Crist Celebrates Florida Scholarship Program

By Jillian Metz

Denisha Merriweather is one of 22,000 students receiving K-12 scholarships to attend the school of her parents’ choice in Florida this year—and she has a compelling story. The progress she has made as a junior has impressed even Gov. Charlie Crist (R).

“Denisha is a young woman who has found a new spark in her life,” Crist said at a school choice rally in Jacksonville. “She has turned around her school career because she found a school that connected with her. God bless her.”

Impressive Turnaround

Before receiving a scholarship through the state’s corporate tax credit program five years ago, Merriweather failed third grade—twice. She missed school repeatedly, recorded Ds and Fs in her classes, and found herself in verbal conflicts and physical fights with other students.

Now she is an honor roll student at Esprit de Corps Center for Learning in Jacksonville with a 3.8 grade point average. She spends her free time volunteering for the Police Athletic League and is the statewide vice FLORIDA p. 13

At a school choice rally in Jacksonville, Florida Gov. Charlie Crist praised the students, parents, and donors participating in the Step Up For Students scholarship program.

Arizona Supreme Court Hears School Choice Arguments

By Jim Waters

More than 200 parents and their special-needs children showed up outside the Arizona Supreme Court on December 9, carrying signs and chanting “school choice works!”

Inside the courtroom, attorneys rep- ARIZONA p. 5
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Duncan Nomination Wins Broad Bipartisan Support

By Lindsey Burke

When President-elect Barack Obama appointed Arne Duncan for U.S. Secretary of Education in December, analysts from both sides of the aisle recognized the move as a compromise among various factions in the education community and applauded the appointee’s reputation for innovation and reform.

According to The Wall Street Journal, the former Chicago Public Schools CEO “has straddled two competing factions of the education community: the teachers unions, who push for more funding and smaller classes, and a movement that favors accountability and free-market-style incentives and looks to hold schools and teachers more accountable for student performance.”

Similarly, The New York Times deemed Duncan “a compromise choice in the debate that has divided Democrats in recent months over the proper course for public school policy after the Bush years.”

Some Differences

The school reform community applauded Duncan’s support for charter schools, public school choice, and increased state flexibility and autonomy. Duncan is also on record as supporting merit pay for teachers and administrators, a position that has earned only lukewarm support from the president-elect.

Obama’s campaign promises centered on modernizing schools, universal government-supported preschool, government higher education tuition assistance, increased teacher pay, and more charter schools.

His call for increased teacher pay was for a limited approach—only within the confines of rewarding teacher mentors, those working in rural and inner-city schools, and teachers excelling in the classroom. He staunchly opposes tax credit and voucher scholarships.

“Arne Duncan has not come out in favor of giving all parents an easy choice between public and private schools, which is the only reform capable of achieving the results that he, the president-elect, and American families seek,” Coulson said. “Duncan may have shown himself inventive and hardworking with his ‘within the box’ public school tinkering in Chicago, but when you’re working in a creaking, dilapidated government monopoly, ‘within the box’ tweaks just aren’t good enough.

“If education is ever going to witness the stunning progress we’ve seen in other fields over the past hundred years, we’re going to have to organize it the same way we organize the rest of our economy, as a free, parent-driven marketplace,” Coulson continued.

Charter Champion

Don Soifer, executive vice president of the Lexington Institute, a research group in Virginia, was likewiseguardedly optimistic.

“During Duncan’s seven years leading CPS, some exciting innovations moved forward, and there were some measurable indications of academic progress district-wide. But he also presided over some of the nation’s least effective bilingual education programs, and more than a third of Latinos aged 16-24 were high school dropouts,” Soifer noted.

But Soifer also noted “his appointment is good news for charter schools—there are some truly exciting things happening in Chicago charters.”

Loud Applause

Other members of the education policy community applauded the president’s choice.

Michael Petrilli, vice president for national programs and policy at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute in Virginia, called Duncan “a great pick for the school reform community. He’s a huge fan of charter schools, a supporter of merit pay, and appreciates the challenges that inner-city Catholic schools are facing. He’s been diplomatic in his reform efforts but isn’t afraid to shake things up. Now what’s important is that his deputies are equally committed to education reform and not afraid to break with the defenders of the status quo.”

The direction the Obama administration and Duncan choose to take will be evident shortly, with the unveiling of the FY 2010 budget, expected in February. It will provide parents and taxpayers a clear picture of the new administration’s plans for education policy, analysts say.

Lindsey Burke (lindsey.burke@heritage.org) is a research assistant in domestic policy studies at The Heritage Foundation in Washington, DC.
Democrats Press Obama for School Choice Options

By Ben DeGrow

With a new administration in the White House, Democrats who favor major changes to the nation’s education system say the opportunity for a breakthrough has come.

Since the election of Barack Obama to the presidency, the national advocacy group Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) has stepped up its efforts to promote public charter schools. Last December, an online petition urged the new president to consider enrolling his two daughters in a Washington, DC charter school and to “join us in fighting for parental choice so that every child in America has the kind of opportunities they deserve.”

Charter Support

Although the Obamas eventually chose for their two daughters an exclusive private school—Sidwell Friends, Chelsea Clinton’s alma mater—DFER Executive Director Joe Williams expects increased support for charter schools from Congress and the White House. Charter schools are independently operated and publicly funded schools subject to the same testing requirements and non-selective policies as other public schools.

Continuation of the Washington, DC Opportunity Scholarship Program, which provides scholarships for more than 1,700 poor students in the nation’s capital to attend a private school of their choice, is much less certain.

Williams said reauthorization may be tied to larger issues of education funding. “No decision has been made yet” concerning DFER’s stance on the Opportunity Scholarship Program, he said at press time.

Feather in the Cap

DFER won its first victory from Obama before the new president was sworn in. In an official “education transition memo” sent to the president-elect on November 11, the group championed Chicago Public Schools CEO Arne Duncan for the position of education secretary. Obama offered Duncan the position a month later.

“That’s a great feather in DFER’s cap—no doubt,” said Robert Enlow, president of the Indianapolis-based Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, a leading supporter of expansive school choice reforms.

DFER’s memo noted Duncan, a personal friend and basketball buddy of the new president, would have a good chance of reform success at the national level because his style was less “confrontational” than others.

Williams applauded the “tag-team” efforts of mayors and superintendents in Chicago, New York City, and Washington, DC, “especially the emphasis they’ve put on choice for parents,” he said.

Changing the Debate

The Democratic Party has traditionally adhered closely to the interests of its teacher union backers, but Williams believes the time is ripe for the party to press for school reform.

“The ground is fertile on the Democratic side for these debates. This had been the place where debates were shut down, but the environment has changed.”

