaker Series are available in a wide range of formats.

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.

DVD recordings of the presentations are also available for purchase, unless otherwise indicated below. For more information, please contact The Heartland Institute at 312/377-4000, email think@heartland.org.

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:

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
Congress Is Getting Closer to Higher Education Reauthorization

By Dan Lips

The U.S. House Education and Labor Committee has voted unanimously to approve legislation to reauthorize federal higher education programs for the next five years. The bill includes dozens of new federal programs and new financial reporting requirements for colleges and universities.

The U.S. Senate approved a similar higher education reauthorization package in summer 2007.

“The U.S. House Education and Labor Committee has voted unanimously to approve legislation to reauthorize federal higher education programs for the next five years.”

The College Opportunity and Affordability Act (H.R. 4137), which the House panel approved in November, will create new programs, increase authorization levels for certain aid programs, and implement new federal regulations to require colleges and universities to report financial information and tuition prices.

Rep. Howard “Buck” McKeon (R-CA), the ranking Republican on the committee, pointed to the new financial disclosure requirements as a key reason he and other Republicans supported the legislation.

“The federal government invests billions in higher education each year to ensure that all Americans are able to pursue a college education and the benefits that come with it. In exchange for that support, these institutions should be held to account for their cost increases,” McKeon explained.

“If we provide a federal investment without accountability, students and taxpayers will be on the losing end of the equation. Sunshine is not the only solution, but it is a critical first step.”

H oward “Buck” McKeon
U.S. REPRESENTATIVE - CALIFORNIA

But McKeon says the reforms initiated by the new legislation are worth the expansion of federal involvement.

“When I am deeply troubled by the number of new programs created by this bill,” McKeon said, “I am mindful that it contains a number of positive reforms that will benefit students, parents, and taxpayers, and, taken as a whole, I believe its positives outweigh the negatives.”

‘Weaning Students’

Vedder argues more fundamental reforms are needed to address the problem of ever-increasing college tuition costs and falling college productivity.

“We need to start weaning students and institutions from massive government support that invites inefficiency, rent-seeking, and a loss of intellectual independence,” Vedder said. “A good place to start would be to end institutional subsidies and concentrate support on vouchers to students—but only those with very significant financial need.”

By Dan Lips

“The best thing I can say about the House bill on higher education is that it is not as bad as I thought it might be, and that there seems to be a bipartisan concern about soaring costs for attending college,” Vedder said. “The bill makes some modest but positive moves in the direction of promoting greater transparency in college operations.”

Vedder called the regulations designed to contain college cost increases “well-intended and even mildly innovative,” but he warned they could create new problems, such as increased student fees, other non-tuition cost hikes, and possibly increased government control of higher education institutions.

Expanding Government

McKeon likewise expressed concern about components of the legislation that will expand federal involvement in higher education.

“The new programs created in this bill are symptomatic of the larger tendency by Congress to fund any and every program with an inviting name—never mind whether the federal government has any business intervening in these areas in the first place,” McKeon said. “Both parties need to take a step back and realize that when we create new federal programs, we may be worsening the very problems we’re trying to solve.”

By Dan Lips

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Vouchers
Continued from page 1
students in public schools with low test scores and high dropout rates;
- 61 percent think private schools in their area are generally better than the public schools; and
- 67 percent say private schools give their students an edge in life.

Necessary Clarity
The poll’s results strongly contradict what the mainstream media has reported about voters’ attitudes toward vouchers.

“I don’t think choice is dead,” said Utah state Sen. Curt Bramble (R-Provo), Senate major­ity leader and sponsor of the bill creating the universal voucher program. “Public education is incapable of substantive change without competition. While it will not be reintroduced in Utah this year, meaningful reform is inevitably.”

Utah voters failed to uphold the voucher program for several reasons, advocates say. A major one is that when an initiative is put to a referendum vote, all an opposition group has to do is raise reasonable doubt about its potential in voters’ minds, because voters are generally against any kind of dramatic policy shift, said David Kirkpatrick, a senior fellow for education at the U.S. Freedom Foundation.

“Every time a voucher initiative has appeared on a ballot—eight times now—the voucher advocates have lost,” Kirkpatrick pointed out. “Yet the movement goes on. The defeats should make it clear that an initiative proposal should never be pushed so hard for universal school choice because it threatens the union gravy train—become even more formidable,” Enlow said.

The National Education Association (NEA) spent at least one dollar from every teacher nationwide to defeat the Utah referendum, using a coordinated misinformation campaign to protect its monopoly.

“On November 6, the nation’s first statewide universal voucher program was defeated in Utah by a referendum vote. Since then, major newspapers and magazines have run stories questioning whether vouchers are dead as a form of school choice . . .”

Internal Debate
There remains debate within the reform community about the best way to provide vouchers. Some favor an incremental approach—offering them on a limited basis to students in chronically failing schools, for instance, or to students with disabilities—while others want to offer them on a universal scale like Utah’s proposed law, making them available to all students regardless of performance, ability, or family income.

“Some choice is better than none, so a voucher program is better than no school choice program. But emphasizing limited school choice over universal school choice at this point would be a huge step backward,” Enlow said.

“Compare the early school choice programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland with the programs we’ve seen enacted in the last five years,” Enlow continued. “The recent programs are much more universal—and we’re getting more of them enacted. That’s because we . . . have pushed so hard for universal school choice. Since we’re having such success by making programs more universal, why stop now?”

A reformer who strongly favors the universal approach is Dr. John Merrifield, a professor at the University of Texas-San Antonio and editor of the Journal of School Choice, a scholarly publication launched in 2007.

“Small, restriction-laden, targeted programs aren’t worth the political capital to fight for. The resistance to them isn’t any less. Extensive restrictions don’t take the political sting out of defeat, and victory would be hollow—even Pyrrhic,” Merrifield said.

Targeted Strategy
Some school choice advocates—most notably at the Cato Institute in Washington, DC—favor tax credits over vouchers. Others say the best strategy simply depends on the setting. In California, for instance, Lance Izumi, director of education studies at the Pacific Research Institute in San Francisco, said the group is “encouraging school choice options ranging from enhanced public school choice to increased charter school authorizers to targeted vouchers to universal vouchers.”

Enlow agrees with that approach. “Both vouchers and tax credits have advantages and disadvantages. For every argument in favor of one, there’s an equal and opposite argument in favor of the other,” Enlow said. “We should stay focused on the goal of providing more choice to more students at more schools. Some voucher programs do a good job at this, while others are hindered by restrictions. Likewise, some tax credit programs do a good job, while others are hindered by restrictions. We should evaluate each program on its own merits rather than assuming that all vouchers or all tax credits work a certain way. We should also maintain the flexibility to go with whatever type of program has the most chance of success in each state,” Enlow concluded.

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

School Choice Still Popular
Despite the defeats in referenda, school choice advocates point to the movement’s enduring popularity with voters. Over the past five years, more school choice programs have been enacted nationwide than at any time in history, in various forms and locations, including:
- Arizona’s corporate tax credit program and voucher programs for special-needs and foster children (all operating since 2006);
- the District of Columbia’s voucher program (since 2004-05);
- Florida’s corporate tax credit program (since 2002);
- Georgia’s special-needs voucher program (since 2007);
- Iowa’s personal tax credit program (since 2006);
- Ohio’s voucher program for autistic children (since 2004) and voucher program for students in failing public schools (since 2006-07);
- Rhode Island’s corporate tax credit program (since 2007); and
- Utah’s voucher program for special-needs students (since 2005-06), which was unaffected by the universal voucher vote.

— Karl Dial
Dueling Studies Debate Advantages Offered by Private High Schools

By Neal McCluskey

According to a report from the Center on Education Policy (CEP), a pro-public school think tank, public high schools educate low-income students as successfully as private schools.

It’s a finding CEP said contradicts “decades of research,” and one that has come under fire from people whose studies have found private schools have advantages. One of those is a new study from the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation. (See story on page 12.)

CEP’s report, “Are Private High Schools Better Academically Than Public High Schools?” used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 to 2000 to examine academic and non-academic outcomes for low-income students who attended various types of high schools, including traditional public schools, magnet schools, diocesan Roman Catholic schools, and schools run by independent Catholic orders.

Factors Discarded

The study analyzed schools’ effects on achievement growth in reading, mathematics, science, and history, as well as their impact on SAT scores, college completion, civic-mindedness, and job satisfaction. To isolate schools’ effects, the study attempted to weed out the impact of family income, parental involvement, and other factors that contribute to student success over time, using regression analysis, an approach the report said differed from previous research comparing the effects of public and private schools.

