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ABSTRACT
                Controlled choice is a method of desegregation that
is voluntary, empowers parents and school staff, and leads to new and
exciting school organization and curriculum. To move in the direction
of controlled choice, substantial changes in present school
organization and operation must be made. This planning guide, based
upon the actual experiences of four Massachusetts school systems
(Cambridge, Lowell, Worchester, and Fall River), has been prepared to
assist local school systems in the exploration, development, and
implementation of plans to achieve both desegregation and educational
excellence through the introduction of controlled choice. Information
is divided into four chapters: "The Case for Choice: Moving Towards
Equity and Educational Excellence"; "Choice and Desegregation: Case
Examples"; "Planning for Choice: Some Do's and Don'ts"; and "The
Development of Choice Plans: An Overview." The introduction of school
diversity through the controlled choice system will decentralize the
educational decision making process and empower parents, teachers,
and administrators to make decisions about the educational
philosophy, the curriculum, and the internal organization of their
individual school. In cases where desegregation is required, choices
must be controlled by admission policies designed to ensure equal and
fair integration among all district schools. The bibliography
contains 26 references. (KM)

NECEA
NEW ENGLAND CENTER FOR EQUITY ASSISTANCE

Planning for Schools of Choice:
Achieving Equity and Excellence

Book I–Rationale

PLANNING FOR SCHOOLS OF CHOICE: ACHIEVING EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

BOOK I: RATIONALE

Evans Clinchy
Senior Field Associate
The Institute for Responsive Education
Boston, Mass.

Edited by
Frances Arick Kolb
Associate Director
The New England Center for Equity Assistance
The NETWORK, Inc.
Andover, Mass.

March, 1989

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PREFACE

The New England Center for Equity Assistance, a project of The NETWORK, Inc., is pleased to publish PLANNING FOR SCHOOLS OF CHOICE: Achieving Equity and Excellence, a series on controlled choice. This is the first of four books to aid school personnel who are looking at controlled choice as a possible desegregation method. They will help educators to think about choice as a way to restructure school systems and achieve desegregation, to learn how to develop a choice plan for their district, and to review the kinds of school organizations that might be developed for individual schools in the district.

We are excited about controlled choice as a method of desegregation that is voluntary, empowers parents and school staff, and leads to new and exciting school organization and curriculum. It uses the best of the magnet schools concept by making all schools "magnets" for student enrollment. It celebrates and encompasses the diversity found in American schools. Choice acknowledges that since not all children are alike or learn in the same way, so schools should be different too. Further, parents and students should be able to choose the schools they think most suitable for them.

For a long time parents have shown a desire to choose the type of school their children attend. They have used the quality of schools as one of the criteria in selecting a neighborhood. They have enrolled their children in private and parochial schools; they have supported various types of education in their own school districts. They have stood in long lines or camped overnight to enroll their children in magnet schools. Children have made choices too. Many, after all, choose not to attend school at all; they drop out. Some choose to go to exam schools or private schools. On the other hand, some parents have never had the luxury of making choices about the schools their children can attend. Because of poverty, illiteracy, or discrimination, they have been forced to send their children to schools that often are underfunded and inadequate. Choice, then, can be a means to empower all parents.

Choice alone, however, will not lead to desegregation of a school district. While choice may increase the comfort level of parents, students, and staff and may lead to improved schools, only through controlled choice can it also lead to desegregation. Based on the limited experience available at this time, its potential as a desegregation method is great. Through use of a choice system, both Fall River and Cambridge, two cities in Massachusetts, have been able to increase the integration of their schools. In Cambridge choice has resulted in increased achievement levels of students from different schools (Rossell and Glenn, 1988). In Fall River, major climate change is already evident, as is a significant increase in parental involvement, especially concerning educational issues.

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Controlled choice therefore has enormous potential as a means of restructuring schools so that they are racially, ethnically and sexually integrated, high quality, effective schools that the community, students and school staff all can be proud of. That potential can only be realized, however, through an extensive and complex planning process in which all of the community's elements are engaged. Also, the school administration must make a major commitment to diversity of school organization and curriculum and school-based management of that organization and curriculum.

These books, we hope, will be helpful to those who are interested in controlled choice and desegregation. We welcome comments and discussion of this new school structure.

The author of this book is Evans Clinchy, senior field associate at the Institute for Responsive Education, Boston, Massachusetts. He has worked in the field of desegregation and public school choice for the past twenty years. He has assisted the communities of Indianapolis (IN), Chicago (IL), Stamford (CT), and the Massachusetts communities of Lowell, Worcester, and Fall River to develop desegregation remedies based upon parent and professional choice. He is a contributing editor of Equity and Choice, and has contributaed major articles on choice to Phi Delta Kappan and other educational publications.

INTRODUCTION

We all want our public scnools to be better. We want them not only to provide all of our students with an excellent education but also to provide this excellence in a way that insures that all students of all races, ethnic groups, and genders are guaranteed an equal chance to achieve that excellence.

Can this be done? A growing body of evidence suggests that the answer to this question may well be "yes". But, if we wish to move in this direction, we must be willing to make substantial changes in the way we presently organize and operate our public school systems. Two crucial steps in achieving these twin goals of excellence and equity are outlined in this handbook First, the school system creates a diversity of approaches to education and within a controlled choice system that is desegregation. Secondly, controlled choice empowers all parents, all teachers and all principals to choose the different kinds of desegregated public schooling they believe will provide an excellent education. This means that ideally every school in a public school system will become a school of choice, offering parents, students, teachers, and principals a particular and distinctive educational option or choice.

The introduction of diversity and choice in schools in such a controlled choice system means that a large measure of the educational decision-making process will be decentralized so that parents, teachers, and administrators in each individual school of choice are empowered to make many -- if not most   .he decisions about the educational philosophy, the curriculum, and the inter. _. organization of their school.

This planning guide has been prepared to assist local school systems in the exploration, development, and implementation of plans to achieve both desegregation and educational excellence through the introduction of controlled choice. School systems must create, first, a range of different kinds of public schooling to meet the diverse needs and talents of students and the diverse educational desires of parents and professionals. Then the leaders must devise ways in which parents (and older students) can choose the kind of desegregated schooling their children will receive so that desegregation and excellence are both assured. In addition to parent choice, the educational leaders must empower teachers and principals to choose the kind of desegregated schooling they wish to practice.

In all cases where desegregation is required, all choices must be carefully constrained or controlled by the overriding requirement that all public schools must be equally and fairly integrated. To see that all students are guaranteed fair and equal access to any and all schools of choice, all admissions policies and procedures must be carefully designed so that no school has disproportionately low enrollments of any group of children or becomes an elite school serving a largely middle class, white, or predominantly male student population.

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The planning process described here is not based upon some purely theoretical model but rather upon the actual experiences of four Massachusetts school systems -- Cambridge, Lowell, Worcester, and Fall River. All four of these systems either have already instituted or are in the process of instituting desegregation and system-wide school improvement plans based upon educational diversity and parent and professional choice. Cambridge, while it did not follow the planning process described here, does offer a diversity of schools in a controlled choice system. This controlled choice approach is also the basic framework of the new student assignment plan currently being instituted in Boston. We will also briefly discuss one example -- that of Community School District Four in the East Harlem section of New York City -- that has instituted choice in a different but no less successful manner.