JOE WILLIAMS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
DEMOCRATS FOR EDUCATION REFORM

Cooperation Essential

DFER’s executive leader believes Obama’s breakthrough might come in the area of teacher compensation.

“There’s an opportunity for him to find a way to merit pay experiments that recognize some teachers do a better job than others,” Williams said.

In pursuing merit pay, school choice, and other reforms, Williams believes it will be vital to garner support from Congressional Republicans.

“I can’t imagine any of this getting done without a bipartisan coalition,” Williams said.

Enlow notes cooperation is also essential among Friedman, DFER, and other groups sharing many common education reform goals.

“This is about developing partnerships that last and are meaningful, and that will be important for moving school choice forward,” Enlow said.

Ben DeGrow (ben@21L.org) is a policy analyst for the Independence Institute, a free-market think tank in Golden, Colorado.
Arizona Supreme Court Hears School Choice Arguments

Continued from page 1

representing those families argued offering publicly funded scholarships to allow learning-disabled and foster children to attend private schools is not only constitutional but in fact is already being done by Arizona’s public education system.

“What is going on here is allowing parents to purchase educational services for their children in the same manner that public school districts are permitted to do every day for children with disabilities,” said Tim Keller, executive director of Arizona’s chapter of the Institute for Justice, a civil liberties law firm.

Educational Benefits
One of Keller’s clients, Andrea Weck, is a divorced single mother of three daughters, including twins. One of the twins—7-year-old Lexi—suffers from autism, cerebral palsy, and mild retardation.

Weck said she “wanted to cry” when a state appellate court ruled last May the scholarship program she uses to send Lexi to a private school is unconstitutional. The scholarships had allowed Lexi to benefit from the education and services provided by Chrysalis Academy, a private school in Tempe, which has one teacher for every two students.

In a videotaped interview conducted by the Institute for Justice, Weck said her daughter has “made enormous strides” during her two years at Chrysalis.

“Lexi actually sits and reads with her sisters—something she never did before,” Weck said. “She wants to be where we are—she doesn’t want to be in her room. Now, she’s part of a family. She never would have learned these skills in the public schools.”

Schools Insist on Control
Weck said her daughter’s educational future is now in question simply because she, and not the public education system, decided Lexi needed to attend Chrysalis Academy. By contrast, she said, the “dozen or so kids who are assigned there by public school officials are not in jeopardy.”

Opponents of the $5 million scholarship programs benefiting Weck and about 400 other Arizona students this year argue the scholarships violate Article 9, Section 10 of the state’s constitution, which forbids appropriating public money “in aid of any church or private or sectarian school, or any public service corporation,” commonly known as a Blaine amendment. Several states have such amendments in their constitutions.

Arizona’s amendment is meant to “ensure that citizens are not taxed to support the propagation of religious views they don’t agree with,” said attorney Don Peters, who represented groups opposed to the scholarship programs, including People for the American Way, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the state teachers union.

Peters argued justices should consider “who [legislators] have given aid to, and for what purpose.” The scholarships aid parents in providing their children with needed educational services, not propagating religion, he said.

“No Other Masters”

Peters argued that while the voucher program is unacceptable, it’s not unconstitutional for public schools to send children, and tax dollars, to private schools for the very same reason Weck enrolled her daughter at Chrysalis with funding she controlled.

Justices vigorously questioned both sides and offered indications they might be looking for ways to direct the legislature to a compromise.

Justice Andrew Hurwitz, for example, asked Peters whether the legislature would be violating the constitution by continuing to send the ADM (Average Daily Membership monies, the basic amount of funding allotted to each school for each student) funds to the school where these special-needs and foster children started out, but offering an additional $5,000 for the same program.

Peters said that would be an unacceptable compromise.

“Under the Arizona Constitution, the legislature is charged with both maintaining and improving the public school system,” Peters told justices. “And I think the intent of the whole document is, this is your vehicle for publicly funded education and thou shalt have no other masters—this is what you will serve.”


“What is going on here is allowing parents to purchase educational services for their children in the same manner that public school districts are permitted to do every day for children with disabilities.”

TIM KELLER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
ARIZONA CHAPTER
INSTITUTE FOR JUSTICE

Local Reactions

Keller said he believes the greater burden of proof was on the plaintiffs to demonstrate how the current law is unconstitutional.

Some analysts say the dispute was exacerbated by the public education system’s decision to direct some special-needs children and funding to private schools.

“If there had been no public money ever going to private and parochial schools through the contracts, I think this would be a slam dunk to say, ‘This is illegal, what you’re trying to do with the parents,’” said Howard Fischer, a reporter for Capitol Media Services, on the Arizona TV public affairs program Horizon on December 10.

The East Valley Tribune, a local newspaper, supported the voucher programs and called the case “a pivotal issue in the movement to create a truly robust K-12 education system that enables parents to select the best possible choice for their children, whether a school is government-sponsored or privately owned.”

Wide Implications

If the justices deem the Arizona Scholarships Program unconstitutional, that ruling could affect a multitude of other programs, including taxpayer-funded college scholarships used to attend private schools.

Keller expects a ruling before the beginning of the 2009-10 school year, which would allow parents to adjust their plans accordingly.

Fischer expects the losing side to mount a ballot initiative. Keller said any attempt to violate parents’ First Amendment rights by excluding religious schools from the Arizona Scholarship Program could trigger an appeal to the United States Supreme Court.

Jim Waters (jwaters@freedomkentucky.com) is director of policy and communications at the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

INTERNET INFO

Cain v. Horne (Supreme Court case CV 08-0189 PR; Court of Appeals case 2 CA-CV 07-0143): http://az.findacase.com/research/wfrmDocViewer.aspx?xq/fac.%5CAZ%5C2008%5C20080515_0000273.AZ.htm&qx


Arkansas Families Fight in Court for School Choice

By Ben DeGrow

Dismayed by failing local public schools in which their children are trapped by state law, Arkansas families are fighting for the right to cross school district boundaries.

The precedent set by a 2007 U.S. Supreme Court decision may help them succeed regardless of whether the state legislature decides to act on the issue.

A federal judge in December granted a hearing to parents who brought a lawsuit to stop their children from being compelled to attend the struggling Malvern School District in central Arkansas. At stake are thousands of dollars in tax revenues and the fate of the state’s School Choice Act of 1989. The district receives about $5,700 in tax revenues for each student enrolled.

A key provision of the legislation limits students’ ability to transfer to a public school district outside their area of residence if doing so would increase racial segregation. Malvern’s 35 percent minority student population is greater than in all the surrounding districts, essentially eliminating the ability of white parents living in the district to choose a different public school for their children.

Malvern, P.I.
To enforce its policy, Malvern School District has hired private investigators to track down local students attending school elsewhere and force them back into the local schools.

