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AUTHOR Larson, Colleen; And Others
INSTITUTION Indiana Univ., Bloomington. Education Policy Center.
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ABSTRACT

A comprehensive review of educational choice literature and selected programs compose part 1 of this report. "Educational choice" is a catchall term encompassing a variety of strategies to grant parents the freedom to select schools, educational programs, or sets of courses based on the specific interests and needs of their children. Advocates of choice offer increased competition, equity, local autonomy, and family centrality as arguments in support of their position. There are five primary categories of choice plans: inter-district open enrollment; intra-district programs; postsecondary options; second chance plans; and plans including private schools. Under a choice plan, schools are viewed as consumer institutions that must serve private interests. To ensure that private interests do not usurp the interests of education, policymakers must consider implications such as the idea that planning is a crucial component for choice program development. In part 2, case studies were conducted at five sites with operative choice programs to obtain first-hand impressions from 45 administrators, teachers, students and parents. A number of themes with implications for policymakers emerged from the studies, such as the finding that neither inter- nor intra-district open enrollment has been a significant incentive for school improvement. An appendix provides interview protocols used in the case studies. (99 references) (EJS)

Educational Choice

FOREWORD

At the request of the Indiana Department of Education, a study of educational choice was undertaken by the Indiana Education Policy Center. The study, conducted during the Fall 1990, was divided into two parts. The first entailed comprehensive reviews of the literature and statewide and selected districtwide choice plans; the second included five case studies (four in Minnesota and one in Indiana), which involved interviews with individuals who are currently engaged in statewide or local choice programs. Combined, these two reports, "Educational Choice: Implications for Policymakers" and "Case Studies of Selected Choice Programs," provide an overview of the current status of educational choice, policy issues raised by choice options, and personal reactions from a number of individuals who have first-hand knowledge of choice programs.

PART I

EDUCATIONAL CHOICE: ISSUES FOR POLICYMAKERS

This report was prepared for the
Indiana Department of Education

by the

Indiana Education Policy Center
Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

The report was authored by

Colleen Larson
Martha McCarthy
Mark Buechler

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Educational Choice: Issues for Policymakers

Parents have always had some choice as to where they send their children to school. For example, in many districts dissatisfied parents can request an "educational transfer" from the home school, and private schools are available for those who can afford them. But these choices have been very limited, and the vast majority of American students attend the public school assigned to them by the district based solely on where they live.

Recently, however, policymakers have been examining ways to expand the options available to parents and students. "Educational choice" is a catchall term encompassing a variety of strategies to grant parents the freedom to select from among schools, educational programs, or sets of courses based on the specific interests and needs of their children. Over 20 states have adopted some type of choice plan during the past five years.

The Rationale for Educational Choice

Advocates of choice offer four diverse arguments in support of their position:

- Competition. Competition among schools for students will foster the same struggle for excellence that competition among businesses for customers fosters in the free market.

- Equity. Wealthy families have always had options; educational choice will extend those options to the poor, and can provide a medium for voluntary desegregation.

- Local autonomy. In contrast to top-down educational mandates that promote uniformity, choice encourages diversity among schools, which is vital to successful educational reform.

- Family centrality. Choice enables parents to select schools that reflect their values rather than the state's values.

The diversity of these arguments helps explain bipartisan support for choice. It also explains why debates over the details of choice legislation can become so heated, and why there are so many different choice plans under discussion.

Existing Choice Options

There are five primary categories of choice plans: inter-district open enrollment, intra-district programs, postsecondary options, second-chance plans, and plans that include private schools.

Inter-District Open Enrollment

Inter-district open enrollment essentially means that parents can send their children to any school in the state, subject to the following restrictions: (a) The district agrees to accept nonresident students; (b) space is available; and (c) student movement will not disrupt prior desegregation guidelines. Plans vary as to the portions of state and local funds that follow the child. Usually, parents are responsible for transporting the student to the boundaries of the new district, and the receiving district is responsible for transportation from there to the school.

In 1988, Minnesota became the first state to adopt statewide inter-district open enrollment. Thus far, participation has been limited to less than 1% of students. Over the past two years, six other states have also adopted comprehensive open enrollment programs, and nine states have adopted more limited inter-district open enrollment plans.

Intra-District Choice

There are several different intra-district choice plans. Intra-district open enrollment means that students can attend any school within the district. Three states (Colorado, Ohio, and Washington) have passed legislation calling for all districts in the state to implement intra-district open enrollment plans.

Magnet schools--specialty schools with a curriculum designed around a specific theme or method of instruction--typically draw students districtwide. Primarily an urban phenomenon, these schools are intended to attract a racially diverse student body and thus achieve voluntary integration. Although magnet schools have been credited with providing high-quality instruction, they have been criticized for doing so at the expense of other schools in the district, skimming off the best students and draining funds from less-favored schools.

Alternative schools offer innovative alternatives for a variety of students: dropouts, at-risk students, and students who are simply dissatisfied with traditional schools. Their primary purpose is to provide innovative instructional strategies rather than to achieve desegregation.

Several school districts around the country have incorporated open enrollment, magnet schools, and alternative schools into what might be called controlled choice, a form of intra-district choice that promotes individual school improvement, fosters voluntary desegregation, and gives students multiple (though not unlimited) options for school attendance.

Postsecondary Enrollment Options

This option enables high school juniors and seniors to take some or all of their classes at an eligible college or technical institute. Students may receive high school or college credit for the courses. Typically, if they receive high school credit, the state pays for tuition and reduces state aid to the resident district. Students are responsible for transportation.

Minnesota adopted the nation's first comprehensive postsecondary enrollment options program in 1985, and 4%-5% of eligible students take advantage of it each year. Colorado, Florida, and Ohio have adopted similar plans, and numerous other states have more limited versions of postsecondary enrollment programs.

Second-Chance Programs

These programs give at-risk students and dropouts a "second chance" to succeed by letting them choose an educational setting other than their home school. Their choice may be limited to an alternative school, but under some second-chance plans, a student may be able to transfer to another traditional school either within or outside the resident district. In the latter case, state aid typically follows the student across district lines, as in inter-district open enrollment plans.

Private School Plans

With several minor exceptions, the above programs exclude private schools. Politically (and perhaps legally) this exclusion was necessary in gaining enough support to pass any choice legislation at all. However, many advocates claim that the free-market benefits of choice will never be realized until the public school monopoly is broken by including private schools in choice plans. Various strategies such as vouchers, tax credits and deductions, and performance contracts have been proposed to include private schools in choice plans. A limited voucher program that allows disadvantaged youth to attend private schools recently was implemented in Milwaukee, but the legislation authorizing the program has been struck down by a state appellate court.

Educational Results of Choice

In theory, the list of the benefits of educational choice is long and impressive. Unfortunately, theoretical discussions of benefits are far more common than empirical research. And although a body of research supports the claim that choice improves student achievement and parent involvement, this research is fraught with problems. For example, many studies that have focused on selective magnet schools have failed to consider the socioeconomic background or the prior academic ability of the newly clustered student body. Also, in most

studies it is difficult to factor out the effects of choice from the effects of other significant educational reforms enacted at the same time. Finally, much research focuses on perception data, which, important though it may be, is less convincing than empirical evidence of improved student achievement and parental involvement. In short, research findings are inconclusive.

Implications for Policymakers

Under a choice plan, schools are viewed as consumer institutions that must serve private interests. Policymakers must ensure, however, that private interests do not usurp the broad, democratic interests of education and of society as a whole. They must strive to balance a desire for excellence with a concern for equity.

The following generalizations gleaned from the literature warrant consideration by policymakers:

- Choice alone is not enough; simply increasing the number of mediocre schools to which students have access will do little to promote higher student achievement.
- If a state wishes to advance school reform through choice, it must be prepared to earmark substantial dollars for school improvement initiatives.
- A crucial component for the development of an effective choice program is planning.
- Student selection policies must be fair, clear, nondiscriminatory, adequately communicated, legally sound, and uniformly applied to all students.
- Financial support for transportation is a critical factor in making possible fair and equal participation in educational choice.
- Effective school restructuring likely has been a major contributor to the success of choice initiatives.
- A system of choice requires parents to make informed, educated decisions about the education of their children.
- While policymakers must be sensitive to legal issues, at present it does not appear that federal or state constitutional provisions pose a significant barrier to the implementation of choice plans unless sectarian schools are included in the programs.
- For inter-district choice to be successful, states need to reduce funding and per-pupil expenditure disparities among school districts.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The interest of governors and other state policymakers in education reform has increased dramatically in the past decade. The reasons for this concern are clear. Between 1982 and 1984 several highly publicized studies decried the failure of public education. One of the most noted reports, A Nation At Risk, alerted Americans that the U.S. was at risk because competitors throughout the world were overtaking our "once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation" (National Commission, 1983, p. 5). According to the report, the nation was at risk because education, the primary institution that "undergirds American prosperity, security, and civility," was failing in its primary tasks (p. 5). Further, and perhaps more importantly, education was failing to produce the work force needed for today's competitive world and failing to prepare individuals to "participate fully" in a "free, democratic society" (p. 7).

During the 1980s there was unprecedented interest in education in the United States, and among reform strategies, educational choice has received increasing attention. Educational choice has become a bipartisan issue: "Conservatives see school choice as a way of injecting a dose of free enterprise into the educational system. Liberals see it as a way of giving the poor the same freedom the rich have" (Fiske cited in Nathan, 1989b, p. 204).

Educational choice grants parents the freedom to select a district, a particular school, an educational program or a set of academic courses based on the specific interests and/or needs of their children. Choice programs represent a departure from the historical practice of assigning public school students to the specific school serving the geographical area where the family lives.

Many educational reformers view choice as a vehicle for restructuring and improving our nation's schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Glenn, 1989a; Nathan, 1989a; Raywid, 1988; Walberg, 1984). However, educational choice is not one clear plan that is universally understood (Riddle & Stedman, 1989). Choice has taken vastly different forms through state legislation as well as local district policy decisions, and as a result has had vastly different effects on educational programs and participants. Educational choice has yielded many outcomes, some intended and some not. What is clear is that good intentions have not always resulted in good policy decisions regarding educational choice,

nor have policy decisions regarding educational choice always been implemented with the intended spirit of the legislation.

Effective school reform through choice, or any other approach, requires the dedication, commitment, and time of administrators, teachers, and parents. Choice is not a quick educational fix. It will not help us avoid the hard work necessary to transform our nation's schools. Choice is one option for bringing about needed change. And as current research shows, it is an option that must be examined carefully and critically.

The primary purpose of this report is to present an overview of the current literature on educational choice in the U.S. This review is divided into the following major sections:

- The Rationale for Educational Choice
- Overview of Existing Choice Options
- Summary of Existing Choice Programs
- Overview of Specific Educational Outcomes Related to Choice
- Legal Issues
- Fiscal Issues
- Implications for Policymakers

In these sections, we will examine current issues in educational choice, primary arguments for and against choice, issues pertaining to private school inclusion in choice programs, exemplary choice programs at the state and district level, legal and fiscal issues pertaining to choice, and the impact of choice programs on organizational systems and student achievement.

THE RATIONALE FOR EDUCATIONAL CHOICE

Educational choice is a policy that has captured the interest and the financial and political support of government officials, business leaders, and the general public. Choice legislation has been adopted or introduced in more than 20 states. Business leaders have long supported increased competition in education and, therefore, have warmed to the notion of choice. In the 1990 Gallup poll (Elam, 1990), 62% of the respondents believed parents should have the right to choose their children's school, 31% believed they should not, and 7% expressed no opinion. When the poll was limited to parents with school-age children, interest in choice was even greater, with 65% expressing support for educational choice.

Increasingly, policymakers are turning to choice to improve student academic achievement and to increase parental involvement in education. Proponents of choice represent diverse political and educational views. According to Chester Finn (U.S. Senate, 1985), there are four primary rationales that undergird educational choice policy: competition, equity, local autonomy, and family centrality. An examination of these rationales indicates that although many people support educational choice, they do so for very different and often conflicting reasons.

Competition

The value of competition underlies most choice initiatives in education. Peter Drucker (1974) argues that education institutions, like other service institutions, are ineffective because of the way they are funded. Business leaders recognize that satisfying the customer is the only way to guarantee continued existence and growth of their companies.

However, public education institutions (and other government agencies) are consistently funded through involuntary tax support. Schools collect their share of tax dollars to stay in "business" regardless of whether they satisfy their clients or perform effectively. Public support coupled with involuntary student assignment to schools means that educators are guaranteed a steady clientele of students regardless of their level of performance or their responsiveness to parents and children.

Educational choice is an effort to address issues of complacency and lethargy in bureaucratic educational organizations (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Kearns & Doyle, 1988). Under most choice plans, state governments would continue to collect tax dollars to support education, and school districts would maintain the

authority to seek additional tax dollars through referendums, but schools would no longer be guaranteed state dollars based on involuntary student attendance. Parents could opt for a school either within or outside the district, and state funds for educating that child would go to the school of choice. Therefore, schools (and districts) that meet the "market demand" of parents and children would receive continued financial support. Many advocates of this approach maintain that the introduction of educational choice would force public schools to be more responsive to parents and students, and, in turn, schools would provide more desirable educational programs (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Glenn, 1990; Kearns & Doyle, 1988; Nathan, 1989b; Walberg, 1989; West, 1981). They contend that schools (or districts) that do not satisfy parents and students would either improve their educational programs or be forced to close.

Equity

Some theorists and practitioners advocate choice as a means to increase educational equity and opportunities for working class or poor families (Glenn, 1989a; Nathan, 1989a; U.S. Senate, 1985). Wealthier families, they contend, have always had the means to exercise options in educating their children. Such families can simply move into neighborhoods that offer stronger educational programs or choose private schools. Poorer families rarely have such options and typically are forced to send their children to a district-assigned public school (Darling-Hammond & Kirby, 1985; Nathan, 1989a).

Examination of dropout patterns in Portland, Oregon, led one researcher to conclude that the school attended had more to do with whether or not children graduated than either their economic status or their race (Sexton, 1985). According to Charles Glenn (1989a), "Geography is destiny for millions of American children; where they live affects profoundly the kind of education they will receive and what they will learn about life in our society" (p. 47). He further notes that "the 'neighborhood school' is too often a means of locking poor children into schools populated entirely by other poor children" (p. 47).

Proponents contend that another equity issue addressed through choice is voluntary racial integration. Choice programs have proven to be an effective strategy for furthering desegregation efforts in some school districts (Blank & Messier, 1987; Glenn, 1990; Price & Stern, 1987).

Local Autonomy

The 1980s will likely be remembered as the decade of federal and state intervention in educational policy, and this trend shows no sign of easing in the 1990s (Kirst, 1988). Elected state officials influenced by both professional and political agendas

are increasingly centralizing educational policy and prescribing outcome standards. Critics of this trend contend that these top-down government practices have only contributed to greater bureaucracy and ineffectiveness in our schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Doyle & Finn, 1984; Gregory & Smith, 1987; Sizer, 1984). Advocates of local control argue that the current trend toward greater state intervention serves to homogenize educational institutions and leads to regulations that are insensitive to the local context, interests, and problems of diverse schools and school districts (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, 1984; Kirst, 1984). They contend that the overuse and misinterpretation of statewide tests leads to faulty conclusions about the effectiveness of schools. Supporters of local autonomy also assert that greater educational diversity is desirable and that educational choice is a means for attaining more local control over educational programs (Fliegel, 1989; Nathan, 1989a). This will occur, however, only if local schools are freed to satisfy local educational needs and interests with minimal intervention from state and federal governments. Chubb and Moe (1990) fear that state-generated choice programs may not go far enough in freeing schools of paralyzing state control. They argue that if control is not returned to parents, students, and teachers within communities, effective choice and accompanying school reform will not be possible.

Family Centrality

According to Estelle James (1987), the state has gradually supplanted parents in shaping the education, beliefs, and values of their children. Many researchers assert that individual and family rights, community values, and social pluralism are at risk in the current education system (Giroux, 1988; MacLeod, 1987; U.S. Senate, 1985). The values and philosophies that shape the public school curriculum, they maintain, are often problematic for persons who view the world from different perspectives. For example, children are often taught that Christopher Columbus "discovered" America. But Native Americans do not likely interpret this historical event in the same way as it is depicted in most traditional social studies curricula.

Some religious groups, particularly fundamentalist/ evangelical sects, also are strong supporters of increased family control and advocate including private schools in educational choice programs. They argue that parents should have a greater role in selecting the educational programs that serve to shape the values of their children (Coleman, 1985).

Summary

These four diverse rationales help us understand bipartisan support for educational choice, and it should be clear that those who support educational choice are as varied as the people served

in our educational system. As Chester Finn (U.S. Senate, 1985) notes, "The puzzle we call 'education choice' has many parts" (p. 16).

Clearly, advocates of these separate rationales could--and have--come to cross-purposes and become entangled in disagreement over the design of effective educational choice policy (Finn, 1985). Proponents of family control may seek private school inclusion in choice plans. Egalitarians, on the other hand, may view private school inclusion as a benefit to the wealthy; they may seek economic subsidies for the poor to ensure greater financial equity in education. Persons who value infusion of competition into the educational system maintain that through competition schools will either become better or be forced to close; therefore, equity becomes a nonissue. While these multiple interests are not necessarily mutually exclusive, policymakers must be sensitive to the potential conflicts in developing choice programs.

OVERVIEW OF EXISTING CHOICE OPTIONS

Inter-District Open Enrollment

Inter-district choice, which is also called open enrollment, typically allows families to send their children to any school district in the resident state subject to the following restrictions: (a) the receiving district agrees to accept non-resident students; (b) available space exists within the receiving district's schools; and (c) the transfer will not adversely affect desegregation mandates. Seven states currently have adopted comprehensive statewide open enrollment plans: Arkansas, Idaho, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, Ohio, and Utah. Nine additional states have adopted more limited legislation for open enrollment (see chart, p. 19). Phone discussions with state personnel revealed that at least 14 other states are seriously considering open enrollment options.

In some states inter-district choice has been used to facilitate voluntary desegregation between two or more districts by offering unique and special-focus schools to attract children from both urban and suburban settings (Price & Stern, 1987; Witte, 1990). Inter-district choice also has been used to give parents and children greater flexibility in choosing educational programs. Frequently, small towns and rural communities have only one school at each level (elementary, middle and high), so inter-district choice enables parents to expand their educational options to neighboring communities.

Despite the attention focused on inter-district plans, where statewide programs have been implemented, few students have actually changed school districts. This finding is not surprising given the funding and transportation problems inherent in inter-district programs. State funding for schools is primarily determined by the number of students in the district. Therefore, school district officials are less inclined to promote inter-district choice plans for fear of losing students and needed state funding (Witte, 1990). Also, the provision of transportation between school districts is a departure from traditional busing practices and is, therefore, a planning and fiscal nightmare for many school officials. Currently, the added costs and responsibility for transporting children to a school outside the resident district usually fall on parents (Odden, 1990). This financial burden, as well as increased travel time for youngsters, discourages many parents and children from taking advantage of inter-district choice options.

Intra-District Choice Plans

Some form of intra-district choice has always been available in some school districts throughout the U.S. School attendance areas are typically determined by local school boards, and some boards have allowed parents and students considerable discretion in selecting schools outside their attendance areas. Others have been very strict in adhering to school attendance zones (Witte, 1990).

Historically, the impetus for intra-district choice was provided by desegregation mandates. Desegregation requirements greatly increased pressure to integrate, either by choice or force, many large racially segregated schools. In the mid-1970s, choice plans were created to minimize the need for forced busing (U.S. Senate, 1985). This section provides an overview of the most popular forms of intra-district choice: open enrollment, magnet schools, and alternative schools.

Open Enrollment

In intra-district open enrollment, families may choose to send their children to any school (offering the appropriate grade levels) located within their resident school district. This option is sometimes limited by what Cambridge, Massachusetts, has called "controlled choice," a form of intra-district choice that promotes individual school improvement, fosters voluntary desegregation, and gives students multiple (though not unlimited) options for school attendance (Education Commission of the States [ECS], 1989a). Prominent controlled choice plans can be found in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Cambridge, Massachusetts, East Harlem, New York, Montclair, New Jersey, Seattle, Washington, and St. Paul, Minnesota.