We should also add that, while the planning process developed in the three Massachusetts communities of Lowell, Worcester, and Fall River was created to address simultaneously the twin challenges of desegregation and system-wide school improvement, the process is equally applicable to any school district. Indeed, we see the planning process described here, while it has emerged from desegregation and the search for educational equity, as first and foremost a planning process for the achievement of educational excellence. Educational diversity and parent/professional choice, we believe, are among the most powerful instruments to reshape and improve the public schools of this country.

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THE CASE FOR CHOICE: MOVING TOWARDS EQUITY EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

"It has become clear that choice can do much to promote equity. It does so by creating conditions which encourage schools to become more effective, it does so by allowing schools to specialize and thus to meet the needs of some students very well rather than all students at a level of minimum adequacy, and it does so by increasing the influence of parents over the education of their children in a way which is largely conflict-free." Dr. Charles Glenn, Director, Office of Educational Equity, Massachusetts Department of Education, April 1985.

While controlled choice was introduced into public education in this country primarily to achieve peaceful desegregation, many educators and parents have begun to realize that choice can be a powerful means to improve the quality of the education offered in our public schools. While the introduction of diversity and choice does not in and of itself solve all of the educational problems (such as the need for higher teacher salaries or for vas'' increased funding of urban public schools or for the provision of decent ol facilities), both research and experience support the idea that diversity and choice can be a major step towards the empowerment of individual school communities to achieve educational improvement and to encompass and encourage the diversity of talents, backgrounds and interests of students and parents.

We say here that research has supported rather than proved the idea that choice promotes educational excellence, firstly, because precious little research has been conducted in this field. Indeed, we do not at the present time know precisely how many magnets or controlled choice schools exist in this country, since a national survey has yet to be conducted. Secondly, we are expressing extreme caution because it is often difficult to determine how much of an individual school or system's improvement can be attributed to the introduction of diversity and choice and how much to other factors, since other changes may have been going on at the same time.

To cite one such example, the student population at the Lowell (MA) City Magnet School is carefully organized and controlled to insure that it is closely representative of the total Lowell school population. Thus, it is not an elite school that skims off only the best students, although as a magnet school it has received extra state funds for a full-time program facilitator and for staff and curriculum development workshops. Yet in its seven years, the students at the City Magnet have consistently scored above the citywide averages on their reading and especially their math achievement tests. Since system-wide choice has come to Lowell only during this past academic year, these citywide averages have been determined predominantly by students in non-choice schools.

The City Magnet is, to begin with, a micro-society school in which the students (with the assistance of the professional staff) have created and now operate their own democratic, free-market society in school, a distinctly unusual approach to education. Its approach is aimed at achieving a great deal more than basic skills and good scores on standardized tests including, as one small instance, the aim of having children understand what living in a democratic society is all about by actually experiencing that life in school.

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How much of the school's success should be ascribed to its micro-society curriculum? Or to the fact that the people in the school have been empowered to a very large degree to determine their school's curriculum, organization, and governance structure? And what does one make of the fact that many of the positions of power and influence in the school -- such as school president, managers of banks, and business entrepreneurs -- are filled by young Latina and Southeast Asian women? Complications such as these are enough to make one swear off judging any school's degree of educational excellence by any such simplistic measure as achievement test scores.

Despite all of these rather fundamental reservations, at least two studies do provide data indicating that students in non-selective magnet schools do appear to have higher reading and math test scores than their district averages. The New York State study (New York State Magnet School Research Study, 1985) indicates that the academic performance of schools as a whole improved after they became magnet schools. The study also showed that magnet schools experienced significantly higher attendance rates, fewer behavioral problems, and lower suspension rates than comparable non-magnet schools. Three-quarters of the magnet schools in the New York study had drop-out rates below their district averages.

Partly this high achievement level can be attributed to the fact that virtually every magnet school or school of choice exhibits the basic requirements that the research on effective schools says a high quality school must have: a principal who is the true educational leader of the school; a teaching staff imbued with the belief that all children can learn; a stable, calm, and well-disciplined school environment; and an emphasis on basic skills development (Zerchykov, 1984).

Diversity and choice provide individual schools with three additional characteristics that in all probability lead to excellence: stability of the student population, diverse types of school organizations and curricula, and the empowerment of individual school communities to determine their school's particular mission.

EDUCATIONAL STABILITY

In many school systems, especially urban systems that operate on the neighborhood school principle, student mobility and turnover is one of the major problems that makes educating children not just difficult but well nigh impossible. In these systems, whenever children move out of any school's allotted geographic zone, they must switch to the school that serves their new neighborhood. Given the high degree of mobility of many urban children, many schools experience a student turnover rate that can exceed 100 per cent in the course of a school year. Many children have no educational continuity at all. Some students may attend three or four schools in the course of a single academic year because they and their families are moving around and in and out of the school district. Teachers have no chance to get to know the children and provide them with continuity (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Education, 1988).

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Under a system of controlled choice without neighborhood attendance zones, once a child's parents have chosen a school, that child can continue to attend that school no matter where the parents move within the district. A child starting in kindergarten can remain in that school until the completion of elementary school, thereby assuring educational stability for every child.

DIVERSITY OF SCHOOL ORGANIZATION AND CURRICULUM

Diversity and choice also are much more congruent with what we know about children. Most educators and parents realize that since all children are not alike in their talents, interests, and educational needs, no single kind of schooling can adequately serve the broad diversity of their talents, interests, and educational needs.

It has also been known for years that all parents do not share a single vision of the kind of education they want for their children. Some parents believe strongly that one or even all of their children need a traditional school with a traditional and highly academic curriculum. Other parents want something quite different for their children. A recent Gallup poll indicated that 68 per cent of the public school parents in this country do want to be able to choose the public school their children will attend (Gallup, 1986).

Similarly, we also know that public school educators do not all agree on a single kind of schooling that is indisputably the best and only way to educate all children. Again, some teachers and principals want to practice a traditional academic form of schooling, while others believe that they will receive more professional satisfaction from practicing developmental schooling or some other less traditional approach.

The traditional way of organizing and operating public school systems, however, has tended to ignore the large differences in children and the large areas of disagreement among parents and educators. Rather than providing a diversity of school organizations to match the diverse needs of students and the diverse philosophies of parents and educators, most school systems have concentrated their energies on a standardized curriculum and organizational structure so that all schools are roughly similar to each other.

Most public school systems have also historically organized themselves around the concept of the neighborhood school that serves a particular geographic section of the school district. Such neighborhood schools, of course, have many virtues. Since they are close to home, most students can walk. Such schools can also serve as local community centers, providing a focal point for community life and social and recreational services for both young people and adults. But the practice of assigning all children to a neighborhood school also means that both parents and students are restricted to the particular type of education offered at that school, whether or not the parents want that kind of schooling for their children or whether it is the kind of schooling that will most benefit any individual child.