“They are left without an option,” said Andi Davis, the attorney representing the parents in the federal lawsuit.

Dan Bufford, who represents the Malvern School District, refused comment.

“Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District
ruled in 2007 that school districts cannot use race as a factor in assigning students to schools.

“The meat and potatoes of the case is good,” Davis said. “I feel confident the judge is going to rule in our favor.”

State Rep. Mike Burris (D-Malvern) disagreed, saying the facts vary too much among different families to make a blanket judgment.

“This is one of those situations where there just isn’t a clear-cut answer, because each case has its own uniqueness,” Burris said.

Seeking Satisfaction
Davis said she hopes the state legislature will amend the School Choice Act to comply with the Seattle decision, but she says the parents pressing the case will seek satisfaction either way.

“We will eventually be heard, or the law will be changed,” said Davis. She said the 1989 school choice law “makes it perfectly clear why they want parents to send students to the school of their choice—schools will become more competitive. Just because of their race and the district they’re in, they shouldn’t be knocked out of the opportunity of being able to choose.”

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

Arkansas law prohibits students from crossing district borders to enroll in other schools.
Florida Mandates Virtual Schooling Funds

By Jillian Melchior

Opening up another education option, an innovative new law will take effect in Florida in the fall, requiring all of the state’s school districts to offer online K-8 schools.

“We want to empower parents to get involved in their children’s education,” said Sonia Esposito, director of school choice at the Osceola County School District. “[Online school] is just another opportunity, another choice for parents.”

“We want to empower parents to get involved in their children’s education. [Online school] is just another opportunity, another choice for parents.”

SONIA ESPOSITO
DIRECTOR OF SCHOOL CHOICE
OSCEOLA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Though several other states also have virtual educations programs, Esposito said, Florida has become a leader in providing them broadly and innovatively.

The new law is part of a larger legislative effort to give Florida families school choice, said former state Rep. Joe Pickens (R-Palatka), erstwhile chair of the state House of Representatives Schools and Learning Council, which produced the bill last spring.

The idea began in the late 1990s as a pilot program, funded newly each year and able to accommodate only a small number of students. The children’s scores on Florida’s standardized tests proved the pilot online schools were as successful as the traditional schools, Pickens said.

Stable Funding

Pickens said the new law makes three changes to the original pilot program. It makes the funding less limited, allows school districts to create their own online curricula or collaborate with an outside vendor, and lets school districts receive a portion of the per-student funding.

When lawmakers saw the success of the pilot online schools and parents’ demand for them, Pickens said, they decided to move it to a more stable funding formula that would incorporate the program into the state budget.

The new law also gives school districts more authority over the programs’ curricula. Esposito said the districts can either develop their own curriculum or contract out, tailoring a program that meets students’ needs and teaches them in accordance with the state’s benchmarks and standards.

“It’s just like another public school, except that it’s online,” Esposito said.

Balancing Interests

Pickens said the new authority allows larger, more sophisticated districts to take on the involvement they may desire without keeping the smaller ones from contracting with online curriculum vendors.

Finally, and perhaps most important, Pickens said, the new law lets the money follow the student. Before, districts missed out on the funding when a student opted to take classes online.

While some costs were saved, typically there weren’t enough students attending online schools for the districts to eliminate a bus route, a building, or even a teacher—and in some cases, before the new law passed, districts reported they actually lost money on children attending online schools.

“You balance the districts’ interest, if it is valid, with creating educational opportunities,” Pickens said. “We’ve done something very, very forward-thinking.”

Happy Parents

Under the new system, the school districts will get the funding, and if they can provide the online education without spending the full sum allotted for each student, they can keep the money and reinvest it in the bricks-and-mortar schools.

The online schools give parents another choice, Pickens said.

“I think it’s better for both kids and parents,” Pickens said. “Some of the testimony and communication I had from parents and from students who had availed themselves of the program was pretty powerful. [We] give children more public education options than the traditional bricks-and-mortar school.”

Esposito said the online education program has given Florida a good reputation on the subject.

“Every state is different, but I know that many states look at Florida to see the innovative things that we are doing out here,” Esposito said.
New Texas School Provides Innovative Alternative

By Phillip J. Britt

Unhappy with the education his son was receiving in a public school and turned off by the academics of some private schools and the cost of others, a Texas entrepreneur has launched a private school that incorporates individualized learning and new technology to give Plano students an alternative.

Three years ago Randall Reiners’ eight-year-old son was bored with the education at his previous school—a common problem with traditional education today, Reiners says, because the federal No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to concentrate on the weakest students and neglect the most capable.

So last September he started Yorktown Education, a school for students between the ages of 11 and 18.

“Education is aimed at the lowest common denominator,” Reiners said. “Schools are rated based on how they do with the worst student, not on how they work with average or above-average students. Private schools were teaching the same things in the same ways.”

Poor U.S. Performance

Reiners—an entrepreneur and the school’s chairman and CEO—says most students in schools nationwide are performing about one grade level below where they belong. The country as a whole ranks 28th out of 40 industrialized nations, according to the Program for International Student Assessment, a triennial survey of the knowledge and skills of 15-year-olds, developed by the participating countries and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Reiners spent a little more than two years studying the education industry before launching Yorktown Education. Plans are underway to add a lower-level program for students from ages 5 through 10 by next September.

Nontraditional Approach

Yorktown has eliminated the idea of traditional classrooms, grade levels, grades, and schedules, Reiners explained. Incoming students are tested, then placed at the level their results indicate is appropriate. Curricula are designed according to each student’s customized plan.

For instance, elite athletes or those with jobs have slower schedules to provide more free time. Some students will have a full-time, year-round speed schedule if their goal is to enter graduate school before the age of 20.

Instead of letter grades or even number grades, Yorktown operates on a “mastery” program: If a student scores 80 percent or lower on an exam, for example, the teacher will review the material with the student until he can master it.

“At the core of our thinking is that every student is an individual,” Reiners said.

Setting the Pace

Though Yorktown is similar in some ways to Montessori schools, Reiners said there is an important difference. Montessori schools permit students to set their own pace, while Yorktown establishes the pace for students.

If students set their own pace, many of the older ones will tend to slack off, Reiners explained.

“We pace them so that work is occasionally sped up and scaled back,” Reiners said. The oldest students are offered Advanced Placement courses designed to provide the equivalent of up to two years of college work.

Student Enthusiasm

Tracy Fisher, mother of a 13-year-old at Yorktown, said curriculum pacing and a zero-tolerance policy for bullying has transformed her son from someone who complained and just got by at his traditional public school to someone who is excited about going to school and is excelling at Yorktown.