Magnet Schools

Magnet schools are designed to "attract" a racially diverse student body and as a result are predominantly an urban phenomenon (Price & Stern, 1987; Witte, 1990). These schools offer alternatives to the traditional curriculum and typically share three primary characteristics: (a) a curriculum designed around a specific theme or method of instruction; (b) a selected student population and teaching staff; and (c) students drawn from a variety of attendance areas.

Research findings on the effectiveness of magnet schools are mixed. Many magnet schools have achieved the goal of racial balance through voluntary integration (Glenn, 1990; Riddle & Stedman, 1989; Witte, 1990). In a national study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, more than 45 magnet schools in 15 school districts were examined; this study revealed that 40% of the districts were effective in achieving voluntary desegregation

(Blank & Messier, 1987). Blank and Messier found that large urban school districts that were gaining in population and were multiracial and multiethnic were most successful in achieving this result. School districts in Milwaukee, St. Paul, Hartford, and Cambridge have implemented successful voluntary integration programs through the use of open enrollment options and magnet schools (U.S. Senate, 1985).

Additionally, there is some evidence that magnet schools increase student achievement levels. Researchers found in a survey of 12 school districts that 80% of the students in magnet schools scored at or above district averages in math and reading (Blank, Dentler, Batzell & Chabotar, 1983). However, these positive effects have come under some criticism (Moore & Davenport, 1989; Price & Stern, 1987). Researchers have faulted the validity of the reported achievement gains because magnet schools typically serve a small percentage of the student population and often leave the traditional educational system intact for the vast majority of students (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

Some researchers have concluded that achievement gains of magnet school students have often been made at the expense of students in non-magnet schools (Moore, 1988; Moore & Davenport, 1989; Price & Stern, 1987). Moore and Davenport (1989) have noted that magnet schools have typically pulled the "best and the brightest" from school districts, which has had a negative impact on non-magnet schools. Further, there is some evidence that magnet schools siphon needed funds from other schools (Blank, 1984; Moore & Davenport, 1989). In a 1984 survey, researchers found that magnet schools received, on average, 8% more funding than other schools (Blank, 1984) and thus had higher per-pupil expenditures. These additional dollars have been defended due to the higher salaries of more experienced teachers that magnet schools seek and hire, greater transportation costs due to busing students out of their attendance zones, and the need to refurbish school buildings to attract students. Further, magnet school support from foundations and the business community often creates an even greater gap between per-pupil expenditures in magnet schools and other non-magnet district schools.

Researchers have also found that students who are selected for magnet schools have been predominantly middle-class black and white students (Moore & Davenport, 1989; Price & Stern, 1987). This overrepresentation of middle-class students has been attributed to the use of selection criteria such as test results, prior academic performance, and/or past behavioral record for admittance--criteria that disproportionately favor middle-class students (Moore & Davenport, 1989). Interestingly, however, even in magnet schools that have formally revised selection criteria to address these concerns, middle-class students are disproportionately represented (Blank, 1984; Moore & Davenport, 1989).

Many advocates of magnet schools agree that the only selection criteria used for these schools, other than racial and ethnic balance, should be the interests and needs of parents and children (Moore, 1988; Nathan, 1989b; Price & Stern, 1987). Past behavior and academic performance alone should not entitle some students to a better education than others (Price & Stern, 1987). The most frequently recommended solution to the problem of more students than available capacity in a magnet school is to adopt a stratified random sample from which children representing all income levels, racial and ethnic groups, and special educational needs are selected (Glenn, 1989b; Moore & Davenport, 1989). Another solution is to turn the entire school district into a series of magnet schools (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Moore & Davenport, 1989; Nathan, 1989b; Price & Stern, 1987). Advocates of this approach contend that magnet schools do work, but are available to far too few children. Where magnet schools exist, there are often long waiting lists of students wanting to attend (Raywid, 1989). One exception is East Harlem where several unpopular schools have closed and programs of the very popular Central Park East Elementary School have been replicated in two other schools and extended to higher grade levels (Bamber, Berla, Henderson, & Rioux, 1990).

If only a small proportion of a district's schools are magnets, they operate much like private schools (Moore, 1988). Eighty-nine percent of the magnet schools studied by Blank et al. (1983) had procedures for eliminating students with severe academic or behavioral problems from their rosters. Like private schools, selective magnet schools relegate problem students to non-magnet schools, which can become a "dumping ground" for children that magnet schools will not take (Moore & Davenport, 1989; Price & Stern, 1987). Likewise, magnet schools often do not serve children with exceptional educational needs (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Moore & Davenport, 1989; Price & Stern, 1987). This phenomenon helps to explain the higher test scores of magnet and private schools.

Some researchers argue that the criticism of magnet schools points to problems existing in large urban school districts that have neglected effective design and implementation strategies for improving education in <u>all</u> schools (Fliegel, 1989; Nathan, 1989a). They argue that the effectiveness of magnet schools should be evaluated in places like East Harlem, where magnet schools exist within a districtwide school improvement effort.

<u>Alternative Schools</u>

Alternative schools gained acceptance in the 1960s and were designed for students who for a variety of reasons did not function well in traditional schools. These schools typically serve students who have dropped out of school or who are in danger

of dropping out due to underachievement, pregnancy, low skills, or drug or alcohol dependency.

Alternative schools strive to "rescue" students by providing an alternative to traditional schooling. These schools differ from traditional educational programs in organizational structure, size, and curricular offerings (Raywid, 1984). Because alternative schools typically offer open, flexible alternatives to traditional educational programs, they appeal to parents and students who are more philosophically comfortable with open learning environments as well. Research has shown that if alternative schools are good, their waiting lists are long (Raywid, 1989). Like magnet schools, however, interest in these programs has not significantly increased the number of alternative schools. Therefore, these successful educational programs typically serve a relatively small percentage of the school population.

Many researchers list magnet schools as a form of alternative school, and in terms of meeting student needs and interests, this is very appropriate (Herrington, 1988; Raywid, 1984). However, magnet schools sprang from desegregation efforts, while alternative schools for the most part arose out of the need for alternatives to the traditional educational system. Therefore, the two approaches have different histories and have led to somewhat different outcomes.

Unlike magnet schools, alternative schools exist throughout the country and have not been limited primarily to urban areas targeted for desegregation. Also, because alternative schools are grounded in a need for different educational programs, they have resulted in greater diversity in and experimentation with organizational structure and teaching pedagogy. Raywid (1988) has noted that among the educational innovations of the 1960s, alternative schools have been a lasting alternative to traditional educational programs, and the positive impact of alternative teaching approaches is increasingly being documented by empirical research (Gregory & Smith, 1983; Raywid, 1988).

Although we often tend to think of alternative schools as occupying separate facilities, they can and do exist within traditional school buildings. For example, the "school-within-a school" approach to increase choice within schools is an important alternative for many children and parents who do not want to leave neighborhood schools. This approach has been used effectively in the school improvement effort in East Harlem (Chubb & Moe, 1990). When parents are given alternatives within their neighborhoods, there is some evidence to suggest that these alternatives are much less costly and can serve greater numbers of students (Elmore, 1986).

Postsecondary Options

A postsecondary options program allows high school juniors and seniors to take courses for high school or college credit at colleges/universities, community colleges or vocational/technical schools. Fourteen states have approved postsecondary options programs (see chart p. 19). Such programs are designed to create more options for students who wish either to accelerate their educational program or expand their high school studies to include course work that may not be available in their high schools. Students may enroll for one or more classes as long as the number of classes does not exceed the equivalent of a high school load. The high school determines how much credit each course is worth, and students must declare whether they are taking the course for college or high school credit.

In comprehensive postsecondary option plans, costs for tuition, books, materials, and fees are underwritten by the state. Typically these costs are reduced from the resident school's state aid to support the postsecondary institution. Limited postsecondary plans require students to pay tuition and all related costs, so such programs are a viable option only for students who have the financial means to pay for college courses.

Most states rely on parents to transport students to postsecondary institutions, but there are a few exceptions. For example, in the Florida postsecondary program, transportation costs are shared by the resident district and the receiving postsecondary institution. Ohio parents also are reimbursed for transportation costs, while in Minnesota only low-income parents are eligible for this aid. Researchers agree that transportation for families who need it is crucial to make this option available to all students (Bennett, 1986; Glenn, 1989b).

A major concern surrounding the adoption of postsecondary choice options is that high school students will leave in droves to attend local colleges, which would mean significant cuts in state aid to school districts. Another concern is that postsecondary programs will not be accessible to students in rural areas, thus increasing educational inequities. Also, fears are voiced that requiring parents to absorb transportation costs eliminates low-income students from participating in the program. However, in Minnesota, where a postsecondary program has been operating since 1985, some of these concerns have subsided since there has not been mass exodus of students or significant loss of funds to local school districts (Bamber, Berla, Henderson, & Rioux, 1990).

Second-Chance Programs

These programs give at-risk students and dropouts a "second chance" to succeed by letting them choose an educational setting

other than their home school. Their choice may be limited to an alternative school, but under some second-chance plans, a student may be able to transfer to another traditional school either within or outside the resident district. In the latter case, state aid typically follows the student across district lines, as in inter-district open enrollment programs.

The obvious benefit of a second-chance program is the opportunity it provides for at-risk students and dropouts to continue their education in a setting more amenable to their needs. Second-chance programs may also provide a mechanism for linking students with other social service agencies (ECS, 1989a).

Critics suggest that if second-chance programs are tied exclusively to alternative schools (rather than to broader intra-district and inter-district options), several problems may arise. First, if most students involved in the program are members of minority groups, the program may serve as a mechanism for resegregation. Second, there is the danger that alternative programs can be misused to move difficult students out of the regular classroom. Third, if large numbers of at-risk students are concentrated in one geographic area, there may not be enough alternative schools to meet their needs. Fourth, second chance programs often are created using "soft dollars" such as grants or special district funds; thus, funding can present difficulties. Finally, care must be taken to ensure that second-chance programs maintain high expectations and provide students with a quality education while still meeting their diverse needs (ECS, 1989a).

Inclusion of Private Schools in Choice Plans

Several plans for inclusion of private schools in choice programs have been proposed, but few have been implemented. Although there is general public endorsement of public school choice options, similar interest has not been shown in private school choice programs (Raywid, 1988). The use of public funds to support private education has not yet received widespread acceptance among the citizenry.

Advocates of including private schools find support in outcome comparisons between public and private schools (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982). They note that student test scores are higher and dropout rates are lower in private than in public schools. However, these comparisons are problematic for several reasons. The relationship between private schools and their students is voluntary, whereas in most public schools, it is not (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Private schools select their student population, and they need not accept or keep students who have significant academic or behavioral problems. When children are dismissed from private schools, they typically return to public schools. Public schools usually do not have the option of dismissing students for academic or behavioral reasons.

Moreover, private schools tend to draw students primarily from middle and upper class backgrounds because of the costs associated with private education. It has been well documented that socioeconomic background is correlated positively with student achievement (Cain & Goldberger, 1982; Raywid, 1989). Given the differences in their student populations, any comparisons between public and private schools as to student achievement should be viewed skeptically.

A brief description of proposals that include private schools is provided below, and legal issues pertaining to such plans are addressed on pp. 35-39.

Voucher Systems

In the early 1960s Milton Friedman, a renowned economist, advocated the use of a voucher system to fund education (Friedman, 1962). Under a basic voucher plan all parents would receive a voucher for a designated amount per school-age dependent. These vouchers could be applied to the cost of education at any approved public or private education facility of the parents' choice. The amount of the voucher would be based on the total amount of public funds available for education divided by the number of school-age children. Private schools, however, could set higher tuition costs than covered by the state vouchers, and parents selecting private schools would have to cover these extra costs. Both public and private schools would compete in the marketplace for students.

Voucher proposals differ both in philosophy and method. Unregulated market vouchers would allow private schools to charge any amount over the basic voucher that parents would be willing to pay. Under an egalitarian model, the value of the voucher would be the same for all students, and no school would be permitted to charge additional tuition. Other models have been proposed that would vary the voucher amount inversely with household income (Johns, Morphet, & Alexander, 1983; Pauly, 1967) or provide a supplemental voucher to poor families (Coons & Sugarman, 1978). More recently, models have been suggested that would adjust the voucher amount based on student grade level, special needs (e.g., handicapping conditions), and other educational considerations (Webb, McCarthy, & Thomas, 1988).

In 1971 the federal Office of Economic Opportunity provided a grant to experiment with a voucher plan in four school districts (Webb, McCarthy, & Thomas, 1988). Three of the districts, however, rejected the voucher project because of strong resistance from teachers' unions and civil rights groups. One small California district, Alum Rock, did establish a demonstration project from 1972 to 1977, but several modifications were made in the voucher model, including a prohibition on using the vouchers in private schools. While the district did offer parents and

students intra-district choice through the creation of minischools offering approximately 50 specialized programs, the Alum Rock program is not generally considered a fair trial of a voucher system (Catterall, 1984; Levin, 1980). Rebell (1982) asserted that the school district participated in the project to secure funds to enhance administrative decentralization and had little commitment to the voucher concept.

Although the Milwaukee program (see p. 35) is the only current voucher system involving private schools below the college level, it should be noted that in some New England states, "de facto" voucher systems have operated for years. In lieu of establishing their own high schools, many small school districts have chosen to provide school-age children at the high school level with tuition grants to attend schools outside the district (Webb, McCarthy, & Thomas, 1988). Some of these small districts have contractual arrangements with neighboring districts, but in other situations, parents are provided a voucher of a specified amount that can be applied toward the cost of a high school education at any approved public or private school.

While few voucher proposals have been tested, advocates claim that they would result in a number of benefits. In addition to the obvious advantage of giving parents greater freedom in selecting the educational setting for their children, proponents contend that voucher plans would enhance the quality of education by forcing schools to compete for students. Effective schools would survive, and ineffective schools would go out of business. It is also argued that voucher plans would decentralize educational decision making and reduce administrative overhead by focusing accountability on the individual school rather than on the school district (Webb, McCarthy, & Thomas, 1988). Advocates also argue that voucher programs could enhance desegregation efforts if vouchers redeemed by minority students were worth more to schools, thus encouraging schools to recruit these students.

Critics of voucher proposals have also been vocal. Levin (1980) has claimed that "perhaps the greatest social dilemma raised by vouchers is the potential divergence between private choices and the social benefits of education" (p. 116). Educational policy in the United States traditionally has been based on the belief that individual interests of parents, students, and educators should be subordinated to broader public policy objectives such as equity in educational opportunities for all (Elmore, 1988). There is some fear that voucher systems would undermine the attainment of national priorities and exacerbate class separation in that parents would send their children to schools that reinforce restrictive political, ideological, and religious views of the family. Critics have conjured images of tax-supported schools for the Ku Klux Klan and religious cult schools led by the likes of Charles Manson and Jim Jones.

A basic concern regarding voucher proposals that would allow parents to supplement the basic amount to purchase more expensive educational services is that middle and upper class parents would withdraw their children from public schools. It is argued that public schools would thus become "pauper" schools and eventually loose both political and economic support. Critics suggest that voucher systems would result in additional sorting of students by race and socioeconomic class.

Although voucher proposals have been discussed in the literature for several decades, they have not received much political support. In national Gallup polls, the percentage of the citizenry reacting positively to the voucher concept declined from 51% in 1983 to 44% in 1987 (Gallup & Clark, 1987). More recent Gallup polls have not included a question pertaining to educational vouchers.

Tax Credits and Deductions

Another strategy to increase parental choice in educational decisions affecting their children is to provide income tax relief for costs associated with private schooling. Through a tax credit plan, parents who have children attending private schools would be allowed to take all or part of the educational expenses as a tax credit subtracted directly from taxes owed. Such credits would potentially benefit most parents with school-age children; only parents with no tax liability would be ineligible for the credit. In contrast, tax deductions would benefit only those taxpayers who itemize deductions (20%). Low-income families would be least likely to profit from a tax deduction option.

Ronald Reagan strongly supported tuition tax credits and proposed federal income tax credits of up to 50% of each child's tuition costs, rising to a cap of $500 (Webb, McCarthy, & Thomas, 1988). Reagan argued that the program would foster taxpayer equity for parents who are taxed to support public schools and also pay private school tuition, but the measure failed to receive congressional support. Proponents contend that such tax relief measures would make private schooling more accessible to middle class parents who under the current system cannot afford full tuition costs of private schools.

Critics counter that such tax benefits would have devastating effects on public schools; parents would be encouraged to select private schools, thus reducing the political support for funding public education. Critics also argue that tax credits or deductions for educational expenses would greatly reduce income tax revenues, thus putting additional strains on public coffers.

Although polls have indicated considerable public support for tuition tax relief measures, only a few states have adopted such programs (Webb, McCarthy, & Thomas, 1988). Measures that provide

benefits only for private school patrons have not survived legal challenges (see pp. 36-37). However, the Minnesota program that offers a state income tax deduction for expenses associated with public or private schooling has been judicially upheld. Darling-Hammond and Kirby (1985) reported that 53% of Minnesota private school administrators surveyed indicated that the state tax deduction had little or no effect on either school enrollments or tuition costs. Only 10% of the parents surveyed indicated that the deduction was an important consideration in their educational decisions.

Given the federal budget deficit and recent measures to raise taxes, it is unlikely that a federal income tax credit for educational expenses will garner much support in Congress. Also, many states are facing budgetary crises, so measures that substantially reduce tax revenues are not likely to be endorsed as strategies to increase educational choice.

Contractual Services

Public school districts that cannot provide a wide variety of services may choose to contract with private schools to furnish those services for specific students. Public school officials have typically contracted with private schools to serve dropouts, pregnant teenagers, and students with disabilities. Indeed, many large school districts enter into contracts annually to pay the tuition costs of thousands of handicapped students who are placed in nonpublic facilities because appropriate programs are not available in public schools. A study in the New York City Public Schools indicated that such contractual arrangements were cost-effective and resulted in increased governmental regulation of private schools to ensure that such schools met minimum program and teacher certification standards (Rebell, 1982).

In addition to contracts with private schools to provide services for special-need students, there has been some discussion of public schools contracting with private agencies to provide parts of the general education program, such as foreign language instruction. There were some limited attempts to use performance contractors in the early 1970s to provide reading instruction for a fee in public schools (Odden, 1990), but the widespread use of private firms to provide educational services at public expense has not yet received serious attention among state and local policymakers.

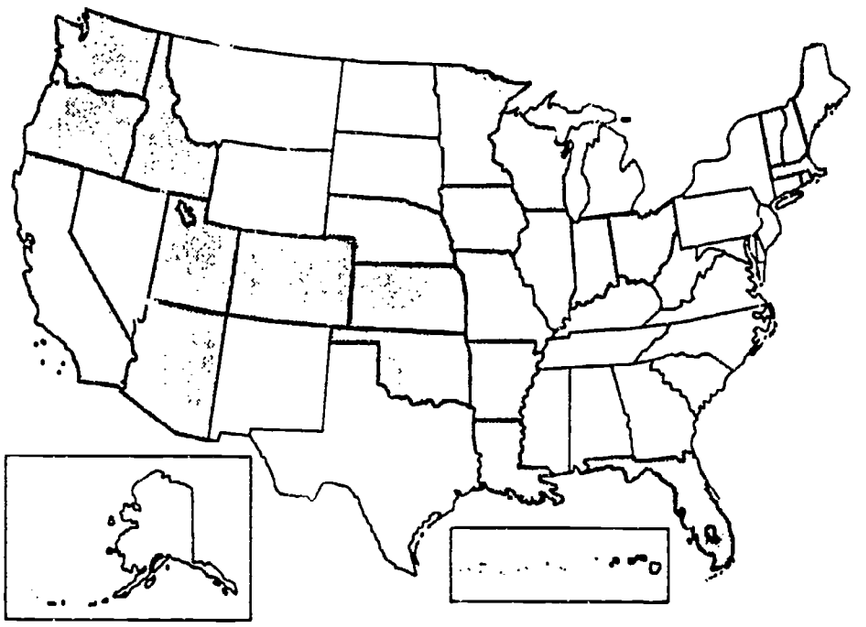
SUMMARY OF EXISTING CHOICE PROGRAMS

Overview of State Involvement in Choice

Choice legislation in state legislatures has mushroomed over the past three years. In 1987, no state had adopted comprehensive inter-district or intra-district open enrollment policies. By 1990, 9 states had adopted such policies, and at least 9 others had adopted more limited versions of open enrollment. When postsecondary and second-chance programs are included, more than 20 states have elected to expand parental and student choice in one form or another.

