DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 306 702 EA 021 002

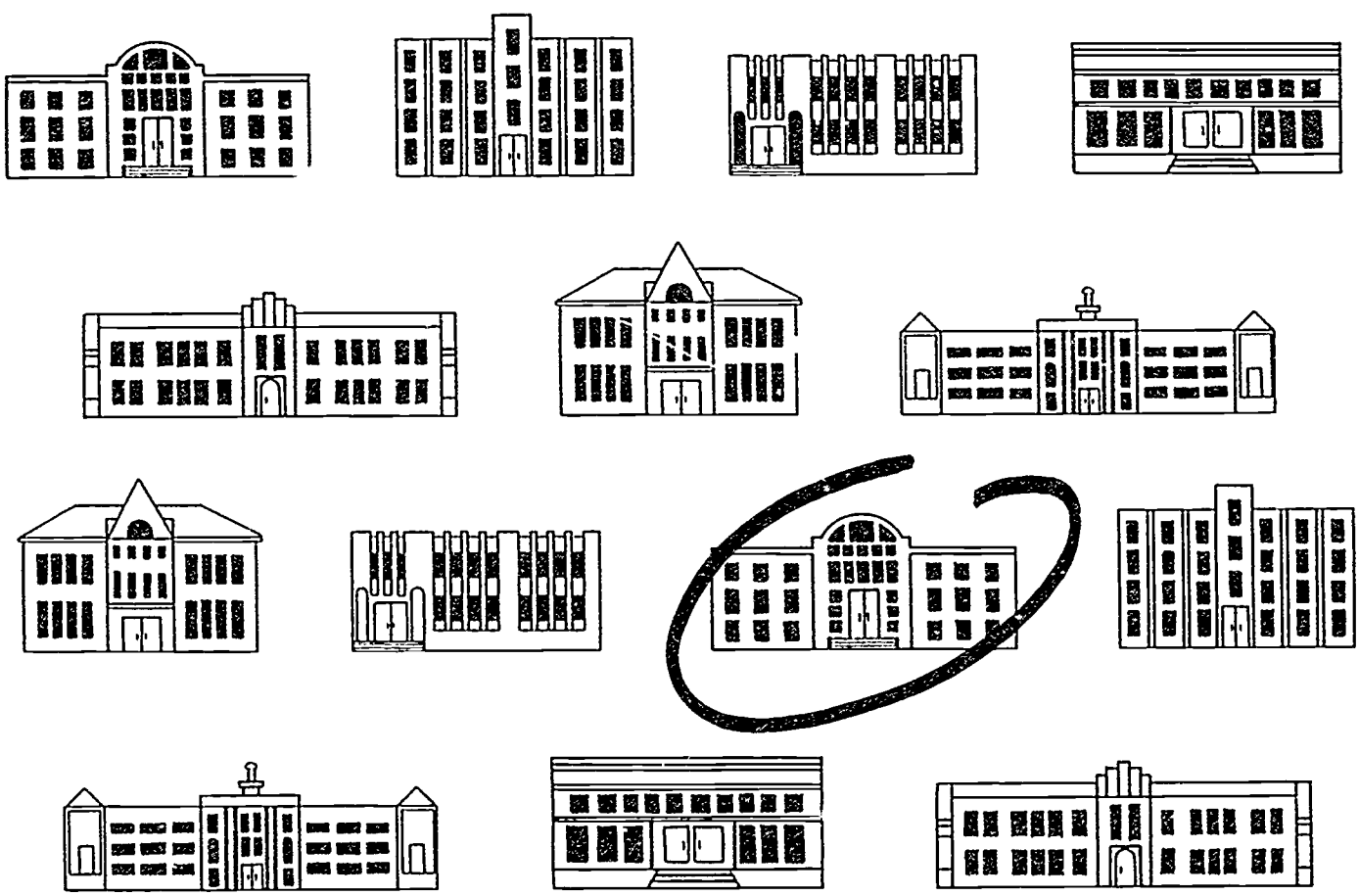
TITLE	A State Policy-Makers's Guide to Public-School Choice. Draft.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colo.
PUB DATE	Feb 89
NOTE	60p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Distribution Center, Education Commission of the States, Suite 300, 1860 Lincoln Street, Denver, CO 80295 (Stock No. SI-89-1; $11.00 plus $2.50 postage and handling).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Improvement; *Elementary Secondary Education; Family Role; Family School Relationship; Magnet Schools; *Program Development; *Program Implementation; *Public Policy; *Public Schools; *School Choice

ABSTRACT

This policy guide draft pulls together information on the types of public school choice plans being implemented or debated across the nation. The guide describes six different kinds of plans that involve a choice among public schools: interdistrict, postsecondary options, second-chance, controlled-choice, teacher-initiated schools, and magnet schools. Each chapter elaborates on the interplay in each type of plan within the framework of finance equity, and school improvement. Six sections describe what the plan is, how it works, how finance and equity are played out, what the advocates and critics say, and how the plans are linked to school improvement. Each chapter concludes with a list of policy questions that must be answered as a community designs its own choice plan. The final chapter on "family information" provides a framework for thinking about the new relationship with families that districts and states must construct when families have the opportunity to choose their children's schooling. (SI)

POLICY GUIDE

A STATE POLICY MAKER'S GUIDE TO PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE



A STATE POLICY-MAKER'S GUIDE TO PUBLIC-SCHOOL CHOICE

D R A F T

February 1989

Education Commission of the States
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300
Denver, Colorado 80295

Copies of this book are available for $11 from the ECS Distribution Center, Suite 300, 1860 Lincoln Street, Denver, Colorado 80295, 303-830-3692. Ask for No. SI-89-1.

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide interstate compact formed in 1965. The primary purpose of the commission is to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education at all levels. Forty-eight states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are members. The ECS central offices are at 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, Colorado 80295. The Washington office is in the Hall of the States, 444 North Capitol Street, Suite 248, Washington, D.C. 20001.

It is the policy of the Education Commission of the States to take affirmative action to prevent discrimination in its policies, programs and employment practices.

CONTENTS

WE NEED YOUR HELP 1

INTRODUCTION 3

1. INTERDISTRICT CHOICE 7

2. POSTSECONDARY OPTIONS FOR HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS 17

3. "SECOND-CHANCE" PROGRAMS 25

4. INTRADISTRICT CHOICE: CONTROLLED CHOICE 33

5. INTRADISTRICT CHOICE: TEACHER-INITIATED SCHOOLS 39

6. INTRADISTRICT CHOICE: MAGNET SCHOOLS 49

7. FAMILY INFORMATION 55

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Education Commission of the States would like to thank the numerous individuals and organizations that have provided so much information and insight on how public-school choice initiatives work in their state or school district. Educators and policy makers in Minnesota, Massachusetts and District 4 in New York City openly described their public-school choice plans as well as the policy questions and guidelines that surround these plans.

Several ECS staff members were involved in developing and producing this guide. Jane Armstrong, as director of this project, interviewed educators and policy makers on the issues related to public-school choice. She worked closely with a consultant to ECS, Rona Wilensky, who participated in the interviews and wrote this policy guide. Kim Moyer developed a survey of state initiatives on public-school choice. Linda Mughrabi provided staff support, and Sherry Freeland Walker and Anna West contributed editorial expertise.

Frank Newman
President
Education Commission of the States

WE NEED YOUR HELP...

Public-school choice -- the idea of providing parents and students with greater options in their education -- is an important new development on the policy-making scene. We see new evidence every day of the growing interest in choice across the country. More than 20 states already have passed choice legislation or are considering some type of action. The White House recently sponsored a conference on choice programs in the public schools, and news stories and editorials increasingly are looking at the issue.

Public-school choice is part of overall efforts around the country to restructure our education system and to create incentives for schools to improve. This issue points up one of the best aspects of our nation and our education systems -- the freedom to try new methods, new ideas. Early experiences with public-school choice, like other ideas before it, will tell us much about quality, about decision making and about the structure of our systems. We will owe a debt to those leaders in this experiment.

Foremost among them is the State of Minnesota which has led the way in instituting public-school choice plans. The state has been willing to take the risk in trying something new and controversial. Many states since have followed Minnesota's lead, recognizing that various aspects of choice may be a viable option for them as well.

This policy guide draft pulls together information on the types of public-school choice plans being implemented or debated across the nation. It is designed to educate policy makers about the pros and cons of the several choice plans, about the issues they should consider and about the questions they should ask. We have included the arguments that have been made for and against each type of plan. Some of these arguments probably will not stand the test of examination. As yet, we have not tried to weigh or evaluate them.

We would, however, like your help in doing just this for the next draft. We would like your ideas, suggestions, comments, data and other information from your experience with choice plans in your area. We would like to know what you have learned so we can share that with others who are looking at public-school choice as an option in their state or district.

Public-school choice is one step toward restructuring of our school systems; it is not a panacea. Many options are necessary in the movement to improve and redesign the way students are educated in this country. Properly thought out and implemented, choice can be among them.

Frank Newman

INTRODUCTION

At an accelerating pace, state policy makers are contemplating the redesign of their public-school systems to make room for more "public-school choice" by participants.

In 1988, Governor Rudy Perpich of Minnesota succeeded in passing legislation that allows students to attend public schools in any district in the state, the governor of New Jersey directed the state commissioner of education to study how greater choice can be offered in the public schools, and the governor of Colorado signed a bill that grants high-school juniors and seniors the option of completing work for their high-school diploma at a public college or university. In all, 20 states are actively involved in deliberations on, or implementation of, some kind of public-school choice plan. Clearly, allowing parents and students a measure of choice in their educational program is an idea whose time has come.

Freedom, equity and school improvement

Public schools of choice have earned support across the political spectrum because they are capable of addressing three policy priorities which appeal to diverse interests: freedom, equity and school improvement.

Freedom. The monopoly power of the public schools, the uniformity of the curriculum and pedagogy with which it is taught, and the difficulty in meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student body through a standardized education system are coming under criticism. These characteristics of contemporary public schooling are of national concern because they have limited the ability of the public schools to serve the diverse families of a pluralistic society and have limited the freedom of families to send their children to schools whose mission they support.

Equity. Families of the middle and upper classes have always had the power to exercise choice in the public education of their children. They have done this by moving into communities whose public schools offer the kind of education these families want.

Because this form of choice is based on mobility and affluence, it does not exist for those families who cannot live in communities with the schools they want.

School improvement. School reformers worry that the educational bureaucracy has become unresponsive to its clients. It has been unable to respond to a pressing national priority: educating a student body increasingly comprised of minorities and students from nontraditional families for productive participation in a constantly changing and highly competitive world economy.

In the view of their supporters, public schools of choice can address all of these concerns by providing:

- A mechanism for increasing family autonomy and freedom. Families may choose schools for their children that best suit their needs.

- A means for extending choice to those who do not have it because of their race or socioeconomic status. All families have options within the public-school system.

- A framework for school improvement. The system of rewards and sanctions within which educators operate is restructured.

To satisfy this variety of needs and concerns in the communities in which they are implemented, and to respond to the major challenges facing American society, public-school choice plans should incorporate elements that address all three of these concerns.

Public-school choice plans, however, are not alike in the way they respond to the community's interest in freedom, equity and school improvement. This guide describes six different kinds of plans which involve a choice among public schools. As the following brief descriptions suggest, these plans differ considerably in the way they address these three public priorities.

- The structures of interdistrict choice and postsecondary options plans emphasize the rights of families to choose among existing public schools. It is assumed that school improvement will follow from the competition choice creates among schools. To insure that all families have equal access to these choices, the plans require special guidelines regarding transportation, admissions and parent information.