Teachers as well are often assigned to such neighborhood schools on the basis of existing vacancies and seniority, whether they agree with the particular school's

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philosophy and educational practices or not. Under these circumstances, many observers say, it seems unlikely that such a diverse collection of parents, students, teachers, and administrators could possibly agree upon what constitutes an excellent public education.

SHARED SENSE OF MISSION

In a controlled choice system those parents and students who want a particular kind of education can band together with teachers and administrators who want to practice the same kind of education. Thus everyone in the school has a clear and shared agreement on what the school's educational mission is, and the kind of education to be offered. Consequently, such a student and teacher assignment policy can leac to much greater parent satisfaction and often strong enthusiasm about the education offered their children. So, too, a large segment of the professional staff is likely to feel professionally rewarded (Schools That Work).

Given such a shared sense of mission, everyone in the school can concentrate their energies on fulfilling that mission, rather than spending time and energy on resolving disputes and disagreements. The record of magnet schools and now schools of choice suggests that a shared mission can have remarkable effects on a school's climate and upon over-all student performance (Raywid, 1984). This empowerment of each individua school community to control its own destiny is also an implementation of one of the major recommendations put forward for the achievement of educational excellence by the National Governors' Association in their 1986 report, A Time for Results, and by "A Nation Prepared," the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy report on teachers.

While the main thrust of the 1986 Carnegie Report is the refo₁m of the teaching profession, its words can just as easily be applied to the entire community of any school of choice. "Within the context of a limited set of clear goals for students set by state and local policy makers, teachers, working together, must be free to exercise their professional judgement as to the best way to achieve these goals. This means the ability to make -- or at least strongly to influence -- decisions concerning such things as the materials and instructional methods to be used, the staffing structure to be employed, the organization of the school day, the assignment of students, the consultants to be used, and the allocation of resources available to the school."

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CHOICE AND DESEGREGATION: CASE EXAMPLES

The aim of District Four schools of choice has been "to create a system that -- instead of trying to fit students into some standardized school -- has a school to fit every student in this district. No one gets left out, no one gets lost. Every kid is important, every kid can learn if you put him or her in the right environment. But since kids have this huge range of different needs, different interests and different ways of learning, we've got to have a wide diversity of schools."
Seymour Fliegel, Former Deput Superintendent, Community District Four, New York City.

CONTROLLED CHOICE IN CAMBRIDGE

To show how desegregation can be achieved and/or maintained through controlled choice, the three Massachusetts school districts - Cambridge, Fall River, and Lowell - will serve as examples. In each of these school systems choice really is system-wide. Every school in the system either is, or is in the process of becoming, an educationally distinctive school. (The city of Worcester, which also used the basic elements of the planning process to develop its 20 magnet schools, has not yet extended the choice process to every school in the city.) In all of these instances, the system-wide choice plans have been developed as the result of Massachusetts laws outlawing segregation in the state's schools. In addition to the Massachusetts examples, the New York City example, Community School District Four, will serve as an example of a different means of arriving at choice.

To take the earliest Massachusetts example first, Cambridge is a city of 95,000 people separated from neighboring Boston by the Charles River. The city has 13 K-8 elementary schools and a single high school, for a total of about 7,500 students. During the 1987-88 school year, 49.9 per cent of those students were African American, Latino, and Asian-American and 50.1 per cent white. The system serves a highly diverse population encompassing 47 different language groups.

When Cambridge began to desegregate in 1979, the city attempted to solve its racial imbalance through simple and straightforward redistricting and, in at least one case, the pairing of schools. While these approaches achieved numerical desegregation, they caused considerable unhappiness among parents. In 1981, in an effort both to maintain the desegregation already achieved and to devise a desegregation remedy that would satisfy parents and provide a permanent solution to the imbalance problem, the Cambridge system moved to establish a system-wide controlled choice plan.

The Cambridge approach has abolished all neighborhood elementary school attendance zones. Students are now assigned to schools through a system of parent choices. The parents of all entering kindergarten students, the parents of all students entering the system for the first time and all parents who wish to transfer their child from one school to another go to a central parent information center. After parent information specialists inform them of the variety of choices available to them, parents then list their first, second and third choices of schools, of which one may be the neighborhood school. As parents make their

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choices, those choices are immediately examined by the student assignment officer to determine whether the requested assignment falls within the desegregation guidelines and whether space is available at the student's grade level.

If the assignment requirements are met at the school of first choice, the assignment officer is empowered immediately to make the assignment to that school. If not, then the assignment can be made to the parents' second choice school or perhaps to the third choice. The system has also set up an elaborate appeals process for those parents dissatisfied with the assignments their children receive. (See Book II for details.) All of the system's schools are desegregated, with sixty-three per cent of the parents choosing a school other than their neighborhood school.

An additional interesting result of the Cambridge plan is the increased attractiveness of the schools for all of the city's parents. Prior to desegregation and controlled choice, more than half of the school-age children (mostly white) in Cambridge attended private schools. Indeed, there were more private and parochial than public schools in Cambridge. However, as of the last school year, 84.8 per cent of Cambridge's school age children attended the public schools. The attractiveness of the public schools in Cambridge has clearly increased.

As can be seen from this brief description, Cambridge did not desegregate its schools by means of educational diversity and controlled choice -- the system desegregated first by non-choice means. Although before desegregation a small degree of diversity in the schools did exist (including one of the country's early and most successful open education alternative schools, the Graham and Parks School), choice has clearly spurred the system's movement towards greater diversity. Over the past several years, individual Cambridge schools have been encouraged and assisted by the system's central administration to develop increasingly distinctive and unique educational programs, including more open schools. Today, for instance, students attend a school that is future-oriented where they explore and implement the most advanced educational technologies.

Lowell is a former mill town with a unique history as the nation's first planned industrial community. Although Lowell was the site of the beginning of the American Industrial Revolution, the town fell on hard times after the Second World War when the textile mills moved South. It recently has undergone a remarkable economic and cultural renaissance as high tech industries have moved into the city's restored and converted mill buildings.

DESEGREGATION AND CONTROLLED CHOICE IN LOWELL

As a part of this renaissance, a wave of new immigrants, mostly Hispanic and Southeast Asian, have come to the city, the home to previous waves of Irish, Greek and Portuguese immigrants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Lowell's rebirth, however, has also engendered a severe desegregation problem because the population of Hispanic and Southeast Asian children has grown so rapidly. The school system began to address this situation in the early 1980's

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through the network of seven magnet schools established by means of the type of community-wide planning process described in Book II. The ultimate aim of Lowell's plan was that every public school in Lowell would become a school of choice.

As the minority population grew by leaps and bounds, the seven magnet schools proved inadequate to handle the desegregation problem. So, during the 1987-88 school year, Lowell implemented its original idea and moved to a system-wide controlled choice plan. Now every school in Lowell is a school of choice, with each school involved in a school-based school of choice/school improvement planning process. Today, the Lowell School District has 13,625 students of which 24% are Southeast Asian, mostly Cambodian, and 15% are Latino. The district has 28 schools, one high school and 27 K-8 schools in a wide variety of grade combinations.