While the clear trend is toward adoption of some type of choice program at the state level, choice initiatives have not always passed at the polls. For example, in 1990 Oregon voters defeated a referendum that would have established the most extensive school choice and tax credit plan in the country. It would also have forbidden state and local school boards from regulating all private schools and home education programs. Viewed as a test case by the White House, it received less than 30% of the vote despite campaign stops by Vice President Quayle and others ("Voters Support," 1990).

The following map highlights current state involvement in educational choice. The shaded states have some type of statewide choice program.



Most statewide policies pertaining to educational choice can be grouped into four of the categories described in the previous section: inter-district open enrollment, intra-district open enrollment, postsecondary enrollment options, and second-chance options.

The chart below provides an overview of all states that have passed choice legislation in one or all of these four categories. This chart addresses statewide initiatives and, thus, does not address the increasing number of successful district-level programs such as those operating in Cambridge and East Harlem. These exemplary districtwide choice initiatives are discussed on pp. 28-30.

Plan	States (comprehensive)	States (limited)
Inter-District Open Enrollment	Arkansas (1989), Idaho (1990), Iowa (1989), Minnesota (1988), Nebraska (1989), Ohio (1989), Utah (1990)	Arizona, California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Oklahoma, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin
Mandatory Intra-District Open Enrollment	Colorado (1990), Ohio (1989), Washington (1990)	
Postsecondary Open Enrollment	Colorado (1988), Florida (1987), Minnesota (1985), Ohio (1989)	Arizona, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Washington
Second-Chance Programs	Minnesota (1987), Washington (1989), Colorado (1985)	California, Oregon, Wisconsin

Sources: ECS, 1989b; Nathan, 1989a; New Jersey, 1989; Snider, 1990. We also contacted departments of education in numerous states for information.

The choice programs in this chart are categorized as either comprehensive or limited programs. A comprehensive inter-district open enrollment program is one in which a student can enroll in virtually any district in the state as long as the district has available space and the transfer does not affect desegregation plans. A limited program is governed by restrictions imposed at the state level. For example, Arizona allows districts to enter into covenants barring transfers between the districts. California limits inter-district transfers to the

district where the parents work. In Washington, parents must convince school officials in the resident district that their child's education would be enhanced by transferring to another district school. Massachusetts authorizes inter-district movement between particular urban and suburban districts only.

A comprehensive postsecondary enrollment program is one in which the state allows high school juniors or seniors to take college courses for high school credit (if the institution accepts the student) and pays their tuition, often by reducing state aid to the resident school district by that amount. Like open enrollment, this option can be limited in a number of ways. The state may require students to pay their own tuition, restrict the courses students take to those unavailable at the high school, or allow the district to decide whether or not to participate in the program.

A comprehensive second-chance program provides multiple options for at-risk students or dropouts, letting them attend regular schools in other districts, alternative programs, etc. Limited second-chance programs provide fewer options, such as allowing dropouts to attend a particular alternative school in the resident district.

Leading Statewide Programs

The implementation of statewide policy pertaining to educational choice has a rather brief history. Examination of choice policy in a few of these states, however, is instructive as to how these programs are being implemented. This section provides an overview of four states that have adopted statewide open enrollment policies. Because Minnesota, the first state to adopt open enrollment, has a longer history in choice, it will be discussed in considerable detail. A brief overview will be provided of policies in three other states that have recently adopted comprehensive choice legislation: Colorado, Ohio, and Washington.

Minnesota

In 1985, Governor Rudy Perpich joined forces with Commissioner of Education Ruth Randall and key legislative and business leaders in an attempt to have open enrollment and postsecondary enrollment options adopted (Mazzoni, 1988; Montano, 1989). However, educational associations in Minnesota actively opposed the open enrollment plan (with the exception of the Minnesota Secondary and Elementary Principals' Association). In addition, only 33% of the citizenry polled in 1985 were in favor of the choice legislation. As a result, open enrollment was defeated, although the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Program passed.

Despite this setback, Governor Perpich and his supporters continued to press for choice. In 1987, both the High School Graduation Incentives Program and a voluntary interdistrict open enrollment bill passed. And in 1988, Minnesota became the first state to adopt a statewide inter-district open enrollment plan.

There were four primary reasons for this turnabout. First, the Governor was able to garner public support for open enrollment by pursuing an active media campaign. By 1988, 63% of Minnesotans favored this choice option, up from 33% three years earlier (Nathan, 1989a). Second, none of the problems anticipated by opponents of choice (mass exodus of students, major loss of funds for districts, etc.) had materialized as a result of postsecondary options, graduation incentives, or voluntary open enrollment. Consequently, many earlier opponents were reassured. In fact, by 1988 only the Minnesota School Boards Association continued to lobby actively against choice. Third, the development of internal and external coalitions, including educators and others, was central to the acceptance of open enrollment (King and Roberts, 1987; Mazzoni, 1988). Finally, a concession was made to allow districts to declare themselves closed, meaning that they could refuse to accept incoming students, although they could not prevent their own students from leaving. This concession made the plan more palatable to school administrators and board members who feared loss of control. Ultimately, only one very wealthy district, Edina, declared itself closed, and after one year even this district opened its doors to incoming students.

The three choice options that have been adopted in Minnesota--open enrollment, postsecondary enrollment options, and the High School Graduation Incentives Program--are discussed below. Because Minnesota has been involved in choice longer than any other state, the effects of some of these programs on student enrollment are also discussed.

Open Enrollment. Under Minnesota's open enrollment plan, public school students may transfer to any district in the state for any reason, subject only to the following three restrictions:

- the nonresident district lacks space in the school, grade or program;
- the transfer negatively affects prior desegregation guidelines (applicable to Duluth, Minneapolis, and St. Paul);
- the nonresident district has declared itself closed to incoming students.

The open enrollment program was phased in over a three-year period. In 1988-89, participation was voluntary. In 1989-90, all districts with more than 1,000 students had to participate in open enrollment. Finally, in 1990-91 all districts must participate.

A survey conducted by the Minnesota House of Representatives (1990) indicated that more students transferred for reasons of convenience than for any other reason. More than 40% of the students said their selected school was more convenient to work, to their parents' work, or to their home. Only 20% of students said they transferred for academic reasons.

In 1989-90, 3,900 students requested transfers, but only 3,200 actually transferred. This may have been due to desegregation mandates; however, the data are not clear on that point. Trends in enrollment patterns from 1987-88 to 1989-90 are as follows (Minnesota House, 1990):

	#Student Transfers	# of Participating Districts
1987-88	137	95 (22%)
1988-89	435	153 (35%)
1989-90	3,200	345 (80%)
1990-91	not available	433 (all districts)

As these figures indicate, student participation in inter-district open enrollment has been very limited. Less than .5% of the total Minnesota K-12 student population is currently exercising transfer options available through open enrollment. Only four districts experienced a net loss of more than 5% of their total enrollment, and eight districts had a net gain of more than 5%. Seventy-five percent of the participating districts experienced less than 1% change in enrollment. However, it is important to note that districts losing enrollment were more likely to be small districts (Minnesota House, 1990).

For the most part, school districts in Minnesota have not been significantly impacted positively or negatively by inter-district choice, due to the small number of student transfers (Minnesota House, 1990). One small district (Mountain Iron), however, was faced with declining enrollments and increasing costs in 1989. The school board made a very unpopular decision to consolidate the Mountain Iron High School with the high school in nearby Buhl. Parents were furious and "voted with their feet." Under the open enrollment program, parents were able to avoid the newly created Mountain Iron-Buhl High School by sending their children to another district's high school in the town of Virginia, Minnesota. Because 167 new students registered to attend Virginia in the fall of 1990, the Mountain Iron-Buhl district needed financial support from the state to keep its high school open. Although this situation is unusual, it does highlight the political difficulties that can, and will, arise through open enrollment, and the special problems faced by small school districts.

Perhaps one factor that has contributed to the small number of transfers is that no substantial effort to transform the curriculum or to restructure schools has accompanied this open

enrollment legislation. Many school districts throughout the state have not engaged in any significant instructional or programmatic change, which would serve to attract students away from neighborhood schools. Further, money that has been made available for school reform has been limited to a small number of magnet schools. This might help explain why there has been little effort to evaluate the program to date and why no studies of achievement patterns are planned for the near future (Witte, 1990).

Inter-district choice also raises important questions about who pays for the education of a child choosing to leave the resident district. In Minnesota, the resident district is considered the home district. This means that when children choose to leave their resident district for schooling, the base aid (state aid and state-mandated local levy) follows that child to the receiving district. However, any additional dollars generated in the resident district to support education remain in the resident district.

Special education students are treated somewhat differently. When special education students choose to leave, state aid, including categorical funds, follows the student to the receiving district. In addition, the resident district must, through a tuition pay-back plan, pay the receiving district for the actual cost of transporting and educating these children.

Transportation to non-resident districts is the responsibility of parents, who must take children to the border of the district; the nonresident district then assumes responsibility for transportation within the district. All low-income parents are eligible for transportation support; however, many families who cannot afford transportation are not eligible for the low-income (poverty level) aid for transportation.

Postsecondary Options. During the first year (1985-86) of the postsecondary options program, approximately 3,700 of the eligible students in the state participated (Minnesota Department, 1987). By 1988-89, this number had increased to 5,900 students, approximately 5% of the student population (Minnesota Department, 1990). Many initial concerns about the program have subsided, but problems in the initial implementation of the comprehensive postsecondary option in Minnesota led parents to write to the governor with complaints about the plan. One early complication was that students who had enrolled in inappropriate college courses or withdrawn from and/or failed college courses did not have enough credits to graduate from high school. Parents did not feel that they or the students adequately understood how the program worked. This problem was quickly addressed. At the end of the first year of implementation, the state amended the legislation and required school districts to give students detailed program information and counseling (Montano, 1989).

Since this change in practice, the program has enjoyed increasing acceptance in the educational community.

In a comprehensive evaluation of the postsecondary options program, the Minnesota Department of Education (1987) published the following findings for the 1985-86 school year:

- The reason students gave most often for participating in the program was to get a head start on college.
- The most frequent reason for choosing a particular institution was proximity.
- 74 of the 76 postsecondary institutions in the state participated in the program.
- More students (49%) enrolled at community colleges than at any other type of postsecondary institution; another 34% attended the University of Minnesota or another university in the State University System.
- 73% of the students were 12th graders.
- 64% of participating students were female, 36% male.
- 95.3% of participating students were white, compared to a statewide high school percentage of 94.2%.
- The greatest participation rate came from high schools outside the metropolitan area.
- Students received information about the program primarily from a counselor or from friends.
- Humanities and communications were the most popular courses.
- Only 13% of the students who enrolled in college classes dropped the courses. Of courses completed, students got As or Bs in over 50% of the classes, got no credit or incompletes in 19%, and failed less than 1%.
- About two thirds of the courses were rated as more difficult than high school courses.
- Scheduling conflicts and course availability were the major problems for students.
- 95% of students were satisfied with the program.

The postsecondary options program has apparently prompted some changes in high school programs. In the first three years of the program, Minnesota high schools quadrupled the number of advanced placement courses in an effort to keep students in high school (Rist, 1989). Further, to ease the problem of isolation in rural districts, some high school teachers have become "adjunct professors" to offer high school classes for college credit. Also, more districts are making college courses available to students in high schools throughout the state by experimenting with satellite technology. There is, however, little evidence on the effectiveness of this relatively new program.

High School Graduation Incentives Program. This second-chance program focuses on at-risk students and dropouts, offering them a variety of options to encourage them to earn a high school diploma. When it was adopted in 1987, it included students aged

12-20 only. In 1988, the program was expanded to include students 21 and older. There are different eligibility requirements depending upon the student's age and attendance status. Requirements for students under 21 include:

- at least two grades below performance on local achievement tests;
- at least one year behind in graduation credits;
- pregnant or a parent (only for 12-19 year-olds attending school);
- assessed as chemically dependent; or
- absent more than 15 consecutive school days in the preceding or current school year.

Students 21 and older may qualify if they have less than 14 years of education, have completed the tenth grade, and are eligible for one or more of a specified list of public assistance programs.

Students who qualify may enroll in a variety of programs to complete their high school education. Students 21 and under may apply to:

- any public high school in the state;
- a private (nonsectarian) school having a contract with a public school district to provide services (in 1988-89, 12 private nonsectarian schools were approved by local school boards to participate in the program);
- an approved public alternative education program;
- an Area Learning Center (see description below); or
- a college or technical institute under Postsecondary Enrollment Options.

Students 21 and older may apply to an approved Area Learning Center, an approved alternative program, a public high school (if that school has approved the enrollment of students 21 and older), eligible adult basic education programs, or an institution of higher education under the Postsecondary Enrollment Options. These adults are entitled to up to two years of public education at state expense. In 1989, the state appropriated $1 million in high school graduation aid for adults. Under this program and another one, the Educational Program for Pregnant Minors and Minor Parents, child care and other forms of assistance are available for eligible students.

In 1987-88, HSGI attracted 1,400 participants, 700 of whom had earlier dropped out and were returning (Snider, 1988). In 1988-89 (the first year students 21 and older were included in the program), the program involved 1,800 students aged 12-20 and 1,500 older students.

As mentioned above, one of the options available for students in the High School Graduation Incentives Program is to attend an Area Learning Center. Area Learning Centers offer individualized academic instruction as well as vocational training, work experience, and transition services. They often operate in cooperation with postsecondary institutions, public agencies, or businesses. They differ from other alternative education programs in that they must provide a mix of services and must offer instruction year-round. In addition to state funding, the Centers generally receive funding from outside sources like postsecondary institutions, job training partnership act programs, welfare programs, corporate contributions, etc. Currently, there are 20 Area Learning Centers throughout Minnesota.

Colorado

The State of Colorado recently adopted choice legislation that differs considerably from Minnesota's program. The options included in this legislation are described below.

Inter-District Open Enrollment. As a result of legislation passed in 1990, three districts are being selected to pilot-test inter-district open enrollment, and any district may establish a policy allowing inter-district choice.

Intra-District Open Enrollment. In 1990, the Colorado legislature passed a law requiring every district to establish an intra-district open enrollment policy, giving students the option of attending any school within their resident district. Students who enroll in a school outside their attendance boundary will be ineligible for interscholastic athletics during the first semester of enrollment. The policy went into effect in the fall, 1990.

Postsecondary Enrollment Options. The Postsecondary Enrollment Options Act of 1988 enables juniors and seniors to enroll full- or part-time in state colleges and universities, junior colleges, community colleges, and vocational schools. Higher education institutions and districts of participating students cooperate in determining the amount and type of credit involved (high school credit, college credit, or both). The state pays tuition for all courses accepted as high school credit, but does not provide transportation. Unlike Minnesota, high schools in Colorado are not required to inform students of their options.

Second-Chance Program. This 1985 program gives high school dropouts the opportunity to re-enroll in another eligible high school either within the district or in another district, including public schools with above-average dropout rates and certain other public schools, vocational programs, and private nonsectarian schools. In practice, this has often involved the development of alternative programs that attract dropouts across district lines (ECS, 1989a). The resident district must provide

counseling and moritor the student's progress, even though the bulk of education funding follows the student across district lines.

Ohio

Another recent addition to state policy on education choice is found in Ohio. Its statewide program includes the following options.

Inter-District Open Enrollment. Statewide inter-district open enrollment will begin in 1993. In preparation, Ohio has begun a pilot inter-district open enrollment program in three rural districts.

Intra-District Open Enrollment. Also by 1993, districts will be required to permit students to attend any school within their resident district. Districts may adopt such a policy before 1993.

Postsecondary Enrollment Options. As of the 1990-91 school year, high school juniors and seniors can enroll in college courses for either high school or college credit. If the student takes courses for high school credit, the state will pay for tuition, books, and fees, reducing district revenues by this amount. Schools must notify students of their options and forewarn them of potential risks associated with the program. The students are responsible for transportation, with reimbursement available for poor families.

Washington

Inter-District Open Enrollment. The Washington legislature adopted an inter-district open enrollment plan in 1990. However, this program is more limited than inter-district plans in states like Minnesota. All resident districts are encouraged to honor parents' requests to transfer their children to another district, but they are only required to do so if the parent can show that a financial, educational, or health condition affecting the student would be improved, if the new school is closer to a parent's workplace or to childcare, or if there is some special hardship to be taken into consideration. Also, receiving districts may charge parents a transfer fee based on differences in local costs.

Intra-District Open Enrollment. Unlike its inter-district plan, Washington's 1990 intra-district plan is comprehensive. Washington joins Colorado and Ohio as one of three states that require all districts to adopt an intra-district open enrollment plan.

Washington also allows 7th and 8th graders to earn high school credit for high school level courses taken either at their junior high school or at a high school.

Postsecondary Enrollment Options. Washington's 1990 Running Start Program enables high school juniors and seniors to take courses at community colleges or vocational/technical institutes (four-year colleges/universities are not included in the plan). Students receive both high school and college credit for the courses, and the state pays tuition and fees by transmitting state funds from the resident district to the college. School districts are required to provide information about the program. Transportation is the responsibility of the student.

Second-Chance Program. Beginning in 1989-90, students who have dropped out for more than six weeks, have a drug or mental health problem, or are teen parents may choose to attend any high school in the state if the school accepts the student (schools are encouraged by the state to do so). State funding follows the student.

Exemplary District Programs

In addition to these statewide choice initiatives, many states have excellent choice option programs operating within specific school districts. For example, East Harlem, Cambridge, Montclair, and Richmond have all been recognized as having exemplary choice programs. Two of the districts that have received considerable recognition, Cambridge and East Harlem, are discussed below.

Cambridge, Massachusetts

In the last seven years, the Massachusetts legislature has allocated more than $40 million to choice initiatives (Nathan, 1989a). This state has actively encouraged school districts and administrators to develop distinctive schools among which parents can choose. These dollars have been used to support educational planning, redesign and refurbishment of buildings, and parent-involvement initiatives.

Cambridge has received considerable attention for its choice initiative. More than 100,000 people live in Cambridge, and the minority population in Cambridge is approximately 25% (Peterkin & Jones, 1989). About six years ago, the state and school district educators combined efforts to plan diverse educational programs. Cambridge was the first city to adopt "controlled choice," a form of intra-district choice designed to enhance: (a) voluntary desegregation, and (b) school-based responsibility for improving educational quality within the community.

A key to the success of this program has been the parent-involvement initiative and the formation of a parent information center (Peterkin & Jones, 1989). Citywide planning meetings were held with community leaders and others who wished to contribute to the creation of educational options within the community. Equity and excellence were adopted as the system's major goals (Peterkin & Jones, 1989). The planning process resulted in the elimination of all traditional neighborhood elementary school programs; new school programs were created to take their place (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Special focus was given to creating programs that would improve the performance of underachieving minority students. Sample school themes include:

- performing arts
- computers and technology
- language immersion program--Spanish and English

These programs have attracted many students. A teacher has been hired full-time to handle all student transfer and placement activities. Students are placed according to their first choice when seats are available. All decisions are based on student choices, but must be balanced with the need to maintain and facilitate majority/minority representation within each school. Nearly 90% of all students are placed in schools they indicated were their first choice, and more than 95% are at one of their preferred schools (Peterkin & Jones, 1989).

Outcomes of this plan thus far have been encouraging. In the past six years, average student achievement has increased each year, and the achievement gap between black and white students has narrowed (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Peterkin & Jones, 1989). Given the success of the program in fostering racial integration, plans are underway to address social class segregation, which is also viewed as a major factor contributing to the disparity in academic performance among children (Peterkin & Jones, 1989).