“He was thrilled when we first took him there,” Fisher said. “Before, it was a struggle for him just to write two paragraphs. Today, he wrote a 500-word essay in 45 minutes. Earlier this week, he wrote an 800-word essay.”

Yorktown’s curriculum consists of core courses in math, sciences, “world context” (history, economics, social studies, and related courses), communications, and life skills, as well as a wide variety of electives ranging from engineering to film study.

“Education is aimed at the lowest common denominator. Schools are rated based on how they do with the worst student, not on how they work with average or above-average students.”

Randall Reiners, CEO

Yorktown Education

Flexible Scheduling

Students are educated through a combination of distance learning courses on the Internet, teacher instruction, and a few books. Teachers don’t provide traditional classroom lectures. There are small groups, consisting of no more than eight students, with most of the instruction given one-on-one with individual students.

Students can attend on a flexible schedule. Yorktown is open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, year-round, meeting the state’s guideline of providing at least 180 days of education each year. Instruction is provided at an accelerated pace designed to provide a year’s worth of education in two quarters, Reiners said.

By late November, 12 students were enrolled at Yorktown, but Reiners said he expects the school to grow quickly to 200. Half the families who hear a presentation about Yorktown enroll their children, Reiners said.

Tuition is $4,170 per year, split into monthly payments, plus a $2,000 one-time membership fee. Upon graduation, the membership can be sold to another family—much like a country club membership, Reiners said. Families also must provide laptops for students.

Reiners hopes to win wider acceptance of the concept throughout Plano and the surrounding communities. His plan is to open other facilities, five to 10 miles apart, with a maximum enrollment of 200 in each.

“All the teachers I tell about it are very excited,” Fisher said. “All the parents I tell about it are very excited, too.”

Philip J. Britt (spenterprises@wowway.com) writes from Illinois.
Washington Parents Fight Special-Ed Discrimination

By Jillian Melchior

Three families with disabled children who attend religious schools have filed a federal lawsuit against the state of Washington after it denied them access to the assistance normally provided under the federal Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act.

The lawsuit was filed in November, and the case will likely play out through 2009 as the families argue their case raises a valid constitutional issue.

“Washington’s regulation directly targets families who choose religious schools for their children,” said Michael Bindas, the lead attorney on the suit. “Washington offers special education to everyone except those whose parents choose a religious school. That’s religious discrimination, and it’s unconstitutional.”

“It’s really upsetting that families have to go through so much stress and so much haggling with the state because their children go to a specific school,” said Andrew Campanella, director of communications for the Alliance for School Choice, a Washington, DC-based organization.

“We need a system where parents who are working their hardest to educate children who have special learning needs are not discriminated against simply because they are doing what is best for their child,” Campanella said.

“Washington offers special education to everyone except those whose parents choose a religious school. That’s religious discrimination, and it’s unconstitutional.”

MICHAEL BINDAS
ATTORNEY

Restrictive Amendment
Under the IDEA, the federal government provides money to states to provide special-education services for children with special needs in both private and public schools.

The Washington state government justifies its ban on special-education services in religious schools through the Blaine amendment in its constitution, which forbids direct government aid to religious institutions. If the families want IDEA help, the state has said, the children must travel to a “non-sectarian” school or offsite location.

But the families argue the state has created a policy of religious discrimination and is violating their right to choose their children’s schools.

The Institute for Justice (IJ), a civil liberties law firm based in Washington, DC that is working with the families, said the amendment is an unfortunate relic of nineteenth-century religious bigotry.

National Implications
Bindas, an IJ staff attorney, said the U.S. Constitution requires states to be neutral toward religious programs, neither favoring nor discriminating against any religion. He said the state of Washington is violating this requirement by singling out families who send their children to religious schools. It creates a policy much more restrictive than any other state’s, he noted.

“We hope to vindicate these parents,” Bindas said.

In addition, Bindas said, Washington’s stance keeps parents from choosing the education they believe best suits their child. “No parent should be forced to choose between their child’s physical needs and the school they believe is best for their child,” he said.

Bindas said the lawsuit has national implications because 37 state constitutions have similar Blaine amendments, which can be eliminated only by state legislators.

Jillian Melchior (jilliankaym@gmail.com) writes from Michigan.

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Passionate Harlem Parents Rally for Charter Schools

By Jillian Melchior

The New York City-based Success Charter Network has announced plans to host its second annual Harlem Charter Night on March 26 to rally families and politicians in support of charters and school choice.

The organization, which promotes equality of education through reforms that increase the number of charter schools, expects between 3,000 and 4,000 parents to attend.

“It’s really about the American dream, not to be to schmaltzy about it,” CEO Eva Moskowitz said. “Kids from our community in Harlem are going to get a chance to succeed.”

At Harlem Charter Night, students from several charter schools will perform in talent exhibitions, elected officials will speak, and celebrities might also attend, all making a statement about the value of charter schools in the Harlem community.

Best Schools Around

Since New York passed its charter school law in 1998, Moskowitz said, Harlem’s charter schools have proven more successful than traditional public schools in reforming and providing high-quality education.

“Harlem has more charter schools per square mile than any other community nationwide—22, with two more scheduled to open in 2009.”

Now, Moskowitz said, Harlem has more charter schools per square mile than any other community nationwide—22, with two more scheduled to open in 2009. Harlem has a history of poverty and failing public schools, she noted, which has increased the demand for charter schools.

Last year, for example, 5,000 parents entered a lottery for 600 spots at the Harlem Success Academy. “We actually need more charters,” Moskowitz said. “I’m opening up schools as fast as I can. I can’t open them any faster and guarantee quality, but parents are just knocking down the doors. There’s a really high demand for charters in Harlem. The public schools are failing. At the early grades, it’s a difference between being taught to read and not being taught to read.”

Harlem Charter Night allows families to express how important the schools have been to their children, said Jenny Sedlis, Success Charter Network’s director of external affairs.

“It’s kind of a pep rally for charter school parents and kids that will show the outside world that Harlem parents really love and treasure their charter schools,” Sedlis said. “There are thousands of parents who support them. It’s going to be a joyous, happy, fun event, but also a proof that so many parents do want parental choice and charter schools.”

Connecting Pols, Parents

Last year, the event was hosted by Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) and attended by about 1,400 people.

DFER Executive Director Joe Williams said the event is effective because it personalizes the discussion about charter schools. Formerly, he said, charter schools were discussed only in the abstract, because they didn’t exist.

Now, he said, they not only exist but are often the highest-achieving schools in their neighborhood, and parents are thrilled.

“They’ve got a passionate, engaged constituency,” Williams said. “Harlem Charter Night is a chance to show that there are many people who feel very strongly that charter schools are part of the solution. We just want to put a face on that.”