According to the report’s narrative, after controlling for all contributing factors other than school type, private high schools’ advantages essentially evaporated. The study also indicated parental income and involvement and the student’s previous test scores are the biggest factors behind student success.

“Once the full scope of the family is taken into account, cultural capital as well as economic capital, private school effects disappear,” wrote study author Harold Wenglinsky, a professor at Columbia Teachers College.

Negative Implications?

Wenglinsky’s report, released in October, focused on “low-income students in urban settings—those for whom policies of school choice are often aimed,” CEP noted in its news release.

Despite Wenglinsky’s conclusion, the report’s findings suggest some private schools are indeed more successful at educating low-income students than public high schools. Catholic schools run by religious orders—as opposed to much more numerous diocesan schools—were found to be better than public schools at teaching reading, mathematics, and history, and they better prepared their students for the verbal section of the SAT.

Similarly, independent private schools better prepared students for the math and verbal sections of the SAT and to complete at least some college.

‘Unacceptable’ Method

The study’s claims might not be of much value, according to Greg Forster, senior fellow and director of research at the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation.

“CEP has been bragging that the outcomes of its study differ from those of the previous research because they use a different statistical method,” Forster said.

“There are good reasons why nobody else has used these methods before—they’re scientifically unacceptable.”

A Friedman Foundation brief responding to CEP’s report focused on Wenglinsky’s attempt to control for parental involvement and parental expectations, noting it is very difficult to disentangle how parents and schools influence each other.

According to the brief, “It is a difficult chicken-and-egg problem, because it is likely that one of the ways private schools improve student outcomes is precisely by increasing parental involvement. ... As a result, the controls CEP applies are grossly inappropriate.”

In his own study comparing private and public schools, also released in October, Forster found private high schools do, in fact, outperform public high schools. He noted “a scientifically sound” research method produced his findings.

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

In Other Words

“Ben, Alison and Lily, along with another few dozen who attend my afterschool writing program, also attend top-notch New York private schools that cost upwards of $25,000 a year. So why, one might wonder, do these kids need an extracurricular creative writing coach? The answer is simple, though twisted: Their schools—while touting well-known athletic teams—are offshoots of the ‘progressive education’ movement and uphold a categorical belief that ‘thought competition’ is treacherous.

“Administrators of these schools will not support their students in literary, science or math competitions, including the most prestigious creative writing event in the country: the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. So we at Writopia Lab help these kids to join the 10,000 young literati from across the country who are hurrying to meet the event’s January deadline, as well as deadlines for other competitions. ...”

“Mel Levine, a professor at the University of North Carolina and one of the foremost authorities in the country on how children learn, believes the impact of the collaborative education movement has been devastating to an entire generation. When students are rewarded for participation rather than achievement, Dr. Levine suggests, they don’t have a strong sense of what they are good at and what they’re not. Thus older members of Generation Y might be in for quite a shock when they show up for work at their first jobs. They expect to be immediate heroes and heroines. They expect a lot of feedback on a daily basis. They expect grade inflation, they expect to be told what a wonderful job they’re doing,’ says Dr. Levine.”

Rebecca Segall-Wallace
The Wall Street Journal
November 28, 2007
South Carolina Superintendent Offers Public School Choice Plan

Proposal would provide little real choice, reformers say

By Ben DeGrow

South Carolina's top education official is proposing a new public school choice program, but the governor and other reform-minded critics are skeptical.

State Superintendent of Education Jim Rex (D) is pushing for a revised version of an open-enrollment bill vetoed by Gov. Mark Sanford (R) in June 2007. The latest edition appears unlikely to satisfy the governor's concerns or those of school choice advocates.

Rex's plan is being advocated in conjunction with the State Department of Education's new Office of Public School Choice and Office of Innovation, created since Rex took office in January 2007. The superintendent said he wants to see a variety of public education programs grow and flourish, especially Montessori and single-gender schools.

"When I ran for this office, I talked about the need for more innovation," Rex said. "We were doing too many things that didn't work for too many kids."

District Decisions

Under the proposal, all 85 South Carolina school districts would be required to undergo a two-year school choice process. In the first year, districts would form committees to design a public school choice plan suitable to local needs. In the second year, districts would implement at least one additional option at each level—elementary, middle, and high school.

But critics say putting district leaders in charge of creating more options is not a promising tactic.

"When you give ultimate control of a choice program to people who have opposed it, that's the fox guarding the henhouse," said Joel Sawyer, Sanford's spokesman.

Rex disagrees, saying school districts should be given a chance in spite of past problems.

"The argument that because you haven't means you never will, I don't believe that," Rex said. "I expect South Carolina to be a leader in single-gender and Montessori options. And if it disappoints people for a variety of ideological reasons, I'm sorry for that. They ought to withhold their judgment for a year or two and then decide whether it works."

Fewer Choices

Transportation arrangements and complications with unequal funding between districts caused Rex to scrap a mandatory interdistrict proposal in the 2007 bill. Eight districts already participate in interdistrict choice, and more would have been allowed to join under the discarded plan.

The superintendent says his new plan should meet most families' needs.

"The vast majority of parents want choices in their local communities near their homes," Rex said. "As public school choice [plans become] more common, you're going to see the vast majority of them within districts and within schools."

Quality and Quantity

The superintendent said the same can be said of available private options.

"We certainly would be in favor of giving more choice to parents, both in the public and private sector," Sawyer said. "The marketplace works, and we think it will work in education if more parents are empowered to make good choices as consumers."

Ben DeGrow (ben@i2i.org) is a policy analyst for the Independence Institute, a free-market think tank in Golden, Colorado.
Crawford and several other parents sued the state and 25 school districts in which fewer than half the students had met state proficiency standards, claiming the state was failing to meet its constitutional obligation of providing a “thorough and efficient education,” as well as violating the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Superior Court Judge Neil Shuster agreed on October 5 to a motion to dismiss the suit. In a 54-page opinion he agreed on October 5 to a motion to dismiss the plaintiffs’ claim that failing schools violate the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, because they could not show their acts together.

Shuster wrote, “defendant-District Boards cannot unilaterally provide the relief sought by the Plaintiffs” and instead the state board “is the relevant legal entity for the issuance of relief.”

Support Is Widespread
Other school choice advocates agree with that assessment. In July 2006, while the case was still being argued, Clint Bolick—then president of the Alliance for School Choice in Washington, DC—wrote in The Wall Street Journal that the remedy the parents sought would “create a powerful catalyst for failing public schools to get their acts together.”

Former presidential contender Steve Forbes, writing on Forbes.com on September 4, 2006, said the case “could be the most important education lawsuit since Brown v. Board of Education,” because it “could ultimately make America’s K-12 school systems the finest in the world, enabling kids to get a sound education.”


In Other Words
“For Vision 2015 supporters, the report’s bottom line is clear: Delaware can’t afford world-class schools under its current system. That makes systemic change necessary, said Paul Herdman, president of the Rodel Foundation of Delaware, a financial backer both of the DKPPI study and of Vision 2015.

“If we keep the current system the same, we likely will get the same results we have today, which works for some kids but not a lot of kids,” he said.”

The News Journal, November 28, 2007, reporting on a study released by the Delaware Public Policy Institute, which found that to create high-achieving schools under the state’s current education framework, educators would have to increase per-pupil spending by 83 percent. Delaware’s current per-pupil spending is eighth highest in the nation.
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“If a teacher is being charged with something, they’re not being represented by a lawyer,” said Taylor. “These Uniserv directors that represent members, they’re elementary teachers. They don’t know what they’re doing, and they’re just looking forward to a position with the district.”

CCEA President Mary Ella Holloway disputes Taylor’s claims. She says Uniserv directors are trained to resolve problems favorably for teachers at the building level, but that other options are also available if they cannot reach a satisfactory settlement with the principal or other administrators.

“Any time it proceeds to that, our teachers will have lawyers,” said Holloway.

Raising Complaints
Taylor was provoked to action in 2006 after he learned CCEA charged its members much more ($3,600) to take Center after he learned CCEA charged its members more ($3,600) to take Center

“They are working in cahoots,” said Taylor.

The CCEA president attributed the higher initial price to overhead costs for facilities and attorney fees.

“After we set everything up, we’ve been able to reduce those fees, because we’re not paying as much overhead,” Holloway said.

After his persistent complaints, CCEA terminated Taylor’s membership in February 2007. He said the group also sought to have him dismissed from his teaching position with the Clark County School District. He has filed several unsuccessful legal challenges against CCEA.