East Harlem, New York - District 4

The reform and restructuring initiative in East Harlem has been in effect for more than 10 years, focusing on public middle and junior high schools. In East Harlem, one of the most economically depressed school districts in the country, all middle schools are unzoned and students can attend the school of their choice (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Fliegel, 1989). For the most part, these schools focus on a particular teaching pedagogy or theme. An effort was made to turn all of the schools into magnet schools, not just one or two. Further, East Harlem has successfully implemented school-within-a-school models, thus giving students greater educational choice within their own neighborhood schools. As far back as the 1970s, East Harlem restructured 20 schools to offer over 44 different educational programs (Bamber, Berla, Henderson, & Rioux, 1990). Each program is available to students

based on interest, and unlike most districts involved in choice, the more popular programs have been replicated in schools throughout the district. According to officials with the East Harlem Magnet Project (1987-88), the program has resulted in:

- a reduction in the size of educational units;
- introduction of a variety of themes and teaching methods;
- encouragement of educational innovation at each of the individual schools;
- increased staff participation in decision making;
- increased parental involvement.

East Harlem provides the majority of its students with real choice. School assignment is based on the students' preferences and school officials' appraisal of who would function best in each program. Only a few programs have more specific entrance requirements (Fliegel, 1989). East Harlem also has gained a reputation for consistently having a number of teachers wanting to work in the community. The culture in these schools is said to attract teachers from outside the district (Merrow, 1989). To ensure communication, information sent to parents is written in both English and Spanish.

When the school district started this program, it ranked last in student achievement among the 32 community districts in New York City, and no more than 15% of the students read at or above grade level on the California Achievement Test. Examination of test scores a decade later reveal that approximately 65% of the students read at or above grade level and the district had climbed to 15th in standardized test scores in reading and math (Fiske, 1988; Fliegel, 1989; Merrow, 1989).

OVERVIEW OF SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES RELATED TO CHOICE

Issues in Existing Research

Much has been written about the outcomes of educational choice. Theoretical discussions on both the advantages and the dangers of choice are abundant. Unfortunately, to date, theoretical viewpoints far outweigh existing empirical research on the complex issues of choice (Raywid, 1989; Riddle & Stedman, 1989; Sanchez, Smith, Arnove, & Kuzmic, 1990; U.S. Senate, 1985). This is particularly true when examining research in the area of student outcomes. The theoretical list of positive outcomes attributed to choice is long and impressive (e.g., higher student achievement, increased parent involvement, voluntary desegregation, more positive school climate). These outcomes appear seductive to policymakers striving to improve educational quality in their respective states.

However, a review of current literature reveals that many of these claims have yet to be documented in actual choice initiatives. This finding is not an indictment of choice or of current research practices. Like any relatively new educational phenomenon, it will take time to conduct the necessary studies on the more progressive approaches in statewide and district-level choice initiatives. However, current research in educational choice is limited in several ways:

- The lack of sufficient empirical data makes it difficult to discern specific educational outcomes that have been attributed to choice programs. In the choice literature, any improvement that occurs within a school that is part of a choice program is often attributed directly to choice, when in fact, these findings could be caused by many other significant factors (e.g., curriculum innovations) in schools that are experiencing extensive change.

- Much of the existing empirical data addresses outcomes in administrator, teacher, student and parent attitudes toward educational choice. With the exception of East Harlem and Cambridge, few studies have attempted to assess student achievement within entire districts that have adopted choice plans. Most studies that do address student achievement have been limited primarily to selective magnet schools, which often are comprised of significantly different student populations than are nonselective schools.

- There have been few qualitative examinations of educational choice initiatives over time. Therefore, we have little insight into the process of designing and implementing choice policy in urban, suburban, and rural school districts.

- Claims that competition forces ineffective schools to improve have yet to be documented. While research does support the notion that choice has led to effective innovation in individual schools, such as alternative schools and magnet schools, there is little evidence to support the conclusion that choice leads to overall improved school districts.

The remainder of this section examines the literature pertaining to the effects of choice on student achievement and parental involvement.

Effects of Choice on Student Achievement

Research findings on the impact of choice on student achievement are mixed and inconclusive. Given that a wide variety of school restructuring efforts coexist with choice and differentially impact student achievement within schools, this finding is not surprising. Choice alone does not necessarily lead to higher student achievement. However, choice coupled with effective school restructuring has led to improved student achievement (Fliegel, 1989).

For example, significant student achievement gains in Cambridge and East Harlem have been attributed to choice. These improvements are significant. However, upon closer examination, Cambridge restructured its elementary and middle schools and made curricular and pedagogical changes that contributed to these improved test scores (Blank & Messier, 1987). Restructuring could account for much of the success of these schools; thus, it is misleading to attribute the change to choice alone. Did restructuring come about <u>because of</u> choice, or would this restructuring have taken place simply because of desegregation efforts? Did student achievement improve as a result of restructuring alone, or did choice serve to enhance student performance? On these questions, the data are not clear. Policymakers need to know whether or not choice as a policy enhances the educational innovation process.

The literature is abundant with perception data about choice. For example, Joe Nathan (1989a) supports the notion of student achievement gains through postsecondary options by stating that "90% of the parents said that their children had learned more than they would have if they had taken courses only at the local high school" (p. 12). These are important findings and should continue to be gathered; however, we also need empirical data linking improved student achievement and choice.

Another issue raised when examining current achievement attributed to choice is the failure of these studies to take into consideration the socioeconomic background of the newly clustered student body as well as the previous academic and achievement levels of these students prior to attending choice schools. Moore and Davenport (1989) found that parents who opted to move their children to other schools were typically middle class black and white families. This finding has implications for examining student achievement in choice programs and should call into question comparative analyses of magnet schools and schools that are predominantly comprised of students who have remained in neighborhood schools (Duke, Lindon, & Muzio, 1978). Further, student achievement claims must be based upon overall district improvement rather than achievement gains found only in magnet schools.

Effects of Choice on Parental Involvement in Schools

Kearns and Doyle (1988) observed that in a system of choice, parents cannot make good decisions for their children if they are not properly informed. Ensuring that parents who are illiterate or who speak limited English receive clear and understandable information about their educational options is crucial. Critics observe that well educated middle and upper class parents may have an unfair advantage in a system of choice.

To address these concerns, policymakers would be well advised to ensure that there are multiple strategies for communicating with parents. Effective school systems use many channels to disseminate important information to parents: local media, formal and informal meetings with parent groups, mailings to students and parents, recruitment visits to other schools, peer recruitment, on-site visits to low-income housing centers, school open houses, and recruitment booths at shopping malls (Hale & Maynard, 1988). Illiteracy and limited English proficiency pose significant obstacles to effective communication in many communities. Further, research has shown that more educated parents depend primarily upon printed material and conversations with school staff to provide them the information they need for making decisions about educational options for their children. Parents with less education, however, depend primarily upon personal dialogue with counselors (Rand, 1981; U.S. Senate, 1985).

To handle parent coordination and communication activities, some school districts involved in choice programs have hired full-time parent coordinators. This component of choice is an expensive endeavor. Effective outreach to parents has cost Cambridge more than $100,000 a year (Snider, 1987). Districts must absorb the cost of hiring parent coordinators who are primarily responsible for preparing communication brochures and mailings; talking to, informing, and advising parents; conducting

special information sessions throughout the community; and establishing and maintaining multiethnic communication centers.

Advocates for choice argue that greater inclusion of parents in decision making about their children's education leads to greater parental involvement, interest, and support of schools. Expanded educational choice for parents, they maintain, results in parents becoming more enthusiastic about educational programs that are more consistent with their own educational philosophies and interests (Snider, 1987). However, traditionally, parental involvement has been highest among middle and upper-middle class parents with strong educational backgrounds (Riddle & Stedman, 1989). Participation is lowest among the poor, first generation immigrants who are language deficient, and the less well-educated.

Although many school officials claim that parents are more involved and motivated as a result of choice, this research is problematic as it fails to differentiate between parents who have always been involved in and supportive of schools, and those who have become interested in and supportive of schools as a result of choice (Riddle & Stedman, 1989). If choice does not impact parental involvement by pulling in parents who historically have not participated in the system, the result may be the creation of schools where all informed, motivated, and supportive parents are clustered in some schools and the poor, non-English speaking, and less educated parents are clustered in others. Riddle and Stedman (1989) note that "benefitting from the availability of choice may require a degree, free time, energy and knowledge that [some] parents do not possess" (p. 18).

Data from one of the most touted and praised educational programs, East Harlem, have shown no increase in parental involvement as a result of choice (Kutner & Salganik cited in Riddle & Stedman, 1989). The researchers found no evidence of involvement beyond typical parent-teacher interactions.

Another critical issue pertaining to choice programs and parental involvement is that current district governance of schools does not allow non-resident parents to vote in levy referendums that impact the education of their children who attend schools outside their resident district. This constraint actually serves to decrease parental involvement in schools through participatory democracy. Clearly, if inter-district choice is a viable option for parents, we may need new governance structures that include non-district parents in the decision-making process (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

LEGAL ISSUES

In addition to assessing the educational merits of various choice options, policymakers must consider their legal ramifications. This section provides a brief overview of legal challenges to various choice programs as well as areas of potential legal vulnerability.

Private School Choice Plans

Choice plans that allow public funds to be distributed to private schools--85% of which are church related--have been questioned as abridging the establishment clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. This clause prohibits governmental action that advances or impedes religion or excessively entangles church and state. Also, private school choice plans have been questioned under state constitutional provisions that prohibit the use of public funds for private purposes. Although the case law is scant because only a few choice programs in operation have included private schools, some lessons can be learned from the litigation to date.

Voucher Plans

The one experiment with a voucher plan that allows public funds to be used for private schooling has generated litigation in Wisconsin. The program provides a $2,500 voucher for up to 1,000 low-income students in Milwaukee; the vouchers can be used to attend nonsectarian private schools that have received state approval to participate in the program. The plan was challenged by the state superintendent of public instruction, the Milwaukee branch of the NAACP, the state's two largest teacher unions, and public school administrators as violating the "public purpose" provision of the Wisconsin Constitution because it diverts public funds to private schools (Boston, 1990). A group of private school parents also sued the state superintendent, claiming that regulations he had formulated for participating private schools were too burdensome.

The circuit court judge upheld the voucher program's constitutionality, reasoning that the plan was intended to provide a quality education, which is a legitimate public purpose. The judge also ordered the state to reduce several reporting and regulatory provisions applied to participating private schools. However, the state appellate court reversed this decision on the technical grounds, holding that the legislature was not authorized to attach the choice program (a local rider bill) to the state budget bill. The Wisconsin Constitution prohibits private or

local legislation from being passed as part of a bill embracing more than one subject. Thus, the appeals court invalidated the choice plan without addressing the merits of the constitutional claims (Davis v. Grover, 1990), and the fate of almost 400 students currently using the vouchers remains uncertain.

While church/state questions involving private school voucher programs remain to be litigated, it is likely that the federal judiciary would reject an establishment clause challenge to voucher programs even though some public funds would flow to religious schools. Support for this conclusion can be drawn from a 1981 U.S. Supreme Court decision, Witters v. Washington Department of Services for the Blind. The Court found no establishment clause violation in a visually handicapped individual's use of federal vocational rehabilitation aid for training at a Christian ministerial college. The Court held that there was no advancement of sectarian education, since the aid went directly to the student who then transmitted the funds to the educational institution of his choice. The aid was not considered a governmental subsidy to religious schools, and the student's personal choice to use rehabilitation aid to pursue religious education was not found to confer state endorsement on sectarian institutions.

However, even if voucher plans pass scrutiny under the Federal Constitution, they could be struck down under state constitutional provisions. The Witters case discussed above was remanded to the state judiciary for consideration of claims under the state constitution, and the Washington Supreme Court barred the student from using rehabilitation aid for training in a sectarian institution (Witters v. State of Washington Comm'n for the Blind, 1989). The Court reasoned that the Washington Constitution prohibited the use of public funds for religious purposes and further rejected the individual's claim that the First and Fourteenth Amendments entitled him to use the aid at the institution of his choice.

Thus, voucher plans that include religious schools appear more vulnerable to legal attack under state than federal constitutional guarantees. Indiana's constitution is fairly typical in specifying that "no money shall be drawn from the treasury, for the benefit of any religious or theological institution" (Art. 1, Section 6). Whether aid that indirectly flows to religious institutions under a school choice plan would abridge specific state constitutional mandates remains to be litigated on a case-by-case basis.

Tax Relief Measures

Tax benefits in the form of deductions or credits for private school expenses have been proposed at both state and federal levels to increase parental options in selecting private education

for their children. In 1973 the Supreme Court struck down a New York statute allowing parents to subtract from their adjusted gross income for state income tax purposes a designated amount for each dependent for whom they had paid at least $50 in nonpublic school tuition (Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty v. Nyquist, 1973). Concluding that the law rewarded parents for sending their children to private, primarily parochial schools, the Court held that the law advanced religion in violation of the establishment clause.

In 1983, however, the Supreme Court upheld a Minnesota tax benefit program allowing parents of public or private school students to claim state income tax deductions up to a designated ceiling for educational expenses incurred for each elementary and secondary school dependent (Mueller v. Allen, 1983). Distinguishing this program from the New York provision that bestowed benefits only on parents of private school students, the Court declared that "a state's decision to defray the cost of educational expenses incurred by parents—regardless of the type of schools their children attend—evidences a purpose that is both secular and understandable" (p. 395). The Court reasoned that such aid does not have the primary effect of advancing religion, noting that most decisions in which state aid to parochial schools had been struck down involved the direct transmission of public funds to private schools.

Intra-District Choice Plans

Most challenges to intra-district plans have focused on their impact on school desegregation efforts (e.g., Green v. County School Board, 1968). Such open enrollment or free transfer plans are likely to be found in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause if they result in racial segregation. School districts currently operating under desegregation mandates are particularly vulnerable to legal challenges, because they have an affirmative duty to eliminate the effects of prior racial discrimination. Open enrollment plans can be used to satisfy this affirmative duty only if the plans actually result in desegregated schools (Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education, 1969).

Transportation policies also may become a source of legal controversies in connection with intra-district programs. A basic premise of magnet school models, under which schools develop unique missions and offerings, is that students have the option to choose the school that is best suited to their interests and abilities. However, if students are not provided transportation to attend the school of their choice, such programs may be challenged as discriminating against economically disadvantaged students.

While this specific issue has not yet been litigated, school districts implementing such open transfer plans—with parents responsible for transportation—may find some legal support in a

1988 Supreme Court decision. The Court rejected an equal protection challenge to a North Dakota law that allowed non-reorganized school districts to charge students a transportation fee, concluding that the law was rationally related to the legitimate objective of allocating scarce fiscal resources and encouraging school district reorganization (Kadrmas v. Dickinson Public Schools, 1988; Wood, 1990). The Court was not persuaded that a school district's user fee for transportation unconstitutionally discriminated against children from poor families. The Court held that the Federal Constitution does not require states to provide school transportation services, so if a state elects to do so, it is under no obligation to provide these services free. Whether this case could be used to support a choice plan that transfers transportation costs to parents remains to be litigated. The outcome of such a suit under the Federal Constitution would depend on whether the choice plan is considered rationally related to legitimate governmental objectives.

Given that the Supreme Court has not invalidated public school user fees under the equal protection clause, most litigation involving such fees has taken place in state courts on the basis of state constitutional guarantees. While some courts have interpreted their state constitutions as barring most types of public school fees (e.g., textbooks, transportation, extracurricular activities), several state high courts, including the Indiana Supreme Court, have upheld the practice of charging students fees for the use of textbooks (Chandler v. South Bend Community School Corporation, 1974; McCarthy & Cambron-McCabe, 1987). However, the Indiana court noted that a waiver must be provided for indigent children and that students could not be punished for nonpayment of such fees. Possibly, the court would similarly conclude that school districts could transfer the cost of transportation services to parents as long as provisions were made for students who could not afford transportation to the school of their choice.

Inter-District Plans

Choice options involving open enrollment across school district lines are subject to the same challenges discussed under intra-district plans. In addition, choice plans crossing district lines may provide an impetus for school districts to challenge state school funding programs. Even if the state aid follows the child, school districts that increase their student population under a choice plan may be disadvantaged because state aid does not cover the per-pupil costs of education. In Indiana, for example, about 36% of educational funds are supplied by local school districts, so a sudden increase in students without an increase in local tax revenues would cause the district's per-pupil expenditures to decline. Inter-district choice programs are likely to focus additional attention on fiscal disparities among districts.

While some state courts have upheld state school funding programs despite their inequities (Webb, McCarthy, & Thomas, 1988), the recent trend has been for state supreme courts to invalidate such plans under state constitutional guarantees. Since 1989, high courts in Montana, Kentucky, Texas, and New Jersey have invalidated public school funding systems for failing to provide the constitutionally mandated "efficient" system of public schools (Helena Elementary School District v. Montana, 1989; Rose v. Council for Better Education, 1989; Edgewood v. Kirby, 1989; Abbott v. Burke, 1990). The Kentucky court called for reform of the state's entire educational system, and the New Jersey court instructed the legislature to amend the funding law to assure educational support in poor urban districts at the level of property-rich districts. Indiana's funding system is currently being challenged, and the outcome of this case could have implications for the implementation of cross-district choice plans (Indiana v. Lake Central School Corporation, 1990). It appears unlikely that an inter-district choice program entailing substantial student movement can be successfully implemented until resource disparities among districts are significantly reduced.

Postsecondary Options

Choice plans allowing high school juniors and seniors to enroll in courses at qualifying two- and four-year colleges often include religiously affiliated institutions. Such a postsecondary options program in Minnesota recently was found to satisfy the establishment clause as long as the funds do not flow to colleges that are pervasively sectarian (Minnesota Federation of Teachers v. Nelson, 1990). Although this is the only postsecondary program that has been challenged to date, it is likely that a determination of what constitutes a "pervasively sectarian" institution may be controversial in future cases.

Even if private institutions are not involved, there may be legal vulnerability in the funding arrangements for postsecondary choice programs. If qualifying students are given the option to enroll in college courses, but their parents must pay the fees, such programs might be challenged under equal protection guarantees as discriminating against high school students from low-income families. If such programs are fully funded by the state, there also may be legal controversies over the distribution of state aid between public schools and institutions of higher education (IHEs). Decisions have to be made regarding whether both institutions will receive state aid for a student who is simultaneously enrolled in high school and college classes, or whether a school district's aid will be reduced for the classes students take in IHEs. These funding issues could result in lawsuits pitting public school districts against colleges and universities.

FISCAL ISSUES

As long as choice plans were contained within school districts, fiscal issues did not require significant attention. However, with inter-district choice plans being adopted, a number of concerns regarding the adequacy and equity of district resources are being raised. When a student transfers, what funds should follow the child? How should categorical aid and capital outlay funds be distributed? Where should the fiscal responsibility for transportation be placed? How should inequities in per-pupil spending levels across districts be addressed? These and other significant fiscal questions pertaining to school choice options are only starting to be addressed by researchers and state policymakers (Addonizio, 1990; Guthrie, Kirst, & Odden, 1990; Odden, 1990). This section focuses on several potentially troublesome issues in this arena.

Wealth and Expenditure Disparities Across Districts

Inter-district disparities in property wealth and per-pupil expenditures can be problematic for both sending and receiving districts involved in open enrollment programs (Addonizio, 1990; Odden, 1990). Under some state plans (e.g., Ohio), a district receives the amount of aid for transfer students that it receives for resident students; in essence, for state aid purposes, students are counted where enrolled. A property-rich district that receives only modest state aid will be hurt financially by a sudden influx of students. Since local revenues do not increase with an increase in non-resident students, per-pupil expenditures would have to be reduced. As Odden (1990) has observed, "students who leave low-spending districts for schools in high-spending districts clearly benefit, but at the expense of the high-spending district" (p. 14). Odden further has noted that this approach could ultimately reduce expenditure disparities among districts, but it does not provide an incentive for property-rich districts (which typically have higher per-pupil expenditures) to participate in inter-district choice plans.

Inequities across districts could be exacerbated under plans where the amount of state aid from the sending district follows the child. If students transfer primarily from property-poor districts that receive significant state aid to property-rich districts with modest state aid, the already wealthy districts would gain additional state funds. Under this system, if some students should transfer from a low state-aid (wealthy) district to a high state-aid (poor) district, the receiving district that depends heavily on state funds to support its educational program would receive less from the state for transfer students than for

its resident students. Again, this situation would increase fiscal disparities across districts.