What is particularly interesting is that when the parents were asked in 1981 what kinds of schools they would like to have as magnets, they chose not traditional schools but two unusual schools. The parents' first choice was a kindergarten through grade eight micro-society school (the previously mentioned City Magnet School and described in more detail in Book IV) with second place honors going to a K-8 school devoted to the fine and performing arts (the Arts Magnet School). These schools were created as citywide magnets and are now flourishing as fully integrated schools (40% minority and 60% majority under the system's strict admissions controls) in newly rehabilitated facilities specifically designed for their unique educational programs.

CHOICE AND SYSTEM-WIDE SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT IN FALL RIVER

Fall River is a moderately sized, semi-industrial, and relatively poor city in southeastern Massachusetts. It has a total public school population of roughly 12,000 students housed in 27 elementary schools, four middle schools, and one high school. According to the U.S. Office of Civil Rights standards, the minority (African-American, Latino, Asian and Native American) population of the school system is small -- around two per cent. However, the city has a large Portuguese-speaking population. Each year more new immigrants with children who know little or no English are arriving, both from mainland Portugal and the Azores.

By agreement with the Massachusetts Department of Education's Bureau of Educational Equity and the State Board of Education, the Fall River school system has become the first in the nation voluntarily -- and in Fall River's case eagerly -- to declare any child whose first language in the home is not English to be a linguistic minority child. With 36 per cent of the school population now classified as minority, the school system was able to fall under the state's integration requirements and become eligible for state financial assistance for both desegregation and school improvement purposes.

With 36 per cent of the system's elementary school population defined as linguistic minority, fourteen of the system's 27 elementary schools were classified

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as minority-isolated (having a minority population over 50 per cent), and nine were now majority-isolated (having a minority population of less than 30 per cent -- with at least one school having only a 6 per cent minority population). The four middle schools and the single high school turned out to be balanced, since they had minority populations between 30 and 50 per cent.

In order to move all of the system's elementary schools into the proper range of balance -- between 30 and 50 per cent minority -- and with roughly equal numbers of male and female students, the system's desegregation planners adopted the Cambridge controlled choice approach. In order to control the extent and cost of busing, the planners divided the city into four zones, each with six to eight elementary schools and one middle school. A parent information center has been set up in each zone to handle the centralized registration process.

Under Fall River's controlled admissions and transfer policy aimed at the gradual achievement of desegregation, all students presently in the system can at this time go to their present schools, unless their parents wish to choose another school for them. However, the parents of all entering kindergartners and all older students entering the system for the first time (and all parents who wish to choose another school for their child), must register at the local parent information center in their zone. There parents are advised that they can choose to enroll their child or children in any school in their zone, subject to available space and the requirements of the over-all minority and gender balance guidelines.

The programmatic choices available in the zone are described to all of these parents, including the possibility that one of those choices could be the neighborhood school. Since all kindergartens under this plan are now balanced and since the guidelines requiring the 30 to 50 per cent minority population and gender balance in all schools will be extended year by year up through the grades, within six years all elementary schools (and thus all Fall River schools) will have the proper minority/non-minority balance and will thus be desegregated.

During the first year of controlled choice in Fall River, the range of educational diversity in terms of school organization and curriculum has been small (although all schools are begininng to go through an elaborate schools of choice planning process, described in Book II). Even so, desegregation resulting from the first year has been remarkable. This is true even though during the course of this year the system's over-all minority percentage has risen from 36 per cent to 39.5 per cent. The number of majority-isolated schools (less than 30 per cent minority enrollment) has been reduced from 14 to 9; the number of balanced schools (those with enrollments over between 30 and 50 per cent minority) has risen from 10 to 15. This indicates that parents are voluntarily choosing schools other than their neighborhood schools, even though the degree of true diversity among those schools is as yet relatively low. Indeed, the figures show that of the 941 students whose parents choose a school, one-third chose a school outside of the neighborhood.

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Some 80 per cent of the parents who chose, including those who chose their neighborhood school, received their first choice. While three schools in Fall River are still over 50 per cent minority, due to the location in these schools of the system's Portuguese bilingual classes (thus 11.1 per cent of the system's minority children are still in minority-isolated schools), the planners in Fall River are already working on ways to spread these bilingual classes more evenly throughout the system to assist in the elimination of minority isolation.

This first-year desegregation success in Fall River suggests that parental choice can work even when diversity of schooling is in its early stages.

IN-SCHOOL DIVERSITY: THE EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT FOUR

New York City's Community School District Four has a unique method for the creation of diverse schools. The district is made up of 20 school buildings -- 16 elementary schools and four junior highs (high schools in New York City are the responsibility of the central board of education). But these numbers are deceiving, for tucked away among those 20 buildings are 28 entities the district calls alternative concept schools. Each has its own administrative staff, teacher, unique educational philosophy and distinctive ways of approaching the education of children.

East Harlem is a section of New York City with a population that is almost totally African-American, Latino and poor. Its desegregation problem is so overwhelming as to preclude any reasonable solution in the near future. Many of the 13,000 school-age (pre-school through grade eight) children in the district come from single parent homes, and many are on welfare. Virtually every child qualifies for a free lunch.

Thus District Four does not start out ahead of the game. Indeed, the district's children -- and therefore the people who run the district's schools -- face every problem that modern society could possibly conjure up, poverty, crime, drugs, broken homes, racism. If you were looking for the least likely place to start an educational renaissance in the public schools, East Harlem and District Four might well be it.

But what is particularly remarkable about what has gone on during the last thirteen years is the way District Four has gone about creating these schools of choice. Instead of a directive from on high, the district superintendent at the time, Anthony Alvarado, turned to the district's teachers and asked them to decide what kinds of schools they would like to teach in. For most of the teachers in the district, such a question must have come as a bit of a shock. One suspects that no one had ever thought it necessary, desirable or perhaps even wise to ask teachers such a question. A handful of teachers in the District Four, however, responded with enthusiasm to Alvarado s question. They sat down and outlined their ideal schools. Some teachers from other community school districts also came up with proposals. The central administrators then set about the formidable task of helping the teachers turn their paper schools into realities.

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After preparing detailed plans for how the schools would operate and what the educational philosophy and curriculum would be, the lead teacher were given the job of recruiting staff from other teachers in the district (or from outside the district) who shared the original teacher's particular vision and wanted to teach in that kind of school. Most of the alternative concept schools started out small, perhaps only one or two classes in one or two grades, and grew from there. Most of them have remained small (somewhere between 200 to 400 students) in order to maintain both the sense and the reality of intimacy and to guarantee that no student gets lost in the bureaucratic labyrinths of a big school.

In short, what District Four has done and is continuing to do is to empower teachers to become what they have always claimed they are or should be allowed to be -- professional educators capable of determining how they can best practice their profession.

When the alternative concept schools began in District Four 14 years ago, the district ranked 32 out of 32 community school districts in the city on standardized reading and math scores. Today, the district ranks fifteenth. Fourteen years ago the district sent only 70 students to the city's selective high schools (such as Bronx High School of Science); this year over 300 students were admitted to those schools. But still, how much of this success can be attributed directly to diversity and choice? John Falco, Director of Alternative Concept Schools, says that it is almost all due to diversity and choice, and particularly to choice. What choice does, he says, is to provide the professionals in the schools with the incentive that comes from competition for students and thus for the allegiance of parents. Given the necessity to attract students on the basis of both the type and the quality of the education they offer, he says, the teachers and principal of any individual school have to make sure that the quality parents want is there.