From June to October 2007, Taylor worked with the Teamsters Local 14 to promote decertification of CCEA and to organize new representation.

“A renegade teacher and a rival union are leading charges against one of the National Education Association’s largest local affiliates, opening up a legal dispute and a debate over who best represents the interests of teachers.”

Petition Disputes
Taylor and the Teamsters, who went their separate ways due to disagreements over tactics and differing agendas, have circulated separate petitions. At press time, Taylor reported having 100 signatures in hand, while the Teamsters had collected 350 cards. The support of 30 percent of the school district’s 18,000 licensed employees is needed to trigger an election. If more than half of current employees sign, CCEA would automatically be decertified as the bargaining agent.

Taylor says a lack of time and opportunity, as well as some resistance from school officials, have kept him from collecting more signatures. At one school, he said, 40 of 43 teachers signed.

“Anyone who looks at the petition when I’ve handed it to them, they have yet to turn it down,” Taylor said.

Holloway said CCEA’s lawyers insist the deadline to collect signatures was November 30, the end of “the only open period to challenge us.”

But another labor expert disagrees, noting CCEA was certified in 1972 by school district recognition without an employee election.

“If the organization was recognized by the employer without an election, then the statutory rules do not govern,” said LaRae Munk, director of legal services for the Association of American Educators (AAE). “All Taylor is going to have to do is show the employer that the CCEA no longer represents a majority, and they will withdraw recognition.”

Alternative Organizations
AAE, a nonunion professional association for teachers, sees the growing turmoil as an opportunity to step up its cooperative approach. In November, the national organization teamed with local members to form the Professional Association of Clark County Educators (PACCE).

“We are so proud of our members because of their motivation to establish a professional educators group that is devoted to working collaboratively with all stakeholders in education,” said AAE Communications Director Heather Reams.

“PACCE is about solutions, not a revolution. We know that this school year has been divisive for many teachers in the district. We don’t want to be a sequel,” Reams said.

Teacher Interests
Holloway discounts AAE because of the organization’s refusal to engage in collective bargaining. “Bargaining is a crucial role that [CCEA] does for its teachers,” she said.

Holloway cited her organization’s recent successes at negotiating a $4,500 increase in starting teacher salary and a 13 percent rise in the school district’s contributions to teachers’ health insurance premiums. She said CCEA is better equipped than other unions to negotiate for teachers.

“We understand education and things the Teamsters don’t understand—preparation periods, testing procedures, and those sorts of things,” said Holloway.

Taylor isn’t ready to give up, convinced the current representation is not serving him and his colleagues well.

“NEA represents the best interests of NEA, not teachers,” Taylor said.

Not all blacks are liberals
(… and that’s a good thing)

Lee H. Walker is president of The New Coalition for Economic & Social Change and a senior fellow of The Heartland Institute. He is a former member of the Illinois State Board of Higher Education, commissioner with the Midwestern (10 States) Higher Education Commission, and National President of the National Guardsmen. He currently serves on the editorial board of The Chicago Defender. Mr. Walker was recently appointed chairman of the Illinois Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

The New Coalition’s mission is to cultivate effective multi-ethnic spokespersons on ideas that empower people with free enterprise and self-reliance. It helps these spokespersons gain access to forums where the major public policy issues of the day are debated.

19 South LaSalle St., Ste. 903 · Chicago, IL 60603
312-377-4000
www.newcoalition.org

INTERNET INFO
More information on Ron Taylor’s petition campaign can be found at http://teachers4change.net.
Hispanic Support for School Choice Is High

Reform movement has broad base, surveys show

By Jim Waters

Hopeing to secure Latino votes, presidential candidates are talking much about immigration reform. But Latinos think educational liberty for parents is at least as important as whether more fences are built or whether illegal immigrants get to stay in the country.

An October 2007 survey of 2,000 American adults published by Harvard University and the journal Education Next revealed 60 percent of Hispanics support vouchers that would allow low-income families to send their children to private school, and 54 percent of Hispanics support initiatives to provide private-school vouchers to all children in failing public schools.

The poll also revealed strong support for school choice among African-Americans, with 67 percent supporting vouchers for low-income families.

“I think that candidates for all levels of office would be wise to realize that the movement for meaningful school choice has a broad base of supporters,” said Andrew Campanella, director of communications for the Washington, DC-based Alliance for School Choice.

Verified Results

Along with being good education policy, the survey confirms earlier polls’ indications that providing school choice could be politically profitable for candidates hoping to appeal to Latinos.

A nationwide poll of 820 registered Hispanic voters, conducted last summer by the Alliance for School Choice and the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options (HCReO), found Latinos will back candidates who carry the school choice banner.

“Hoping to secure Latino votes, presidential candidates are talking much about immigration reform. But Latinos think educational liberty for parents is at least as important ...”

Sixty-five percent of the survey’s respondents—49 percent of whom identified themselves as Democrats—are “more likely” to vote for political candidates who support school choice.

“Immigrants from political candidates to think about when shaping their message to Hispanic voters during the current presidential campaign,” said Anne Guarnera, HCReO’s membership and communications coordinator. “Politicians at every level—national, state, and local—should include choice in their platforms.”

Forty-three percent of respondents picked school choice as their top priority.

“That’s a strong statement when you consider that respondents frequently ranked school choice higher than the war or health care,” Guarnera said.

Nothing New

One reason could be that Latin immigrants are already comfortable with the concept of school choice.

“Immigrants from Latin America are very familiar with the concept,” Guarnera said. “It may be difficult for them to navigate the system here because of the language barrier, but the concept of school choice is nothing new to them.”

While education researchers have succeeded in calling much-needed attention to the academic achievement gap between black and white students, polls reveal there’s also a serious need to focus on the equally large and stubborn gap between white and Latino students.

A study of urban school districts released in November by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) revealed a 25-point gap between eighth-grade white and Latino students in reading, only slightly smaller than the 26-point gap between white and black students. Gaps between whites and Hispanics ranged from 11 points in Chicago to 40 points in Austin.

“This achievement gap has persisted far too long, and it’s time for legislators the country to embrace school choice as a solution,” Campanella said. “We can’t continue to talk about the achievement gap. We must do something about it.”

Dropout Rate

One of many glaring consequences of the academic chasm between Hispanics and white or Asian students is a daunting dropout rate.

More than 20 percent of U.S. Hispanics between the ages of 16 and 24 were dropouts in 2005, according to NCES. These are individuals who were not in school and had not passed General Educational Development (GED) tests.

Even when adjusting for Latinos who dropped out before arriving in the United States—about 80 percent of Latino immigrants—“the dropout rate for Hispanics is greater than for other major ethnic groups in America,” according to a study released in November by the National Center for Policy Analysis (NCPA).

According to authors Renee Bou-Waked and Madison Jones, a lack of English proficiency is a major factor in immigrant Hispanics’ higher dropout rate.

Research by the Pew Hispanic Center offers further confirmation, indicating that in 2000 nearly 60 percent of 16- to 19-year-olds Hispanics who did not speak English well were dropouts, while only 13 percent of Latinos in homes where English was the only language spoken dropped out.

Better Performance

But English proficiency doesn’t automatically correlate with sufficient academic improvement. The dropout rate among English-proficient Hispanics is still higher than other ethnic groups, according to NCPA.

Bou-Waked and Jones promote school choice as a way of addressing schools’ inconsistency in educating minority groups, including Hispanics. They conclude open-enrollment policies allowing parents to choose charter schools for their children would benefit both schools and students.

“With school choice, schools that perform exceptionally well with one subgroup of students could specialize,” Bou-Waked and Jones write. “This could include, for example, programs geared toward English-language acquisition by Spanish-speaking students or other minorities, low-income and disadvantaged students, or low or high achievers.”

Hispanic students not only have a greater chance of getting a better education—particularly by becoming proficient in the key academic areas of math and reading—if they attend a charter school, they also are less likely to drop out, the NCPA study noted.

“If [schools catering to certain populations] competed with other schools through open-enrollment policies, they would have a comparative advantage in Hispanic education that would improve academic achievement and attract even more under-performing students,” the NCPA scholars wrote.
Green Dot Charter Schools Help Revolutionize Los Angeles District

By Lisa Snell

When the 2008-09 school year begins this fall, Green Dot Public Schools—an organization that runs 12 small charter schools in some of Los Angeles’s poorest neighborhoods—will turn its attention to a new one, Locke Senior High School in Watts. And it will do so with the support of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD).