Some states have attempted to address these issues in part by having the total base revenue per pupil (including state aid and state-mandated local levy) follow the child. This strategy can be successful in a state like California, where per-pupil expenditures have been substantially equalized across districts, but it does not solve the inequities in states that allow local levies above the state-mandated amount.

In districts where voter approval of local levies is required, choice programs present additional problems. Parents of transfer students would be disenfranchised and would not bear the tax burden if a higher levy were adopted. Odden (1990) has concluded that there is a fundamental "mismatch between a district-based school funding system and a school-based attendance system in states that have differences in base expenditures per pupil across district boundaries, which is the case for the bulk of the states in the country" (p. 15). A major challenge in addressing the problems of current school finance systems is to reduce fiscal disparities across districts.

Additional Costs Associated with Choice Programs

The literature indicates that choice programs will without a doubt cost states and districts money. However, so will any other successful approach to school improvement (Riddle & Stedman, 1989; Uchitelle, 1989).

In a competitive system, states will need to devote more dollars to personnel and resources for establishing and maintaining a comprehensive communication and information system for parents. Choice also creates additional costs in financial reporting and record keeping. Further, without money to plan, develop, and implement alternatives to traditional schools, choice will be little more than a policy on paper.

In addition to programmatic and marketing costs, transportation costs can increase under a choice plan. In a district like Cambridge with more than 100,000 people located on just 6.25 square miles, transportation for choice poses few problems. Yet, for most school districts, transportation is one of the most difficult issues to address adequately and fairly. Currently, most states require that parents choosing to send their children to a neighboring district must arrange for transportation to the border of that district, and then the district of choice transports the children to the school (Odden, 1990). Many school officials maintain that the costs and logistics of providing transportation for out-of-district children would be financially and operationally prohibitive.

However, some commentators contend that choice plans should include free and appropriate transportation for all children (Bamber, Berla, Henderson, & Rioux, 1990). According to Glenn (1989b), "To provide a choice of public schools as a deliberate policy decision without providing free transportation can only lead to unequal opportunities for children based upon the ability of their parents to get them to school at their own expense" (p. 162). He further notes that requiring parents to provide transportation runs counter to the recent trend in education policy, which has been to eliminate wealth-based barriers to participation.

Arkansas, Iowa, Minnesota, and Ohio have allocated money to reimburse low-income families for transportation costs. In Minnesota, for example, $50,000 has been set aside for transporting children who are below the poverty level or who qualify for free or reduced lunch programs. These transportation funds, however, have been earmarked only for the very poor, and it is likely that many lower-income families who are not eligible for this funding cannot afford to transport their children to a school of choice (Glenn, 1989b). California, Idaho, and Nebraska have no provisions for reimbursing parents for transportation costs.

These transportation issues are usually most complicated in open enrollment programs. However, many of the same concerns also apply to postsecondary options programs and large-scale intra-district programs where transportation is not provided for all students who choose schools outside their attendance areas.

Treatment of Categorical Aid

Odden (1990) has observed that "many states inadvertently overlooked the issue of categorical funding in designing public school choice fiscal policy" (p. 19). If such state and federal categorical funds do not follow the child, then the resident district may have to contract with the receiving district in some type of tuition payment plan for the special services (e.g., special education programs) provided in the nonresident district.

Having categorical aid follow the child can be problematic. For example, comprehensive school choice programs call into question the formula used for selecting target school attendance areas under th Federal Chapter 1 compensatory education program (Riddle & Stedman, 1989). Under the present system, Chapter 1 funds are given to schools based on the percentage of low-income children within the school. This funding formula is based on the premise that federal dollars should support schools with the greatest percentage of low-income families. However, if a choice plan is successful, it could disperse low-income children throughout schools.

Currently, if a child in need of special academic support attends a non-funded school, Chapter 1 services are not available. There are, however, exceptions to this situation. A child receiving Chapter 1 services may continue to be served in his or her new school for up to one year. Further, under Chapter 1, an authorized educational agency may choose to use up to 5% of its funds to support transferred pupils for up to two years after the transfer (Riddle & Stedman, 1989).

Riddle and Stedman (1989) offer several recommendations for aligning federal funding of Chapter 1 with educational choice. They suggest:

> 1) granting to LEAs [local education agencies] the authority to extend the eligibility of transferred pupils (to schools that are not in Chapter 1 target attendance areas) beyond the current school year; 2) authorizing LEAs to select Chapter 1 participants from among the lowest achieving pupils in the LEA, regardless of the school they attend or the school attendance area in which they reside; or 3) adopting the concept now used to determine the eligibility of private school pupils for Chapter 1--that pupils are eligible for Chapter 1 if they reside in a relatively low-income school attendance area and are educationally disadvantaged, regardless of the location of the school they attend. (p. 27)

The authors suggest that one of the dangers of these recommendations is that Chapter 1 services will be widely dispersed, with small numbers of pupils being served in many schools. They contend that this approach could make it difficult to offer the depth and quality of services currently available in many schools.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

This report has addressed many issues with implications for policymakers. Increasingly, schools are being viewed as consumer institutions that must serve private interests. Education policymakers and school officials have the responsibility, however, to ensure that private interests do not usurp the broad, democratic interests of education and of our society. Policymakers must strive to balance concerns for equity, school autonomy, and diversity as they discuss the possibilities of using choice programs to further school improvement in our pluralistic society. A review of current literature suggests the following implications for state policymakers.

- **Choice alone is not enough; simply increasing the number of mediocre schools to which students have access will do little to promote higher student achievement.** The state must be prepared to support other school restructuring efforts to guarantee that students have real options among a variety of high quality schools.

- **If a state wishes to advance school reform through choice, it must be prepared to earmark substantial dollars for school improvement initiatives.** Choice policy without money to plan, design, and implement alternative educational programs will not stimulate the educational market sufficiently to bring about needed educational change.

- **A crucial component for the development of an effective choice program is planning.** Planning and program development funds must be made available to teachers, administrators, and parents, allowing them to create and design educational programs. State policymakers could further these initiatives by providing greater flexibility in school calendars so that planning time can be phased throughout the entire year with major program development taking place during the summer months. Planning is a key component of any restructuring initiative and is often neglected or inadequately funded.

- **Student selection policies must be fair, clear, nondiscriminatory, adequately communicated, legally sound, and uniformly applied to all students.** Academic criteria for magnet schools can serve to siphon the best and the most enthusiastic learners as well as the best teachers from poorer schools. Policymakers must ensure that choice plans do not resegregate our society by race, ability, or other inherent traits.

- **Financial support for transportation is a critical factor in making possible fair and equal participation in educational choice.** If choice policy is designed to ensure that poor families will have the same opportunities that wealthier families have always had, then we must provide transportation for all students.

- **Effective school restructuring likely has been a major contributor to the success of choice initiatives.** Choice alone may not stimulate new initiatives, since it simply allows parents to enroll their children in existing programs. If all schools offer the same curriculum, and all teachers are directed to cover the same material, there is no real choice.

- **A system of choice requires parents to make informed, educated decisions about the education of their children.** Not all parents are equally prepared for this responsibility. If legitimate choice is to exist for all children, the diverse information and communication needs of parents from all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds must be addressed.

- **While policymakers must be sensitive to legal issues, at present it does not appear that federal or state constitutional provisions pose a significant barrier to the implementation of choice plans unless sectarian schools are included in the programs.** However, given that several choice plans implemented to date have been accompanied by litigation, the legal dimensions should be carefully considered before a specific choice option is adopted.

- **For inter-district choice to be successful, states need to reduce funding and per-pupil expenditure disparities among school districts.** Disparity in educational funding among districts leads to confusion and disagreement about fair, adequate support for children who choose to exercise their educational choice by changing schools.

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PART II

CASE STUDIES OF SELECTED CHOICE PROGRAMS

This report was prepared for the
Indiana Department of Education

by the

Indiana Education Policy Center
Indiana University, Bloomington, IN

The report was authored by

Mark Buechler
Colleen Larson
Barry Bull
Mark Rothschild

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For Part II of this report on educational choice, the Indiana Education Policy Center conducted case studies at five sites with operative choice programs. Our purpose was to obtain first-hand impressions from those involved in the development and implementation of the programs as well as those affected by them: administrators, teachers, students, and parents. Since Minnesota was the first state to adopt statewide inter-district open enrollment, one of our site visits was to the Minnesota Department of Education and three were to Minnesota school districts: one rural, one suburban, and one urban. Our final site visit was to one of the three districts in Indiana with an intra-district choice program.

Minnesota Department of Education

Minnesota DOE personnel are impassioned advocates of the statewide choice initiatives. They view choice as an extremely important educational innovation, with the potential to improve school programs, increase equity, and, surprisingly, to enhance cooperation among districts.

However, they acknowledge that at least in part because of compromises made to facilitate the passage of choice legislation (no money for new programs or marketing, failure to provide transportation to all students), choice has not yet had as significant an impact on school operations as it might. Participation is relatively low, and many districts have neither initiated new programs nor allowed students to transfer to other schools within the district (the state law mandates inter-district choice but not intra-district choice).

Interviewees agreed that for choice to reach its potential, the state will have to hire additional personnel for parent communication and advocacy, fund increased transportation costs, and support school improvement initiatives throughout the state.

Minnesota Rural District

Respondents in this district believe that statewide choice initiatives may help reshape attitudes toward education in important ways: encourage parents to seek ownership of school programs, encourage teachers to reexamine their programs, and redirect schools toward a service orientation. They also see choice as a useful way to meet the concrete needs of a small number of families and students. Although actual participation in choice is low, they regard the option as a parental right worth having. However, they are generally skeptical of what they see as politicians' attempt to pass choice off as a cost-free

educational reform, and they do not think that statewide choice is having much of an impact on local options or programs.

This is not to say that local options are lacking. On the contrary, the superintendent views the district as a pioneer in school innovation. He has introduced so many options at the local level--decentralized budgeting, magnet programs, and year round school--that some teachers feel that they are being prodded to change too much too fast. However, the point is that all of this change has been locally initiated, with little or no impetus from the statewide choice program.

Minnesota Suburban District

Unlike the rural district, the suburban district is not interested in innovation, but in improving the basic programs offered in its schools. The district does not permit intra-district open enrollment, although exceptions may be made for students with special needs.

Although suspicious of the political rationale underlying inter-district choice (some thought it was to force school district consolidation), all respondents were positively disposed toward the program. They thought it was a good way to meet the exceptional needs of a few students. They also noted that the postsecondary enrollment program had prompted the University of Minnesota to offer introductory courses at their high school. However, many complained that lack of transportation and insufficient marketing of the program curtailed participation. Some even suggested that school districts have tacitly agreed not to compete with one another by limiting information about the program.

Overall, respondents in this district did not regard the statewide choice initiatives as particularly significant, wide-ranging, or threatening.

Minnesota Urban District

In the early 1980s, several schools in this district were cited as being out of compliance with racial balance guidelines. As a remedy, the district adopted a comprehensive intra-district controlled choice program, using state and federal funds to transform a number of out-of-balance schools into magnet and specialty schools. The hope was that these schools could induce enough voluntary student movement to achieve racial balance.

In this respect and many others, the program has been a notable success, according to respondents. Controlled choice has accomplished its main goal, voluntary desegregation. Many innovative programs have been implemented in the schools. Schools are actively competing for students, and students and parents are

actively shopping around for schools. Many school personnel seem genuinely excited by the opportunity to develop innovative programs and to promote their schools. Student achievement and parent involvement are up by most accounts. The district has installed full intra-district transportation and information systems, two touchstones of a thorough commitment to choice.

The only dissenting voices were those in inner city neighborhood schools. There was some resentment about the special treatment accorded magnet schools and some concern that such schools attract the best students—potential role models—away from neighborhood schools. Most importantly, there was the sentiment that choice was irrelevant to the people in these neighborhoods, to the neediest and most disadvantaged students, in other words, to those who perhaps could benefit most from the plan.

Because of this intra-district choice program, the urban district's participation in statewide open enrollment is limited. But as in the other two districts, respondents were generally favorably predisposed toward inter-district choice, although they cautioned that for the system to be fair, adequate information and transportation must be provided.

Choice in Indiana

Indiana students have always had a handful of limited options for choosing schools: a tuition transfer statute, some magnet and alternative schools, and vocational schools, to name three. But new, more comprehensive options are emerging. Indiana's Postsecondary Enrollment Options Program gives 11th and 12th grade students the opportunity to take courses for secondary and postsecondary credit at eligible higher education institutions. Students are responsible for paying their own tuition.

Additionally, three Indiana districts are now experimenting with versions of intra-district open enrollment: Bartholomew, Vincennes, and Washington Township. All three programs enable students to attend any school of their choice within the district as long as space is available in the school. Bartholomew and Vincennes do not provide transportation out of the student's attendance area; Washington Township does. Vincennes gives preference to handicapped students, and Washington Township requires that racial balance be maintained.

In Washington Township, the impetus for choice arose when district officials were discussing the redrawing of attendance areas due to the opening of a new elementary school in 1991. To meet the expected resistance of some families to the new school, district officials decided to give parents their choice of elementary schools. They also hoped to improve racial balance. Interestingly, they did not view choice as a means of sparking

competition between schools but as a community service in tune with the collegial ethos of the district. Although there have been some difficulties in implementation (transporting students is expensive and maintaining racial balance is a complex task), overall the program has been well received both by educators and by the community as a whole.

Lessons Learned

A number of themes with implications for policymakers have emerged in our case studies of choice programs in Minnesota and Indiana. Key themes are listed below.

- Although choice is grounded in the belief that competition between schools will fuel improvement, many respondents noted that the implementation of choice has been accompanied by an increase in cooperation.

- Relatively few students are transferring to new schools under the inter- or intra-district open enrollment programs, but few respondents viewed this limited participation as an indictment of the program.

- Choice is not a cost-free education reform. Many respondents felt that to accomplish its goal of better schools for all students, a choice program should include funding for school improvement, transportation, marketing, and increased administrative costs.

- Providing transportation to all students who choose new schools is expensive. Failing to provide transportation makes these options less accessible to low income families.

- Lack of effective communication about choice options to parents of all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds remains a key concern.

- Neither inter- nor intra-district open enrollment has yet been a significant incentive for school improvement.

- Although inter-district choice has received all the publicity in Minnesota, the most significant choice activity seems to be occurring inside particular districts, for reasons unrelated to the statewide plan.

- Despite limited participation, the absence of funding, and the rather insignificant impact of choice on school improvement efforts thus far, most respondents remained quite favorably disposed toward open enrollment.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This report, "Case Studies of Selected Choice Programs," is part two of the study undertaken by the Indiana Education Policy Center for the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE). The report depicts what was discovered about educational choice from those who have been involved in administering statewide and local choice programs as well as those who have been affected by these programs. The first section details the methodology--how we went about selecting sites, developing interview protocols, and conducting the case studies. The next five sections of the report describe the results of the case studies conducted in Minnesota and Indiana. The final section focuses on "lessons learned"--an analysis of what was learned from the case studies about implementing and operating choice programs.

METHODOLOGY FOR THE CASE STUDIES

Selecting the Sites

IDOE personnel requested that Minnesota be the central focus of our case studies since it was the first state to implement a statewide inter-district choice plan. They also requested a case study of a specific Indiana district that has an intra-district choice plan.

Minnesota

We first contacted one of the coordinators of Minnesota's open enrollment program and received approval to include individuals at the Minnesota Department of Education in our site visits. In addition, we asked the coordinator to assist us in identifying three local school districts to visit: one rural district, one suburban district, and one urban district. We also asked that the districts selected be representative of districts in Minnesota in that they would provide a clear picture of reactions to choice (pros and cons) at the local level. In addressing these criteria, the coordinator chose one urban district that operates its choice plan under federal desegregation guidelines, one suburban district that is financially sound and is supporting a number of different school initiatives, and one rural district that has good local support but limited funding for its schools. Once the school districts were identified, superintendents were contacted to determine their willingness to participate in the study.

Indiana

To select a site in Indiana, we identified districts with some type of intra-district choice plan specified in local school board policy, excluding magnet school programs. We made phone calls to the Indiana School Boards Association and to individuals who are knowledgeable about choice. After identifying three such districts, we chose for our study the district with the longest history in operating a choice plan. Incidentally, the district was the one the IDOE had initially suggested as a case study site.

Developing the Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was developed following an extensive review of the literature and a number of conversations with individuals who are familiar with the research on educational

choice (e.g., state personnel, researchers). Three broad questions governed the development of the interview protocol:

- Why were state and local choice programs adopted?
- What has been the impact of choice on state and local education systems?
- What has been the reaction to school choice?

To address these questions, the interview protocol focused on issues such as implementation, school finances, equity, transportation, information provided to parents, parental involvement, school climate, student participation, and school program changes made as a result of choice. (See the appendix for a copy of the interview protocols.)

Conducting the Interviews

Interviewers were trained to conduct both individual and group interviews using a semi-structured format. This format allowed respondents to answer specific questions as well as to offer additional insights about school choice as they desired. The interview climate was informal, and where respondents granted permission, interviews were taped to ensure that the information gleaned from these discussions would be accurately described.

Of the 63 interview participants in both states, more than half were interviewed individually, while the rest were interviewed in focus groups. The majority of the interview sessions were taped.

Minnesota

Our contact person in the Minnesota Department of Education identified four individuals at the state level to be interviewed. These individuals were chosen because they played key roles in designing the choice legislation and/or implementing the choice program. Two of these people currently serve as coordinators for the choice program and have regular contact with local school administrators and parents across the state; two are education finance officers who deal with the financial issues of choice. In addition to these four people, we interviewed a choice theorist from the University of Minnesota who assisted with drafting the legislation and has written widely on Minnesota's choice program. Since he worked with the Minnesota DOE on the choice initiatives, his comments are included among state department personnel for purposes of reporting the interview data.

We spent one day each in the rural and suburban districts and two days in the urban district. In addition to interviewing central office administrators, we talked to principals, teachers, students, and parents at schools selected by central office

officials specifically to provide a broad overview of choice in the district.

Because districts were promised that confidentiality would be maintained, we have invented fictitious names for each district. The rural district is called **Rustic Hills**, the suburban district **East Suburbia**, and the urban district **New Gotham**. We have also given fictitious names to specific towns and schools mentioned in each section.

Nine central office administrators and 45 persons from 12 different schools were interviewed in these districts, with the breakdown as follows:

	District Officials	School Personnel
Rural	2	7 teachers 7 parents
Suburban	2	2 principals 3 teachers 1 counselor 2 students 6 parents
Urban	5	5 principals 4 teachers 2 counselors 1 curriculum director 1 student 4 parents
Total:	9	45

Indiana

Per the request of district officials, we conducted interviews during one morning session. A district official was interviewed individually, and a focus group was held with three principals. To supplement what we learned about choice in Indiana from the interviews conducted in this district, we obtained information on choice policies from the two other districts identified in the study. In addition, we discuss Indiana's tuition transfer statute and its postsecondary enrollment plan.

Data Analysis

Following the site visits, interviewers carefully reviewed the notes, tapes, and documents they obtained from the state, district, and school levels and wrote detailed summaries of what they had learned. All project staff then held a three-hour meeting to discuss the data and to delineate key trends and issues regarding choice programs that emerged from the case studies.

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

In the following four sections, we assume that the reader has a basic familiarity with Minnesota's statewide choice initiatives. For a detailed description of those initiatives, see pp. 20-26 in Part I of this report.

The primary purpose of our interviews at the Minnesota Department of Education was to obtain a richer understanding of the state's choice initiatives through the insights of people who have been actively involved in the process and who have dealt with implementation issues.

Choice Advocacy

All those interviewed at the Minnesota Department of Education were strong advocates for educational choice, and they agreed that Minnesotans enjoy their national reputation as leaders in educational choice. They used phrases like "in typical Minnesota style," referring to the bold choice legislation that many of them helped to formulate. Though each of them has spent numerous hours with interviewers from other states, they were actively engaged in the discussions as if for the first time. While displaying strong support for the concept of educational choice, none of the interviewees suggested that Minnesota's choice program was fully formed and operational. Discussions of limitations and on-going problems were typically reflected in their stories along with statements like "it will take time," or "it won't happen overnight." One interviewee stated that the Governor believed that educational choice would not bring about significant change in the educational system of the state for at least five years, and others echoed that sentiment.