- Second-chance plans extend interdistrict choice and postsecondary options to at-risk youth as well as offer them alternatives to traditional schools, thus increasing their range of educational options. In doing so, the plans provide improved learning opportunities for participating students with equity and school-improvement issues a secondary concern.

- The strong suit of controlled-choice plans, which require all families to choose the school their child attends, is their overt commitment to equity. To insure that all families have access to schools of acceptable quality, plans must incorporate special provisions for implementing school-based improvement. Because of the priority given to racial balance, parental freedom to choose a school is limited by the requirements of that goal.

- An intradistrict choice plan based on teacher-initiated schools views parental freedom as a necessary adjunct of school improvement, but features school restructuring as its centerpiece. Such plans must make special efforts to insure that diverse schools are accessible to and equitably serve all families within a school district.

- Magnet schools set school improvement and family choice within a framework that allows some district families to choose from a handful of schools with special resources. Because not all students in a district can attend a

magnet school, inequities can be overcome only when all schools in the district are "magnetized."

An elaboration of each of these public choice plans follows. Each chapter discusses the interplay in each type of plan among freedom, equity and school improvement. Sections describe what the plan is, how it works, how finance and equity are played out, what the advocates and critics say and how the plans are linked to school improvement. Each chapter concludes with a list of policy questions that must be answered as a community designs its own choice plan.

A final chapter on "Family Information" provides a framework for thinking about the new relationship with families that districts and states must construct when families have the opportunity to choose their children's schooling.

This guide is designed to accomplish two purposes: to enable policy makers better to understand public-school choice and to help them decide whether public-school choice can be useful in their efforts to improve education for the children for whom they are responsible.

1. INTERDISTRICT CHOICE

What is it?

Interdistrict choice can expand educational options for students, families and educators, promote interdistrict competition as well as cooperation and create an incentive for school and district restructuring.

In an interdistrict choice plan, families can choose public schools located in districts other than the one in which they live. In a statewide plan, access to these districts generally is limited only by available space and state desegregation standards; receiving districts may not screen applicants on the basis of race, ethnicity, academic and developmental needs or socioeconomic status. In metropolitan plans designed to achieve desegregation, racial-balance guidelines have priority.

The ability to choose a school in another district does not necessarily translate into the ability to choose another school in a family's home district. This depends on the availability of intradistrict choice. (See Chapter 4 on Controlled Choice and Chapter 5 on Teacher-Initiated Schools.)

How does it work?

Below are detailed descriptions of the existing plan in Minnesota and the proposed plan in Massachusetts. Iowa also has a plan which is designed solely to allow students in districts with small high schools to have access to more comprehensive high schools in contiguous districts. Because of its limited scope, it is not discussed at length.

Minnesota's Open-Enrollment Plan

Students entering kindergarten through grade 12 (including those currently in private schools) may choose to enroll in a public school or program located in a district other than the one in which the pupil lives. While the family may apply for a specific program or school, acceptance into the new district does not guarantee acceptance into a specific school or program.

Beginning with the 1990-91 school year, a student may apply to any school district to enroll for the following year. All districts must participate unless their school boards have declared their district closed. In the latter case, resident students may leave to attend

another district, but no nonresident students may enroll in the district.

A student may be denied approval to enroll only if the district:

•Has declared itself "closed" to all enrollment-option students

•Lacks space in a grade level, program, school or district

•Would fall out of compliance with desegregation guidelines (e.g., Duluth, Minneapolis, St. Paul)

Students may not be excluded because of previous academic achievement, athletic or other extracurricular ability, handicapping conditions, lack of proficiency in the English language or previous disciplinary proceedings.

Students enrolled in nonresident districts must reapply every year for admission to that district.

Transportation. The nonresident district will transport students from school-district boundaries to the school. Sometimes resident districts will assist, but usually parents have to provide their own transportation to the border of the new district. The nonresident district may use state funds to reimburse low-income parents for the costs of transportation from the pupil's residence to the border of the nonresident district.

Desegregation. A district that has a desegregation plan approved by the state board of education may limit the number of pupils who transfer into or out of the district. To maintain compliance with its desegregation plan, the district may establish the number of majority and minority pupils who may transfer into or out of the district and it may accept or reject applications based on the needs of its desegregation plan.

Parent Information. A participating district is required to provide information about the district, schools, programs, policies and procedures to all interested parties.

Finance. The nonresident district will report to the resident district those students who attend school in that district. The state will then increase the general education and capital expenditures aid for the district of attendance by the per-pupil amount of the home district.

Massachusetts' Proposed Plan

The Massachusetts Board of Education developed a plan for Governor Michael Dukakis to file with the legislature which would allow families to choose schools in other districts. Each district would decide if it

was willing to accept such transfers but it could not prevent a student from leaving.

Districts willing to accept transfer students would inform the state commissioner of education of how many students the district would accept, in which programs, schools and grade levels. Information from all participating districts would be coordinated by the department of education and provided to parents throughout the state. The state department, if funded, would support efforts by public or private agencies to provide outreach and information on educational choices to parents in their primary language.

Families would apply to the state for spaces in programs or schools in other districts or in their resident district. A state assignment officer would make the final assignment in accordance with rules developed by the board of education. These regulations would prevent students from being excluded or accepted on the basis of race, sex, previous academic achievement, athletic or other extracurricular ability, handicapping conditions or lack of proficiency in English. If approved, districts would have no direct contact with families during this process. No district could prevent a student from participating in this program, unless it affected a state-approved desegregation plan.

Districts that participate in the interdistrict transfer plan would commit to enroll participating nonresident students until the students completed the level of school (elementary or secondary) to which they were accepted.

Districts implementing a racial-balance plan approved by the board of education or by a court would be asked to provide for the transfer of students between its schools and those of other communities, consistent with the goals of the racial-balance plan.

Finance. The commonwealth would pay $2,000 to the host district in lieu of state aid for each participating student in a regular day program. Additional support for students requiring bilingual and special education would be provided under other statutes.

For state-aid purposes, resident districts could continue to claim a student during the year in which he or she transferred to a new district.

Transportation. The commonwealth also would pay the host district transportation costs for students entitled to free student lunches. In turn, the host district would arrange to transport a student from his or her home to the new school. Transportation costs for other students would be paid by their parents, but these students would be entitled to free use of any existing school transportation provided by the resident or host community. The state education commissioner could excuse a host district from the obligation to provide transportation if too small a number of students took part.

Making Urban Schools Attractive. The state board of education could make grants for the costs of magnet schools in communities implementing racial-balance plans that attract students from other communities. Grants also might pay for parent-information programs designed to attract these students or to transport them, regardless of income, from their home to a school with a racial-balance plan, i.e., from a suburb to an urban district. An urban magnet school could provide extended school services beyond the regular school day for students whose parents reside in another community and could accept payments for such services.

Collaborative Programs. The board of education also could make grants to help cities, towns or regional school districts plan and develop an educational program that draws students from more than one school district.

Teacher-Initiated Programs. Grants might also aid school systems that want to encourage teacher-initiated schools to serve out-of-district students under an interdistrict transfer plan. This approach would provide for shared decision making, professional working conditions and accountability.

Evaluation. The board of education would be required to establish an advisory committee, representing the education profession, parents and other interested parties, to assess the development of interdistrict-choice programs. The committee also would disseminate information about successful models and make recommendations to the board. It would prepare an annual report on the impact of interdistrict transfers upon racial integration and equal access to educational services in the host districts.

What are the finance and equity considerations?

Careful study of the existing Minnesota and proposed Massachusetts plans provides other states with useful guidelines on finance and equity issues.

State Aid. In Minnesota, when parents choose another district, the state transfers aid payments from the resident district to the new district. The general education revenue and the capital expenditure revenue are transferred to the new district. Both of these funds consist of state aid and local property tax. The formulas are equalized. Because the property taxes are fixed in millage, they do not change; the equalization aid transferred is equal to the guaranteed revenue per pupil unit.

Transportation within its borders becomes the responsibility of the receiving district and the transportation aid is paid to that district.

In Massachusetts, where there is a greater range in the state's contribution to local school finance, the proposal calls for a state contribution to the nonresident district of $2,000. This is expected to cover the nonresident district's additional costs.

This alternative provides a finance mechanism that might be followed by states with low or unequal state aid.

In both cases, the finance mechanism is designed to insure that the host district has the financial capability of educating nonresident students and that the resident districts lose only the per-pupil state aid that they traditionally have received.

Admissions. Both Minnesota's and Massachusetts' plans contain several provisions to insure that all families are treated equally.

In Minnesota, districts are precluded from choosing students on the basis of race, ethnicity, handicapping conditions, disciplinary history or athletic ability except in cases where such decisions improve racial balance. Some funding is available for the transportation of low-income students.

In Massachusetts, the plan seeks to insure nondiscriminatory assignments by inserting a state assignment officer as the neutral decision maker who must observe policies identical to Minnesota's. Transportation for all low-income families is called for and a parent-information program, designed to reach families in their native language, is envisioned.

Both states have strong guidelines to protect existing desegregation plans.

Other states considering interdistrict choice should also be sure to address these concerns: nondiscriminatory admissions, transportation, parent information and protection of desegregation plans.

What do the advocates say?

Parent/Student Involvement. When parents and students are able to choose their school, there is strong evidence to suggest that they become more involved in the school and are more satisfied with the education being provided. It is important to note that when choice is available, even those who do not move are making a choice, so long as they are fully informed about their options.

Student Growth and Learning. Research shows that students who are able to choose specially designed high schools have improved attendance, better grades and a more positive attitude. When students are placed in programs tailored to their unique needs, their performance improves.

Increased Educational Choice. Students can benefit from learning opportunities offered in another district but not in their own. For example, they may be able to study an unusual foreign language or to participate in an intensive chemistry program not available in their home district. Elementary students may be able to participate in different pedagogical models, such as open schools, continuous progress, language immersion, etc.

Cooperative Planning. In several instances competition between school districts has been an incentive for contiguous school districts to collaborate on program offerings. This has allowed students to have access to more opportunities than

each district could provide on its own. By participating in an educational division of labor, all districts may be able to keep traditional enrollment levels while increasing student learning opportunities.

Flexibility and Convenience. Families can choose schools that suit their needs and convenience. For example, they can select a school near their work place to be closer to their child and after-school care arrangements. California has passed a law allowing this option. Parents can register their child either in the school district in which they live or in the school district in which they work.

Families who live near school district lines and are actually closer to a school in another district could be allowed to send their children to the nearer school.

Schools At or Near Work-Sites. Employers working in conjunction with school districts can provide schooling for the children of employees on or near the work site regardless of the district in which their employees live. For two working parents or single-parent families, the option of early-grade-school classes near the work site may be very attractive. Examples of such schools can be found in the satellite schools of Dade County, Florida.

Efficient Utilization of School Facilities. In addition, such collaborative arrangements may be a way to take advantage of underutilized school buildings or available commercial space. This can delay or avoid the necessity of constructing new schools.

Pressure for School Responsiveness. When families have the option to attend school in another district, which removes resources from their home district, a district faces significant pressure to be more accommodating to resident families' needs and concerns. Such accommodation can take the form of offering new programs, of arrangements between districts that allow children to attend schools nearest their home or their parents' work places, or of greater communication between teachers and parents.

Increased Accountability to the Community. When parents are asked to make choices, they must be provided with information that can be the rational basis for that choice. Districts will find themselves pressured to release descriptive information that will allow families to determine which schools will best meet their children's needs.

Links to School-Improvement Efforts. When families "vote with their feet," interdistrict choice can identify those systems in need of change. School improvement can result from the signal of distress that interdistrict transfer provides.