This marks a change in the school district’s attitude, as LAUSD has had a long-running battle with Green Dot over control of some of the state’s lowest-performing schools. But the LAUSD board voted 5-2 last September to turn Locke over to Green Dot.

“We at LAUSD spend $7.7 billion every year, and yet we still have graduation rates that hover between 40 and 50 percent,” explained board president Monica Garcia. “I’m supporting this charter today because I’ve had enough of yesterday.”

Locke ranks among the lowest-performing schools in the state. In 2005, 332 students graduated from a group of 1,318 that began ninth grade together. As Locke senior Ainesha Jones said during the packed school board meeting last fall, “It’s too late for me, but I want my younger brothers and sisters to have a good school and a good education like Green Dot is talking about.”

Quarantined

After a rash of violent episodes at the school and a lack of meaningful reform from LAUSD, last May a majority of tenured teachers at Locke, led by Principal Frank Wells, signed a petition to convert the school to a Green Dot charter. Soon afterward, Wells was fired and teachers were required to go to mandatory meetings to “discuss” the charter school petition.

“When the 2008-09 school year begins this fall, Green Dot Public Schools … will turn its attention to Locke Senior High School in Watts. And it will do so with the support of the Los Angeles Unified School District.”

“[The district] sent three police officers and an associate superintendent of schools to the school at 6 o’clock at night to escort me off campus and to demand my keys,” Wells explained.

For the rest of the year, Wells was ordered to report to a district office for work.

“They gave me a cubicle next to the restrooms at $600 a day to sit and do nothing,” Wells said.

Teacher Revolt

After the mandatory district meetings, 17 teachers rescinded their signatures on the charter school petition.

By September 2007, a new Los Angeles school board majority, more favorable to charter schools, allowed Green Dot to resubmit the Locke charter conversion plan. In addition, at the September 11 meeting, Green Dot founder Steve Barr and senior school district officials told board members Green Dot had resubmitted letters showing 38 of 71 tenured teachers had reaffirmed their support, pushing Green Dot safely over the 50 percent requirement.

At that meeting the majority of the board approved the plan that will allow Green Dot to divide Locke into small schools of about 500 students. Their model is based on basic tenets such as giving teachers and principals authority over budgets, curricula, and work rules, requiring parental involvement, and keeping schools open longer each day.

“We go into areas, very simply, that have 60, 70 percent drop-out rates, and we reverse that achievement gap,” Barr said. “We retain and graduate 80 to 90 percent of the kids that come in.

“I want all the money at the school site, in the classrooms, paying the best teachers, giving them the best tools,” Barr continued. “You got 30,000 people at LA Unified, for instance, that don’t work at school sites. They’re not teachers, and they’re not support people for teachers.”

Green Dot Revolution

Green Dot keeps its administrative expenses at 6 percent of the total operating budget for managing all schools, and it pays its Los Angeles teachers more than LAUSD does—even though Green Dot receives less money per pupil than do district schools. According to a November 11 Chicago Tribune article, a four-year teacher at Green Dot makes $8,000 more annually than his or her LAUSD counterpart.

The revolution at Locke has implications for other large urban high schools in Los Angeles. Santee Education Complex, another low-performing school in the city, might soon follow in Locke’s footsteps. Teachers at Santee have already had preliminary discussions with Barr.

Green Dot has consistently built new charter high schools near low-performing high schools in Los Angeles, and students have flocked to them. Three years ago, Barr negotiated with district officials about overhauling Jefferson High School in downtown Los Angeles, only to be rebuffed. He then collected 10,000 signatures from parents endorsing Jefferson’s division into several small charter schools and marched with 1,000 parents to deliver the petition to district headquarters.

The district refused to turn Jefferson over to Green Dot, but the school board did approve five new Green Dot charters near Jefferson. When those schools opened in the fall of 2005, they enrolled the majority of what would have been Jefferson’s freshman class.

So far, Barr said, demand has far exceeded the supply of Green Dot charter school slots.

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

N.J. Leads in NEA PAC Fundraising

By Mike Antonucci

The New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) is the National Education Association (NEA)’s second-largest state affiliate and by far the leading contributor to the national union’s political action committee, according to figures obtained by the Education Intelligence Agency (EIA).

As of October 2007, NJEA members, officers, and activists in 2007 had contributed almost $139,000 to the $1.7 million war chest of the NEA Fund for Children and Public Education. As with every NEA affiliate, most of that money was collected during the NEA Representative Assembly in Philadelphia last July.

Although NEA boasts 3.2 million members, the 8,800 delegates to the union’s national convention are responsible for more than three-quarters of the PAC contributions. Regional leadership conferences also have a campaign contribution component, which accounted for an additional $82,000 from those who attended the events, according to the EIA figures, which were obtained in late November.

The top 10 PAC contributing state affiliates are:

1. New Jersey - $138,982
2. Illinois - $86,848
3. Michigan - $76,671
4. Ohio - $75,370
5. Tennessee - $67,843
6. Wisconsin - $67,038
7. Connecticut - $66,866
8. Pennsylvania - $63,092
9. Indiana - $59,807
10. Florida - $55,320

NEA’s largest affiliate, the California Teachers Association, ranks only 15th in contributions to the national PAC, with $42,233.

“The New Jersey Education Association is the National Education Association’s second-largest state affiliate and by far the leading contributor to the national union’s political action committee…”

Mike Antonucci (educationintel@aol.com) is director of the Education Intelligence Agency, an educational research and investigations group based in Elk Grove, California.
State Rep. Polly Williams Honored at Group’s Fifth Anniversary Benefit

The Faith First Educational Assistance Corporation honored Wisconsin state Rep. Annette Polly Williams (D-Milwaukee) at its fifth annual Anniversary Banquet in Philadelphia in early November. Williams wrote the bill that created the nation’s first school choice program nearly 20 years ago in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Faith First primarily gives scholarships to students in Christian schools, from pre-K through 12th grades. Over the past five years the organization has awarded approximately 400 scholarships to children all over Philadelphia—and for the past two years, in Virginia as well.

It also holds Parent Engagement Meetings twice monthly to help educate parents so they remain engaged in their children’s lives. In addition, the group helps local church schools renovate or build facilities for the purpose of enrolling additional students.

Faith First founder Dr. Alberta C. Wilson—former principal of a Christian school in the city—and her husband, Woodrow L. Wilson, had no money to help disadvantaged students choose better schools in 2002, but that didn’t stop them from establishing a corporation intending to do just that. Also recognized at the banquet were:

- Tyree Johnson, editor of Westside Weekly, for his consistent work educating parents about educational choice;
- Jean Allen, member of Beulah Baptist Church, for her volunteerism supporting Faith First;
- Donald Forrest, of Christian Accountants, for maintaining Faith First’s finances; and
- Linda Rumer, a member of Calvary Chapel, for her diligence in engaging parents and furthering the mission of the organization.

Several “educational freedom fighters” also attended the event, including Virginia Walden Ford, executive director of DC Parents for School Choice in Washington, DC; Evelyn Taylor, executive director of Parents Challenge in Colorado; Daria Stone, program manager of Parents Advancing Choice in Education in Dayton, Ohio; and the Rev. Ron Harris, CEO and founder of A Level Up, Inc., in Springdale, Arkansas.

For more information about Faith First and how to contribute to its ongoing fundraising efforts, or to obtain a scholarship for your child, contact Dr. Alberta Wilson at 215/870-9454.

INTERNET INFO


NCLB Systems in Place, But Results Uncertain, Study Shows

By Larry McQuillan

Experts from the RAND Corporation and American Institutes for Research (AIR), analyzing data from five years’ worth of experience with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), say states have already put into place most of the law’s test-based accountability requirements and now must focus on improving schools identified as poor performers.

“Accountability Under NCLB: Interim Report” concludes 75 percent of the nation’s schools made adequate yearly progress (AYP) as defined by their respective states in 2003-04, a 2 percent increase from the previous year. Also, all states have adopted most of the accountability requirements dictated by the law.

However, 20 states are not up to date in adopting English-language proficiency tests, and performance measures are not uniform nationwide.

Making Progress

The schools most likely to be identified as needing improvement were high-poverty, high-minority, and urban schools, as well as large schools and middle schools, according to the report released in mid-November. Across the nation, 13 percent of schools were identified as needing improvement in 2004-05. The student groups most likely not to make AYP were African-Americans and those with disabilities or limited English proficiency.