Williams said the event is unique in uniting politicians with the “end users of charter schools” and giving families the opportunity to speak about the charter schools they treasure.

Jillian Melchior (jilliankaym@gmail.com) writes from Michigan.

New Utah Web Site Offers Education Facts, Figures

By Aricka Flowers

Parents for Choice in Education (PCE), a Salt Lake City-based organization promoting school choice, has unveiled a new Web site, Utah EducationFacts.org, offering information about all facets of Utah’s education system, including public schools.

“Part of our mission is to empower parents, and we think this is the best way to do that,” said Robyn Bagley, the group’s chairperson of the board.

“We want to give them quality information in one place and allow them to become more educated about their children’s education opportunities, whether it be public or charter schools or homeschooling,” Bagley continued.

“The more empowered they are, the better they can help their children,” Bagley said. “The site offers information about budgets, what percentage of property tax dollars go to schools, and even how much money goes to each individual student.”

Engaging Parents

The Web site features videos, news updates, school performance information, and suggestions on how parents can get involved in the education system. Executive Director Judi Clark says the organization is using social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to help get the word out regarding the new site. She expects parents to be receptive to the reservoir of education information.

“I think there is a certain percentage of parents who are really engaged and always looking for resources to find that kind of information,” said Clark.

“Here in Utah, people are interested in education and are constantly looking for information in a clear, easy-to-navigate way that doesn’t bombard them.”

PCE saw a need for such a Web site after noticing Utahns appeared to have numerous misconceptions about education funding during an unsuccessful push to get a statewide universal school voucher referendum passed in 2007.

“We want to give [parents] quality information in one place and allow them to become more educated about their children’s education opportunities. ... The more empowered they are, the better they can help their children.”

Robyn Bagley

Chairperson of the Board

Parents for Choice in Education

Getting Results

Because of the organization’s work on the voucher issue, some public school reform opponents accuse the site of being biased. In a December article in the Salt Lake Tribune, Utah Educa-
Massachusetts School Officials Seek Changes to State’s Enrollment Law

By Phillip J. Britt

Massachusetts, like many other states, uses a form of open enrollment, but public schools are asking for the law to be changed because, they say, so many students are opting to attend charter schools that school districts are facing financial problems.

Under state law, passed in 1993, the home district must pay when students enroll in schools outside the district—up to $5,000 per year to public schools in other districts, and about $10,000 if that school is a charter.

“I’m not opposed to charter schools, but there is a very convoluted formula for determining the amount of state aid to local school districts,” said Jonathan Pope, former chairman of the Gloucester School Committee. “There’s a complete denial of the actual costs of special education, transportation, and other costs.”

Glenn Koocher, executive director of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, which represents all but six of the state’s school districts, agrees. He said the group is in a constant lobbying effort to change rules regarding public schools, though no legislation to do so is imminent.

Koocher said school districts lose more in revenues than in expenses when a student opts for a charter school. He also says charter schools don’t provide a true alternative means of education, which the state law requires for charter school funding.

Calculations Questioned

The fee paid to the charter school is determined by dividing the school’s revenue from local and state taxes by its number of students. So if the district has a budget of $1 million and 200 students, the charter school would receive $5,000 for each student attending.

“That’s not an accurate calculation because it doesn’t take into account costs of special-needs students, transportation, and [similar items],” Pope said, adding that Gloucester is losing students to wealthier districts and the net loss of funds is hurting those who remain.

Room to Adjust

The school districts losing students argue, with some validity, that fixed overhead costs such as heating and cooling remain the same unless a significant number of students leave. For example, one student leaving wouldn’t affect the amount of heating and cooling, but if the school loses enough students to shut down portions of a building, the heating and cooling bills could drop. Similarly, one student leaving won’t affect the number of teachers, but 50 students leaving would.

Pope says the only way to address that problem is for local communities to go through their own redistricting of schools, which has its own costs.

“There are some fixed costs, and it’s hard for schools to make those cost adjustments on a quick basis,” acknowledged Todd Ziebarth, vice president for policy at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, an advocacy group based in Washington, DC.

Massachusetts law attempts to address that concern, Kerwin said, by reimbursing districts the full fees from state funds they lose when a student chooses another district in the first year, 60 percent in the second year, and 40 percent in the third year. There’s no further compensation after that.

“I’m not opposed to charter schools, but there is a very convoluted formula for determining the amount of state aid to local school districts.”

JONATHAN POPE
FORMER CHAIRMAN
GLOUCESTER SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Fund Students Instead

The funding problem could be solved fairly easily if the state treated charter schools the same as other public schools, says Kara Hornung Kerwin, director of external affairs for the Center for Education Reform, a charter school advocacy group based in Bethesda, Maryland.

“The problem with charter school funding in Massachusetts is not about school districts losing money, but that all of the state’s public school children should be funded equitably,” Kerwin explained.

“Charter schools in Massachusetts receive about $4,600 less per student than conventional district schools,” Kerwin noted. “Districts even receive funding for charter students they no longer serve and claim that it is still not enough. Lawmakers and taxpayers in the Bay State should question why money is being spent on big district bureaucracy rather than following students.”

Phillip J. Britt (spenterprises@wowway.com) writes from Illinois.

CONTINUED from left

tion Association President Kim Campbell noted, “From my brief look at it, there’s some good information, but there’s also a heavy bias. The point of view promoted on that Web site is pro-voucher, pro-private school, and anti-public school, and readers should keep that in mind.”

That’s not true, Bagley said.

“We really wanted to provide a tool to help people get involved in the dialogue,” Bagley explained. “There is no agenda behind it. If people sit back and say [K-12] education is doing well in the United States, they are just fooling themselves. We want every avenue of education to be the best it can be, whether it is public or charter. We hope this tool will give people a better idea of where we are in terms of education in the state as a whole.”

In the long run, Bagley said, the goal is to educate parents and get them involved in finding the best learning environment for their child. She suggests the best way to do this is by learning how to make do with the current resources available to the education system.

“We’re always going to be fighting the dollar issue, which has been the largest argument of the establishment when it comes to making changes,” said Bagley. “But even the highest-funded system doesn’t necessarily have the best results.

“The bottom line is we have to accept the fact that we have a certain amount of dollars and figure out how we are going to use them most effectively,” Bagley concluded.

Aricka Flowers (atflowers@hotmail.com) writes from Chicago.
New York Charter School Proponents Press for 50 Percent Participation

By Phillip J. Britt

Charter schools are becoming an increasingly popular option in New York, enrolling 25 percent or more of all students in some areas of the state. Advocates for the schools are trying to build on that popularity by enrolling 50 percent of students statewide in charters and non-conventional public schools. Parental involvement will be critical to the effort’s success, they say.