What do the critics say?

Weakened Sense of Community. Family decisions to send children to school in other communities begin to sever the connection between schools and a community's identity. Schools may lose the role they play in some communities as a center of local activities.

Loss of Resources. Because school financing is universally based on enrollment levels, school districts lose resources whenever families leave. Remaining students can suffer if decreased enrollment translates into smaller budgets, fewer teachers and fewer opportunities.

Competition with Resident Students. School districts with attractive extracurricular activities may find that resident students have less chance to participate in these activities when out-of-district students are admitted.

Loss of Community Advocates. Some of the families who take advantage of choices may be parents who are actively involved in the improvement of schooling. If such families leave a district, the community they leave behind may lose important advocates and constituents for improved public schooling.

Ineligibility to Vote in New District. Parents sending children to school in another district do not vote in that district. These parents will have no official vote regarding school-board elections that affect the education their children receive.

Loss of Students, Courses. Small, underfunded districts, in particular, may find themselves losing students to larger districts which are able to offer more comprehensive programs. Under these conditions, interdistrict choice can indirectly lead to school-district consolidation by reallocating students from small to large districts.

Increasing Education Budgets. Interdistrict choice can entice back into the public-school system parents who have placed their children in private schools. While public-school education is a right of all persons, transfers from private to public schools translates into increased state and local expenditures. Without an associated increase in resources, this is money that will be spent on basic educational services to accommodate student transfers from private schools, not on improving programs or raising salaries.

Educational Discontinuity. Some interdistrict choice plans require students to reapply every year. Although most students are able to complete their education in their chosen districts, the annual application process does not guarantee continuity in a school. The inability of a district to commit to a student's assignment may prevent assimilation into a new school and discourage families from exercising the option to place their children in a school in another district.

Increased Educational Inequity. In some interdistrict choice plans, the ability of a family to participate in the plan depends on the adequacy of the information they receive and on the family's ability to provide some of the transportation needed to get to a school in another district. Without extensive parent outreach through

diverse methods and in native languages, and without full subsidy of the transportation costs of low-income families, critics fear that not all children will have an equal chance to participate. They are concerned that this might lead to the isolation of poor children within their home districts and the loss of widespread public support for those districts.

How does interdistrict choice relate to school-improvement efforts?

Advocates of interdistrict choice believe that breaking the traditional monopoly that school districts exert over resident families, and creating conditions that could lead to the loss of districts' revenues, will be sufficient to convince districts to be both more responsive to the needs of families and to improve the education of children.

Others believe that the effectiveness of choice as an incentive for change depends on a district's capacity to respond to the new competitive environment that choice creates. They suggest that choice as a sanction for failing to change be complemented with a support system that provides technical assistance, staff development and planning grants as an incentive for change.

What policy questions should an interdistrict choice plan address?

Administrative

- Will the plan be mandatory for all districts or voluntary? Can districts choose to withdraw?
- Will there be any limitations on the districts students can choose?
- Will transportation be provided? Will it be limited? Who pays for it?
- Who will handle admissions -- districts or a state assignment officer?
- Will reasons for transfers be monitored to provide feedback to districts losing students?
- Will it be necessary for participating students to reapply for acceptance by their new district each year?

Governance

- Is interdistrict choice being used as a mechanism for school-district consolidation? Should it be?
- Will eligibility for participation in school-board elections continue to be based on district of residence?

Finance

- Do existing school-finance mechanisms support interdistrict choice? Are there great disparities in per-pupil expenditures among districts within a state that make movement across district lines inequitable?
- If the plan is financed by the state share of per-pupil expenditures, is it high enough to cover the additional costs of transfer students that nonresident districts will incur?
- If not, will supplements be provided to existing state aid to cover the additional cost of educating the transferring student?
- Should the state fund both the sending and receiving district?

Equity

- How will existing desegregation plans be protected? How can an interdistrict public-school choice plan complement existing desegregation guidelines and maintain or improve the racial balance?
- How can urban schools make themselves more attractive to suburban students? Is there a state role in providing additional resources to urban districts?
- Should transportation be provided for urban students to attend suburban schools and vice versa?
- How will the plan assure that admissions are not based on race, ethnicity, sex, handicapping conditions, disciplinary history or athletic ability, except in cases where such decisions improve racial balance?
- Will restrictions be placed on the eligibility of transfer students to participate in extracurricular activities?
- If districts choose to use marketing strategies to attract students from other districts, how can policy makers be sure marketing is not "targeted" to attract more "desirable" students?
- Will parent-information outreach be developed to insure that all families, including low-income and non-English-speaking ones, receive full information on the choice plan?
- Will full transportation funding be available to all low-income students who participate in interdistrict transfers?

School Improvement

- Will technical assistance and support be provided to districts that experience student losses? Will distinctions be made among districts that lose students because of dissatisfaction with educational quality and programming and those that lose students for other reasons?

- Will planning grants and technical assistance be provided to help districts attract out-of-district students? To help regional consortia plan integrated programs?

What are potential state education department roles and responsibilities?

- Coordinate available space with families wanting to transfer and insure that the process of admissions is nondiscriminatory.
- Make sure that students and dollars flow together.
- Approve, along with state boards, amendments to desegregation plans to insure that interdistrict choice doesn't violate existing plans.
- Assist districts that have lost students by providing diagnostic teams and technical assistance for school and district improvement.
- Evaluate the interdistrict choice program and monitor reasons for transfers.
- Provide parent outreach and information.
- Encourage cooperative planning among school districts or between employees and districts.

2. POSTSECONDARY OPTIONS FOR HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS

What is it?

A postsecondary options plan allows upper-division public-high-school students to take courses for high-school or college credit at institutions such as community colleges, vocational/technical institutes, four-year colleges or universities. Tuition for these courses is paid for by a state funding mechanism which varies among plans.

Postsecondary options can increase educational, developmental and social opportunities for high-school students, while creating incentives for high schools to offer more advanced courses and challenges for high-school students.

How does it work?

Postsecondary institutions participate on a voluntary basis and set the standards for admitting eligible high-school students, subject to state guidelines for the program. Interested students apply to the institution they wish to attend. If accepted, they may attend that school on a full-time basis or split their schedule between higher education and the high school. Typically, state per-pupil funding is shared between the two institutions in proportion to the amount of coursework taken in each.

In general, participating students are eligible for all high-school activities and are responsible for making sure the courses they take satisfy high-school graduation requirements. Plans vary in the coursework they permit high-school students to take. Some allow students to take any course in which the postsecondary institution will permit their enrollment; others allow them to take only courses that are not available at the high school.

Minnesota's Postsecondary Enrollment Options Plan

Any 11th- or 12th-grade public-school student may enroll either full- or part-time in nonsectarian courses or programs at an eligible postsecondary institution. Students attending high school full-time cannot participate. Students eligible for Minnesota's "second-chance" plans are also eligible to participate provided they are in 11th grade and meet the postsecondary institution's admissions requirements.

Eligible institutions include the University of Minnesota and its branches, all state universities, community colleges, public technical institutes or a Minnesota private two- or four-year liberal-arts, residential, degree-granting school. These institutions set the standards for admission of high-school students and are allowed to give course-enrollment priority to their postsecondary students over 11th- and 12th-grade students.

If courses are taken for high-school credit, the state pays for tuition, fees and required textbooks and provides transportation aid based on family income. The high school determines the amount of high-school credit which will be awarded.

After graduating from high school, postsecondary credit is available either by enrolling in the institution where the courses were taken or by obtaining another institution's agreement to accept those credits as transfer credits.

The student and his or her family have the responsibility for applying to the postsecondary institution and insuring that all high-school graduation requirements are met. To the extent possible, the school district is expected to provide counseling services to pupils and their parents or guardian before the pupils enroll in postsecondary courses. This is to ensure that the pupils and their parents or guardians are fully aware of the risks and possible consequences of enrolling in postsecondary courses.

Minnesota legislation requires the state department of education to evaluate the program periodically and its impact on students, high schools and postsecondary institutions.

Postsecondary institutions whose high-school students are enrolled full-time in their institution are compensated by the state with a share of the general education revenues. The general education revenue which would normally be paid to the district is available to pay tuition, fees and books. If the cost at the postsecondary institution is less than the general education revenue for the student, the remainder is paid to the school district even though the student does not attend any classes in the district. When high-school students are enrolled part-time in both their high school and a postsecondary institution, the general education revenue is divided proportionately based on course credits between the high school and postsecondary institution.

No institution may charge students for tuition or fees in excess of what they receive from the state.

Florida's Dual-Enrollment Program

Florida's "articulated-acceleration" legislation includes five programs for high-school students designed to shorten the time necessary to receive

a postsecondary degree, broaden the scope of their curricular options or increase their opportunity for in-depth study. One of these opportunities, the "dual-enrollment" program, offers high-school students the chance to take postsecondary courses for credit toward a high school diploma and postsecondary degree. Postsecondary institutions can include community colleges, vocational schools and four-year universities.

The superintendent of a school district is expected to develop an interinstitutional articulation agreement with the president of the community college that serves that district as well as a representative from the university that serves that area. These agreements include determining eligibility criteria and delineating responsibilities regarding student monitoring and developing criteria for course quality, program offerings, costs of instructional materials and student transportation.

Florida provides full funding to the high school and the equivalent tuition of .25 FTE to the postsecondary institution for students enrolled in the dual-enrollment plan, regardless of the number of courses the student takes in the postsecondary institution.

Colorado's Postsecondary Enrollment Options Plan

In an effort to challenge students in their last two years of high school, Colorado lawmakers, in 1988, passed the "postsecondary enrollment options" act. The bill encourages and enables secondary pupils to enroll full-time or part-time in courses at state institutions of higher education, including all independent area vocational schools, all junior college district colleges, state community colleges and state-supported colleges and universities.

The home school district of students pursuing this option enters into a cooperative agreement with the institution of higher education. This arrangement determines the funding method for the pupil and the amount of academic credit, including which credits may qualify as high-school credit, college credit or both. The law requires that coursework qualify as credit toward earning a degree at the institution of higher education and that students not pay tuition for courses accepted as high-school credit.

If a student enrolled in this postsecondary options plan is receiving high-school credit and is enrolled in fewer than two postsecondary courses, the student is counted in the attendance entitlements of the high-school district. The state department of education withholds one-half of the revenue base of the school district for each student enrolled in the postsecondary plan and forwards these revenues to the postsecondary institutions where students are enrolled.

School districts are not required to provide transportation.

What are the finance and equity considerations?

In plans where dual funding exists, policy makers must ask if the benefits to high schools and postsecondary institutions warrant the additional financial resources.

Outreach efforts that provide information which reaches all upper-division high-school students in a state is necessary to assure equitable participation in this program.

Some critics are concerned that postsecondary options plans offer to only a handful of eligible high-school students what amounts to a state subsidy toward a college education. They further worry that plans may be designed to attract only high-achieving students. This latter concern can be overcome through provisions such as those of Minnesota which encourage at-risk youth to apply for participation.

What do the advocates say?

Advanced Work. Upper-division students have the opportunity to take coursework unavailable at their public high school. This is particularly beneficial for students who have exhausted the courses that challenge them or for students with interests not met by the high-school curriculum.

Unusual Learning Opportunities. Even when postsecondary courses seem quite similar to those offered at the high-school level, important differences may make the postsecondary course desirable. For example, world-language courses at the postsecondary level are often taught by native speakers while such instructors are infrequent at the high-school level. Similarly, postsecondary instructors with doctorates may have either broader or deeper knowledge of their fields than many high-school teachers. Also, because postsecondary courses cover more material in a shorter time period than high-school courses, students are able to take more courses.