All of the respondents noted that their workloads had increased as a result of the choice initiative. One who travels the state to assist schools in change efforts indicated that he was physically exhausted and had piles of work and unanswered mail surrounding his desk. However, not one interviewee complained about the increased demands of supporting the choice initiative. The commitment of choice activists has been compared to that of civil rights activists, and after speaking with people at the Minnesota Department of Education, we think the analogy is appropriate.

Adopting Choice Legislation

Although much has been written about the events leading up to and following the implementation of choice in Minnesota, some additional insight was gleaned from conversations with state department personnel. All interviewees agreed that educational choice came to Minnesota as a result of a study instigated by the Minnesota Businesses Partnership. This study focused on the state of education in Minnesota and provided recommendations for educational improvement, including the implementation of postsecondary options and open enrollment for all children in the state.

When asked to reflect on how the choice legislation was passed, interviewees typically recalled three key issues. First, Governor Perpich was a tireless supporter of educational choice and led a strong media campaign to change Minnesotans' initially negative attitude toward choice. Second, his interest in and support for choice was powerfully reinforced by the Minnesota Business Partnership. Third, due to great opposition from educational professional associations, several concessions were made that allowed districts to "wade in" and "test the waters" of choice, lessening their opposition to the legislation. Allowing school districts to "close their doors" to choice may have had the greatest impact on defusing opposition to the choice initiative.

All interviewees agreed that the phase-in voluntary approach to choice was a wise compromise. Voluntary participation enabled reluctant and skeptical school boards and superintendents to observe the experiences of others more willing to participate in the choice experiment. According to many of the people with whom we spoke, the strongest fears of school boards and superintendents were allayed during the voluntary phase of the choice legislation. Fears of mass exodus of students from school districts leading to school closings and loss of jobs proved to be unfounded. Therefore, by the time mandatory choice was introduced in the legislature, there was far less opposition to the initiative. Further, because the statewide choice initiative mandated only inter-district choice and not intra-district choice, all school districts retained control over the educational options available within their own borders. (This point is often overlooked in the literature.) These concessions enabled superintendents and school boards to preserve a sense of internal control over the initially threatening statewide initiative.

However, state department personnel also identified a downside of these concessions. To date, the vast majority of students have chosen to remain in their own school districts despite the inter-district choice option. As a result, many school districts in the state of Minnesota have not been compelled to initiate school improvement efforts or to expand educational choice within their own communities. Therefore, choice has thus

far not provided the impetus for the improvement of educational programs for most children in the state of Minnesota.

Several interviewees noted that Governor Perpich's original goals for educational choice included the allocation of money to support program development within school districts. However, this allocation did not survive the legislative process and, as a result, no money has been provided for to diversify school programs. According to most of the interviewees, this omission has hampered choice initiatives in many school districts. "Many of our districts have not changed their curriculum or their programs," one interviewee stated flatly. Another respondent noted that the elimination of financial support for school innovation was viewed skeptically by superintendents who often criticized the choice legislation as just one more high profile, "no cost" state approach to school improvement.

Responding to Common Concerns

According to interviewees, many concerns were raised in heated discussion prior to the implementation of choice. In addition to concerns about students' leaving resident school districts, opponents feared that educational choice would "end all future cooperation between school districts." Clearly, this was a legitimate concern given that an underlying assumption of choice is that greater competition between schools and school districts will improve education.

However, all five of the people with whom we spoke rejected the notion that choice has led to greater competition in Minnesota. Surprisingly, the interviewees maintained that cooperation among school districts has actually increased as a result of choice.

Two factors have likely contributed to this cooperation, according to interviewees. First, the state department has historically supported school collaboration through incentive programs such as "pair and share." This program encourages and financially rewards school districts for combining efforts and providing more cost-effective programs. Smaller school districts in particular are encouraged to broaden their program and course offerings to students by pairing with other districts and allocating specific curriculum or program responsibilities to each district. For example, one of the districts may assume responsibility for foreign language programs while the other district provides a tech prep program for non college-bound students. Students in either district may attend these courses. Or two districts may combine to offer students a choice of five foreign languages rather than each district financing the same three traditional languages: French, Spanish, and German. This form of cooperation backed by state financial incentives has fueled greater cooperation and collaboration between school

districts and has expanded educational choices and opportunities for students.

Several interviewees also mentioned a second possible explanation for increased collaboration between school districts: "self-protection." Many school districts recognize that in an environment of choice their very survival could be threatened by neighboring districts. Planned cooperation with these neighboring districts and the creation of distinct educational niches in each district could be viewed as crucial to their continued existence.

A second initial fear regarding inter-district choice discussed by several respondents was that it could result in school district consolidation. Many opponents of choice contended that consolidation was at the heart of Minnesota's choice initiative. There is no denying that the student population is declining in many areas of the state and that smaller, rural districts have suffered the most from declining enrollments. Indeed, consolidations are on the rise in Minnesota. However, those interviewed at the state department asserted that this trend has nothing to do with choice. They noted that the small number of participants in open enrollment has had no effect on consolidation efforts. They attributed this increase in consolidation to the state's "pair and share" incentive program, which has led to three consolidations since the adoption of choice, and to the declining populations and related financial problems of those communities.

A third fear was that choice would create greater inequities within the public school system. Those interviewed at the state department expressed a strong belief that poor children should have the same educational opportunities as other children. "We do not want resegregated schools," one interviewee stated. Another interviewee noted that it is precisely because of the diversity of Minnesota's population that greater choice was needed among the public schools. However, interviewees expressed concerns about problems in informing people of all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds about choice options, and they readily admitted that the vast majority of children who currently participate in inter-district choice are white, middle-class children. In fact, about 95% of all students participating in open enrollment are white, while 91% of K-12 students are white. This finding has led one interviewee to push for extensive market research to determine the effectiveness of current state and district communication efforts in getting choice information to people of all racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Another factor that several interviewees mentioned as potentially contributing to inequity in educational opportunities through choice is the failure to provide transportation for all students who need it. This issue is widely discussed in the literature on educational choice; however, few states have funded

full transportation. People at the state department acknowledged that many poor families do not qualify for transportation aid but cannot afford transportation to non-resident school districts. This financial burden likely affects the participation of low-income children in inter-district choice.

Key Issues in Student Participation in Choice

A recent trend in the choice literature has been to examine participation in educational choice as a perceived indicator of the success or failure of the initiative. Questions regarding student participation levels in various choice options generated considerable discussion among state department personnel. One interviewee noted that according to the most recent figures, 6,000 students are now participating in open enrollment. This means that in the first year of mandatory participation in open enrollment, the student participation figure has almost doubled. The interviewee further stated that this number is drawn from a student population of just over 630,000 students. New attendance figures reveal that approximately 6,000 students also are participating in the postsecondary options program, which has historically been the most popular choice option in the state.

When we asked about the number of students participating in open enrollment, several of the interviewees were quick to defend the small but increasing numbers. They made it very clear that majority participation in open enrollment was never the goal. One interviewee stated, "Open enrollment is not for everybody, but for students who need it, it is an important option." Several people with whom we spoke contended that students who have special problems or interests that can be served better in another school have greatly benefitted from open enrollment. However, those interviewed fully expect most children to remain in neighborhood schools because that is their preference. The major difference under the choice program is that they are no longer forced to attend the resident school.

A follow-up question regarding why students participate in choice l[illegible] to discussions about a 1990 report disseminated by the Minnesota House of Representatives (see Part 1). The report claimed that 40% of students choose their educational program based on convenience, while only 20% do so for academic purposes. Several of the interviewees challenged the findings of this study as misleading. One claimed that the report was designed to reflect the anti-choice bias of the Minnesota House of Representatives. He noted that the data were gathered from transfer application forms that were never intended to be used for research purposes. Parents did not have the opportunity to complete a survey regarding their reasons for requesting a transfer.

Other interviewers also noted that a student's reasons for transfer (e.g., proximity, academic opportunity, general environment) were categorized by the researcher, not by the participants in the program. Finally, they argued that convenience appeared to be the most prominent factor only because of the manner in which the data were displayed. Because four reasons for transfer (proximity to home, proximity to work, availability of daycare, and plans to move to another district) were collapsed under "convenience" and only two reasons (specific program and academic opportunity) were listed under "academic," convenience was unfairly weighted.

Thus, state department personnel argued that had the educational factors been more appropriately grouped and parents given the opportunity to classify their own reasons for transfer, educational preferences would likely have surpassed "convenience." One interviewee further noted that as educational programs become more diverse, parents will have greater reasons to select schools based upon educational programs.

Communication and Marketing

Perhaps the greatest challenge presented by choice is the task of communicating information on the open enrollment plan to parents of all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. According to one interviewee, Minnesota is working hard to improve the strategies used for communicating choice options. Choice has been advertised on grocery store bags, in public service announcements, and through local newspapers. In an effort to reach low-income populations, choice coordinators have been working with local community centers, low-income housing centers, and through associations like the NAACP.

According to one interviewee, "Choice simply makes us do what we should have been doing all along. Parents know more about their local grocery store than they do about the schools where their children spend the majority of their time." Several people noted that parents need to be better informed about educational institutions and programs. One person stated that "once parents understand the system they can work with it, access it, and support it."

However, getting information about choice to the people who need it has proven to be a difficult and time consuming task. Two people at the state department have primary responsibility for statewide communication on open enrollment. One of these stated, "Two people in the Department of Education with no budget cannot help 730,000 parents understand this program overnight--it's not going to happen." Without a budget of their own, people at the state department must rely to some extent on support from business partnerships to sustain their communication efforts. For the most part, however, the state department relies heavily on local school

districts to communicate with people about their educational programs. This situation is problematic since school districts have not received any additional funds for communication and marketing costs. Further, the fact that many school boards and superintendents are not yet wholly supportive of the choice initiative often results in failure to dedicate sufficient time and/or dollars to communicating to parents about new educational options.

Key Issues in Financing Educational Choice

Another topic that generated considerable discussion was that of financing educational choice. According to educational finance personnel, the choice program has generated more paperwork at both the state and the local level, but they do not view this as a problem. One education finance official said, "We used to have just two forms for generating state aid but now we have added several forms for the open enrollment options program. Reporting with choice has at least doubled our paperwork. But if it means providing better education for kids then it's worth it."

The interviewees believe that most school districts would agree that the current system for distributing state aid under open enrollment is fair. They also noted that to date, open enrollment has not been a significant financial burden for most of Minnesota's schools districts, for two possible reasons. First, because the number of students participating in open enrollment has remained quite low, very few districts have been negatively impacted by loss of significant state aid through choice, or by an influx of non-resident students who potentially bring insufficient dollars to support their education. Second, there are not great disparities in per-pupil expenditures among districts in the state; therefore, few districts are financially disadvantaged as a result of students choosing to attend their districts. Edina, the only school district in the state that initially did not participate in open enrollment, feared having to raise local taxes to support an unwelcome influx of students from property-poor communities. However, recognizing that children were not moving in significant numbers to wealthier districts, Edina eventually opened its schools to open enrollment.

When asked about any unanticipated financial issues or problems that emerged as a result of the open enrollment program, interviewees noted the failure to address funding for special education students in the original legislation. In fact, the original legislation failed to address special education at all, which led to considerable confusion about whether or not special education students could even participate in choice programs. Because of this oversight, there were no provisions for obtaining additional dollars needed to support out-of-district special education students. According to one interviewee, "This situation upset a lot of people."

The oversight was remedied the following year. In financing open enrollment options for special education students, Minnesota wanted to preserve the notion that the district in which the child resides retains responsibility for the education of that youngster. Therefore, it was decided that resident districts must pay districts of choice all transportation and education costs for special education students. This decision was made to ensure that school districts would not be financially rewarded for not providing their own special education services.

In addition to these issues, interviewees frequently mentioned the additional financial burdens at both the state and local level of supporting educational choice initiatives. Several interviewees emphasized that choice is not a "no cost" approach to school improvement. They cited many areas where money is crucial to effective and equitable program implementation. According to one interviewee, "Choice demands the creation of an entire marketing department." People at the state department also noted that money is needed to:

- hire additional personnel for parent communication and advocacy;
- support an on-going statewide communication program in multiple languages;
- fund increased student transportation costs;
- support school restructuring initiatives throughout the state, including program planning and staff development.

Failure to fund each of these elements adequately creates a significant barrier to the effective implementation of open enrollment options.

Summary

People at the Minnesota Department of Education were very positive about the open enrollment initiative in Minnesota. Unlike many people interviewed in school districts within the state (see the next three sections), they viewed choice as an important and far reaching educational initiative. However, they readily admitted that their program is in its infancy with much left to be done. They frequently stated that choice alone will be insufficient to bring out needed school improvement and that there must be greater efforts to create more diverse educational programs and opportunities if true choice is to exist for all children in the state of Minnesota.

RUSTIC HILLS[1]

The School District

Rustic Hills School District was formed through the consolidation of several smaller districts in the 1960s. It includes five relatively small towns, the largest of which is Shelley with a population of around 3,000. With the completion of a new middle school this year, the district consists of four schools--a primary school (K-3), an intermediate school (4-5), a middle school (6-8), and a high school (9-12). Approximately 2,600 students are enrolled in these schools. The district enrollment has been growing at about 1% to 1.5% per year. Although originally agricultural communities, these towns are becoming third ring suburbs of a major metropolitan area. Shelley, the closest of the towns to the metropolitan area (about 40 miles), has experienced the most rapid growth of families seeking a more rural life within commuting distance of the metropolitan area. About half of the men and 20% of the women in the district hold jobs in the metropolitan area.

The education director characterizes these communities as low to moderate income, with about half of the population employed in working-class jobs, about 35% in skilled labor, and about 15% in professional jobs. Fifteen years ago about 30% of the adults had not completed high school; now the education director estimates that only about 20% have not done so. The high school dropout rate is about 20%, somewhat higher than the state average. About 85% of high school graduates pursue postsecondary education, with about 40 % attending four-year colleges. The education director categorizes the district as property poor and therefore limited in the funds available for schools. In fact, the district has joined several others in the state in a law suit alleging that the current system of school funding contravenes the state constitution.

The superintendent views himself as a futurist and sees the district as a pioneer in school change and innovation to meet emerging social and political needs. He uses developments in state legislation and state department of education policy as a way of motivating change in his district. He sees his role as the

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[1]As explained in the introduction, "Rustic Hills" is a fictional name for the rural district in Minnesota where we conducted one of our case studies. Specific towns and schools mentioned in this section also have fictional names.

agenda setter for change in the district (and to a real extent in the state).

Each August, the district holds a retreat for administrators, school board members, and selected teachers, parents, and community members. The superintendent uses this retreat to articulate issues that he wants the district to address in the coming year; he often brings in speakers from other districts, universities, the business community, or the state to provide information that reinforces the agenda that he wants to pursue. He sees himself as providing the direction and stimulus for change but asks principals and teachers to plan for and implement the change.

In the past few years, the district has undertaken a significant number of innovations: decentralized budgeting in which teachers at the primary and intermediate schools are authorized to plan for the expenditure of instructional support funds (about $231 per student this year); the institution of magnet programs at the primary and intermediate schools; the offering of mini-magnet courses at the middle school; and the development of a year-round school at the high school level. As will be explained later, the last three innovations have provided significant options for parents and students within the district. The year-round school required a change in state legislation, a change that the district initiated. The superintendent is also pushing for change on two new fronts; he has volunteered his district to participate in a new state program in outcome-based education, and he is seeking legislation that will permit his district and the local community college to merge into a single entity responsible for education from preschool through college.

For the superintendent, the purpose of innovation is to change teachers' attitudes and approaches to teaching. He emphasizes, in particular, teaching for meaning rather than factual information, actively involving students in learning, teaching through positive student motivation rather than fear, viewing discipline as a social responsibility, and the creating a school atmosphere in which it is permissible for students to take risks and, at times, to fail.

As a result of this innovative activity, choice in Rustic Hills has a meaning beyond the Minnesota statewide programs that provide for the transfer of students among school districts. Therefore, state-sponsored and locally-initiated choice are discussed separately below.

State-Sponsored Choice

Rationale

The superintendent views the state adoption of choice as an effort to improve schools without any additional costs. The graying population has meant a change in political priorities in Minnesota and a subsequent unwillingness to increase school expenditures. He sees choice as a cost-free way for Minnesota to serve its traditional ideological commitment to educational progressivism. The education director sees choice as growing out of a concern about inequality in school financing and programs. He believes that politicians viewed choice as a way of producing more equality without having to make tough decisions to change the state funding formula or to consolidate school districts.

Although both the superintendent and the education director believe that the specific state programs will have little direct impact upon school enrollment patterns, both believe that the statewide initiative may help to reshape attitudes toward education in important and potentially revolutionary ways: (a) encouraging parents to seek ownership of school programs, (b) helping schools realize that they cannot be all things to all people, (c) redirecting school boards and professionals to a service orientation toward students (as the superintendent put it, "to see students as customers"), and (d) encouraging teachers to reexamine their programs. In short, they perceive the state program as a way in which interested administrators can motivate internal change in school districts but do not believe that this change will happen without deliberate efforts from school leaders.

Teachers view the state choice program as a way of maintaining Minnesota's tradition of concern about education and its "maverick" reputation. They do see the program as having some real benefits for the small number of families that participate in it: enhancing parental support and ownership of school programs, providing vocational alternatives to students, giving students a second chance, preventing dropouts. Parents view these programs as a useful way to meet the concrete needs of a small number of students and families to overcome negative peer pressure, address family problems, provide greater convenience to working parents, and enhance some students' access to academic or special education programs. They do not believe that many students will need to take advantage of these opportunities but regard the state-sponsored options as establishing parental rights worth having.

Implementation

Under the leadership of the superintendent, Rustic Hills volunteered to participate in the state choice programs in the first year. There were some initial difficulties in arranging transportation logistics and in getting the word out to parents.

These difficulties have not been fully resolved. The district does have a brochure that it sends to parents who inquire about the choice programs, but administrators have not made a particular effort to market the programs. Parents still do not feel that they have adequate information; the parent group characterized itself as naive about available options. Transportation does make real demands upon the time of parents. Some parents said that they believe many families wait until their children are in high school and can transport themselves before they take advantage of state-sponsored choice. The education director indicated that there are some academic and programmatic problems with inter-district transfers that have not been fully resolved (e.g., how to grant students credit for their work in previous schools when those schools' courses are significantly different from courses in receiving schools; how to maintain continuity in individualized programs for special education students). He also said that the programs are less accessible to rural and low-income students.

Impact

Rustic Hills has lost 20 students through open enrollment and high school graduation incentives and has gained 16. In addition, they gained 31 students through the previously available agreements between school districts and lost 21. About half of the inter-district transfers occur at the high school level, but there is a small number of students involved at every grade level. A very few of the open enrollment students are handicapped. The education director estimated that about 10% of the high school students are involved in the postsecondary program; however, prior to the state legislation, the district did have an agreement that allowed some students to take courses at the local community college. The state legislation and strong district administrative support have increased the participation in these courses.

While Rustic Hills has been actively involved in program innovation and state choice has been used by the administration as one of many vehicles for change, neither the superintendent nor the educational director viewed it as a strong incentive for school improvement. The state programs have little effect on teachers' or administrators' work loads, and there was no noticeable impact on the district's financial status or planning. Teachers expressed the concern that the programs may encourage change to improve a district's image rather than for genuine educational reasons.

Teachers also said that postsecondary options do cream off the best students, leaving the regular classes without the best academic role models. Parents also voiced a concern that the postsecondary program may encourage students to grow up too fast, to take a premature interest in their careers rather than enjoying

the social and personal opportunities available in high school. Parents also were worried about the effect that taking college courses might have on the GPA and class ranking of high school students. They thought that averaging these grades with those for regular high school courses might penalize students who want to take advantage of college-level opportunities. While several parents and teachers said that movement of students for athletic reasons may be a potential problem in certain districts, none knew of any specific instances where this has occurred.