Deputy Superintendent Fliegel expands on this notion, but says that the quality must be there in the design and the staffing of the school, almost before choice enters the picture. An individual school will attract students, he says, only if it does already offer quality. "And parents find out very quickly by word of mouth from students and other parents whether a school is a good school or not."

In order to achieve quality, Fliegle has a formula. "First," he says, "a school and the people who run it must have a philosophy, a vision of what they want the school to be. Secondly, the school has to be small, so that there can be a real relationship between the students and the teaching staff. And then, third, you have to extend ownership of the school through choice, to the students, to the parents, to the teaching staff."

CONCLUSION

The characteristics of successful schools of choice are further re-enforced by a national study of 1,000 public and private high schools conducted over the past several years by John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe of the Brookings Institution. They wanted to find out why some schools excel in promoting the academic achievement of students and some do not. The researchers gave academic achievement tests to 25,000 representative students in 1,000 schools in the spring

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of their sophomore year and at the end of their senior year (Chubb and Moe, 1988). Those schools in which the students scored in the highest quarter of achievement were labeled as "high performance" schools while those in the lowest quarter were labeled as "low performance." All of the schools were then profiled on the basis of four characteristics: formal structure, informal organization, classroom practice, and the composition of their student bodies.

When the data were analyzed and controlled for such factors as student aptitude, ethnic and racial mix, family income, and money spent on the schools, the researchers discovered that the most crucial element of the high performance schools was the effectiveness of the school's organization and, most specifically, the school's autonomy trom higher level administrative control. The school's staff and parent body had the ability to determine a common school purpose or a shared view of education, i.e., a shared sense of mission.

The researchers concluded that "all other things being equal, attendance at an effectively organized school for four years is worth at least a full year of additional achievement over attendance at an ineffectively organized school." The researchers went on to make the following suggestions:

"A number of options ought to be taken seriously -- among them magnet schools, open enrollment plans and full or partial voucher systems. In one way or another, each provides students and parents more choice among schools and more reason to become cooperatively involved in them. Each also encourages schools to organize for greater effectiveness by establishing competition for both students and resources and by increasing school autonomy" (Chubb and Moe, 1988).

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III
PLANNING FOR CHOICE: SOME DO'S AND DON'TS

"In a democracy, you can't just tell people what's good for them and then impose it on them whether they want it or not. Yet that's what we have always done in public education. That's why so many parents want to take their children out of the public schools and -- using tuition tax credits or vouchers -- put them in private or parochial schools. That is often the only way that parents can choose the kind of education their children will receiv..." --George Tsapatsaris, Project Director for Magnet Schools, Lowell Public Schools, Lowell, Mass.

DO COMMUNICATE WITH EVERYONE ABOUT THE NEW SYSTEM CONTINUALLY.

Before a school system engages in the process of planning for choice, it is useful to look at some pitfalls of choice plans so that school personnel have an opportunity to think about how to overcome these problems, some of which might ruin any possibility of success. In order to avoid the mistakes that are often made in designing and implementing choice systems, here are some do's and don'ts, derived from actual experiences with magnet schools and schools of choice across the country.

Sometimes when a controlled choice system is inaugurated, people do not really understand what parent and professional choice are all about. As a result, precisely those people -- parents and teachers -- who are the prime beneficiaries of choice become negative. In most cases, this occurs because of a hasty and poorly conceived planning process that has neither taken the time nor made the effort to ensure that the choice process, including its benefits and possible drawbacks, is fully explained and thoroughly grasped by all those who are going to be affected.

Since the introduction of choice is a major change in our thinking about public schooling and particularly about the way children are assigned to schools, such a change is bound to make everyone a bit nervous and frightened. Choice appears to threaten (and in many cases does threaten) all sorts of vested educational interests: the decision-making authority of the local board and the central administration; the traditional adversarial roles in collective bargaining between teachers' unions and local boards of education; the contractual dogmas, such as the supremacy of seniority of the teacher and administrator unions; and the parental right to have children attend the neighborhood school.

If these perfectly natural and expected fears are to be dealt with in a fair and understanding manner, the planning process must be conducted in a fair and thoroughly democratic fashion. Everyone should be given a chance to voice all of their worries and concerns and have them dealt with in an open and forthright manner.

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DO INVOLVE PARENTS IN THE CREATION OF CONTROLLED CHOICE.

In many school systems that have instituted magnet schools or schools of choice, the central administration has made the decisions as to the different kinds of schools (or educational options) the school system will offer. As a result, parents believed that their wishes have been ignored and/or their opinions never even asked for; they had little say over what was going to happen to their children in the public schools.

While schools of choice created in this fashion have often been highly popular and have succeeded in attracting parents and students, in other places central administrators have badly misjudged what the parents wanted. In Worcester, Massachusetts, at least one central planner was convinced that a school that operated on a longer 220-day school year and a longer school day would be immensely popular with parents. When parents were asked about this option on a survey, they turned thumbs down on the entire notion. Indeed, one absolutely essential step here is the conduct of surveys of all parents and all teachers and principals in the system to determine the actual choices both parents and teachers want - and how many schools housing each option are needed (see Book II for how this can be done).

The most successful choice systems -- such as those in Buffalo, New York, and the Massachusetts communities of Lowell, Worcester, and Fall River -- have involved parents and other community people in the decision-making process from the beginning of the planning of schools of choice, so that most parents felt that their wishes were being properly respected.

DO BE SURE TO TAKE ALL NECESSARY STEPS TO SEE THAT ALL PARENTS ARE WELL INFORMED.

In even the most carefully designed and executed planning process, some elements of the community may be inadvertently left out. This danger is particularly acute in situations where parents do not speak English, but it can also happen where parents may not have much connection with the school system or where parents see the local public system as their enemy. When this happens, parent choice comes to be seen primarily as a benefit to middle class parents, which is hardly what diversity and choice are all about.

Again, great care must be taken to reach all parents, and especially linguistic minority parents. The experiences in such Massachusetts cities as Cambridge, Lowell, Worcester, and Fall River suggest that when the right kind of mechanisms are created for the planning of schools of choice, this danger can be avoided. Some of these mechanisms are citywide parent planning councils, parent surveys in all appropriate languages, and informational meetings held in all neighborhoods. Once diversity and choice are ready for implementation, elaborate mechanisms should be in place to inform parents of the choices available to them.

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DO BE SURE TO INCLUDE THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN ALL PHASES OF THE PLANNING OF CONTROLLED CHOICE.

A further and most obvious danger is that choice will be seen, especially by the system's teacher and administrative unions, as a benefit to parents and students but not as a contribution to greater professional status and satisfaction for teachers and principals. In choice situations, teachers and principals are most often likely to worry that they will not be given a chance to choose the kind of schooling they wish to practice. They fear that they will be arbitrarily assigned to schools of choice or that their present school will become a school of choice of a kind they do not wish to work in. One result of this may be that teachers (and their unions) oppose the idea of parent choice altogether and/or unions resist productive changes in existing contracts, such as allowing teachers to opt for and be selected for the schools of their choice, without regard to seniority.