“States are making progress implementing policies required by No Child Left Behind, and they’ve largely met the accountability requirements through 2004-05,” said coauthor Kerstin Carlson Le Floch, a principal research analyst at AIR, in a press statement. “But much remains to be done to fulfill the full promise of the law.”

Doing More

“These are good first steps, but more needs to be done,” agreed co-author Brian Stecher of RAND in the same press statement. “Some states still struggle to deliver timely information, for example, while others struggle to provide basic resources for schools, such as textbooks and instructional materials.”

According to the study:

• Of the 25 percent of schools not making AYP in 2003-04, 51 percent failed because the entire school population or most of its subgroups did not meet achievement benchmarks.
• One-third of the schools not making AYP failed primarily because of the performance of disabled students or those with limited English language proficiency.
• Approximately 20 states weren’t able to tell schools how they did on statewide assessment tests before the 2004-05 school year began.
• The most common efforts to improve schools include using achievement data to improve teaching, having teachers or tutors spend more time with low-achieving students, and aligning curricula with tests.

Faith First award recipients and leaders gathered at the group’s fifth anniversary celebration.

Back row, left to right: Gerry Rogers, Virginia; Woodrow L. Wilson, vice president of Faith First, Virginia; Alberta C. Wilson, founder and CEO of Faith First; June Fike, West Philadelphia; Bessie Crawford, North Philadelphia; William L. Banks, Philadelphia; Don Dobbs, South Carolina. Front row, left to right: Donald Forrest, Philadelphia; Linda Rumer, Philadelphia; Jean Allen, West Philadelphia; Wisconsin state Rep. Annette Polly Williams (D-Milwaukee); Tyree Johnson, West Philadelphia.

Tonya Jones and her son Raymond, a sixth-grader, celebrate after receiving a scholarship from the Faith First Educational Assistance Corporation.
Study: Competition Brings Success

By Bailey Quinonez

Competition fostered by a free market is good for education, according to a new study by the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation.

“Monopoly versus Markets: The Empirical Evidence on Private Schools and School Choice,” by Greg Forster, Ph.D., presents rebuttals to common arguments against reform and stresses the importance of using appropriate methods of analysis when conducting research on education. Forster provides new evidence in addition to reviewing past studies on the topic.

Obvious Benefits

Jamie Story, education policy analyst at the Texas Public Policy Foundation, noted, “Free-market thinkers know intuitively that school choice will improve education for all students, but it’s important to have hard evidence when communicating our message to those who don’t yet hold this belief.”

David Kirkpatrick, senior fellow for education policy at the U.S. Freedom Foundation in Washington, DC, said it’s obvious choice works—even without a study.

“Those who maintain school choice doesn’t work need to explain why, then, is it available to all of the millions of students in higher education, none of whom are assigned to the institution they attend? Or to the estimated 1.2 million—and growing—students attending charter schools?” Kirkpatrick said.

“A survey of public school parents a few years ago found 53 percent said they live where they do so their children can attend those public schools,” Kirkpatrick continued. “If their exercising [that] choice is harming their children, perhaps some government agency should step in and reassign their children to some school whether they like it or not. After all, if compulsory assignment is good enough for low-income families, it should be required for middle- and upper-income families as well. Such discrimination based on ability to pay is clearly unfair and should not be permitted.”

Better Research Methods

The study stresses the importance of proper research methods, noting inappropriate methods of analysis produce conflicting results that can undermine the accuracy of data and create confusion in public policy.

Forster explains methodology choices can limit results or omit important factors that must be considered in order to produce reliable conclusions. Research on dropout rates, for example, is difficult to quantify, he explains, because so many factors must be considered, including race, family income, number of parents in the home, and parents’ levels of education.

Forster details the corrections that should have been made to previous studies and provides new data to reinforce the issue of monopoly versus markets. “[E]ven the public school system itself would be better off if it were not a monopoly,” he writes.

The study, released in October, shows competition improves all schools, public and private, on both fiscal and academic measures.

“[School choice] provides a powerful incentive for schools not to allow things to go wrong in the first place, lest they lose their students,” Forster writes.

Forster finds students in private schools make better academic gains than students in public schools. In the area of race relations there was no notable difference between the two types of schools. However, private school students were found to be less likely to drop out.

Debunking Myths

Forster’s report disputes several common myths about school choice. For example:

• Private schools are unregulated. Untrue, Forster writes. Every state has established laws for private schools as safeguards, such as laws on health, safety, and mandatory attendance. In addition, “when parents are armed with school choice,” he writes, “they can hold schools accountable by withdrawing their children and finding better schools.” That is not the case with public schools.

• School choice takes money from public schools. Forster says this too is untrue: “The savings produced by school choice are typically much larger than any plausible estimate of fixed costs.”

Let’s Put Parents Back in Charge!

Energize Your School Choice Campaign!

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

Let’s Put Parents Back in Charge! — a groundbreaking bilingual (English/Spanish) tool for the school choice movement — is available free of charge (in quantities of 50 to 500) to grassroots school choice efforts, charter schools, parent groups, elected officials, and others.

State legislatures across the country are considering vouchers, tuition tax credits, and other measures that would give parents more control over their children’s educational futures. But before they’ll act, they need to hear from informed, motivated constituents.

To energize your school choice effort with Let’s Put Parents Back in Charge! contact us at 312/377-4000, email think@heartland.org.

Individual copies can be ordered for $5.95 in The Heartland Institute’s online store at http://www.heartland.org.

“Competition fostered by a free market is good for education, according to a new study by the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation.”

Variety of Resources

The Heartland Institute’s online store at http://www.heartland.org/friedman/downloadfile.do?id=255.

INTERNET INFO

New York
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bonuses directly to teachers who actually increase students’ performance.

Standing beside Schools Chancellor Joel Klein and United Federation of Teachers (UFT) leader Randi Weingarten, Bloomberg presented a plan to use private funding to attract top teachers to the city’s most challenging schools. Bonuses will be aligned with the U.S. Department of Education’s new progress reports.

Shared Control
While unions have traditionally opposed merit pay, UFT is embracing this version in part because of the level of control the union will have in making decisions and distributing the bonuses.

Though 200 high-needs schools will be eligible for funding in the 2007-08 school year, more than half of the UFT-represented staff at each school, plus the principal, must vote in favor of participating in the program for that to occur.

“School-wide bonuses properly refocus the misguided debate over individual merit pay,” Weingarten said at the unveiling. “Respecting and understanding the importance of teamwork and collaboration is precisely why the UFT has opposed the idea of individual merit pay for teachers—especially when based solely on student test scores.

“This school-wide program recognizes

“New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg (right) has unveiled a new program designed to reward teachers who increase student achievement at high-needs schools.”

and builds upon a core philosophy that says students learn, achieve, and benefit most when all educators in a school collaborate to provide the best possible education,” Weingarten said.

Indiscriminate Awards
Though reform-oriented education analysts generally like the idea of merit pay for teachers, Sol Stern, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a New York City think tank, urges caution regarding Bloomberg’s program, noting it is unclear exactly how effective it would be.

“We in the school reform movement have to keep thinking about this,” Stern said of the program, which was unveiled on October 17. “This is not individual merit pay, and it could reward teachers that don’t do well. Whether it will have a cause-and-effect relationship with performance is not known.”

Teamwork ‘Critical’
While student performance and progress will be the key measures the Department of Education examines to determine school success and thus eligibility for bonuses, UFT will be consulted as well. At the school level, reward funding will not be distributed only to individual teachers who can be shown to have increased student achievement. Instead, a four-person committee, including two UFT members, will decide who gets the money. It can reward all teachers equally or distribute funding based on individual performance. The program has enough funding to provide eligible schools with $3,000 per UFT teacher.

“This school-wide plan generates the kind of spirit and partnership within the school community that make a school great,” Weingarten said.

Questionable Effectiveness
Klein and Bloomberg both said the new program would draw better teachers to more needy schools, creating a different market for teachers in the long run.

Stern is skeptical.

Philanthropy Watchdog Says Choice Donors Do More than Give Money

By Meredith Brodbeck

A report by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP) offers an inside look at the organizations funding school vouchers and tax credit efforts nationwide.

In “Strategic Grantmaking,” released November 27, author Rick Cohen identified more than 1,200 foundations that gave more than $380 million to 104 organizations advocating school vouchers and K-12 education tax credits between 2002 and 2005. NCRP is a watchdog group based in Washington, DC.

The Walton Family Foundation gave the most, donating $25 million in total grants to school choice groups in 2005 alone. The other top five givers for 2005 were the Lynde and Harry F. Bradley Foundation, Sarah Scaife Foundation, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and John Templeton Foundation.