School Reform News writer Phillip J. Britt recently spoke with one of those charter school advocates—Thomas Carroll, chairman of the Albany-based Brighter Choice Foundation—about the issue.

Britt: Can you tell us a little about the Brighter Choice Foundation?

Carroll: The Brighter Choice Foundation was created in 2001 and exists to encourage the development and operation of charter schools in the city of Albany. We opened two Brighter Choice Foundation elementary schools—the Brighter Choice Foundation School for Girls, and the Brighter Choice Foundation School for Boys—in 2002. As we saw more parental demand and a growing waiting list, we’ve gotten more involved.

Britt: Why have charter schools become so popular?

Carroll: We have a very urban area with about 10,000 students, and most of the schools stink. We have primarily minority students and the worst public school districts. We offer a tuition-free alternative, longer school days, a longer school year, uniforms, and a return to traditional education—phonics, memorization, and other methods that were popular in the 1960s but have been abandoned by many public schools.

Carroll: The universal truth is that parents want to sustain opportunities for their children. If children have a chance at a better education, parents will fight to the death for the right to protect it and expand it. We’re in constant communication with parents and with community leaders—ministers, community organizers, and others.

We had 3,000 people out at a rally recently. Elected officials are very good at counting people. They understand this is a very potent political force.

Britt: Then why do some states have difficulty getting more charter schools?

Carroll: In New York, we’ve benefited from the support of Wall Street and business leaders, who have been major donors. We’ve had a lot of people interested in charter schools involved in the legislative process. In New York, people tend to be more active politically.

The difference is that in many other communities around the country, charter school students represent only a small market share of the population. As a result, teacher unions and school districts are [relatively] more powerful, so they win the legislative battles to limit the number and size of charter schools.

Britt: Do you encourage people to support specific candidates?

Carroll: We’ve asked people to become involved, but we don’t actively back particular candidates.

Carroll: The choice: vouchers, charters, tax credits, and public school choice.

“School choice programs give parents the power to decide where their children are schooled. School choice is accountability. When parents have the power to remove their children from a school that is failing them, without financial penalty, they and their children are better served.”

To get your free copy, call Heartland Order Fulfillment at 312/377-4000 and mention this ad. Or send an email to think@heartland.org, specifying Free School Choice Report Card in the subject and providing your mailing address.

Choice & Education Across the States, a report card from The Heartland Institute, ranks state efforts to increase accountability and improve student achievement with four kinds of school choice: vouchers, charters, tax credits, and public school choice.

“In all, 25 percent of Albany public school students attend charter schools. You build it, and they will come.”

Since then we’ve opened four elementary schools, three middle schools, and a high school, with another high school to open next year. One other charter school was opened before us. In all, 25 percent of Albany public school students attend charter schools. You build it, and they will come.

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Crist Celebrates Florida Scholarship Program

Continued from page 1

president of the Youth Directors Council in Florida.

Merriweather is planning to start college this fall and hopes later to become a geneticist.

“The last five years have completely changed my life,” Merriweather said. “If it weren’t for the scholarship program, I might have been one more student who drops out of school and just another statistic. My school ended up being a perfect fit for me. It was the first time in my life that I actually believed in myself.”

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DENISHA MERRIWEATHER

FLORIDA STUDENT

Giving Back
Merriweather shared her story with the governor, local dignitaries, corporate donors, and more than 600 parental choice supporters at The Potter’s House Christian Academy, a local scholarship school, at the rally on November 10.

Florida’s corporate tax credit scholarships—called Step Up For Students scholarships—provide annual tuition support up to $3,950 or transportation scholarships of up to $500 to out-of-district public schools for students whose families meet the federal guidelines for free and reduced-price lunches.

In its first six years the program has been fueled by more than $400 million in corporate contributions. At the November rally, three companies—Fidelity National Financial, FSS World Medical, and Walgreens—were honored for their commitments to low-income students. Walgreens has contributed $26 million since 2006. Fidelity presented a check for $2.3 million and FSS World a check for $1 million at the rally.

“Our contributions over the past three years have provided scholarships for more than 6,500 children throughout Florida, giving them the opportunity to receive the education they deserve,” said Debra Garza, Walgreens’ divisional vice president of government and community relations. “It’s only right that we give back to those families who make our community strong—because our companies couldn’t exist without them.”

Gaining Momentum
The scholarship program has become more popular with Florida companies and policymakers each year, with a strong bipartisan majority in the legislature voting last May to expand its reach to more than 25,000 students a year.

Crist, who signed the expansion bill in 2008, called the scholarships “an example of what we need to do to adapt public education to a new century.”

“We are no longer just competing with other states in this great nation, but with other countries as well,” Crist said. “Step Up For Students scholarships are helping us to diversify our education system to achieve greater results and provide our children and future workforce with a world-class education.”

Fighting Crime
Crist was joined in his praise by retired Duval County Sheriff Nathaniel Glover Jr. and former state Rep. Terry Fields (D-Jacksonville). Glover, a police officer for more than 35 years and Florida’s first African-American sheriff since the Reconstruction era, was the featured speaker.

Glover said he strongly believes the most effective tool in combating crime is education, and he dedicates his time to encouraging students to stay in school and pursue higher education.

“The reality of what our youth face today is devastating,” Glover said. “Just last year, more than 4,100 Duval County youth were charged with delinquent crimes, and 18 percent of those were charged with committing violent felony offenses. The link missing for many of these children is the proper education.”

The rally, called “More Choices, Better Futures,” is held each year to recognize the vital role corporations play in Florida’s school choice program.

Jillian Metz (jillian.metz@gmail.com) writes from Tampa.

In Other Words

“We need to pay attention to results. We’re just static, and other countries are improving. Whether it’s global warming, energy production or conservation, or homeland security, people need to be able to understand enough to make decisions as a citizen.”

— National Science Teachers Association Executive Director Francis Eberle, reacting to the news that U.S. students are doing no better today on international science tests than they were in 1995—scoring an average of 539 points in fourth grade and 520 points in eighth grade on a 1,000-point scale.
South Carolina Grassroots Group Promotes Choice

By Jason Spencer

A new, informal group called School Choice Now-Spartanburg has sprouted as a grassroots effort to promote its ideas and make contact with legislators as certain bills wind their way through the South Carolina statehouse.

Headed by Brantlee Fulmer, chief executive of Merryland Child Development Center, and Nicole Cobb, a local Republican activist, School Choice Now has met twice and is building an e-mail list to reach its members.

Initially, Fulmer said, School Choice Now was following the lead of South Carolinians for Responsible Government (SCRG), but later expanded upon that. School Choice Now is taking ideas and information from different groups with similar beliefs and choosing what it likes and doesn’t like to support, she said.