Given the example of New York City's District Four, this is a situation that should never occur. Teachers and principals and their unions should be involved in planning schools of choice and be represented on citywide planning committees, especially in the development of all parent and professional surveys. Indeed, according to Mary Romer-Coleman, Assistant Director of Alternative Concept Schools, it is precisely the treatment of teachers as adult professionals that has served as a major cure for (and/or vaccination against) teacher burn-out and kept many of the district's best teachers in the schools. She herself was preparing to leave the profession when the alternative concept idea came into existence. "I would have been long gone," she says, "if I hadn't had the chance to develop and work in the kind of school I believed in. And this is true, I think, for most of the teachers in the alternative concept schools."

DO BE SURE TO ENLIST THE SUPPORT OF ALL CONSTITUENCES IN THE COMMMUNITY.

Sometimes when a school system plans for controlled choice, its staff think only in terms of information and planning for its immediate and visible constituency -- public school parents and public school professional staff. The most immediate constituency that often gets ignored is those parents who do not at the moment have children in the public schools. This group in particular includes the parents who have only pre-school children and/or children in the private and parochial schools. It is extremely important that all of these parents be included in the planning process and receive all surveys and information on the choices within the public system.

In addition, the following groups need to be informed: those parents whose children are beyond school age but who still retain a concern about the public schools and who, as voters and taxpayers, are still called upon to support the public school system; and all of the community's social agencies and community organizations, the business community, and the community's political structure. It is important that these people be informed and brought into the planning process, so that no segment of the community can claim ignorance of the plans of the school system.

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**DO MAKE SURE THAT
CONTROLLED CHOICE IS NOT
SEEN AS A SYSTEM OF
SELECTIVE SCHOOLS.**

More than a few school systems that have instituted one or m re magnet schools or schools of choice while leaving other schools in the system as non-magnets or non-choice schools have run into this problem. No matter how hard the planners of the choice system try to make it clear that they are not creating elite schools, many parents and community people will see a handful of magnet schools as the system's best or first class schools, while the other non-magnet schools are viewed as the second class or merely ordinary schools (Metz, 1986).

This problem becomes particularly acute when the magnets or schools of choice are selective, that is, when they restrict their enrollments to students who meet some set of criteria or standards and reject all those students who do not measure up.

All of these selective schools have in recent years drawn justified fire for the following reasons:

● School staff accuse them of skimming off the academically talented students.

● The selective schools that use academic achievement as the primary entrance criteria often tend to have skewed gender and race enrollments.

● Selective schools often are predominantly white, thus raising questions of equity and, in desegregation situations, of compliance with court rulings and civil rights standards on desegregation.

● Some of the selective schools specialize in fields that have historically been restricted to males. Those specializing in science and technology or computers have tended to be mainly male, thus again raising serious questions of equity.

● Some programs for the talented and gifted have mainly white enrollments.

This raises some very pertinent questions such as "Who are the untalented and ungifted children?" and "Who decides which children have talents or gifts and which do not?" and "How are such decisions made?"

While all of these criticisms are valid, they do not address an even deeper problem -- the fact that many of our young people all too rarely get a chance to display and develop the full range of talents they possess or to discover that they do possess particular talents other than the purely academic ones.

We clearly need to broaden the range of offerings available to all children and then make very sure that we give all children every opportunity to display and develop their talents.

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We should add here that the elitist school problem for any system that has only a limited number of magnets or schools of choice is by no means limited to selective schools. The magnet school experience all across the country suggests quite clearly that even non-selective magnets, open to all students and operating within strict minority/non-minority admissions guidelines, still are thought of as the system's first class schools and accused of skimming the best students from other schools. This tends to be true even when the admissions to such non-selective magnets are carefully controlled for equity reasons and have attracted a student population that exactly mirrors the racial, ethnic, and social class make-up and the academic achievement levels of the school system as a whole.

What these experiences seem to suggest as a way to solve this problem -- lo and behold! -- is that if every school in the system becomes a school of choice, then all schools are on an equal footing.

DO BE SURE THAT THE COMMUNITY REALIZES THAT ALL SCHOOLS WILL BECOME SPECIAL SCHOOLS WITHIN A SHORT TIME PERIOD.

The feeling that magnets are a system's first class schools is fueled in large part by the fact that magnets do require extra funding in order to get started, and, in many cases, to maintain their special attractiveness or magnet quality. In the Blank study (Blank, 1984), the additional cost per pupil was $59 more than the average district-wide per pupil costs.

Despite the fact that usually these funds come from outside the local tax base, either from the federal government (Magnet School Assistance Program funds) or from state funds (such as Massachusetts' Chapter 636), the perception still exists in many communities that the magnets are robbing the non-magnet schools of funding that is rightfully theirs. An instance of this is the classic tale of the chairman of the school board in one magnet school community who rose at a school board meeting and held up a short worn green crayon that, he intoned, was what one of the system's non-magnet schools had to make do with while the magnet schools were being showered with extra supplies, equipment, and even extra teachers. The crayon money that would normally have gone to the non-magnet school, he claimed, had somehow been transferred to the magnet school bank account. Since the magnet money was extra money supplied by the state, this was false.

While it is easy and even tempting to dismiss such histrionics, it is true that magnet schools have, as a general rule, received extra funding. Many parents then believe that if they get their children into a magnet school, those children will get more and therefore perhaps school of choice, with all schools receiving equal funding depending upon the number of children each attracts, then some of the charges of perceived or real favoritism will die out.

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DO MAKE SURE THAT EVERYONE UNDERSTANDS THAT A LONGER TIME FRAME IS NECESSARY TO CREATE A FULL-FLEDGED CHOICE SYSTEM.

While parents have every reason to hope and even to expect that they will get the schools of choice they want and that such schools will produce better education for their children. expectations may be raised in the process of planning a system of parent choice that few school systems will actually be able to fulfill. Some of these expectations are:

- that the system will immediately be able to create all of the different kinds of schools parents want.

- that all parents will be able to have their first choice of schooling for each of their children. While this may turn out to be true for 80 to 90 per cent of the parents in any given system (if the schools of choice planning has been properly conducted), probably all parents will not receive their first choices.

The best -- and perhaps the only -- way to cope with the possibility of such excessive expectations is to make sure that the system explains to all concerned that, while the school system is dedicated to creating all of the different kinds of schools parents (and teachers) want, the development of some of those schools will take time.

DO BE SURE TO KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR RESEGREGATION AMONG OR WITHIN SCHOOLS

Planners must make clear to the community that once diversity and choice have been implemented and all schools of choice have been integrated, such desegregation will be maintained as a permanent fixture of the school system. No drifting back will occur, either intentionally or accidentally, into a system that allows schools to become unbalanced once again.

And most importantly, this same stricture applies to the educational process within schools that on paper appear to have achieved the proper minority/non-minority and male/female enrollments. It is all too easy -- especially in traditional schools that use achievement level grouping -- for Latino, African-American and poor children to find themselves relegated to lower tracks and thus to be re-segregated within schools that appear at first glance to be numerically integrated and balanced (Oakes, 1985).