State-Sponsored Choice: Conclusions

Despite a strong administrative commitment to innovation and general support among parents, teachers, and administrators for the state choice program, the participation rate of Rustic Hills students in open enrollment and graduation incentives seems little different than that of the state as a whole. Involvement in the postsecondary program does seem to be greater than the state average, but this may reflect the district's cooperation with the local community college, which started prior to the enactment of state choice legislation. At its current participation rates, Rustic Hills' use of state choice programs seems to meet the specific needs of a small number of individual students rather than to provide a significant stimulus for program change within the district. Although the superintendent has an aggressive leadership style, he has concerned himself mostly with innovation within the district's schools rather than with the potential effects that such changes might have in attracting other districts' students or with the vigorous marketing of Rustic Hills' programs to outsiders. Even in a district like this one that is willing to take risks, state-sponsored choice seems to be a secondary concern and to involve limited student participation.

Locally Initiated Choice

Rationale

As noted, the district superintendent is strongly committed to school innovation, and several of the recent program changes in Rustic Hills include opportunities for choice on the part of students, teachers, and parents. To some extent, the choice elements in these programs stem from beliefs in the value of diversifying the curriculum and promoting student and parent commitment to education.

However, choice also functions in Rustic Hills as a mechanism to foster innovation despite the fact that there may be no general consensus among teachers or parents about the worth of any particular innovation. When a specific innovation is tried, teachers are often able to decide whether and how they wish to be involved in it. Those who do not want to change or do not feel that the change is an improvement may continue to teach in the

previous program. Similarly, choice enables only those parents who approve of an innovation to enroll their children in the new program. Those who are satisfied with the old program may continue to be served by it. Thus, internal choice in Rustic Hills is valued, especially by district administrators, partly for its own sake and partly as a politically necessary strategy for making program innovation acceptable to teachers, parents, and other members of the community.

The Programs

Rustic Hills has instituted three programs that permit student and parent choice:

- Magnets at the primary and intermediate schools. These schools have created three thematic programs focusing respectively on science, arts, and global education in addition to the traditional self-contained classrooms. All basic education--reading, mathematics, etc.--is conducted around these themes. The theme curricula are planned and taught by teams of teachers that span the grades within the school. Parents may choose which, if any, of the magnets their children will participate in. Although the central administration mandated that magnets would be created, teachers and parents were involved in the selection of magnet themes and in designing the new curricula. Teachers also were permitted to decide whether to teach in one of the magnets or to remain in a self-contained classroom.

- Mini-magnet courses at the middle school. During a seven-day period after each of the first three school quarters, teachers offer what the educational director calls high interest mini-courses. Although all teachers are required to offer such classes, individual teachers select and design their own courses. They teach the classes in three double-period blocks each day during the seven-day interim period. Students in 7th and 8th grades select three classes from those offered. Sixth-grade students are required to take specific classes designed for them.

- Year-round school at the high school. Rustic Hills sought and received authorization from state legislators to count classes offered during the summer as regular classes deserving of state financial support and meeting state graduation requirements. This enables Rustic Hills students and some who come from other districts to arrange their schedules over the entire year rather than only nine months. District teachers may volunteer to teach in the summer. Although it is possible for a teacher to count summer teaching as part of a nine month contract and to take some other part of the year off, everyone so far has chosen to teach the summer in addition to the regular year. When

local teachers are not available, the district recruits those from surrounding districts. Although an effort is made to offer a reasonably complete summer program, the full range of specialized courses has not been available in the summer. Thus far, and to the superintendent's disappointment, the year-round school has not stimulated any change in the high school's program.

Teacher Reactions

Teachers at the primary and intermediate schools reported a number of problems with the magnet program. The development of the magnets has involved a huge investment of teacher time. The magnets have required most teachers to significantly redesign the curriculum and to a lesser extent their instructional techniques. The programs also indirectly compete with one another for students. Some programs are oversubscribed and have a waiting list. The science program has considerably more boys than girls, while the situation is reversed in the arts program. The question of year-to-year enrollment in the magnets has not been fully resolved. It is not clear whether those enrolled in a particular magnet this year will have first choice for that magnet next year or whether they will have to compete with other students on an equal footing. Despite these difficulties, the elementary teachers interviewed said that the magnet program is worth trying, especially since teachers have a choice about their involvement.

Middle school teachers were considerably less enthusiastic about the mini-magnet courses. This is the first year in a new middle school building, and with the new building has come a wide variety of changes in the school program. The mini-course program is just one of these changes. In a year of hard adjustments, these courses seem to be an innovation that may have limited teacher support. Teachers complained about unequal enrollments in various classes, the difficulty of maintaining instructional momentum and student attention for a double period, and the interruption in instruction in basic language and mathematics skills for 21 days during the school year. They did report, however, real enthusiasm from most students. They expressed the hope that the effectiveness of the mini-magnet program would be carefully evaluated before continuing it in its current form. This is the only student-choice program in the district where teacher participation is not optional.

High school teachers reported that the year-round school had been developed by the high school principal with little input from faculty. Nevertheless, they had little criticism of it because it does not involve any program change and does not mandate teacher participation.

Parent Reactions

Parent reaction to these innovations was somewhat mixed although generally positive. They expressed some concern about the pace of change in the schools; they want new programs to be carefully and completely planned before they are implemented and hope that their effects will be monitored. Some expressed doubts that these expectations had been or would be satisfied.

On the other hand, they expressed general support of the concept of all three types of innovations now being tried in Rustic Hills schools. The primary and intermediate magnet program received the greatest support: An entire year had been spent in a planning process in which some parents had been involved; parents received good printed information about their options and were also informed at school meetings; students in the magnet program seemed to be genuinely enthusiastic about their education.

Parents thought the middle school mini-magnet courses were probably a good idea but did not regard them as a particularly important change. They felt that they had received too little information about the choices available to their children.

Parents were very supportive of the year-round school but had several criticisms of it. They complained that limited counselor availability at the high school meant that few students had the chance to plan carefully to take advantage of the summer program. They found that the offerings were generally limited to basic courses; therefore, students could not take more specialized and difficult courses in the summer when they might have more time to focus on them. They wished that summer courses were more flexibly scheduled so that family and work plans could be more readily accommodated.

Locally Initiated Choice: Conclusions

The superintendent's agenda of program innovation and choice within the Rustic Hills schools is clearly creating some tension in the community and the schools. He himself expressed dissatisfaction with the slow pace of change and the limited range of options available at the secondary level. He said that his message about student-centered instruction is not getting across to high school teachers.

At the same time, administrative pressure for innovation is producing resistance among teachers and, to a lesser extent, among parents. Many teachers feel that they are being pushed farther and faster than they are willing to go. While they are generally supportive of the new programs, they do not seem to fully share the superintendent's conception of the purpose of those changes. Some feel that they have not had the time or support to plan the new programs adequately and are worried that they will be asked to

do more before they feel that they have mastered the current programs. They voice the desire for detailed evaluation of the innovations, but this may be as much an expression of their desire to slow the pace of change as it is a well-founded questioning of the value of the changes. Parents express some concern that these innovations might tend to be change for its own sake, but they seem to feel reasonably well served by their schools. In fact, they seem to want more genuine choice at high school level.

Overall, locally initiated choice seems to provide more readily available options for parents and students than do the state-sponsored choice programs. At the same time, local programs demand strong leadership and high levels of energy and commitment from teachers.

EAST BURBANIA[2]

The School District

East Burbania School District is a "third-ring" suburban district located about 30 miles from a major metropolitan area. It serves a geographic area of 153 square miles with a population of about 22,500. Approximately 4,800 K-12 students and 250 early childhood education students are enrolled in five elementary schools (K-5), one middle school (6-8), and one high school (9-12). School enrollments have doubled in the past 15 years and continue to rise at the rate of about 100 students per year. This growth has been the result of a pattern of metropolitan population movement to more distant communities. The majority of residents work in the metropolitan area although a number are employed in three relatively large local companies as well as smaller businesses. The district employs about 300 licensed professionals and 200 other staff members. Turnover in staff is about 1% per year. The superintendent characterizes the community as middle to upper-middle income with few truly low-income families and minorities. Most members of the school board have served for a considerable time; the chair has been on the board for 15 years.

The goal of the district, according to the board chair and administrators, is to provide children with a good basic education. The district has not sought to diversify school programs, but instead has focused on improving the basic programs offered in its schools. The board does not permit open enrollment in its elementary schools, although individual students with special needs or circumstances may be allowed to attend schools outside their geographic attendance areas.

Perceptions of the Rationale for Choice

Nearly all interviewees saw the state choice program as originating from the business community and as being based upon a theory of school improvement through competition. Some believed that, in addition, the policy was an indirect measure to encourage school consolidation in some rural areas. No one believed that either of these predicted outcomes was likely to come to pass. The convenience of neighborhood schools and citizens' attachment to their residential communities make great

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[2]As explained in the introduction, "East Burbania" is a fictional name for the suburban district in Minnesota where we conducted one of our case studies. Specific towns and schools mentioned in this section also have fictional names.

shifts in enrollment improbable; therefore, districts (with the possible exception of first-ring suburbs) simply do not face the necessity to compete for students.

All interviewees without exception were positively disposed toward the state choice program despite feeling that the initial political rationale (i.e., cost-free reform, improvement through competition) for the legislation was inappropriate. The board, at the urging of the superintendent, voted unanimously to participate voluntarily in the program in its first year. Administrators saw choice as meeting the needs of a few students whose circumstances were exceptional—those who had undergone substance abuse treatment and did not wish to return to their previous school, whose residence was more convenient to a school outside their district, who had negative personal experiences in their home schools, and a few who sought academic or special education programs not available locally.

The reasons cited by interviewed parents seem to confirm this perception. One parent had sent her child to a parochial preschool in East Burbania because none was available in her district; she decided to send her child to East Burbania public schools to continue the friendships made in preschool. One parent's children had been socially ostracized because one of them had been involved in a scandal. One student was attending school in East Burbania while his parents, living temporarily in an apartment in Minneapolis, were searching for a house in East Burbania. Two parents sent their children to an East Burbania program for learning disabled children after several years of dissatisfaction with the program in their home schools.

Implementation

Program Phase-in

The board chair said that the optional period, allowing school districts two or three years to choose whether to participate in open enrollment before it became mandatory, was a good idea. It allowed communities to make up their minds about and to prepare for choice.

Information

All parents interviewed said that they had learned about open enrollment through newspapers or television. East Burbania does inform parents of the deadlines for applications in its district newsletter, through counselors, and at PTA meetings. Few school districts, to the knowledge of the superintendent and high school principal, actively market their programs. East Burbania does have material describing the district that is made available on request to real estate agents and others. The state has attempted to generate publicity by means of press releases,

notices on grocery bags, and billboards, but none of the parents mentioned these efforts. Some parents felt that their home districts had withheld information about other school districts in order to discourage participation in open enrollment. Two said that their ignorance of deadlines had created a problem for them. In general, parents felt that the information available was inadequate.

East Burbania administrators said that they willingly answer inquiries from potential transfer students but that they make no special effort to solicit interest from residents of nearby districts. The district superintendent, who chairs the state's advisory board on enrollment options, said that the state has initiated contact with community groups and leaders (such as the Urban League) in an effort to encourage greater inner city participation in the program. He indicated that informational meetings in the cities are now better attended than had been the case in the past.

The board chair said that he had learned of a computer program that was being developed by the state to provide concrete information to parents about the specific programs available in the state's schools. He felt that this information would be valuable but that it would not increase participation dramatically.

Space and Program Availability

Administrators expressed some concern about potential oversubscription to certain classes or schools. They indicated, however, that they had not had to deny or discourage any transfer for this reason.

Transportation

East Burbania transports open enrollment students to and from the borders of the district on its regular bus routes. However, respondents complained that the system has some flaws. One parent from an adjoining district said that her home district bus drops her daughter off about a half mile walk from where the East Burbania bus picks her up. The high school principal indicated that most of the out-of-district students at his school drive themselves. The superintendent said that this system does not work for many students. There have been requests to relocate a bus route for the convenience of open enrollment students, but they have not been honored. As a result, many parents must provide their own transportation.

Two parents made a special point of emphasizing the difficulties that transportation poses for them. The superintendent said there was a system involving neighboring districts for reimbursing parents for the costs of transportation,

but it was not clear whether reimbursement was available for all participating families. Reimbursement is based upon the number of days of school attendance, the mileage driven, and the district's average cost of bus transportation per mile during the school year. Sending and receiving districts pay parents separately for the portion of the trip that falls within their districts. It was not clear whether there was any reimbursement for the portion of the trip outside of either district for students who do not come from an adjacent district. This formula requires that payment be made at the end of the school year because a district's average transportation costs cannot be calculated until school is over. While parents and administrators all felt that transportation is a real problem, no one had a suggestion about how to correct the situation under current state transportation rules.

Impact

In general, interviewees regarded the program as having minimal impact on the district's educational system as a whole but saw it as extremely valuable to the small number of people who participate.

Participation

Participation in East Burbania in state choice programs occurs at all levels of schooling but is greatest at the high school level. Nearly all of the participants live in surrounding districts; there seem to be no inner city minority participants. The middle school principal said that three students have transferred to his regular school programs through open enrollment, and none to his knowledge have transferred out. About ten students have transferred into the middle school's special education programs for learning disabled and profoundly handicapped students. At the high school, 13 students have transferred in and 4 have transferred out through open enrollment; 15 participate in the postsecondary program and 10 or so in high school graduation incentives.

It is not clear how much of this participation is a result of the state choice legislation, however. Prior to the legislation, districts were able to transfer students by mutual consent; many of the special education and graduation incentives students probably would have transferred without the legislation. The program for profoundly handicapped children is the result of an interdistrict agreement to provide special programs for small populations with exceptional needs. These children's participation, then, seems wholly independent of the state choice legislation.

Although there were no data available, both the superintendent and the board chair expressed a concern that open enrollment is probably less accessible to low-income families and

students in part because of their lack of knowledge about the program and in part because of the costs and inconvenience of transportation. The parent of an elementary school child said that she knows of three other families in her area who would participate if transportation were more readily available. The high school principal speculated that high school students' ability to transport themselves was probably a major reason why participation at the high school is greater than at other levels.

Programs

The high school principal said that three of his school's programs do attract open enrollment students: environmental science, vocal music, and group counseling. As noted, the middle school principal mentioned the appeal of his school's special education programs. But teachers, principals, the superintendent, and the board chair said that the prospect of gaining or losing students through open enrollment did not figure at all in program development or modification. Changes in programs are made, they said, for the benefit of currently enrolled, and local students. The board chair said that he would be concerned about loss of students only if it reflected a defect in his district's basic educational programs. He noted that current reasons for students' leaving East Burbania did not indicate that such a problem exists. He, the superintendent, and one principal observed that some small, rural districts have made program changes to keep students from leaving.

The high school principal and board chair noted that the postsecondary program had encouraged the University of Minnesota to offer introductory college courses at several high schools around the state, including their own. Both were enthusiastic about this development.

Finance

Because the numbers involved in the state programs are relatively small, the superintendent and board chair said that choice has no effect on East Burbania's long-range financial and facilities planning. The district has not developed new programs to attract out-of-district students, and state and federal grants have not been sought or received for this purpose. The board chair did express some concern over the high costs of educating the handicapped students who come into the district; state money is not sufficient to educate these students. However, he values these programs enough that he will try to keep this issue off the board agenda and out of the public eye if the numbers of such students increase dramatically. The superintendent indicated that East Burbania does bill the home districts for the excess costs of educating the profoundly handicapped students.

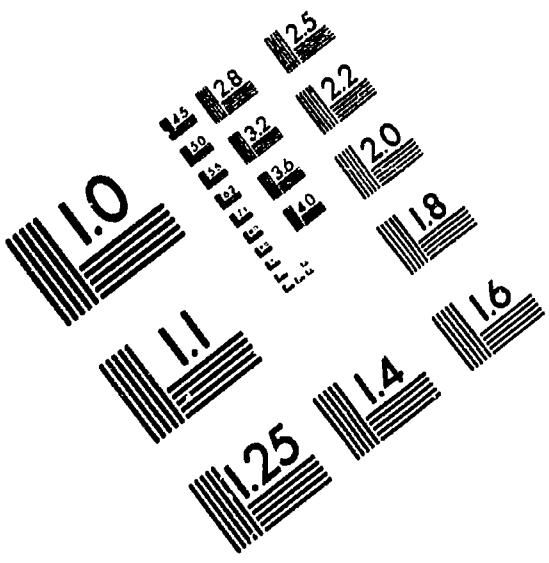
The superintendent stated that open enrollment has become a financial issue in a small number of districts. In Mountain Iron-Buhl, a decision to close a small high school led all but twelve students to transfer to a high school in the neighboring Virginia District. In response, the Mountain Iron-Buhl board reopened the school, and about half of the students returned. According to the superintendent, in another district, Mound, the failure for several years of a bond issue led to large class sizes that motivated many Mound parents to transfer their children to schools in nearby Orono.

Parent Participation

The superintendent perceived parents of open enrollment children to be reasonably involved in their children's schools. The very process of changing districts usually requires a concerned parent. The high school principal, while examining a list of incoming open enrollment students at his school, noted that several of their parents were among his most active. With one exception, the parents interviewed said that their level of participation in school had not changed after they moved their child to East Burbania. One parent, however, said that she had become less involved because she was no longer fighting her home district to provide an appropriate special education program for her child. Neither the superintendent nor the board chair felt that the mere existence of choice programs was sufficient to stimulate appropriate involvement among parents. The board chair said that better information about alternatives and parent training were necessary to encourage parent participation in choice and in their children's schools.

Work Load

The superintendent indicated that the choice programs do involve an increase in paperwork that falls partly on central office staff and partly on school counselors. The state has provided clear procedures and assistance in completing required forms. The high school counselor said that while the open enrollment program requires no more work than registering any other student, the graduation incentives and postsecondary programs entail considerable additional work for him. He feels that the additional work is worthwhile since he can provide a wider range of alternatives to students, especially to those having problems, and can therefore do a more effective job in counseling them. Teachers said that the programs impose no additional burdens upon them; in fact, they do not routinely find out which students are in their classes by means of exercising choice.



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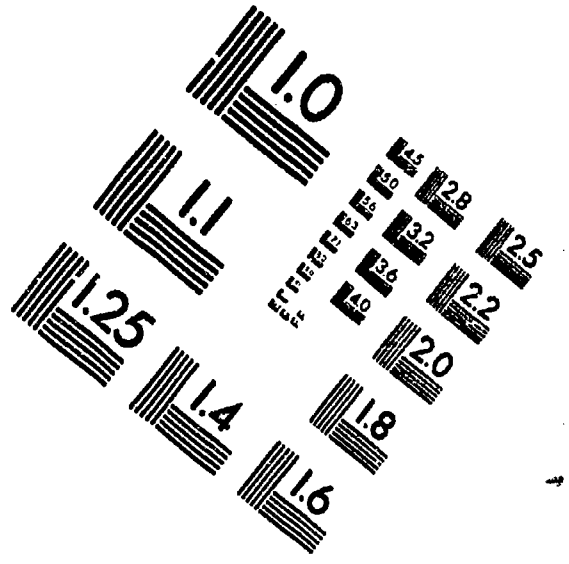

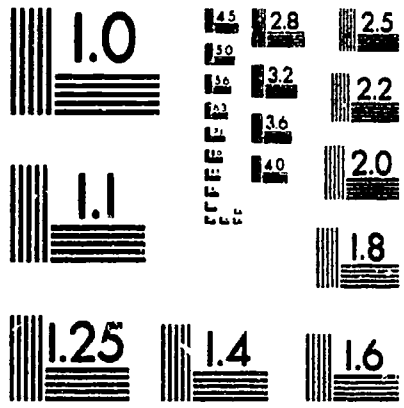

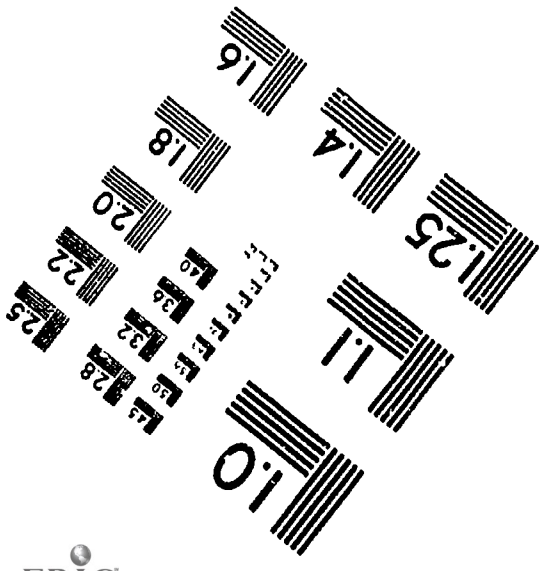

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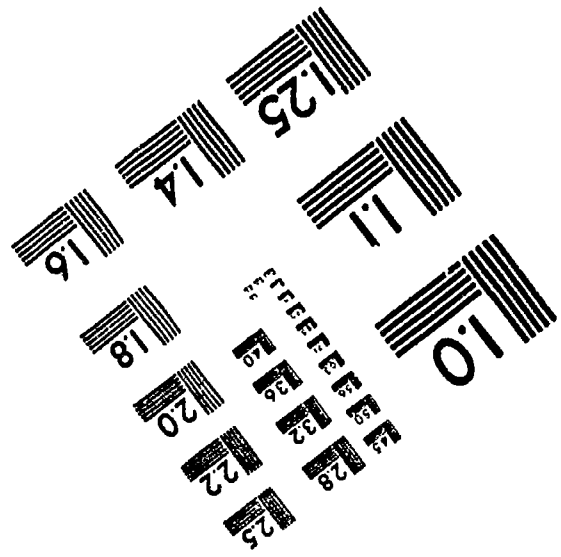

Athletics

Teachers and principals expressed some concern about the transfer of students through open enrollment in order to participate in varsity athletics. The state interscholastic athletic association has rules prohibiting recruitment, but some thought that an athlete might leave his/her own school to have a chance to be a member of a state tournament caliber team. The concern is that such transfers might mean that local students would not have as a great a chance of making the team. No one, however, was aware of any actual instance in which this had happened. In fact, the board chair said that his own sons, who are competitive swimmers, would not even consider enrolling in an adjacent school district that has a championship swimming team because of their strong attachment to their home community.