Personal Responsibility. Postsecondary options plans also give students the opportunity to experience the social and academic environment of colleges while still retaining their connection to the high school. For many, this is a chance to see whether they are interested in attending college after graduation from high school. For others, it may be an experience that motivates them to develop stronger skills to succeed in an academic environment.

Dropout Prevention. Some students on the verge of dropping out or who already have dropped out have found that the greater freedom of a postsecondary institution offers them the environment they need to sustain their interest in learning.

College Credit. Under certain circumstances students can begin to accrue credits toward a college degree.

Better Articulation Between High Schools and Postsecondary Institutions. The need for joint counseling of students attending both high school and a postsecondary institution has encouraged joint planning and coordination between the two institutions.

Competition for School Improvement. The competition between two distinct educational systems creates pressures for high schools to be more responsive to the academic needs of students, e.g., by offering more advanced-placement courses, by providing an International Baccalaureate program or by offering college-level courses in the high school in conjunction with postsecondary institutions. It may also pressure high schools to offer upper-division students more opportunities for independent work and greater personal autonomy.

What do the critics say?

Loss of Resources/Weakening High-School Programs. In some postsecondary plans, the movement of students between institutions means the loss of some funding to the institution from which the students transfer. If a large number of students from a single high school participate in the postsecondary options plan, that high school could lose resources for teaching staff and programming, eventually weakening its program.

Out-of-Sync Schedules. A minor problem can emerge when the schedules of high schools and postsecondary institutions are not synchronized, yet students participate in educational programs at both. In one state, for instance, university and community-college courses begin three weeks after the public schools' fall semester and finish three weeks later.

Adequate Counseling. A postsecondary option shifts from high-school counselors to parents and students the responsibility to make sure that courses taken meet high-school graduation requirements and their special needs and interests. In some cases, high-school students have completed postsecondary courses which could not be credited toward high-school graduation requirements.

Cooperation of the High Schools. Not all high schools regard postsecondary options favorably and may try to discourage student participation. They can do so by withholding information on the program, by denying participants access to high-school activities or by excluding them in their class ranking. In a few cases, high schools tried to prevent students from participating in graduation ceremonies with their class or from joining the National Honor Society.

High School/Postsecondary Articulation. Increased costs are associated with the joint planning and the forging of agreements among schools, districts and institutes of higher education. Even when it is the student's responsibility to select appropriate postsecondary courses, costs associated with keeping track of the student's postsecondary work and counseling him or her on postgraduate plans require time and effort. These costs have not typically been considered in recent choice legislation of this type.

Public Support of Private Higher Education. In some plans, the state aid that follows students participating in postsecondary options can be used in private institutions. Whether or not this can be done depends on each state's constitutional findings on public support for private education.

Less Competition with Double Funding. Postsecondary options plans provide an incentive for high schools to retain their students by being more responsive to the needs of their upper-division students. If a plan pays adequate tuition at both institutions, the loss of students will provide less of an incentive for high schools to be responsive than a plan that carries financial consequences.

How do postsecondary options relate to school-improvement efforts?

Competition for students (and their associated funding) between high schools and postsecondary institutions may be a strong incentive for high schools to create more challenging and responsive programs.

In Minnesota, many high schools have responded by implementing more advanced-placement and International Baccalaureate programs. In some cases, high-school teachers have become "adjunct professors" who teach college courses on the high-school campus, eliminating transportation needs.

States can encourage school-improvement activities by coupling this type of competition with some additional incentives such as planning grants, technical assistance, staff-development opportunities, etc., to help high-school educators redesign a program that challenges and meets the needs of their students.

What policy questions should a postsecondary options plan address?

Administrative

- How will high-school students be guaranteed access to the program and high-school credit for their postsecondary coursework? How can students be protected against reprisals by uncooperative high schools?
- How can states be sure high schools inform students of their eligibility for this postsecondary option?
- Should the state provide program training to high-school and college counselors and staff and facilitate coordination between them?
- Should participation be limited only to postsecondary courses not offered at the student's home high school?

- Should the state provide guidelines on the new responsibilities high-school counselors have to educate parents and students on their new obligation to assure adequate graduation credits?

- Should the state issue guidelines on the kinds of counseling services that postsecondary institutions must provide for participating high-school students?

- Should all participation in the program be monitored by the state department of education or through bilateral agreements between high schools and postsecondary institutions?

- Should students be able to earn dual credit simultaneously?

Governance

- Should private postsecondary institutions be eligible to participate?

Finance

- Should additional funding be available to cover the increased planning, articulation and record-keeping costs involved when students affiliate with two institutions?

- What funding mechanism best realizes the goals of the program -- full double funding or the portability of state and local aid?

Equity

- Should the state underwrite the postsecondary tuition of only those high-school students who choose to participate in the program? What about students who attend postsecondary institutions after finishing the regular high-school program?

- Should the state develop a complementary program allowing students who are currently unsuccessful in high school to have another chance in a community college or vocational/technical institute?

- How can a state ensure all high-school students are aware of their options in a postsecondary program?

School Improvement

- Should the state provide technical assistance and support to high schools that are losing students and are thereby threatened with the loss of financial and programmatic resources?

- If a state offers full funding to the high school and the postsecondary institution, what is the trade-off on the lack of incentive for school improvement at the high-school level?

- Is there a state role in supporting high schools to develop more challenging courses for high-school students?

What are potential state education department roles and responsibilities?

- Keep track of student credit hours and the flow of state dollars.
- Monitor the reasons for student participation and provide that information to high schools.
- Train high-school and college personnel on how the program works.
- Encourage high schools and colleges to work together to coordinate the program and provide students with a common message about expectations and requirements.
- Provide public information to families and high-school students so that they are well informed about their choices.
- Act as arbiter between high schools and postsecondary institutions to insure compliance with state rules and regulations.
- Evaluate the program and report to the legislature.

3. "SECOND-CHANCE" PROGRAMS

What is it?

"Second-chance" programs are choice programs designed specifically for students who have problems succeeding in a traditional school setting. Such students generally have low grades, poor attendance or disciplinary problems, they may be pregnant or they may already have dropped out. "Second-chance" programs range from allowing students to attend another school other than the public school to which they were assigned, to alternative programs to postsecondary options. They can help students make the transition from school to postsecondary education or work and give students who choose them a chance to be in control of their lives by allowing them to start over in a new and sometimes very different environment.

How does it work?

Existing "second-chance" programs offer eligible students some or all of the following options: (1) attend another public school in either their own or a different district, (2) choose an area learning center or other alternative education option in their own or another district, (3) enter a postsecondary institution, or (4) enroll in a private, alternative, nonsectarian program which has a contract with a local school board. Minnesota and Colorado are among the states with "second-chance" programs.

Minnesota's High School Graduation Incentives Program

Minnesotans who qualify for the state's High School Graduation Incentives Program can earn a high-school diploma by choosing from a variety of state-funded programs. Persons ages 12-21 may apply to any public high school; a private, nonsectarian school having a contract with a public school district to provide services under this program (there are 11 in the Twin Cities area); an approved public alternative education program or area learning center; or a college or technical institute under the state's Postsecondary Enrollment Options Program.

Qualifications vary by age but include such factors as being two grades below performance in local achievement tests, being one year behind in graduation credits, being pregnant or a parent, being assessed as chemically dependent or being absent more than 15 consecutive school days during the preceding or current school year.

Eligible students can apply at any public school, alternative program or school-district office. Counselors at these institutions are familiar with the program and can help students choose the appropriate option.

The program incorporates Minnesota's long-standing policy of extending public funding for education up to age 21. In addition, the state, in 1988, adopted legislation providing state funding to permit certain high-priority adults age 21 and over to finish high school. Eligible adults may choose among the same four types of educational programs as younger students. In addition, school boards may contract with local adult-basic-education programs so that districts can tap state funds to serve eligible students through the High School Graduation Incentives/Adult Basic Education Program.

"Second-chance" adults over age 21 also may participate in the postsecondary options plan, which allows them to apply to a two- or four-year college or university or a postsecondary vocational/technical institute.

Participating Minnesota students receive public-school aid in accordance with the program they choose. If they transfer to another district, the rules of interdistrict choice apply. If they transfer to another school within their own district, the enrollment change is handled at the district level. If they attend a postsecondary institution, the funding mechanism for postsecondary options applies.

Youth and adult students also may choose one of the 14 designated area learning centers which are district-based alternative programs that serve eligible students from various districts. These centers utilize regular educational funding and supplement it with appropriate noneducational funding such as job-training funds, human-service funds and private sources. The first four area learning centers approved by the state serve as demonstration sites and were provided state-funded incentive grants.

When a "second-chance" student chooses to enroll in the postsecondary options program, the state uses the student's per-capita education aid to pay the tuition. The funding system is the same regardless of whether or not a student already has dropped out of school. When a student participates part-time in a postsecondary program and part-time in a secondary program, the state education aid is divided between the two programs.

Colorado's Second Chance Program

In Colorado, an amendment to the Educational Quality Act of 1985 established the Second Chance Program. The program allows school dropouts who have been out of school for six months or more to attend another school in their district or in another district. In practice, the program has meant the creation of alternative programs that attract dropouts across state lines.

Schools eligible to ac ɔt participating students include public schools with above-average d. pout rates; public schools in districts contiguous to those with high dropout rates; schools established by private, nonsectarian agencies; vocational, technical or adult education programs; a school established by a group of educators under contract with a public school district; or schools operated by boards of cooperative services. Although state promotion of the program ended in 1988, the program remains as an option for school districts.

Like Minnesota, Colorado's state education agency has been responsible for much of the program's initial promotion.

In Colorado, an eligible student's resident school district is required to help the student enroll in the school of his or her choice, provide counseling to the student and parents and monitor the progress of the student. The bulk of state education funds follows the student if he or she changes districts.

What are the finance and equity considerations?

Interdistrict Choice. States considering "second-chance" programs that allow students to choose a school in another district need to consider their own school financing situation. Where finance inequities exist, or where the state share of per-pupil expenditures is low, "second-chance" programs face the same problems as interdistrict choice programs under those conditions.

Alternative Programs. When "second-chance" means enrollment in an alternative program, slightly different finance considerations apply. First, such programs may have to be created. In the past, many alternative programs existed on "soft dollars" such as grants or special district funding. They often found space by sharing another school's facilities during off hours. If enough alternative programs are to exist for all the students who need them, districts and/or states must create a funding system to maintain them. Once those programs exist, funding patterns are similar to those that apply for intra- or interdistrict transfers, unless there is a need for special processes or funds.

Outreach. A major equity consideration in "second-chance" programs relates to outreach provided to students. In both Minnesota and Colorado, the state education departments have taken on the major responsibility for informing students of their new options through posters, advertisements, information packets and public-service announcements. In addition, the private sector in Minnesota, including the Citizens League and individual businesses, has sponsored key publicity efforts. Local educators have been informed of the variety of "second-chance" programs through state-sponsored workshops so they can be helpful to youth and adults who are making educational choices. A hotline provides information to parents, educators and students so the full burden of matching what a student needs with what is available is not solely on the student.

Efforts to communicate the new options also may require multicultural sensitivity, bilingual materials and person-to-person dissemination to reach those students for whom the written word and the mainstream media are not major sources of information.

Two other equity questions come up when considering "second-chance" programs. One is whether "second-chance" students are treated like other transfer and interdistrict students in terms of admissions, eligibility for courses and access to resources. The second concern is whether alternative programs provide a quality education program that meets students' individual needs so they can leave their prior failures behind. States may want guidelines to deal with both issues.