DO EMPHASIZE THAT SCHOOLS OF CHOICE ARE BEING SET UP SO THAT PARENTS AND STAFF WILL HAVE A DIVERSITY OF EDUCATIONAL CHOICES.

One of the major arguments often advanced against the traditional organization of public schools is that individual, neighborhood school is guaranteed a captive clientele. Since all children living in the school's district must attend that school, that school's staff need not be responsive to student or parent needs and desires, nor is it under any compulsion to produce high quality results. Nothing bad happens to the principal or the teachers in a neighborhood school if they are unresponsive to parents or if the school is low quality. No one loses a job, nor does the school close down.

Most choice advocates argue that this situation is not only intolerable from the viewpoint of parents who find themselves trapped in inferior neighborhood schools, but that it is one of the main reasons for the mediocrity of most

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American schools. Many public schools will remain mediocre, these choice advocates say, until:

- individual public schools are forced to compete with each other for the patronage of parents and students (and school districts are forced to compete with each other as well);

- the inferior schools that are not chosen by parents and students are closed down and replaced with the high quality schools that parents and students do want.

As John Falco in New York City's Community School District Four pointed out earlier, choice makes it not only possible but necessary for individual public schools to compete with each other for the patronage and allegiance of parents and students. The professional educators now have a powerful incentive to perform well and create the quality parents and students want.

Other choice advocates, however, point out that such competition between schools, while it may provide some professionals in schools with an added incentive to do a good job, is not what choice is or should be all about. Choice, they say, should be about the provision of a broad range of schools to fit the educational needs of every individual child and the educational desires of all parents -- and of all of a school system's professional staff -- and should not be based on the results of effective advertising. These advocates worry that competition between schools will produce educational snake oil and hype rather than true quality. Schools will attempt to sell themselves to parents on the basis of catchy phrases and trendy programs rather than solid educational distinctions and achievements.

The operating wisdom here probably lies somewhere in between these two views. A little competition can be a healthy stimulant. Inferior schools should be put out of business or, at the very least, be re-formed and re-constituted. On the other hand, it is supremely important that a school system based on choice really does create and maintain a wide diversity of schools, even if this year one type of schooling is more popular with parents than most of the others.

As Seymour Fliegel points out -- and experience out in the field appears to support him -- parents do seem to have an uncanny knack for searching out and selecting the schools that are not simply selling snake oil but are actually producing the particular type of quality parents are seeking (Raywid, 1987). When schools that fail to attract students and parents, then need to be encouraged to rethink their philosophy and organization so that the school can become attractive to the community.

Central administrators and planners thus need to walk the thin and perilous line between a healthy measure of stimulating competition and the need to maintain a broad and diverse range of schooling. They need to make it clear to everyone concerned -- parents, teachers, and principals -- that diversity will be treasured and protected but that the local school board and central administration still

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retain the power to judge the performance of schools and to close down those that fail to meet the minimum standard of quality and thus fail to satisfy the system's primary clients, the parents and students of the school district.

DO TRY TO LAY TO REST THE REAL FEARS ABOUT NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOLS.

While many choice advocates take a dim view of many aspects of our traditional system of neighborhood schools, they are fully aware that one of the most pervasive fears associated with the introduction of both desegregation and choice is the possibility that these new methods will require parents to put their children on buses and send them to schools on the other side of the district. Many parents understandably fear the loss of some of the neighborhood school's virtues: the closeness to home and therefore ease of access in cases of emergency; the sense of the school as a part of the local community; the comparative ease of parental involvement in the school and in after-school and evening activities.

The degree of threat to the neighborhood school varies enormously from district to district. It depends on the extent of desegregation requirements, the type of choice plan, and the district's particular policies concerning student assignment. In districts where a court has ordered citywide desegregation of all schools, the chances of maintaining true neighborhood schools may be small. In other districts where no court order exists, children whose parents want them to atte id their neighborhood schools are often guaranteed a seat in the school.

In actual practice most of these fears turn out to be illusory. Usually, as the idea of diversity and choice becomes more widely practiced and thus familiar and as parents are offered an increasing number of choices, many parents who began as staunch defenders of the neighborhood school discover that the school best suited to their children is on the other side of the city and happily put their children on buses to go there.

This fear, however, is one of the most powerful reasons for the careful, time-consuming, step-by-step planning process described in Book II, a process that requires the involvement of everyone who will be affected by the introduction of a choice-based school system and most especially all the parents who may fear the loss of their neighborhood school. This fear is also another powerful reason for the formation of new citywide schools of choice, even if they are sub-schools in existing buildings.

DO PLAN FOR AN INCREASED NUMBER OF STUDENTS AS CONTROLLED CHOICE SUCCEEDS.

Added to all of these dangers, a positive danger may arise when schools of choice prove far more popular than anyone could possibly have predicted. As a matter of fact, this almost always does happen either because the planned number of schools of choice is simply inadequate to meet the parent demand or the range of choices does not encompass all of the various kinds of schools parents want. To avoid this problem, the best method is to follow the survey data closely in developing the schools of choice. And secondly, it is probably a good idea to keep in mind the possibility of increased students in years to come.

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DO CREATE THE RANGE OF CHOICES PARENTS WANT.

A most insidious danger that confronts any attempt to institute a system of diversity and choice is that no matter what the range of different kinds of schools parents want and have asked for in their surveys, the local school system will fail to provide them. This is most likely to happen when each existing individual school decides on its distinctive program. Since most schools are traditional, the natural reaction of most of the school staff is to come up with a minor variation on their beloved traditional school -- perhaps a slight curricular emphasis or specialty, such as science and technology or the use of computers.
Any existing school faculty that is made up of teachers who just happen to have been assigned to that school may have difficulty developing a genuinely shared sense of mission of any kind, much less agree on the creation of a type of school. Further, if seniority governs teacher mobility, the chances of developing school faculties that have a shared sense of mission are mighty small indeed. Given all of these built-in possibilities, the chances of developing a wide range of truly different kinds of schools of choice become even smaller.

Thus. once again, the planning process must take this danger into full account and make sure that all the different kinds of schools parents and teachers want are created, even if this means setting up entirely new citywide schools in which everyone in he school -- students, parents, teachers and principal -- is a volunteer who shares a sense of that school's mission. A district could follow the East Harlem District Four method of carving out pieces of existing large school buildings to create a separate school or several different schools within the same facility.

DO PREPARE TO MAINTAIN THE SYSTEM OF CONTROLLED CHOICE EVEN WHEN PUBLIC FUNDING DECREASES.

Many local systems of controlled choice -- and also desegregation remedies based upon magnet schools -- have depended upon state or federal sources of funding for their development and implementation. Almost inevitably, a day comes when these non-local sources of funding dry up or at least cease to be sufficient to provide every school in the system with the help that the early magnets may have received.

It is certainly true that the planning and start-up costs of a genuine system of diversity and controlled choice can be substantial. School of choice planning teams need to be supplied with funds to do their planning. The district will need to cover the costs of transforming existing schools into new and different kinds of schools of choice (re-equipping them with specialized and appropriate equipment, materials and supplies as, for instance, in the case of an arts school or a science and technology school) or of starting brand new schools parents and teachers want (Montessori, for instance).