Building a Movement
Foundations don’t merely write the checks that fund parental choice in education, the report noted.

“What impresses me the most about these school choice funders is their movement-building strategy,” said NCRP Executive Director Aaron Dorfman in a November 27 news release. “They’re targeted. They’re organized. They utilize effective grantmaking practices that other foundations can learn from to build more support for other issues they care about.”

Supporting Operations
In his report, Cohen identifies those strategies as:
• giving more unrestricted general operating support to grantees than most foundations usually do; by giving more

“A report by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy offers an inside look at the organizations funding school vouchers and tax credit efforts nationwide.”

than the federally mandated 5 percent of assets, these foundations ensure school choice advocacy groups get more money to use; and
• making personal contributions to can-

didates, political parties, nonprofit groups, and political action committees that support the parental choice movement.

Arizona, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin all have school choice programs in place. Efforts to create such programs are ongoing in other states.

Meredith Brodbeck (mbrodbeck@ncrp.org) is communications and development assistant at the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy in Washington, DC.

INTERNET INFO

What Works: Charter Schools Expect Kids to Learn, and They Do

By Leonard Pitts, Jr.

“Who you is?”

That’s how a student greeted me years ago in a Miami classroom. I waited to see how the teacher would respond to this insult against grammar, but she did the last thing I expected: She answered the question, as if it had been posed in English. So it makes an impression on me, standing in a classroom in North Carolina, when a student says “ain’t” and a teacher promptly and gently corrects him. It is a small difference, but on the basis of many small differences, Gaston College Preparatory (GCP) and KIPP Pride, a middle and high school side by side in a former peanut field, have carved out one big difference: They work.

Better Results

According to the state, 83.9 percent of GCP students are performing at or above grade level in math, versus a state average of 66.4. In English, the numbers are 87 percent to 72. KIPP Pride posts similarly impressive stats.

GCP and KIPP Pride really work, and Caleb Dolan, principal of GCP, wants you to know it isn’t because they use selective admission to cull the cream of the crop. As public charter schools, they take students on a first-come basis. Kids come here reading below grade level. Or not reading at all.

So what makes a difference is ... well, the differences: a longer school day and year; high expectations as a matter of policy; reintegration of sports, art, band, phys ed and other curricula that have disappeared from other schools; a culture of trust where students store their belongings in open lockers (if you are caught stealing, you must explain yourself to the entire school); Dolan says it’s a potent deterrent; higher teacher pay; a lack of red tape.

“I worked for a good principal,” says Dolan. “Strong disciplinarian, cared about the kids. She couldn’t hire who was in her building. That decision was made in some central office. She couldn’t get rid of the teacher who took naps. Versus, last year I fired my seventh-grade writing teacher because he didn’t get it done in the classroom.

There’s too little time to waste with a bad teacher.”

“[O]n the basis of many small differences, Gaston College Preparatory and KIPP Pride, a middle and high school side by side in a former peanut field, have carved out one big difference: They work.”

Better Method

A few years ago Dolan and Tammi Sutton, principal of KIPP Pride, were teachers dangling “quite honestly, at the end of our rope,” frustrated with the failings of ordinary schools. Dolan remembers working hard with one underachieving girl and seeing her blossom into “this dynamic student.”

“Then she’s pregnant by ninth grade.” He takes such failures personally, he says.

So he was primed to listen when he got a call from Mike Feinberg: “You guys want to start a school?” Specifically, a KIPP school.

Feinberg and his partner, Dave Levin, had been where Dolan was—frustrated teachers. Says Levin, “We kept asking ourselves, what more could we do? And one thing led to another.” In 1994, it led to KIPP (the Knowledge Is Power Program), now a network of 57 free charter schools serving 14,000 kids across 17 states and Washington, D.C.

Better Lives

None of whom, presumably, could get away with saying, “Who you is?” in front of a teacher. When that happens, it speaks eloquently to what that teacher sees in, and expects from, that child.

So consider Sherron Lynch, a seventh-grader who thought her mother was “crazy” when she enrolled her in GCP.

“I thought it was a regular school, just regular time and mean teachers. But it was so different. Some teachers ... [the] only reason they’re teaching is so they can get some money. But at GCP they care about the student’s education, and that really makes a difference.” Lynch’s reading scores have improved by 25 points in the last year.

That speaks eloquently, too.

Leonard Pitts, Jr. (lpitts@miamiherald.com) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for the Miami Herald, where this story originally appeared in November. Reprinted with permission.

School Administrators Under Fire for Protecting Female Modesty

By Ralph W. Conner

School administrators nationwide are in a quandary about how to deal with the new freak dancing—or “juking”—craze going on at high school dances and proms.

The Wall Street Journal devoted an article in mid-November to the way the issue is tearing apart the Dallas suburb of Argyle, Texas. And last September, Evanston Township High School in Illinois issued fliers before its homecoming dance admonishing students that “salacious and inappropriate dancing” was outlawed. At Naperville North High, also in the Chicago suburbs, the dance tickets outlawed “sexually explicit and front to back dancing.”

School principals have deemed juking to be “simulated sex,” and they worry about modern cultural norms that encourage young girls to compete for boys’ approval and acceptance with such self-demeaning behavior. They argue the hip-hop culture has scuttled chastity and female self-esteem in one cool swoop.

Harming Mental Health

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), over-sexualized images of young women are rampant in all forms of media today, and “pimp chic” culture is harmful to girls’ mental and physical health, sexual development, body image, and scholastic achievement.

The late Dame Anita Lucia Rodrick—founder of the Body Shop cosmetic company in England and a social activist in her own right—excoriated female entertainers who serve as role models for America’s youth for capitulating to mainstream culture’s pimp chic. She cautioned consumers about the effects of marketing “sharp-suited men with scowls, skimpily clad women looking up to them with awe, flashy cars, and lots of bling-bling” to impressionable kids.

“School administrators nationwide are in a quandary about how to deal with the new freak dancing—or ‘juking’—craze going on at high school dances and proms.”

In Argyle, parents’ opinions are split between those who vociferously oppose juke dancing in schools and those who evoke a more permissive stance that minimizes the “youthful indiscretions” of dirty dancing. Some parents even say school administrators are persecuting jukers for what the parents consider
Defining Safety Down

By Matthew Carr, Nathan Gray, and Marc Holley

It’s hard to believe, but roughly 580,000 violent student-on-student crimes and 407,000 violent student-on-teacher crimes took place in America’s public schools in the 2005-06 school year, according to a federal report.

It’s even harder to believe that fewer than 50 of America’s 90,000 public schools were labeled “persistently dangerous” that year. Officially, the schools in Boston, Detroit, Los Angeles, Miami, St. Louis, Washington, DC, etc.—the list of major city school systems could go on—are all either safe or, at the very least, only sporadically dangerous.

A little-known provision of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law allows students in schools that have been designated as “persistently dangerous” to transfer to another public school in the same district, or a charter school. The catch of the Unsafe School Choice Option, however, is that each state has been allowed to define for itself what a “chronically unsafe” school is. As a result, only six states reported having even one dangerous school in the 2005-06 school year.

Either schools aren’t reporting the incidents that occur, or the states have set the threshold for being labeled “persistently dangerous” so high that even a school located in a war zone would have a hard time reaching it.

Impossible Standards

In South Carolina, for example, to get that label a school must have two or more of the following crimes occur for three consecutive years: homicide, forcible sex offense, kidnapping, aggravated assault, robbery, or weapons violations.

In Michigan 2.5 percent of the total number of students must be expelled or suspended for more than 10 days, or 2.5 percent of students must have been victims of violent criminal offenses for three consecutive years, for a school to be labeled “persistently dangerous.”

By that definition, a school of 2,000 students having one sexual assault on campus every week for three years in a row doesn’t rate as “persistently dangerous.” It’s not surprising, then, that not a single school in the state received the label.

The reason states have created these blatantly absurd standards is to protect schools from losing students under the Unsafe School Choice Option. By setting the bar so high, states are preventing parents from exercising their right to transfer their children to safer public schools.

Protecting Schools, Not Students

Favoring schools over students is symptomatic of the larger crisis facing public education today. Public officials are protecting schools from sanctions when they ought to be protecting children from harm—bowing to pressure from school districts that can’t afford to lose more students and the funds that go with them.

These state definitions of dangerous schools may be within the letter of the law, but they clearly violate its spirit. Analyzing the situation, the Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Advisory Committee—an advisory group created by NCLB within the U.S. Department of Education—offered two recommendations in December 2006 for correcting the situation.