First Amendment Freedom

Fulmer, who has a three-year-old son, said she agrees with allowing tax dollars to partially pay for private education, and thinks the larger issue of school choice is misunderstood.

“As a parent, I may or may not necessarily agree with the direction that a particular public school would go in,” Fulmer said. “We’re fortunate in Spartanburg because unlike the lower part of the state, we have some really good schools. But from a personal perspective, I prefer more of a Christian education. So, when the time comes, I may choose to send my child to a Christian school.”

Critics say applying the “choice” label to any kind of tax credit or voucher that takes away from the public school system is misleading.

“What’s happening is that some of these groups are starting to come together—especially among the home-schoolers, parents of special-needs children, and those who see tax credits or vouchers as a social justice issue, a way to break the achievement gap, have stopped working at cross purposes and started working systemically, he said.

“Tough economic times are causing more people who have been peripherally interested in this issue in the past to become more passionate about it, Mellen said.

SCRG was one of several entities funded by New York millionaire Howard Rich and his associates to support candidates who promote their agenda.

Upcoming Bill
House Speaker Bobby Harrell (R-Charleston) said he supports school choice but doesn’t see it getting much attention early on [this] year’s legislative calendar. It could increase as the year progresses, he said.

State Rep. Keith Kelly (R-Spartanburg) thinks the matter will continue to come up during the next two years.

“All that out-of-state money that flowed in here the last two years didn’t flow in for no reason,” Kelly said. “I do not understand how anybody can believe that taking money out of Dorman High School, or Byrnes High School, or from the R.D. Anderson Vocational Center will make them better schools.”

Neil Mellen, a spokesman for SCRG, said grassroots efforts similar to School Choice Now-Spartanburg have begun forming across South Carolina. Families interested in private schools, home-schoolers, parents of special-needs children, and those who see tax credits or vouchers as a social justice issue, a way to break the achievement gap, have stopped working at cross purposes and started working systemically, he said.

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Rep. James Merrill (R-Charleston) pre-filed a bill in December that, if passed, would create a $200 tax credit for books and supplies for parents who homeschool their children or send them to private school.

White called that bill “a small hole in the dam that could lead down the wrong path.”

“It’s not a matter of the size of the dollars involved—it’s the principles of the thing,” White said.
Choice Is Solution to Education Faddism

By Robert Holland

Eggged on by teacher unions and even school board associations, U.S. public school systems have acquired a reputation for being resistant to change. When it comes to opposing school choice, they certainly have lived up—or down—to that reputation.

In one way, however, public school leaders have been wide open to new programs. Unfortunately, that kind of change often has been slickly packaged by consultants and peddled to school systems as snake oil might be, as cure-alls for universal application. Promised elixirs to help all children learn at high levels have turned out to be worthless fads that waste money and fail to improve student achievement.

The latest example comes from Maryland, where public school officials now are asking for millions of dollars to install “open space enclosures”—a euphemism worthy of the Pentagon—in existing decades-old schools.

In plain language, they want to put up walls.

**Deafening Roar**

Why do so many schools have no walls separating classrooms, thereby forcing hundreds of kids to try to learn English, math, science, and history while several classes proceed simultaneously and teachers try to make themselves heard above the din?

The answer is that in the 1960s and ’70s, Maryland school systems, along with many others around the country, bought into the freshest progressive enthusiasm, the so-called open classroom, a.k.a. schools without walls.

“From the Eastern Shore to Western Maryland,” the Baltimore Sun reported on November 2, “students are still struggling to learn in classrooms without walls. And school systems are lining up for money to build walls.”

With the economic crunch, school districts are scrounging a few million dollars here and there to wall just a handful of schools a year. Meanwhile, the Sun reports, some teachers in open-space schools are complaining of “splitting headaches” from having to shout over one another to teach their classes.

**There and Back Again**

Other examples of mindless faddism exacting a high price are easy to find. In 1987, California decided to banish phonics, despite decades of research showing its critical role in teaching children to read, and to institute “whole language,” which is based on the assumption children can learn to read naturally, without systematic instruction in letter/sound relationships.

Predictably, California’s reading scores plunged to dead last among the states, and in 1996 the state government began trying to repair the damage by allotting $100 million for textbooks and teacher training geared to phonics.

The education landscape is littered with fades—such as invented spelling, portfolio assessment, cooperative learning, and project-based learning—that have not lived up to the breathless hype.

All of this is not to suggest progressive or unstructured methods can never work. Led by teachers totally committed to the method, they might be just the thing for certain children.

“Promised elixirs to help all children learn at high levels have turned out to be worthless fads that waste money and fail to improve student achievement.”

**New Jersey Parents, Ministers, Call for Choice**

By Karla Dial

A bill creating a five-year tax credit scholarship program to help students in several of New Jersey’s worst public school districts has brought parents and ministers to the doorsteps of state senators, urging them to support it when it comes before a committee this year.

The Urban Enterprise Zone Jobs Scholarship Act would create a five-year pilot project to give 18,000 students in Camden, Elizabeth, Jersey City, Lakewood, Newark, Orange, Paterson, and Trenton the opportunity to attend the public or private school of their parents’ choice with the taxpayer dollars allotted to them, instead of forcing them to go to their failing local public schools.

Camden residents and members of the local Black Ministers Council rallied outside City Hall in early December with more than 7,000 petition signatures, asking state Sen. Dana Redd (D-Camden) to support the bill when it comes before the state Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.

At press time the bill (S. 1607) had not been scheduled for a committee hearing. Sponsored by state Sen. Raymond Lesniak (D-Union), its progress has been slow—the last action on it came in May, when it was voted out of the Economic Growth Committee 3-1 with one abstention.

New Jersey state Sen. Raymond Lesniak sponsored a bill last year that would make school choice possible for 18,000 students. Although the bill stalled last year, it is expected to reach a key committee soon, and parents and ministers are urging senators to support it.

**Tested and Approved**

This is where the kind of change the education establishment tends to resist—school choice—could be so helpful. Suppose when consultants came touting a British import called the Open Classroom in the late 1960s, our systems had included charter schools, independently managed public schools of choice (which did not come on the scene until the early 1990s).

Teachers and parents who embraced the no-walls philosophy after careful study could have joined with other backers in proposing a local school board issue a charter for an open school. The innovation could have been tried and, depending on the results, refined, discarded, or expanded—one school at a time, instead of all schools being forced into one doomed mold simultaneously.

Of course, there might have been no market for “open” charter schools. Education consumers might have wanted structured schools using methods proven to work, in learning environments with those sound barriers known as walls. That, too, would have yielded useful information.

There is no doubt schools could benefit from intelligent innovation. However, field-testing should precede widespread implementation. This is one way the change most often opposed by education’s vested interests—parental choice—could help school systems make wise decisions without succumbing to endless fades.