What do the advocates say?

A Chance to Start Over. Students whose prior record may prejudice teachers, administrators, other students and parents to expect very little of them get a chance to start over again in a new environment. For many, this step alone can encourage success, including academic success.

Alternative Programs. More alternative programs, whose environment, curriculum and structure are better suited to the needs of at-risk students, may be created. This can occur through legislation, such as Minnesota's, which established a system for approving area learning centers and private nonsectarian alternative programs, or through the leadership of local school boards, often in cooperation with other agencies.

Links to Community Services. Students who need a second chance may also need to be linked with other community services. Schools that serve these students can provide the mechanism that brings other social and community support services to students.

Reduced Dropout Rates. "Second-chance" programs are an important element of a strategy to prevent dropouts and to increase graduation rates by offering students a variety of ways to stay in school and complete their education.

Improved Life Chances. Experience suggests that "second-chance" programs often help individuals get and maintain jobs or vocational preparation. They also can provide teenage parents, and others who face barriers to attending and succeeding in an educational program, with the self-confidence they need to do a better job of caring for their own children or surmounting other obstacles.

What do the critics say?

Segregation. Students may be segregated or resegregated by race if most students in "second-chance" programs are members of minority groups.

Limited Capacity. "Second-chance" programs, which are intended to serve relatively small numbers, may be insufficient in urban systems or schools where virtually all students and out-of-school youth are at risk.

Isolating Difficult Students. Alternative programs, which should provide a positive educational experience to students, sometimes have been used to ease "difficult" students out of the regular classroom.

Low Expectations. Historically, many alternative programs have found it difficult to meet both the emotional/developmental needs of at-risk youth and to set appropriate educational standards. The challenge they face is to provide an environment in which the students feel safe and accepted and have an educational program that motivates them to achieve. In addition, the problem of labeling students as failures may arise if states or districts limit "second-chance" options solely to attendance at an alternative program.

Insufficient Alternatives. Not all at-risk students are the same. They differ in the source of their problems, personality, aptitudes, learning styles and interests. Too often, only one alternative program is available to serve a diverse group of students.

Failure to Restructure. When a number of "second-chance" opportunities are available, students who are the most difficult to serve in a traditional school setting are no longer a visible problem. If the goal of schools is to provide an excellent education for <u>all</u> students, then moving some students to alternative programs reduces the incentive for schools to restructure their programs to meet the needs of a diverse student body.

How do "second-chance" programs relate to school-improvement efforts?

A "second-chance" program can be an important part of a state's efforts to improve its education system when several elements are present. For it to become a means to systemwide improvement, a state needs to create a variety of education programs with different environments, pedagogy or curriculum. The underlying philosophy behind this approach is that no one type of program is best for all students, whether they are at risk or not.

Overall improvement of the education system also requires that educational leaders at every level examine ways in which their basic program contributes to the academic difficulties experienced by some students and that they take steps to improve their program for <u>all</u> students. Only providing difficult students with choices that remove them from the traditional classroom may not be an incentive for this to happen. Critical self-examination of the policies, procedures and practices of the traditional school is equally as important as providing a rich array of programs. The question becomes: Should there be two systems or a single system with many options and opportunities available to all learners?

What policy questions should a "second-chance" program address?

Administrative

- How can partnerships with other agencies and organizations that serve individuals at risk be developed to ensure that those students receive the information they need and that local interagency cooperation will become the norm?
- Should "second-chance" students be defined and provided different policies than others? If so, what criteria will be used to define "second-chance" students?
- Should "second-chance" options be nested in a wider interdistrict choice plan? In a postsecondary options plan? In an intradistrict choice plan?
- Should only one model of alternative education be created or should students have the choice of various educational options?
- What connections should be made among agencies and organizations that address issues that may be barriers to learning, such as health problems, jobs and training, corrections or child care?

Finance

- Should public funding for "second-chance" options be extended to age 21? Beyond age 21? What groups should have priority for service?
- Should supplemental funding be provided to alternative programs because their challenges are greater? To programs providing needed social services to their students?
- What connections should be made between welfare reform and "second-chance" educational opportunities or requirements?
- Should eligible students be able to attend private, nonsectarian schools in addition to public schools? If so, under what conditions?
- Should a state develop a funding mechanism to ensure alternative programs are maintained?

Equity

- How can states, districts or schools develop effective outreach programs explaining new educational options for potential "second-chance" students?
- How can the state or district ensure that alternative programs provide a quality educational program for "second-chance" students?

- How can "second-chance" programs ensure that eligible students are given the same consideration as others in terms of admissions, eligibility for courses and access to resources?

- How can "second-chance" programs avoid resegregation of minority students?

- How much initiative should be the responsibility of the individual who chooses a "second-chance" program? For example, should a student be provided transportation in a manner similar to traditional students?

School Improvement

- What steps are necessary to redesign the educational system so its processes are appropriate for serving all learners?

- Should the state provide additional funding for alternative programs, technical assistance and professional development to ensure that alternative programs are providing serious educational challenges for their students?

- Should programs for at-risk students be the only alternative schools in the system?

- Should systemic reform be undertaken for those programs and systems that serve mostly at-risk students? Should it be undertaken for the entire educational system?

- Who will initiate alternative programs -- the district, interested staff or selected outside organizations or persons?

What are potential state education department roles and responsibilities?

- Provide a funding mechanism which develops and maintains an array of educational program opportunities including training and technical assistance for local school boards, educators and communities on "second-chance" programs.

- Initially provide waivers to encourage the development of innovative curriculum, pedagogy and use of time; revise restrictive policies.

- Evaluate alternative programs to insure they provide a quality education which really offers their students a second chance at academic success.

- Serve as a clearinghouse for information on options for youth at risk.

- Help to insure that "second-chance" students have equal access to interdistrict choice and postsecondary options plans by developing model guidelines and promoting needed policy revisions.

4. INTRADISTRICT CHOICE: CONTROLLED CHOICE

What is it?

In a controlled-choice plan, school assignment is based on family choice among all the schools at a child's grade level within the child's home district. To assure racial balance, there is only one constraint on choice: each school must maintain the desired racial-balance goals of the system.

"Controlled choice" is a form of intradistrict choice that fosters two interrelated purposes: the voluntary desegregation of a community's schools and the strengthening of each school by giving its staff responsibility for improving quality.

How does it work?

Controlled choice was invented in 1981 to resolve the desegregation problems in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Its success has prompted four other Massachusetts cities to adopt the plan -- Fall River, Lowell, Lawrence and Boston. Controlled-choice plans also have been implemented in Seattle, Washington, and San Jose, California. A description of the features common to all these plans follows.

To achieve racial balance, seats in each school are allocated proportionately to the racial or ethnic groups in the community. For instance, in a district with a racial balance of 60% white and 40% black, 60% of the seats in the kindergarten classes of each school will be reserved for white students, 40% for black. With that as the only constraint, new students are assigned to schools on the basis of the preferences they have indicated.

To minimize cross-district busing and transportation costs, many cities implementing controlled choice subdivide their district into zones. These zones are carefully drawn to reflect the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic distribution of the district as a whole and, where possible, to keep neighborhoods intact.

Within this framework parents register their children through a centralized assignment office. There they obtain information on all the schools in the district (or zone), receive counseling in their native languages on school characteristics, school visitation schedules and how to make choices.

A district officer assigns children to particular schools subject to space availability, racial- and ethnic-balance guidelines and parent preference. In some districts, preference is given to children who already have siblings in a school or to children who live in the immediate neighborhood, so long as the racial and ethnic guidelines are supported.

Most districts that undertake "controlled choice" do not try to move everyone in the system all at once. Students already in the system are "grandfathered" into their existing school if they wish to remain there. The new plan is implemented only for students entering school or moving into the district, i.e., kindergartners and transfer students, and for students who wish to change schools.

In most controlled-choice plans, parents are not promised that they will get their first choice, although as many as 85% do in some cities with such plans. However, they are promised that once a student is enrolled at a school he or she will be able to stay. Parents who register late may be assigned schools without regard to preference to insure that racial balance is achieved.

What are the finance and equity considerations?

As with other forms of intradistrict choice, controlled choice does not involve the movement of funding between districts or systems. It may, however, lead to the reallocation of funding between schools within a district.

The costs involved in making the program successful include transportation, parent information, planning, technical assistance and staff development.

One special finance issue that may be unique to controlled choice has to do with using magnet-school dollars. Because controlled choice assures that all schools are magnet schools, special funding is not reserved for only a few schools. The amount of special funding available, however, may be insufficient to make a difference if it is spread evenly across all schools. Some districts have provided this source of funding for a few schools at a time, eventually reaching all schools.

The strong suit of controlled choice is that it places equity considerations at the center of the plan. It is then the obligation of the district to insure that each of the following aspects of the plan is fair to all parents: parent information, school assignment, school-improvement funding, transportation, educational opportunities within zones and access to citywide magnet schools.

In particular, the registration process must be designed so that it does not give undue priority to the best-informed and most aggressive parents. First-come-first-serve policies should not be used.

What do the advocates say?

Increased Support for Desegregation. By substituting voluntary choice for forced busing or mandatory school assignment in districts undergoing desegregation, community resistance to desegregation is reduced dramatically. Though many children still ride buses to school, the fact that they attend the school of their choice builds community support for the plan. Districts also may find that

controlled choice attracts white families who previously left the public schools because of its renewed emphasis on school improvement and educational quality.

Pressure for School Improvement. When school assignment is no longer based on neighborhood residence, it is imperative that the school-assignment plan be one that parents willingly accept. This puts significant pressure on the district to develop a plan with equitable attendance zones and assignment policies as well as to demonstrate a sincere and thorough commitment to high-quality education in every school.

Staff Professionalism and Collegiality. Some level of site-based management is implicit in the school-improvement process that accompanies controlled choice. If every school is to become a school of choice capable of attracting families, staff should have both the ability and responsibility to create effective programs. Meeting this challenge requires professionalism and collegiality among existing staff and simultaneously offers them significantly more decision making and involvement.

Accountability. When parents choose schools, schools that are not chosen stand out. This provides districts with invaluable information about schools in need of greater assistance and support.

System Restructuring. The change in the student-assignment mechanism and the desire to create a system that is equitable for all students provide an opportunity to rethink all facets of the school system's operation. Major system restructuring can be undertaken and disparate programs such as magnet and alternative schools can be integrated into a single framework.

What do the critics say?

Loss of Neighborhood Schools. In a controlled-choice plan, there is no guarantee a child will be assigned to his or her neighborhood school.

Increased Student Enrollment and Expenditures. Controlled choice may bring students and families back from private schools, resulting in larger education budgets and overcrowding.

White Flight. In districts with segregated schools, even voluntary desegregation will mean the end of schools that predominantly serve white students. Where desegregation is strongly opposed, some families may leave the system for private schools.

Unprepared Teachers. When choice disperses minority and limited-English-speaking students throughout the system, inexperienced teachers may find themselves unprepared to provide the multicultural or bilingual educational programs these students need.

Unequal Zones. Controlled-choice planners may find themselves forced to create zones with unequal educational resources in order to balance them racially, ethnically and socioeconomically. In one city, for example, most current magnet schools are located in two of the three proposed zones. Parents in the third zone

oppose a new plan that will limit their access to schools that have previously offered high-quality programs.

Transportation Costs. In one Massachusetts city, the adoption of controlled choice meant new and significant transportation expenses. The density of the city and its large number of small elementary schools previously had made busing unnecessary. But once parents had choices, even limited to zones, transportation expenses became a substantial cost.

How does controlled choice relate to school-improvement efforts?