We should keep in mind, however, that many of these costs are one-time start up costs. Once the transformations are complete, and the new schools are in existence, the cost of operating them in most cases does not exceed the cost of operating any of the other schools in the system.

Still, a local district embarking on diversity and controlled choice and using state or federal funds to do so, even if only for start-up costs, is well advised to look

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forward to the day when such funds may not be available and take such considerations into their long-range planning efforts.

DO PREPARE FOR THE POSSIBLE COSTS OF ADDITIONAL TRANSPORTATION

There is one area, however, in which costs may well experience a permanent rise -- transportation. As more and more parents choose non-neighborhood schools for their children, it seems inevitable that the costs of transportation will increase, and in many cases, such costs do rise. In a number of cases the rise in costs can be calculated because the systems involved have simply added buses and bus routes in order to accommodate the increased number of parents asking for non-neighborhood schools. Oddly enough, this seems to be particularly true in the case of districts that are operating a handful of magnet schools, rather than districts that have system-wide choice. When a system is offering only a few magnets with children coming from all over the district to attend those magnets, it seems clear that this will involve considerable -- and costly -- transportation.

On the other hand, in systems that have system-wide choice and have distributed the choices carefully, the costs of transportation can be minimal. If, for instance, it requires four fundamental or back-to-basics schools to accommodate the parental demand for such schools and if those schools are then located in four different parts of the city, many children will be able to walk to those schools.

In addition to these considerations, the increased costs for transportation needs to be thought out in the light of any school district's total transportation needs and costs. Most school systems bus children for a wide variety of purposes -- bi-lingual and special education, programs for the handicapped, for gifted and talented classes, because children live more than a mile from any school or because dangerous intersections or other hazards make walking to school unwise. If transportation for choice is provided by simply adding buses for this purpose to the already existing transportation system, then choice transportation will certainly cost more. If, on the other hand, a school district looks at all of its needs as a single transportation system and uses its buses to carry children for all of the purposes listed above as well as for choice, it can often turn out that choice adds very little to the over-all cost of transportation.

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IV

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHOICE PLANS: AN OVERVIEW

> *"Clearly, we must call a halt to our century-long march toward standardization. We mus*' *forget such fruitless battles as wheth*_u *or not to begir all reading instruction with phonics and seek instead to match our teaching strategies to particular students -- starting some youngsters with phonics and others with drastically different approach_s.... When we persist in imposing a single instructional approach on all children, we succeed with some students and systematically handicap others."* -- Dr. Mary Anne Raywid, Professor of Education and Director, Center for the Study of Educational Alternatives, Hofstra University, "Public Choice, Yes; Vouchers, No!," Phi Delta Kappan, June, 1987.

As can be seen from the discussion so far, school systems have enacted controlled choice plans for a variety of reasons that encompass both good education and desegregation:

● to achieve desegregation in a peaceful, non-confrontational and educationally productive manner, in a way that empowers parents and professional staff to join together for equity and system-wide school improvement and provides all students with equal educational access;

● to create a system of public education that not only allows for but encourages the creation of a diversity of different kinds of schooling that will better serve the diversity of educational needs, talents and abilities of the system's students and the diversity of educational philosophies and beliefs of the parents and the professional staff.

KEY POLICY DECISIONS NEEDED FOR CHOICE PLANS

The desire to desegregate and to create better schools in the 1990's will require substantial and significant changes in the way public school systems have been run in the past and in most cases are still being run. As the calls for restructuring increase in number and loudness, educational leaders are realizing that the bandaid approach to reform is not resulting in the educational improvement needed, especially in urban schools. Controlled choice can be one means to that restructuring.

Since the creation of a public school system based upon educational diversity and controlled choice is in and of itself one of the largest changes any public school system can undertake, changes of this magnitude are inevitably going to be unsettling to most communities and their school systems. Therefore, any sudden and arbitrary action to institute choice on the part of local boards of education or superintendents of schools will probably not only constitute political suicide but could also spell the immediate defeat of the idea itself. Thus the recommended

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course is to present the notion of choice to its local community as an idea to be explored and studied (unless, of course, a school system is ordered to implement such a plan by a court). Such exploration and study should begin with the board of education, the superintendent, and the central administrative staff of the system. The exploration process t' en should move as rapidly as possible to include the teachers and principals in the schools and most especially the parents whose children will be directly involved, as well as the citizenry at large, those v'hose tax dollars will be spent on a re-organized system.

In short, such a process of exploration and study provides a feasibility study to determine some basic facts about the attitudes and wishes of the total school community. Assuming that the school system must be desegregated and is genuinely seeking system-wide improvement in its schools, here are some of those questions that can be explored and answered by parent/professional surveying before the system begins the process of change:

- Given the possible range of desegregation techniques -- such as the arbitrary assignment of students to schools to achieve racial balance, redistricting, pairing of schools, etc. -- would parents and the system's professional staff prefer controlled parent and professional choice as the primary means of achieving desegregation?

- Do the school system's parents want to be able to choose the schools their children will attend? Would parents be willing to have their children transported by bus in order to attend the school or schools they have chosen?

- What kinds of schooling do parents wish their local school system to make available to them?

- Once the parents have indicated the different kinds of schools that they want for their children, do teachers and principals wish to practice those same kinds of schooling? Would teachers be willing to work on planning teams to create the schools both they and parents want?

- Are teachers and principals be willing to transfer to a new building in order to practice the kind of schooling both they and the parents want? Do the current administrative and teacher union contracts allow for voluntary transfers without regard to seniority? If not, can the contracts be re-negotiated to make provision for such transfers?

MOVING TOWARD EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE THROUGH CONTROLLED CHOICE

If in Phases I and II of the planning process (described in greater detail in Book II of this series), these questions are answered in a generally positive fashion, the local school board is in a position to make the next policy decision and to proceed to the next step -- the actual design of a controlled choice system. Again, however, this next step in the planning should not necessarily be thought of as the final decision to implement the choice system. The final decision should be made only after the planning has been completed and all segments of the community -- the parents, the professional staff, and the citizenry at large -- are fully informed about what is going to happen and have agreed to the

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introduction of educational diversity and parent/professional choice.

All planning and implementation of a choice system must be a careful, step-by-step process that will take _time_. Assuming for a moment that each stage of the feasibility process results in a decision to proceed, it will take at least a year to go through the community education and parent/professional survey process (Phases I and II), and another year for the initial planning and staffing of the selected schools of choice and the development of the administrative logistics, such as transportation, student assignment, and so on. At the end of the two year period, the schools of choice should be ready to open their doors and to begin the process of fully developing their distinctive characteristics.

If system-wide choice (every school in the system becoming a fully developed school of choice) is decided upon as the final goal of the process, then any school system probably will require a period of at least five years -- depending upon the size and complexity of the system -- before that goal can be reached. When a school system emerges from this planning process with a careful, long-range plan for instituting educational diversity and both parent and professional choice, that school system has very likely launched itself on the creation of a system of public education that will achieve both educational equity and that long-sought goal of educational excellence.

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New England Center for Equity Assistance
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