Robert Holland (rholland@heartland.org) is a senior fellow of The Heartland Institute.
New Jersey Funding Law Inhibits Choice

By Gregg M. Edwards

New Jersey’s Hamilton Township Council is getting tough with township residents who host students from other school districts under false pretenses. For example, sometimes a Hamilton resident may allow his or her address to be listed as the child’s residence when in fact the child does not live there.

The Hamilton school district pays investigators to verify students are attending its schools legally. Under the new ordinance, adopted late in 2008, families making false residency claims may be fined and compelled to make restitution for school and legal costs.

New Law

When I was a Hamilton school board member in the 1980s, nonresident investigations troubled me. I took pride in the fact that families were willing to risk breaking the law in order to enroll their children in Hamilton schools. Their deception was illegal, but it was easy to sympathize with their plight and admire their pluck.

Still, it was unfair to make Hamilton property taxpayers assume the financial burden of educating nonresidents. Moreover, through their income taxes many property taxpayers already were subsidizing the Trenton schools from which these children were escaping. So I accepted the investigations as unfortunate necessities.

In January 2008, Gov. Jon Corzine (D) and the legislature rewrote New Jersey’s school funding law to make it student-based. (See “New Jersey Lawmakers Revamp the State’s School Funding Formula,” School Reform News, March 2008.)

First, the cost of educating a typical student is determined. That base is then adjusted to account for the needs of individual students. A child from a low-income family or one with a learning disability is considered more costly to educate, so the base amount for that student is increased. This formula is often called “weighted per-pupil funding” (WPPF).

The local community’s contribution to the education of each child is based on that community’s income and property wealth. The state’s contribution essentially makes up the difference. In Trenton’s case, the state pays fully 86 percent of the school district’s budget.

Flaws in System

One positive consequence of WPPF is that the state has an obligation to help fund the education of poor children regardless of their municipal residence.

But the 2008 school funding law is a half-baked version of WPPF. It is missing two other elements essential to a properly functioning WPPF system. First, under WPPF, the funding is “attached” to the student. The money follows the student to the school of his or her choice.

Second, schools that are successful in retaining students and attracting new ones are given significant control over their budgets.

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This system rewards good schools for their success and provides bad or mediocre schools with an incentive to improve their performance.

In their failure to adopt a bona fide WPPF system, New Jersey lawmakers squandered an opportunity to help solve communities’ problems with nonresident students.

Under true WPPF, Hamilton might see Trenton residents as financial opportunities instead of burdens. The Trenton student would bring with him at least $15,572, which is Trenton’s per-pupil cost. With Hamilton’s per-pupil cost being only $9,975, admitting the Trenton student would mean Hamilton could gain as much as $5,597. That money could be used for property tax relief, enhancing existing educational programs, or creating new ones.

“When I was a Hamilton school board member in the 1980s, ... I took pride in the fact that families were willing to risk breaking the law in order to enroll their children in Hamilton schools.”

Missed Opportunity

That would create a win-win situation. Trenton students would be able to attend schools better suited to their needs, while Hamilton schools and taxpayers would benefit from the infusion of additional funding.

Hamilton’s ability to accept nonresidents would be governed by its available capacity—a school would not be forced to admit nonresident students it couldn’t accommodate. But with 17 elementary schools and six secondary schools, the Hamilton school district surely would be able to identify space in its many classrooms to admit some nonresident children seeking to attend its schools.

The artificial geographic barriers that prevent students from moving freely between schools perpetuate an educational system that nurtures failure and inhibits success. Demolishing these barriers would make public schools more effective and efficient.

Gregg M. Edwards (gmedwards1@verizon.net) is president of the Center for Policy Research of New Jersey, an independent nonprofit organization addressing public policy challenges facing the state.
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http://www.flf.org

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The Heritage Foundation
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phone 212/546-4400
fax 212/546-8328
http://www.heritage.org/schools

Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options
2600 Virginia Avenue NW #408
Washington, DC 20037
phone 202/625-6766
fax 202/625-6767
http://www.hcreo.org

Home Schooling Legal Defense Association
P.O. Box 3000
Purcellville, VA 20134
phone 540/338-5600
fax 540/338-2733
http://www.hlsda.org

The Hudson Institute
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Washington, DC 20005
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fax 202/974-2410
http://www.hudson.org

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Arlington, VA 22203-1854
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http://www.ips.org

The Institute for the Transformation of Learning
Marquette University
P.O. Box 1881
Milwaukee, WI 53201-1881
phone 414/288-5775
fax 414/288-6199

John F. Kennedy School of Government
T308 Harvard University
Cambridge, MA 02138
phone 617/495-7976
fax 617/486-4426
http://www.hks.harvard.edu

K12, Inc.
3740 Corporate Park Drive
Herndon, VA 20171
phone 703/483-7281
http://www.k12.com

KIPP Foundation
881 Ponce de Leon Avenue #1
Atlanta, GA 30306
phone 404/541-9975
http://www.kipp.org

Landmark Legal Foundation
3100 Broadway #515
Kansas City, MO 64111
phone 816/931-1115
http://www.landmarklegal.org

The Lexington Institute
1600 Wilson Boulevard
Arlington, VA 22209
phone 703/522-5828
fax 703/522-5837
http://www.lexington institute.org

Manhattan Institute
52 Vanderbilt Avenue
New York, NY 10017
phone 212/596-7000
fax 212/599-3494
http://www.manhattan institute.org

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
1104 14th Street NW #801
Washington, DC 20005
phone 202/289-2700
fax 202/289-4009

National Home Education Research Institute
P.O. Box 13939
Salem, OR 97309
phone 503/364-1490
fax 503/364-2827
http://www.nheri.org

National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation
8001 Braddock Road
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phone 703/321-8510
fax 703/321-9613
http://www.nrtw.org

Partners Advancing Choice in Education (PACE)
1315 North Main Street
Dayton, OH 45405
phone 937/279-0957
fax 937/279-0976

Partnership for Choice in Education
Minnesota Family Council
2855 Anthony Lane South #150
Minneapolis, MN 55418-3265
phone 651/293-9196
fax 651/293-9285
http://www.pcemn.org

Philanthropy Roundtable
1150 17th Street NW #503
Washington, DC 20036
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fax 202/822-8325
http://www.philanthropy roundtable.org

Reason Public Policy Institute
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fax 310/391-4935
http://www.reason.org

U.S. Freedom Foundation
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LAWRENCE SOLOMON
Canadian author, environmentalist, and columnist for the National Post.

RICHARD S. LINDZEN, PH.D.
One of the world’s most respected atmospheric physicists.

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