The group recommended that state benchmarks for determining dangerous schools should take into consideration factors beyond violent crimes, such as drug use and bullying. It also said the U.S. Department of Education should take charge of the matter and set specific, uniform criteria for determining dangerous schools.

State Control

In creating the NCLB provision allowing parents to choose safe schools for their children, lawmakers were correct to avoid being overly prescriptive in dictating to states how they should run their schools.

In principle, this federalist approach is an improvement over past policies, but in practice Congress has left too much discretion in the case of the Unsafe School Choice Option. As a result, states and districts have failed to protect students.

While there are programs and resources that can be directed to reduce the violence that occurs in our public schools, in the meantime the very least we can do is ensure students can transfer to safer schools.

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acceptable self-expression.

But teen pregnancy is a huge problem in Texas. According to the Department of State Health Services, one of every 11 18-year-old girls in Texas becomes pregnant, as do one of every 16 17-year-olds, one of every 27 16-year-olds, and one of every 58 15-year-olds.

Confused Parents

Black parents are clearly divided over the issue. Some get angry when “uptight” school administrators tell them their daughters’ sexually revealing prom dresses are unacceptable, or they complain about their sons being suspended for juking a girl’s rear end, and they applaud when other students encircle the kids to hide the “act” from the school’s “dance police.”

Other parents, outraged, are now homeschooling their adolescents or sending them to same-sex parochial schools as a way out of the social morass. It’s up to parents to decide what’s acceptable behavior for their children—and who should enforce it.

Real Values

Part of the problem here is the decline of academic standards. Student achievement and parental involvement are less important to some government school systems than socialization, and that means accepting highly dubious behavior in order to give students a chance to define a set of social mores in which they can feel comfortable.

As a result, rappers such as 50 Cent hold more sway with students than the civil rights icons of the 1960s, who extolled academic excellence as a way to elevate all Americans in a free-market economy.

“[I]t’s up to parents to teach their children the lasting values of self-esteem and self-respect ... But the schools certainly shouldn’t work against the process, especially while taking people’s tax money.”

This tag-team effort causes many parents to stand on the sidelines as another generation of girls is led to believe their self-esteem can be augmented by accepting their own degradation as normal. Those who disagree have to pull their children out of the public schools—while still paying taxes to support the institutions that are contributing to social decay.

Ultimately, of course, it’s up to parents to teach their children the lasting values of self-esteem and self-respect, while accentuating academic excellence as the path to the wonderful opportunities available to everyone not named Beyoncé or Britney.

But the schools certainly shouldn’t work against the process, especially while taking people’s tax money.

After all, these children are worth substantially more than the 50 Cent culture in which they are mired.

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Mainstream Media Misleads Readers on School Choice Study

By Robert Holland

A report titled “Fixing Milwaukee Public Schools: The Limits of Parent-Driven Reform,” released by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute (WPRI) on October 23, shows why readers should do more than glance at newspaper headlines to gather the gist of the day’s news.

This was the headline on the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel’s front-page story about the report: “Choice may not improve schools, study says/Report on MPS comes from longtime supporter of plan.”

Because Milwaukee is home to the nation’s largest program of publicly financed vouchers enabling parents to choose private schools for their children, the headline implied a study by an organizational supporter of choice had questioned vouchers’ effectiveness.

False Attribution

In fact, the 14-page study did not examine the voucher program at all. Nor did it look in Milwaukee’s pioneering voucher program, which began in 1990. The article went on to review the newspaper’s own investigative report, published in 2005, that alleged about 10 percent of schools in the voucher program exhibited signs of “weak operations.” It then cited other criticisms of vouchers.

The clear insinuation was that the new study by WPRI was all about vouchers, known as the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program.

Forthcoming Analysis

Not until the 12th paragraph did the Journal Sentinel report that the WPRI study exclusively examined parental choice among regular public schools—specifically, parents who select public schools within MPS or in the suburbs under Wisconsin’s open-enrollment law.

“It does not discuss parents who select private schools in the publicly funded voucher program or charter schools not affiliated with MPS,” the article stated at that late point. A reader never would have guessed that from the headline and first 11 paragraphs.

George Lightbourn, a WPRI senior fellow, wrote a guest column for The Capital Times of Madison on November 2 pointing out the Journal Sentinel headline “not only misrepresented the study [but also] energized those who are dying to go back to the days when parents were forced to send their children to whichever MPS school the educrats thought best.”

Lightbourn emphasized, “school choice is working” and WPRI continues to support it.

Careful Readers

In an October 25 statement, Susan Mitchell, president of School Choice Wisconsin, pointed out the Journal Sentinel article itself, not just the headline, was “highly misleading. ... The Journal Sentinel article does not address how a study that excludes major choice programs can reach definitive conclusions about the impact of choice.”

A final lesson for discerning readers is that they should not only read newspaper stories to the final paragraph, but they also should get a copy of the study being reported (usually found online) and read it in its entirety, not just the executive summary—or listen to organizations and individuals that have done so. They should pay particular attention to methodology.

In the flawed WPRI study, researcher David Dodenhoff attempted to estimate how extensive public school choice and parental involvement are within MPS. He drew from U.S. Department of Education and Census Bureau data on family and community involvement, and extrapolated to Milwaukee, relying in particular on the demographics of MPS. The district has a higher proportion of minority, single-parent, and low-income families than the national average.

Dodenhoff observed, “disadvantaged parents may not have the time, energy, information, understanding, or confidence to become active, effective public-school consumers.”

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INTERNET INFO


Teachers Union, Superintendent Demand Court Close Virtual School

By Michael D. Dean

Representat students and parents who are defendants in Johnson v. Burmaster, an ongoing, bellwether case, filed in 2004, that will determine whether nineteenth-century concepts of teacher certification will stifle twenty-first century individualized instruction.

The plaintiff is the 98,000-member Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC). In addition, Elizabeth Burmaster, superintendent of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI), is asking courts to close Wisconsin Virtual Academy (WIVA), a virtual charter school created by the Northern Ozaukee School District (NOSD) in 2003.

NOSD employs WIVA administrators and state-certified teachers and provides curricula and virtual technology through a contract with K-12, Inc., the nation’s largest provider of virtual education.

WIVA enrolls more than 700 students statewide. Parents provide or monitor most instruction at home. WIVA teachers structure individualized programs and provide instruction directly to students through monthly virtual classes and periodic group activities. They also teach most instruction at home. WIVA teaches virtual education.

Despite claiming it represented the interests of “all Wisconsin schoolchildren,” WEAC argued they and their families had no legal interest in deciding whether their own school remained open.

In the trial court, WEAC and DPI argued WIVA teachers provided direct “synchronous instruction” to students less than 10 percent of the school day, compared with more than 90 percent by parents. I argued their point was irrelevant since it can’t possibly be illegal for parents to teach their own children too much.

Creating Issues

Instead, I argued, teacher certification should be a floor defining what teachers must do, not a ceiling defining what parents may not.

Any other view is absurd. Assistant State Superintendent Tony Evers admitted Wisconsin has no standard school day. Evers also admitted Wisconsin has no standards for synchronous instruction.

DPI has no data on synchronous instruction in conventional schools, has never performed or commissioned studies on the issue, and doesn’t know of anyone who has. The only information about synchronous instruction Evers could think of came from newspaper articles complaining there isn’t enough of it.

In fact, since the superintendent’s office was created in 1848, synchronous instruction was apparently of no concern at all until 2004, when WEAC and DPI decided it would be a useful argument for shutting down WIVA.

Redefining Teaching

WEAC and DPI proposed a broad definition of “teaching” so they could argue virtually anything WIVA parents do is “uncertified.”

Evers admitted under that definition most instruction in conventional schools isn’t written or delivered by certified teachers, either. Students learn directly from textbooks, workbooks, learning programs, computer-based instruction, educational films and videos, science experiments, independent projects, group learning, school-to-work employers, and the Internet—all without “synchronous instruction” by a certified teacher.

In fact, Evers acknowledged much of a conventional teacher’s day is just managing and processing large classes—not “teaching” at all.

Maintaining Employment, Control

Since the certification statute predated the Internet and is ambiguous at best when applied to virtual schools, we argued school boards should have discretion in the matter. The trial court agreed.

WEAC and DPI appealed. Now they claim instruction by “uncertified persons” is OK in conventional schools because it’s delivered under the supervision of certified teachers. Yet Evers admitted certified teachers could provide “virtual” supervision, and the actual time WIVA teachers spend working directly with parents and individual students is greater than in conventional schools.