The major focus of controlled choice is equity supplemented by school improvement. To strengthen the school improvement agenda, several components are desirable.

Planning, Technical Assistance and Staff Development. Because every school must undertake school-improvement activities, each should receive the outside assistance necessary to get the process started and to make it meaningful. The former may require principal evaluation and training and the formation of a planning team which has adequate opportunities to meet and work together. Technical assistance may be needed to help the teams learn the process of joint decision making. Lastly, teachers and principals need to be educated in the latest research and ideas surrounding restructured schools and innovative educational programs and pedagogies. Most of these steps will require release time or additional staff days.

Teacher-Initiated Schools/Citywide Magnets. To give parents a full range of educational choices, the school-based improvement process can be supplemented with a program for developing new, teacher-initiated schools (see Chapter 5). Parent and teacher surveys can reveal distinctive programs for which there is both a market and an interested staff. District-supported programs can train teachers and principals in new pedagogies such as Paideia seminars or using the whole-language approach.

Connection to Other Choice Plans. Controlled choice easily can be blended with teacher-initiated schools as a way to strengthen the school-improvement process. In addition to school-based planning and improvement teams in existing buildings, controlled choice can accommodate the creation of new schools, so long as they are filled in strict accordance with the overall system enrollment plan.

Because controlled choice is usually implemented in urban districts with high proportions of at-risk youth, alternative schools should be a natural component of the plan. If they are, districts with controlled choice may not need "second-chance" plans for these students.

Meshing Intra- With Interdistrict Choice. The opportunity to attend a school in another district can be one option that parents have in a controlled-choice plan. The ability to participate in this option will be constrained by the district's need to maintain racial balance. Historically, white urban students' ability to leave their

district has been limited by the willingness of suburban students to attend the urban district's schools.

However, controlled choice is likely to make urban schools more attractive precisely because of its emphasis on school improvement and the creation of high-quality schools. When citywide magnet schools are added to the picture, urban schools can become very competitive with suburban ones. The question of whether white suburban students could "bump" white urban students from their school requires community discussion.

A final consideration when trying to mesh inter- and intradistrict choice is coordination. Coordination is needed to insure that registration dates for the two programs do not put families in the position of having to choose one over another. Registration dates also may be a mechanism for dealing with the question of whether urban students will receive priority treatment within their own district's intradistrict choice system.

What policy questions should a controlled-choice plan address?

Administrative

- How will the community be involved in the planning process?
- How should a well-developed parent-information outreach effort be structured?
- Will teachers be encouraged to transfer between schools so as to strengthen each school's shared sense of purpose?
- Should teachers be allowed to create completely new schools?
- How will the student-assignment process insure that assignments are free of political influence?

Governance

- What will be the relationship of an urban district's intradistrict choice plan to a state's interdistrict plan? Specifically, how will racial balance be maintained and what priority will be placed on attracting white suburban students into improving city schools?
- How should districts support school-based management? Which decisions will be made at the school level?

Finance

- What will be the additional costs associated with a parent-information center, transportation and staff development?

- What is an appropriate balance between maximizing choice within a district and minimizing transportation costs?
- How should federal funds for magnet schools be used in a controlled-choice plan?
- If controlled-choice plans attract students from private schools, where will additional resources come from?

Equity

- What efforts are needed to create educationally equivalent zones?
- What assignment policies should a controlled-choice plan include to guarantee racial balance within zones or the district?
- How will everyone be given an equal chance to get first choice?

School Improvement

- At what level should parent advisory councils be created to insure that parents have a voice in the design and implementation of the plan? The school? The district?
- What kind of technical assistance will be provided to support schools in their improvement activities?
- If a controlled-choice plan disperses ethnic or limited-English-speaking children throughout a district, how can teachers be prepared to provide multicultural or bilingual education?
- How can a district support diversity among schools?

What are potential state education department roles and responsibilities?

As with teacher-initiated schools, controlled choice is a district initiative. State policy makers can, however, play a major role in acquainting districts with the option and providing them with incentives and technical assistance to undertake it.

Massachusetts, for example, has provided substantial financial and technical help to the four cities who chose controlled choice as a way to meet their state desegregation obligations. The state has provided funding to create the choice plans, to undertake school-based planning for school improvement, to train teachers in new pedagogies and to subsidize some transportation expenses.

5. INTRADISTRICT CHOICE: TEACHER-INITIATED SCHOOLS

What is it?

Within a system of intradistrict choice, some public schools are initiated by teachers who share a common philosophy. Using district guidelines, these schools are usually cooperatively managed by staff. This concept recognizes that children learn in different ways and teachers and schools should adapt to the children's needs rather than requiring children to adapt to a standard education system.

As in other intradistrict public-school choice plans, school assignment is no longer based on residence within a designated attendance zone. Instead, families choose the school their child will attend from a set of options. When schools of choice include options designed by teachers sharing a common vision and unique learning environments, the traditional school environment becomes only one choice among many.

How does it work?

Intradistrict choice grounded in school-based diversity operates on a bottom-up philosophy of school improvement. Principals and teachers are encouraged to find colleagues who share similar educational philosophies and interests and to work together to develop proposals for new schools. If approved by the district, these schools are provided with space, resources and opportunities to inform families of the new options.

When these new schools are created and sustained under a formal, written agreement between districts and teachers, they are called "chartered" schools. Where such charters exist, specific policies and conditions for granting and revoking them are required.

> The best-known example of intradistrict choice based on teacher-initiated schools is found in District 4 in East Harlem, New York. The history of teacher-initiated schools in this district began in 1974 when New York City was moving toward decentralization as a strategy to improve its failing schools. Under the leadership of a new superintendent, Anthony Alvarado, principals and teachers were invited to propose changes in school programs and curricula. Supported by the district and protected from the bureaucracy, two schools grew into a system of 30 "options" available to families aside from the regular neighborhood-zoned schools.

What are the finance and equity considerations?

Because intradistrict choice does not involve the transfer of funds between districts, questions of school finance are less complex than in interdistrict choice or postsecondary options plans where students move across district boundaries. Financial concerns are primarily related to start-up costs, transportation and the loss of revenues associated with losing students to other schools within the district.

Transportation. Equity concerns suggest that a district should provide transportation so all students in a district have equal access to schools of their choice. However, because resources are limited in most communities, there is likely to be a conflict between maximizing choice and minimizing transportation costs. As in most "controlled-choice" models, transportation costs will be reduced if choices are limited to zones within a district. At the same time, however, this reduces the range of choices. If zones are not used, transportation costs will be higher because students must be brought to a school from any neighborhood within a district.

In New York City's District 4, public-school choice has not involved significant transportation costs because of three distinctive features. One, the district covers a small geographic area with a high population density. Two, New York City has an extensive public transportation system that has always been used by schoolchildren; and, three, District 4 has made use of a "schools-within-schools" model. There are 49 different schools located in 20 buildings, some of which house as many as five different school programs. This, in effect, provides choice at the neighborhood school.

Planning and Staff Development. Creating exciting and excellent teacher-initiated schools, while maintaining and improving the quality of traditionally structured schools, is likely to require considerable planning time, staff development, technical assistance and some start-up costs such as new instructional materials. Districts that are serious about allowing teachers to create new schools may want to provide these supports to foster the development of high-quality teacher-initiated schools.

Within the costs involved in school creation and school-improvement efforts, there is an important distinction between start-up costs and long-term support. Experience suggests that the creation of new schools or the renewal of old ones can involve significant one-time costs. These are related to retraining, intensive planning, refurbishing facilities and securing new materials. In the long term, however, such schools are often able to operate within close range of traditional school budgets by reallocating funds and reorganizing staff and the structure of the day.

Admissions. Intradistrict schools of choice should insure that the benefits are shared by all students regardless of ability, race, ethnicity and socioeconomic status. This requires that admissions be nonselective, that parents are well informed of their choices within a district and that some guidelines insure a diversity of students are enrolled in all schools.

Interest in a school's program should be sufficient grounds for admission. All parents in a district should have an equal chance to enroll their child in the school

of their choice. This means that first-come-first-serve admissions should be avoided and consideration should be given, instead, to a lottery system if there are more students than space. "Controlled-choice" guidelines such as preference to siblings, neighborhood residence and maintaining racial balance might apply as factors for admission.

In an ideal system, a district has a set of diverse and excellent schools. When this is not the case, uninformed parents or students who transfer late to a district are placed in schools that other families did not select. This can lead to a "default selection" that results in a school with a concentration of students from the least informed and frequently least skilled families. When all schools are high quality, even late registrants are guaranteed a high-quality education for their child.

Student Composition. To avoid internal segregation by race, class or ability, teacher-initiated schools should be asked to meet the test of attracting a diverse student body. This often can be done through an intensive effort at parent outreach which provides sound information and guidance on how to choose an educational alternative for a particular child.

What do the advocates say?

Diversity. Public schools can be more responsive to a diverse and pluralistic community when teacher-initiated schools are allowed to develop a range of learning environments.

Parent Empowerment and Parent/Professional Relationships. A system of teacher-initiated schools of choice simultaneously gives professionals the power to create schools that reflect their professional judgment and provides parents a choice of schools to meet the needs of their children. The result can be a mutually supportive environment where increased parental interest in a school is valued by the teaching staff.

A Shared Vision. The emergence of schools with a coherent and cohesive sense of mission allows problems to be resolved within a common framework and the school to move forward with everyone's support.

Loyalty. When families select the school their child attends, experience shows that they are likely to develop a loyalty which translates into both strong and active support for the school and for their child's educational development.

Accountability. Teacher-initiated schools of choice are directly accountable to a small community of families who support the mission of the school. This more personalized form of accountability can provide far richer information on how well children are learning than more traditional measures can. As in other choice plans, teacher-initiated schools also offer another form of accountability: family requests to transfer to other schools. An examination of the reasons behind such requests can identify schools with problems and provide districts with the information they need to respond with assistance.

Professionalism and Collegiality. Teachers are offered the opportunity to create and influence the educational program in which they work, enhancing their professionalism and fostering their collegiality.

System Restructuring. Because the cooperative management of teacher-initiated schools of choice changes the fundamental relationship between schools and the district, it provides an opportunity to reexamine every facet of the school system's operation. Streamlining operations, reducing administration and moving more decision making to the school site can be among the outcomes.

Educational Continuity. Because students in schools of choice do not have to change schools if they change residence, they can have more continuity in their education. In poor communities, where family mobility is extraordinarily high, such educational continuity can eliminate a major risk factor in children's academic careers.

Improved Racial Balance. The success of teacher-initiated schools of choice in improving the schools of District 4 in New York City has led to an influx of applications from white students who live outside the district. Such schools of choice also may lead middle-class whites and blacks to move from the private-school sector back into the public schools. School systems benefit from attracting parents who have shown themselves willing to pursue high-quality education for their children.

What do the critics say?

Increased Student Enrollment and Expenditures. As with other choice programs, intradistrict choice based on teacher-initiated schools can draw private-school students back into the public system. While this can have significant benefits in the form of improved racial balance and more involved parents, it also means that the public schools must bear the costs of educating more students.

Balkanization. Without a common framework provided by well-written state and district goals, it is possible for diverse schools to become too distinctive and fail to provide students with the common skills needed for further education and employment.

Differences in Quality. When teachers are allowed and encouraged to work together to create new schools, the system and its students benefit from the energy and enthusiasm of the teachers who take advantage of the opportunity. If a large proportion of the most energetic and imaginative teachers choose to leave the traditional schools, however, those schools may be deprived of their strongest teachers. If this happens, families who prefer the traditional school may be shortchanged on quality, and teachers who prefer the traditional school may be discouraged by the loss of valued colleagues.

Loss of Neighborhood Schools. One of the most obvious changes that results from introducing choice as the mechanism for student assignment is the loss of the neighborhood school. This could be felt most keenly at the elementary level in communities where young children have traditionally walked to school and spent

the day close to their homes. Other potential consequences are diminished use of the school as a community center and reduced parent participation and involvement in school activities.

Meeting Demand. Experience with magnet schools shows it is very common for popular schools to be oversubscribed and for parents to find themselves tantalized by choice but unable to benefit from it.

How do teacher-initiated schools relate to school-improvement efforts?

What makes an intradistrict choice system comprised of traditional and teacher-initiated schools different from a system offering magnet schools as an adjunct to the neighborhood school is the long-run goal to make every school, including traditional ones, a school of choice. A district can implement choice as the method of assigning students as long as it has some teacher-initiated schools that coexist with traditional neighborhood schools. The existence of choice becomes an incentive for the conventional schools to develop their own distinctive identity and to pursue their own form of excellence.

Core Curriculum. In the past year, much has been made of the lack of cultural literacy of American students. This has led some reformers to suggest that a core curriculum be developed at the same time that other reformers are calling for site-based management and more diversity.

There may be two ways in which a core curriculum and diversity can coexist. First, diversity can be thought of in terms of the way the common curriculum is taught. Different pedagogical styles and school structures still can be expected to cover common material. Second, the core curriculum does not have to be the entire curriculum, thus leaving time in the schedule for individual schools to supplement the core with other curricular materials.

Curricular and Accountability Flexibility. Districts and states may want to consider the development of new curricular guidelines broad enough to include a wide variety of curricula, pedagogies and structures. In addition, the use of broader assessment measures such as portfolios, juries, performances and affidavits should be considered in order to determine if core skills are being learned in the context of a school's specific approach to education.

Governance and Central Office Support. Teacher-initiated schools of choice require far greater autonomy than traditionally structured schools. District staff will need to develop different relationships with schools to support school staff in carrying out their plans. For these cooperatively managed schools, teachers, school boards and the district central office will need to determine which decisions will be made by each group. Changes likely will be needed in such areas as personnel procedures, curriculum development, textbook and materials acquisitions, staff development and financial management. It will take time for these relationships to change; some type of mediation may be needed to resolve disputes as changes are being made.

Special Staff-Development Needs. Teachers who wish to begin a new educational program will need time to plan their schools and develop their new team. They may need training in such team-building skills as collegial decision making, conflict resolution and long-term planning. They may also need specialized training in a new pedagogical approach they wish to take, e.g., whole language, open classroom, back-to-basics or cooperative learning.

To create broad-based participation for teacher-initiated schools, the district must create ways to motivate teachers to develop ideas for new schools. New learning experiences and opportunities for teachers will help generate teachers' enthusiasm for taking charge of the educational environment. To accomplish this, one superintendent started teachers' weekly reading circles and ran a conference specifically on the topic of how to start a new school.

Supporting Risk Takers. To create a district environment conducive to the development of teacher-initiated schools, it is necessary to support risk takers and give them permission to fail. Not all the ideas that come forward will be workable; not all that are implemented will be successful. When a teacher-initiated school is closed, teachers should be readily absorbed back into the system without loss of pay or status. If this occurs, the superintendent should convey the message that a lesson has been learned and that school-improvement efforts will continue.

Mechanisms to Identify Teacher and Family Interest. Parent surveys are important tools in judging whether a teacher-initiated school is likely to find a niche in the educational market. By soliciting parent input on a wide array of choices, a district can discover which options have a serious following. This can become the basis for recruiting principals and teachers who would like to implement these ideas.

Teacher Mobility. If teachers are to work together with colleagues who share a similar vision, it will be necessary for them to choose the school they will work in, and it will be important for these schools to select appropriate teachers. Traditional methods for handling teacher transfers, especially those relating to seniority, may have to be adjusted to accommodate this new structure.

Parent Involvement. Teacher-initiated schools and site-managed conventional schools of choice offer a unique opportunity for parent involvement. Because parents want their children in a particular school and want that school to succeed, educators have an unprecedented opportunity to engage parents' new loyalty in a multitude of ways that strengthen the school program and the school/home connection.

Student Involvement in Choice. The involvement of students in the choice process can itself become an educational experience when the opportunity to choose a school is offered at the point of transition between elementary and secondary school or upon entry into high school. Working with students on how to make a decision, how to evaluate consequences and how to think about what they want can provide teachers and counselors with an important opportunity for connecting school to the personal lives of their students.

Redefining a School. Traditionally, a school has been a free-standing building managed by an assigned principal, staffed by the central office and expected to

carry out district guidelines. Teacher-initiated schools of choice offer a different vision, and their implementation may require severing the connection between a school and a building. For example, the 49 schools in 20 buildings in New York City's District 4 operate independently of each other.

School Closing and Staff Transfers. A major question for a district that uses an intradistrict choice plan is how to handle a school with low enrollment. A number of considerations should be taken into account. First, schools with small enrollments are not necessarily failures. They may merely represent a minority interest in the community. Before closing a school, a district should assess whether the school's small scale is a result of low-quality, specialized interest or lack of information on the part of the community.

Second, if a school loses students because of the quality of its educational program, it also loses resources which may further weaken its educational program. Districts must decide whether to provide technical assistance and help to such schools or whether to close them. Because school closures affect teachers, districts need a carefully thought-out policy to deal with this issue.

What policy questions should teacher-initiated schools-of-choice plans address?

Administrative

- Should school themes be decided by teachers, the central office or both?
- What efforts will be made to link parent and teacher interest in the creation of new schools?
- What form will staff development take to encourage new responses on the part of teachers?
- How will central-office operations be restructured to support building-level diversity?
- Should broadly defined district goals be developed or should waivers be used?
- What mechanisms will allow teachers to choose their schools?
- What mechanisms should be established to help teachers find others with similar interests?
- How will teachers be supported to take risks and learn from mistakes?

Governance

- Will districts create a formal mechanism for the issuance and revocation of charters? Who will be involved? How will these charters be developed? What decisions will be made at what level?
- Should school buildings be broken up into schools-within-schools or is implementation contingent on empty schools or new construction?
- Will each teacher-initiated school have its own director? Will it have autonomy from other schools whose building it shares?
- Within what limits can school-building staff redesign their school program and reallocate resources, including staff?

Finance

- What are the start-up costs associated with teacher-initiated schools?
- What transportation should be provided for students to attend teacher-initiated schools?

Equity

- How should school closings and staff transfers be handled? What is the role of the teachers' union in these decisions?
- How will adequate parent information reach all families?
- What guidelines are needed to be sure admissions are not selective?
- What guidelines are needed to ensure teacher-initiated schools are balanced racially, by ability and by socioeconomic status?
- Will older students be involved in choosing their schools? How will this be turned into an educational experience?
- What will be done to assure access to schools that are in high demand?
- How will successful schools be replicated?

School Improvement

- Should there be a core curriculum? If so, what kind of diversity can it sustain?
- If there is no core curriculum, what kind of diversity should be allowed: curricular, pedagogical, structural?
- How will technical assistance and staff-development support be provided to both new teacher-initiated schools and existing schools?

What are potential state education department roles and responsibilities?

Intradistrict choice is by definition a matter of local district policy. Because the very premise of the plan is the encouragement of voluntary behavior by teachers and families, and because its success hinges on a supportive administrative environment, such a plan probably cannot be mandated by state policy makers.

However, it is important for state policy makers to provide districts with incentives and support for implementing this new way of carrying out their responsibilities.

Incentives can take a number of forms:

- Provide grants to undertake planning or additional per-pupil funding
- Revise state regulations that make intradistrict choice difficult to implement, such as narrow curriculum guidelines and assessment mechanisms or rigid specifications of the structure of the school day
- Provide technical assistance in developing local plans, "charters" and staff development for administrators and teachers
- Provide for evaluating the success of local efforts
- Create an environment that encourages diversity through such steps as revising state curriculum goals and assessment techniques so that they are broad enough to encompass a wide range of educational programs

6. INTRADISTRICT CHOICE: MAGNET SCHOOLS

What is it?

Magnet schools are islands of choice within a traditional district assignment plan. Employing a particular educational philosophy, such as Montessori or a fundamental approach, or focusing on a curricular specialty, such as the arts or science, magnet schools have open-enrollment policies for students throughout the district who share that interest. Magnet schools have often been used as part of an urban desegregation plan to promote racial balance. They provide an opportunity to undertake school improvement on a more limited basis than other intradistrict choice plans.

How does it work?

In many cities, magnet schools have been created from the top down. That is, central offices decide on themes schools will offer. Rarely are teachers asked to create magnet schools on their own or are parents systematically surveyed as to their interest. Nevertheless, because magnet schools typically offer good working conditions, additional resources and enriched educational programs, they have little difficulty attracting either staff or students regardless of their theme. It is also common for staff at magnet schools to have far greater discretion than staff in regular buildings to decide how their educational program will be conducted.

Admissions procedures for magnet schools vary from district to district. In some cases, it is first-come-first-serve; in some others, seats are allocated for racial balance; and in some, a lottery is used.

What are the finance and equity considerations?

Magnet schools often cost more. How much more depends on how much the district is willing to spend and whether or not federal funding available for magnet schools that are part of desegregation plans is awarded. Higher costs come from transportation, improved facilities for specialized schools such as arts or science magnets, higher material costs for special programs, additional staff, staff development to train faculty in the new approach and planning time to maintain the quality of the program.

Magnet schools raise serious equity questions because they allow only a handful of families to benefit from school improvement (see "What do the critics say?").

What do the advocates say?

Diversity. Magnet schools tend to bring specialized programming to a school district's curricular offerings and thus offer families some choice of educational programs and environments.

Loyalty. Families who have chosen the schools their children attend usually exhibit strong loyalty toward those institutions and participate in activities that ensure the educational success of their children. Research on magnet schools reports high levels of parent involvement and commitment.

Collegiality and Professionalism. The explicit theme of the magnet schools provides a focus for both the staff and the students. The staff have a clear, common mission which they have volunteered to carry out. The shared focus and special status tend to promote collegiality, while the greater discretion afforded the program bolsters the staff's sense of professionalism. Both conditions tend to improve the quality of the educational program.

Accountability. Magnet schools are typically held to whatever standardized accountability procedures a district employs, whether it be test scores or site visits. They have two other built-in accountability mechanisms as well -- the interest of the community of parents who have chosen to participate in the school and are actively involved in it and the prerogative that such parents have to transfer out of the school if they find it unsatisfactory.

School Improvement. Magnet schools are sometimes referred to as "super schools." They tend to be favored by the district and to have all the features that the best thinking now recommends for school improvement: shared mission, planning time, staff development, discretionary resources, etc. As a result, magnet schools are often lighthouses of excellence in a sea of conventionality.

School Desegregation. Magnet schools across the country receive millions of dollars in federal aid because of their role in district desegregation plans. Evidence supports the claim that they can bring together, on a voluntary basis, students from various racial and ethnic groups. Magnet schools are thus the prototype for controlled choice.

Stemming "Bright Flight." By providing enriched educational programming, magnet schools attract the sons and daughters of the middle class of all racial and ethnic groups. The availability of programs of this quality often deters such families from moving out of the central city.

What do the critics say?

"Creaming." The most severe charge laid at the feet of magnet schools is that they create a hierarchy of schools within a district and undermine the quality of education at the regular schools. They can do this in a number of ways.

- They tend to attract some of the most motivated teachers and administrators in the district.