During oral argument in the court of appeals, WEAC and DPI acknowledged WIVA students are performing satisfactorily, but said student achievement isn’t relevant. Instead, they claimed WIVA operates illegally because “untrained, unqualified, and inexperienced” parents can’t recognize “teachable moments.”

They then asked the court of appeals to reverse the trial court and order it to shut WIVA down.

This case isn’t about education at all—it’s about union employment and control. Burmaster appointed an expert study committee, which included experts from her own department. It recommended guidelines under which WIVA’s operation would be perfectly acceptable. But over the past four years Burmaster has refused to submit the committee’s recommendation to the legislative rules process. Instead she continues asking the courts to write regulations more to WEAC’s liking.

Delaying Decisions

At the beginning of the appellate process, the court of appeals certified the case to the Wisconsin Supreme Court because it presents a novel question with statewide impact. WEAC opposed certification, arguing this “is not simply a case where the facts make it a hard case to apply the law; it is a situation where the law was never intended to be applied.”

So why are WEAC and DPI asking the courts to apply the certification statute, which even WEAC agrees provides no guidance? The answer is: They don’t want guidance from the courts, they want delay. As WEAC brazenly argued, “the Supreme Court might be able to avoid making a decision in a politically charged matter and for which there may be no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ legal answers.”

The state supreme court can’t possibly hear the case and issue a decision before the 2008 elections, when WEAC believes it can bring the legislature under Democratic control—which they believe will give the superintendent and WEAC the administrative rules they want instead of those the expert committee recommended.

Michael Dean (mikedean@execpc.com) is general counsel of First Freedoms Foundation, Inc., a law firm in Waukesha, Wisconsin.
North Carolina Program Allows Students to Combine High School and College Coursework

By Richard G. Neal

In an effort to reduce education costs and expand opportunities for students, North Carolina has introduced Learn and Earn, a program allowing students to earn a high school diploma and an associate of arts degree in five years.

Learn and Earn is unique because it allows students to jumpstart their college educations or gain high-level career skills without the burden of tuition fees. Currently, 41 high schools statewide are using Learn and Earn, a number that will swell to 70 by this autumn.

Open Opportunity

Most states' early-entrance models for college are open only to gifted students who have outgrown their regular high schools, but North Carolina's program is aimed at a broad spectrum of able students—even those who might be the first in their family to graduate from high school and don’t see college in their future.

Qualified students in participating public high schools can take a variety of on-campus and online college-credit courses at no cost. Students can earn both high school and college credit for completed courses.

Access to the courses is provided during the regular school day, and an online facilitator assists students in the classroom. The state’s charter schools are eligible to participate in the program.

No Threat

Learn and Earn enjoys a special advantage that may make it attractive to other states. The education bureaucracy and teacher unions historically resist any meaningful education choice. However, Learn and Earn can be incorporated easily into the existing bureaucracy with minimal threat and disruption.

Also, there is little in the program that teacher unions can object to with a clear conscience. Whereas the unions claim—wrongly—that vouchers rob public schools of needed funds and encourage the best students to leave, Learn and Earn does not involve transferring public funds to parents, and it keeps students within the public school and public community college framework.

Those facts are no guarantee, of course, that teacher unions in highly unionized states will not find some way to claim such a program violates their “rights” to taxpayers’ money.

“In an effort to reduce education costs and expand opportunities for students, North Carolina has introduced Learn and Earn, a program allowing students to earn a high school diploma and an associate of arts degree in five years.”

International Competition

Learn and Earn's success is critical to North Carolina's economic welfare. Over the past 10 years, virtually every county statewide has felt the impact of global competition. In the past, the state’s economy was based on a three-legged stool of textiles, furniture production, and agriculture. The textile and furniture industries are practically gone now, and the remaining market cannot accommodate no-skill or low-skill jobs.

The state has decided only a highly skilled workforce, especially in industries where innovation and creativity are involved, can improve its plight. Learn and Earn is designed to help fill this need.

North Carolina is already attracting some of those industries, with biotechnology in Research Triangle Park near Raleigh and banking and information-technology centers in other parts of the state. The hope is that Learn and Earn graduates will stay in North Carolina and fill positions in these expanding industries.

Acceleration Advantages

For students, part of the program's appeal is that they are treated like adults, and in their college courses they get to mix with students of all ages—especially when taking classes on community college campuses.

As director of a large adult education program and a teacher at the community-college level, I have observed this benefit firsthand since Learn and Earn was first established at the beginning of this school year.

In January 2007, Lewis M. Andrews, executive director of the Yankee Institute for Public Policy in Connecticut, published a paper, “Free College for High School Students,” proposing a program similar to North Carolina’s. The main difference is that his program would offer free tuition to any state community college for students who graduate from high school in three years.

According to Andrews, there are many advantages to such programs: They improve the overall quality of public education; they reduce state and local taxes; they lower the need for costly school construction; able students are more engaged with their education and less bored; and the programs make college more affordable and accessible.

Student Bonus

For many, the local community college is the best higher education bargain available. It is conveniently accessible, and although it is inexpensive, it offers high-quality courses.

But there is another advantage of community colleges, and high school students are usually unaware of it. As a college counselor years ago, I learned that many four-year colleges might reject a high school graduate, only to accept him or her after two years of community college coursework.

Four-year colleges do this for two basic reasons: To satisfy themselves that the student has proven his or her worth, and because the dropout rate is so high among most four-year colleges that they welcome graduates from community colleges to help bolster their dwindling customer base at the junior- and senior-level classes.

Richard G. Neal (rneal@triad.rr.com) writes from North Carolina.

INTERNET INFO


A Clear Overview of Current Education Issues

Review by Bailey Quinonez

Attention to education has continued to increase in recent months due to debate over the impending renewal of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The number of books and studies being released also continues to rise. Lois Stovall Williams picked an appropriate time to release Wisdom Is Better Than Strength.

Williams has followed the path less-traveled with this book. It provides a different approach to the topic of school choice, one that is more personable. In only 147 pages, Williams provides a clear overview of the many problems with education today. She analyzes many aspects of education—such as dropout rates, teacher certification, homeschooling, and parental involvement.

Call to Action

Williams calls for all Americans to take notice of the failing education system and the faltering programs that have been created to improve it. The book addresses, if only briefly, a variety of issues in education. Williams stresses the importance of pre-kindergarten education in laying the foundation for a good future. She also notes it is important for parents to be involved in their children’s education.

One of NCLB’s major flaws, Williams notes, is the inability to establish the same standards of performance nationwide. The program that was meant to establish accountability and improve standards across the nation has yet to find a way of successfully creating a national standard. This, Williams says, undermines the proficiency standards in every state, thus making it difficult for others to gauge performance from one to another.

Curbing Dropouts

Williams devotes a good portion of her book to dropouts. Students leave school for many reasons, she notes, ranging from simply not liking it to racism, getting married, or becoming parents. But outside factors aren’t the only reasons kids drop out—schools’ failure to provide basic needs such as textbooks or challenging curricula also play a role.

Schools have a responsibility to keep students in, Williams says, and she provides examples of programs that could be implemented to cut dropout rates.

Offering Alternatives

Some public school diehards question the ability of homeschooling to provide a quality of education the same as, or better than, public schools. To address this issue, Williams discusses teacher qualifications, noting research has proven a “hands-on” education can at times be more beneficial for students than a teacher simply having a bachelor’s degree in education—and therefore, homeschooling can in fact improve a student’s education.

Williams also notes dropouts are more likely to end up in prison than are kids who stay in school. Therefore, she suggests, education reform is a viable avenue to reducing crime and prison overcrowding.

“Although [Wisdom Is Better Than Strength] does not present a large amount of empirical data, it appears its main purpose is to cause people to further question the system and investigate problems with education. That’s a laudable goal.”

Although this book does not present a large amount of empirical data, it appears its main purpose is to cause people to further question the system and investigate problems with education. That’s a laudable goal.

Bailey Quinonez (bailey85@gmail.com) writes from Maryland.

Wisdom Is Better Than Strength: An intimate discussion of the erosion of education in America
by Lois Stovall Williams, Ph.D.
Baltimore: Publish America, 2007
147 pages, paperback, ISBN 1-4241-7758-8

There’s more to directions than EAST and WEST.
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How do you stand on PERSONAL issues?

• Government should not censor speech, press, media or internet.
  ➢ A
  ➢ M
  ➢ D

• 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

• 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.
  ➢ 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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