- They are likely to attract the most motivated and interested families in the district, providing an active constituency for the magnet schools but leaving the other schools without the benefit of those same parents.

- When magnet schools do serve to keep the middle class in the central city, they do so by segregating them in a few schools, thus creating obvious disparities between the student bodies of the magnet and the regular classrooms.

- Some magnet schools are selective in their admissions process and draw out of the regular schools the most successful and best-behaved students. Teachers in the regular school, in particular, feel strongly the loss of the "better" students.

- Even if magnets are in no way selective, even if they represent the composition of the district as a whole, the fact that they have additional resources may create the feeling that the magnet schools are the "good" schools. This perception, when shared by teachers and students in the regular schools, can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, as the other schools lower their expectations for themselves.

False Expectations. Good magnet schools are frequently oversubscribed and have long waiting lists for student enrollment. Even when the process is designed so that all families have an equal chance, the fact that so many are disappointed may fracture the school community. Equally harmful is the fact that the existence of some magnet schools raises expectations of a chance at a better education and then dashes it for some families.

Neighborhood Resentment. Magnet schools are sometimes created out of minority community schools to attract white students. Neighborhood residents can resent the fact that once additional resources have been made available to their neighborhood school, the number of places available for their children is limited to ensure an appropriate racial balance.

Inequity. Magnet schools are seen as inequitable because they provide a few students with far more educational resources than the vast majority of students in the regular schools receive.

How do magnet schools relate to school-improvement efforts?

Only magnet schools are improved under a magnet choice plan. Staff in regular schools feel they need additional resources in order to make the improvements magnet schools have made. Even when "low-cost" school-improvement ideas are developed by magnet schools, they rarely get translated into practice at the regular schools.

What policy questions should a magnet-school choice address?

Administrative

- What is an equitable admissions policy? How can admissions be done so as not to favor those families who are best informed and able to wait in line?
- Will additional magnets be created when demand exceeds the existing seats?
- Will students within the district be given priority over those transferring in from other districts or from the private sector?

Finance

- Will magnets receive ongoing funding above that of the regular school programs?
- Should magnet funds be distributed across all schools in a district in an effort to "magnetize" all schools?

Equity

- What will be done to insure that the student body reflect the racial, academic, special needs and socioeconomic profile of the district?
- Should magnet schools be selective or equitable in their admissions policies?

School Improvement

- How can low-cost school-improvement strategies developed in magnet schools be disseminated and used in other schools within a district?

What are potential state education department roles and responsibilities?

Magnet schools are a form of intradistrict choice. As such, state policy makers can only encourage them and provide supportive services. They can, for example:

- Provide incentive fundir ; for the creation of magnets
- Allocate ongoing funding to maintain the special programs
- Undertake an evaluation of the educational and racial-balance benefits of the magnet schools

- Facilitate communication and the sharing of information among districts with magnet schools

7. FAMILY INFORMATION

By definition, a public-school choice plan, no matter what its particular features, requires that families actively participate in the school-assignment process. Whether the goal is increased educational opportunities, school improvement or voluntary desegregation, public-school choice requires that each family identify its preferences for the school its child or children will attend.

The goal of a family information system is to make sure that all families have sufficient information to make reasonable choices that are in the best interests of their children. This includes the information necessary to allow middle- and secondary-school students to have input into the decision.

What information do families need?

How the Choice Plan Works. In the first place, families need to know that the school-assignment system works on the basis of choice. Second, they must know what steps they have to take to enter their choices into the assignment process. This requires information on deadlines, procedures and where to enroll.

Whenever public-school choice coexists with more traditional assignment plans, as it does in many cases, it is especially important to make sure that all families know they have some choices. Without a special effort to educate all families, it is likely that only the most active and well informed will take advantage of the choices they have.

How to Make an Educational Choice. Traditionally, families have not been called upon to choose the educational environment that was best for their child. Public-school choice insists that families choose a school and often offers families a range of educational settings which differ in their emphasis, curriculum, pedagogy or structure.

When such diversity exists, most families will need some guidance to determine which type of school setting best reconciles the needs of both the adults and children in the family. One family, for example, may favor an open school environment with little formal structure and strong reliance on children's self-direction. It may turn out, however, that the child actually functions better in a more structured environment where the teacher plays the major role in setting direction. This family may need help in finding a school that meets the child's educational needs but is also consistent with parents' preferences.

For single-parent families and those with two working parents, convenience and location may be very important considerations in choosing a school. On the other hand, school systems want parents to think about the special programs and opportunities that schools offer so that the chosen school meets the child's

educational needs. An effective family information program should help families who need to balance these two concerns.

When public-school choice is offered at the middle- and high-school levels, students themselves will most likely be involved in the choice. A school system's family-information program may want to use this important decision as an educational opportunity. Counselors and teachers may be asked to work with students to help them understand the importance of the choice and its consequences for further education or career.

What There Is to Choose From. In addition to helping families understand how the public-school choice plan works and what enters into making that decision, a family information program must insure that families have accurate and complete information on the schools from which they can choose.

This task is more complex than it first seems, because the kind of information required depends both on the plan's approach to school improvement and the kind of public-school choice plan being implemented.

There are two generally accepted views of how public-school choice improves schools. The first focuses on the power of competition. It argues that when given the opportunity, families will "vote with their feet," leaving bad schools and enrolling in good ones. Theoretically, this will pressure schools to improve. If they don't they will be closed.

The second view focuses on the way public-school choice provides diversity that will better serve students. According to this, school improvement occurs, first, as schools strive to develop their own identity. Second, schools improve when family enrollment patterns identify a weak school and the district or state offers technical assistance, staff development and perhaps personnel changes to strengthen the school's pursuit of an appropriate mission.

To reflect the first view, family information would focus on test scores, graduation rates, dropout rates and any other measures of student success that can be identified. The goal would be to compare schools in order to identify those that best serve students.

If the second view is accepted, family information would focus on differences in schools' philosophies, programs and pedagogies. The goal would be for each school to develop a mission statement that outlines its distinctive features and for families to be assisted in sorting these differences out.

These two approaches represent the two extremes of family information. In practice, the information provided should draw from each strategy. States and districts, however, may want to bear in mind the different philosophies of change imbedded in each.

Specific Choice Plans. In an interdistrict choice plan, families need information on which districts and schools are participating and in which grade levels seats are available. Once that basic information is provided, a decision must be made about how each of the districts and the schools will be described to families seeking that information. Will socioeconomic variables be emphasized? Will racial composition

be detailed? How will educational quality be depicted? How will programmatic differences be described?

In a postsecondary options plan, students and their families also need information on which institutions are participating. Other relevant information might include the dates of the term calendar, accessibility by public transportation, descriptions of courses open to participating students and the support services provided.

Second-chance programs have a slightly different challenge. Not only must specific information on eligible schools and districts be provided, but a special effort also must be made to reach those students who already have dropped out of school and are not part of most traditional information networks. When these students are contacted, they and their families will need information that convinces them that their educational experience in participating alternative schools, vocational schools, community colleges or high schools in different communities will be different from the one they left behind.

Parents need a listing of teacher-initiated schools, along with descriptions of their distinctive programs. If any of the schools expect a different kind of parent participation than most families are used to, this should be spelled out carefully.

Controlled choice also requires that families get in-depth descriptions of the schools from which they are choosing. Because controlled choice involves all schools in a district, some may be neither distinctive nor of high quality. How to present information that is accurate and helpful to families is a challenge that each district must meet.

Magnet schools are often the subject of widespread news coverage in communities where they are created. They represent a major investment of resources and are often a source of district pride. Rarely do magnets have to worry about generating parental interest. However, outreach often is necessary to solicit applications from families with low incomes and low educational achievement or who may lack access to or understanding of information through regular channels.

How to Reach Families. A variety of mechanisms are available for getting the appropriate information to parents, with the techniques differing according to what information is being conveyed. The first effort must be to inform families that choices do exist and where they can get more information. Some approaches that might be considered include:

- A traditional public-relations campaign which reaches local broadcast and print media
- Speaking engagements before local civic clubs and organizations
- School newsletters that are mailed or sent to all families
- Posters and announcements at all day-care and early-childhood education centers
- A widely publicized information hotline staffed by knowledgeable personnel

- Posters, billboards, grocery-bag displays
- Parent information centers located in school districts

Once the community is saturated with the information that public-school choice exists, districts or states need a mechanism for educating families more thoroughly about what choices exist and how to make them. In the Massachusetts cities with controlled-choice plans, the preferred approach has been the creation of parent information centers, located at schools or downtown. The centers are staffed by central-office personnel or parents who have been trained to provide other parents with the information they need. In communities with non-English-speaking minorities, parent centers are staffed by bilingual parents. In addition, the centers keep evening hours to accommodate working parents.

In general, family information centers should have all the published materials that describe schools and that help families choose. They also should offer individual counseling to parents in their native languages. Equally important, the programs should be flexible enough to respond to the actual concerns and needs of each particular community.

School Visits. Another key element of an effective family information program is the establishment of a school visitation policy. By creating designated times for school visits during which parents get to observe classes as well as meet staff, a number of important needs are served.

In the first place, those families for whom the written word is not a major source of information can directly experience the school. In the second place, families can decide whether the school reflects the description they have seen or heard. Third, a visit gives families a chance to judge the school climate. For many families, how a school feels, how teachers act, how children are treated are far more important than the official pedagogy and the special programs offered.

Parent Involvement. A final element of a family information program that should be considered is the development of a parent advisory council comprised of representatives of each school. The primary role of parent advisory councils is, of course, to provide a mechanism for policy discussions between schools and parents. But these councils can offer another avenue of outreach to parents as well. Members are generally well informed about the district or system choice plan and can be asked to participate in efforts to inform and guide other parents in their new role.

Who Runs the Program. Teacher-initiated, controlled-choice and magnet schools are all programs that operate within traditional district boundaries. It therefore makes sense for individual districts with these programs to have responsibility for developing and implementing the necessary family information program.

State agencies may want to develop guidelines to help districts devise comprehensive and equitable programs. Such guidelines will carry more weight if the state is contributing to the funding of either the choice program itself or the family information outreach.

Interdistrict choice, postsecondary options and second-chance programs all involve the opportunity for students to leave one district or educational system and enter another. It is therefore not obvious who should have responsibility for running a family-information program. Experience to date suggests an important role for the state.

> The Minnesota Department of Education runs an information hotline to provide parents and students with information on all its public-school choice programs.
>
> The Colorado State Department of Education ran the public-information program during the first three years of its Second-Chance Program.
>
> Under the proposed interdistrict choice plan in Massachusetts, the state department of education would have a considerable budget to develop and run a parent information program.

The argument for state participation is strong. The fact is that the home districts of families have nothing to gain by assisting families to exercise their options. Rather, they have something to lose because state funding is linked to attendance.

On the other hand, the district or institution that wants to attract families is unlikely to have the resources to reach out to everyone who might be interested. But even if all districts and participating institutions are conducting family information programs, this may itself be overwhelming to families trying to sort through various kinds of information from different and possibly competing sources.

State involvement in the family information outreach of interdistrict choice, postsecondary options and "second-chance" programs offers a neutral source of information, coupled with the ability to make all information about eligible programs comparable. This would make it easier for families to understand the real programmatic differences among their various options.

Conclusion. A strong family information system is necessary to make a public-school choice program equitable to all families and to help families in making reasonable decisions about the educational program best suited to their children.

When families understand how public-school choice works, when they are fully informed about the range of choices that exist and when they are offered counseling on how to make educational choices, public-school choice is well on the road to realizing its potential of expanding options for all children, improving schools and increasing the learning of children.