Recommendations and Reflections

Nearly all of those interviewed recommended that choice be adopted to meet individual children's needs rather than as a way of promoting competition for students. The former, they claim, is how choice will actually be used, anyway. Whether this limited use of choice is inevitable or the result of school districts' own efforts to protect themselves against the possibly disruptive effects of significant enrollment shifts is not at all clear, however. It may be that school districts have, by limiting information to parents and tacitly agreeing not to compete with one another, attempted to channel the original intention of the inter-district choice programs in this less threatening direction.

No one interviewed regarded the current inter-district choice program as an especially important, wide-ranging, or threatening reform. Some interviewees said that any original concerns they may have had simply have not panned out. In a district that is committed to evolutionary improvement rather than revolutionizing the status quo, choice in its current form is really a non-issue.

The school board chair recommended that choice be implemented with considerable local planning and involvement. Teachers and parents urged that participants in choice programs not be openly identified as such. They believe it is best to treat them no differently than any other students. Parents, the superintendent, and the board chair recommended that more energy be put into informing parents about their options. And parents were concerned about the difficulty and cost of transportation. University cooperation was thought to be especially important to the success of the postsecondary program.

NEW GOTHAM[3]: INTRA-DISTRICT CONTROLLED CHOICE

New Gotham is one of three Minnesota cities operating under desegregation guidelines. This means that the school district may use racial balance as a criterion for accepting or rejecting inter-district transfers. Thus far, no interdistrict transfers have been denied on this basis, but relatively few have been requested, for two main reasons. First, students in suburban districts around New Gotham generally prefer to stay where they are, like their counterparts in other suburban districts nationwide. Second, urban students have so many options within the city itself under New Gotham's controlled choice program that there is little demand for transfer outside the district. (In fact, more students transferred into the district than out of it this year.)

In effect, then, all the action in New Gotham is occurring within the school district itself. For this reason, our case study focused primarily on New Gotham's intra-district controlled choice program.

New Gotham Public Schools

Serving a city of over 200,000 inhabitants, the New Gotham Public School District has 40 elementary schools and 14 secondary schools. As the chart below indicates, both the overall student population served by these schools and the proportion of minority students has been rising rapidly over the last few years.

	student population	minority population	percent minority
1980	32,283	8,363	25%
1985	31,516	10,770	34%
1990	35,730	15,495	43%

The breakdown for the 1990 minority population is as follows: blacks 16.4%, Hispanic 5.8%, Asian-American 19.6%, and American Indian 1.5%. The Asian-American population is the fastest growing.

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[3]As explained in the introduction, "New Gotham" is a fictional name for the urban district in Minnesota where we conducted one of our case studies. Specific towns and schools mentioned in this section also have fictional names.

Partially because of this rapid minority growth, a number of New Gotham's schools were cited by the state in the early 1980s as being out of compliance with racial balance guidelines. In response to this state mandate to desegregate the schools, New Gotham developed its controlled choice program.

The Development of Controlled Choice

At the time of the desegregation mandate, New Gotham already had one magnet school, Daniel Elementary, a general enrichment magnet that had been established in the mid-1970s. The district decided that establishing a number of other magnets and letting students choose among them would be the best way to address the problem of racial imbalance. The superintendent at that time divided the city into five community areas. Each area had a team of administrators, school staff, and parents to help plan the program, determine the location and focus of the magnets, etc. Because of Daniel's success in achieving racial balance, the initial inclination was to "do another Daniel," that is, to create a number of other general enrichment magnets.

In the middle of this process, however, the superintendent retired, and New Gotham hired a superintendent with prior experience in designing and administering the development of magnet programs in urban areas. Convinced that a variety of special focus magnets (math/science, humanities, performing arts, Montessori, etc.) would be much more effective in generating voluntary student movement than a general enrichment magnet reproduced over and over again, the new superintendent swayed the community groups in that direction.

Accordingly, in 1984 six magnet schools were established, all elementary schools: gifted/talented, humanities, creative arts, technology, and two science/mathematics technology magnets. (The idea was to start at the elementary level and work up to junior and senior high schools.) Start-up funds for changes at these schools—additional teachers, new materials and equipment, building renovation, staff development, etc.—came both from state desegregation dollars and federal magnet assistance grant money.

The district has added new magnet schools each year. Decisions regarding the location and focus of these schools are guided by the goal of maintaining racial balance. When district administrators determine that racial balance could be enhanced by turning a certain school into a magnet school, they collaborate with school staff, parents, and community leaders in determining a magnet focus that will both reflect community needs and attract students from across the city.

Currently, about half of New Gotham's 40 elementary schools are "total" magnet schools, meaning that every child in the school is involved in the magnet program, and the other half of the

elementary schools are traditional neighborhood schools. All secondary schools are partial magnets, or specialty schools, meaning that the school offers a separate magnet program in addition to the traditional secondary school curriculum.

Mechanics of New Gotham's Controlled Choice Program

In New Gotham, no child is simply assigned a school by the district. Rather, every year, all parents have the opportunity to choose a school suited to the interests and needs of their children. Their options include a large variety of magnet programs as well as traditional neighborhood schools. (In the case of secondary schools, a single building serves as the neighborhood school and the magnet.) To help parents decide, the central office distributes voluminous information on all the schools (see Informing Parents, pp. 40-41).

On the application form, parents list a first, second, and third choice school. If their first choice is not granted, the second choice is automatically considered, and so forth. Those who do not get their first choice are put on a waiting list for future consideration. If they get none of their choices they are generally reassigned to a neighborhood school.

The criteria for allocating seats in schools are fairly complex. First, of course, is school building capacity. Second is a racial balance guideline, the "15% rule": No school's percent of minority students may exceed by more than 15% the percent of minority students in the district as a whole, which currently is 43%. Third, preference is given to students living in the attendance area of each magnet school. (There are several "citywide" magnet schools with no attendance area preference.) Certain magnet schools have other selection criteria as well: tier preference (first preference to those in the neighborhood, second preference to those in surrounding areas, third preference to others), sibling preference, preference for previous experience (for Montessori and other programs with distinctive educational philosophies), etc.

Two criteria not generally used are "first-come-first-served" and academic performance. Architects of the controlled choice program felt that using first-come-first-served would give unfair advantage to those parents with the time and wherewithal to shepherd their application through the system. And only certain gifted/talented schools are allowed to base admission on test scores.

If a school is oversubscribed, applicants are categorized by priority level (race, geography, etc.,) and then randomly selected; those not selected are put on a waiting list. It is crucial that the selection process be open to the public, said

one administrator, to forestall all suspicion of favoritism or corruption.

The district provides transportation for all students, using either school buses or city buses.

Main Issues

Finance

Intra-district student movement does not seriously complicate the budget process in New Gotham, as does the statewide inter-district plan in a few districts, because no funding is transferred out of the district.

However, although no exact figures were mentioned, district personnel maintained that their intra-district choice program was expensive to implement and is expensive to maintain. Major expenses include start-up costs for transforming schools into magnets, administrator time for planning and record keeping, provision of information to parents, and transportation.

New Gotham has been experiencing a budget crunch over the last couple years. The main finance problem in this district is getting enough money and finding enough space to serve the rapidly growing student population.

Participation

For a number of reasons it is difficult to determine exactly how many students are actively choosing to change schools. Neighborhood elementary schools are constantly being transformed into magnet schools. How does one count students who stay in the school after the transformation? Are students who attend a magnet school in their attendance area considered transfer students or not? In high schools, the picture is even fuzzier; since magnet and regular schools are in the same building, there can be significant overlap between the two programs.

Even allowing for a large margin of error, however, the participation rate in New Gotham is impressive. One administrator familiar with controlled choice plans in other urban areas said that typically about <u>one third</u> of students will choose a school outside their attendance area if transportation is provided, and this has been the case in New Gotham. (He questioned, however, the use of participation rate as a gauge of choice: "I don't think that nose-counting is a valid way to measure the impact of the program.") Another administrator said that on the elementary level about <u>half</u> of the students attend magnet schools and half attend neighborhood schools.

Whatever the exact figures, it is clear that participation in New Gotham is many times higher than statewide participation in open enrollment, which is less than 1%.

Another significant fact about student participation is that the percent of white and minority students applying to magnets mirrors almost exactly the percent of white and minority students in the district (57% white, 43% minority). The acceptance rate is exactly the same. Apparently, the commonly stated concern that a disproportionate number of white middle-class students would be taking advantage of magnet options is not borne out by the numbers in New Gotham, although, as discussed in the next section, there are some concerns about participation among the very poorest families.

Equity

As explained above, voluntary desegregation was the principal motive for the district's adoption of a controlled choice program. Rather than assigning students to schools based on racial balance formulas, the district transformed out-of-balance schools into magnets in the hope that they would attract enough nonminority students to comply with desegregation guidelines.

In this respect, the program has been a notable success. Thus far, all magnet schools have attracted an acceptable mix of students through voluntary choices rather than mandatory assignments.

However, there is some sentiment among staff at inner city neighborhood schools that although controlled choice has helped achieve equity for many minority students, it has overlooked those most in need: "Choice solves a lot of desegregation problems in the areas where they exist, but, frankly, it does not reach those hard-core poverty families," asserted the principal of one such school. A teacher at the same school concurred: "It's not that choice is bad, but it's irrelevant to this population." Their point was that many families in their school attendance zone live in such distress from poverty, unemployment, crime, extremely high mobility, broken homes, inability to speak English, and a number of other factors that choosing a school is so low on the priority list as to be virtually nonexistent.

To the extent that choice has any effect on inner city neighborhood schools, that effect may be negative, because the few students who transfer to magnet schools are generally the best ones, those who come from families aware of their options and motivated enough to take advantage of them. "We've lost many of our top-level kids, the ones who can be the models in the classroom," said the principal. This skimming process can have a detrimental effect on the school as a whole.

Another equity issue raised by parents and staff at neighborhood schools concerns special treatment of magnet schools, and particularly gifted/talented schools. The perception is that magnets get more money than neighborhood schools, and that there is a cap on class size at magnets and not at neighborhood schools. To a certain extent, their resentment seems justified, because magnets do receive extra funding for equipment, additional teachers, planning time, staff development, etc.

However, staff at magnets tend to bristle at the suggestion that they receive special treatment. "That's a myth," said a principal at a gifted/talented school, pointing out that most of the school's extra funding was for start-up costs. "All we do is we respect the students, we have high expectations, and we get results." A neighborhood principal agreed somewhat, citing a leveling off of funding disparities between magnet and non-magnet schools. Also, there never has been a cap on class size at magnet schools, according to a district administrator. Sometimes a magnet school may have smaller classes than a neighborhood school because of racial balance guidelines, but this was never the result of any class size policy.

Whether magnet programs get special treatment or not, there are often more students wanting to enroll than there are available slots. Gifted/talented schools in particular are always oversubscribed. (Turning an inner city school into a gifted/talented magnet is an "iron-clad guarantee" of attracting white students, said several administrators.) Invariably, some parents complain each year about getting put on a waiting list. In fact, the portion of parents getting their first choice of magnet schools has dropped markedly over the life span of the program:

	% getting first choice
1985	93%
1986	91%
1987	88%
1988	69%
1989	64%
1990	64%

This diminishing portion of first-choice acceptance is a result of two factors: general overcrowding and increased participation in the program. Obviously, if there is less room in the schools and more people trying to make choices, the chances of getting into a particular magnet school are lower.

However, as a counselor at a gifted/talented school pointed out, as long as there are plenty of fine schools to choose from, the waiting list at any given school will not be outrageously long; at his school, it was manageable. Several other respondents

noted that as long as the system is perceived as fair, the existence of waiting lists will not be considered a serious drawback: "When you're not given your first choice, that's life," said one principal. "You don't always get what you want."

School Programs and Competition

The recent interest in educational choice in America derives in no small part from our high regard for free market competition. Under the current bureaucratic system, so the theory goes, there is no incentive for schools to upgrade programs and curricula. However, if schools have to vie for customers (i.e., students) like any other business, they will have ample incentive to improve, to diversify, to find their market niche. Either do so or go out of business!

Unfortunately, the controlled choice program in New Gotham sheds little direct light on this theory. Without doubt, many schools in New Gotham are better than they were, but these changes cannot be attributed to the open market. Schools did not decide, under the pressure of competition, to upgrade their programs. Rather, New Gotham's plan was designed by the district as a means of desegregating the schools. For the most part, the district designates certain schools as magnets, determines what kind of programs they need to develop (in collaboration with school staff and community groups), and provides initial funding for improvements. In sum, choice did not lead to improved programs; rather, improved programs led to expanded choice for students.

Having said this, however, we can attest that competition is flourishing in New Gotham, at least at the magnet schools. The magnets compete with each other for students. Schools that gain students gain extra teachers. Also, each individual school is responsible for attracting enough white and minority students to comply with racial balance guidelines—another motive to compete. Having tasted the fruits of choice, parents are pressing for yet more choices, adding public demand to desegregation mandates as a motive for school change.

Principals, teachers, and counselors at magnets seem generally to have responded with gusto to this competitive atmosphere. They like the challenge. "The teachers know they have to teach," said one respondent. "You have more active parents. I'm convinced the teachers teach better."

School personnel also spend a lot of time considering how to promote their schools so as to attract more students. No one shied away from describing school activities in business terms: public relations, marketing, promoting, recruiting, selling the school, and, on the other hand, parents shopping around for schools (especially elementary schools). As the principal at a business/math/science magnet said, "I think competition does make

a difference. We've pulled some kids in from Martel. We're doing what we really call recruiting. We spent a great deal of money, time, and effort on upgrading the science department." The counselor at the same school said, "We have really changed our attitude in that we are recruiters. I think we've always been friendly, but we're getting more friendly. I think we market, sure. I think public relations is good. I think it improves the school." Recruiting efforts at this school include spending much more time with interested parents, giving more school tours, putting together a pamphlet and a slide show, and going to feeder schools to promote their programs.

Central office administrators also view competition as a positive force. Discussing a communications magnet that is in danger of falling out of compliance with racial balance guidelines (it is on the "wrong side of town" and is having trouble attracting white students), an administrator said that the school simply had to do a better job of promoting its programs, maybe even to change its focus in response to the pressures of competition. At another school, an open education school that was rapidly losing students, the district provided some additional funds for improvement on a "one-time-only" basis, with the understanding that if the student population didn't start increasing, the school would close. Student enrollment went back up, proving that there is still a market niche for that kind of program if it is done right. An administrator mentioned the creation of a popular new program, the work-site kindergarten, as a result of marketplace forces. This is a kindergarten located at a place of business; the company provides the space, the district provides the teachers, and parents provide transportation. This program has drawn lots of parents from the suburbs: "If you create a market, people will respond," said the administrator.

As positive as competitive forces have been in New Gotham, however, several problems loom. Two of them are overcrowding and the budget crunch. The business/math/science magnet mentioned above attracted an additional 70 students through its promotion efforts. It was supposed to get two extra teachers as a result. However, because of the budget crunch, the school actually lost teachers. It won't take too many experiences like that to discourage schools from active recruiting efforts. Indeed, at least one neighborhood school occasionally engages in what might be called "inverse recruiting." The school is so overcrowded--despite the fact that it offers no special programs or promotions--that staff members sometimes advise needier students to enroll in magnet programs where they would be better served.

A teacher at this school also mentioned an ethical dilemma that may accompany competition in the public schools. The school wants to keep its best students for their value as role models for other students. But school personnel do not want to persuade such students to stay at the school, knowing they would be better off

elsewhere: "We don't want to be in the position, and professionally you won't put yourself in the position, of telling a child or a parent lies or distortions in order to keep them. But you do want to say we have a good program and we want your child to stay. You have to tell them that maybe there'll be smaller class sizes or some special programs that we can't offer."

As this teacher's comments make clear, the enthusiastic response to competition does not extend to all the neighborhood schools. When asked what effect choice has had on programs at his school, the teacher answered, "None at all. We're always making changes and adaptations, but not in response to the magnet program." There are two basic reasons for this lack of response. First, as was mentioned above, the school is overcrowded anyway. Second, school personnel spend so much time and energy dealing with the basic survival needs of students that little time is left over for pedagogical innovation. "The circumstances that our youngsters deal with are probably pretty unimaginable to most middle-class sorts of families or teachers who don't see those kinds of things on a day-to-day basis," said the principal. She mentioned children who have been kidnapped or seen a parent murdered, who have been abandoned, who miss weeks or months of school at a time when their parents move, who don't know how to use the toilet, who don't know their last names, who cannot speak English, and so on. Under conditions like these, school personnel do not spend too much time worrying about responding to competition.

Except for extreme cases like this one, however, competition does seems to be having a positive impact on personnel and programs in New Gotham.

Teacher Morale

The opportunity to help transform a traditional school into a magnet school—with adequate funds to do the job right—has galvanized some teachers. One district administrator who had been a teacher when her school was turned into a magnet called the opportunity "a shot in the arm":

> People were really enthusiastic about having an opportunity to plan a program centered around an area that they were really interested in and beginning from the ground up, and have the kind of money to actually support the ideas to develop the curriculum and to buy the materials and equipment and implement a program that had been in their dreams.

She also mentioned that teachers in a traditional school that becomes a magnet who do not feel comfortable with the new focus have the opportunity to transfer elsewhere, while teachers in other schools who are excited by the focus may apply to teach at

the new magnet. This policy ensures that most teachers at a developing magnet school will share a commitment to its success.

Another teacher at a business/math/science magnet spoke of having been "revitalized" by the opportunity to develop a new program and learn new technology after 20 years of teaching the same old material in the same old way.

Some teachers do caution about the possibility of burn-out, working long hours after school and on weekends and giving up summers to fashion a new program. Said one, "It's heavy duty in terms of the commitment and the time and the work and the headache. . . . So the burnout rate can be really dramatic." But most seemed genuinely excited about the opportunity.

However, there is an undercurrent of resentment among staff in some inner city neighborhood schools at the special treatment of magnets, especially over the perceived cap on class size. The resentment does not run deep, because inner city teachers know that their colleagues at magnets work just as hard as they do, or maybe even harder given the time and effort it takes to develop a program, but it is something to be noted.

Transportation

As mentioned earlier, transportation is provided to all magnet schools in the district, either by school bus or city bus. District personnel maintain that this is a crucial feature of any equitable choice program. "You can't offer options to people and not provide the means of them getting there," said one administrator. "That's got to be part of the package."

Of course, living up to this mandate does not come cheap. "Transportation is extremely expensive," said an administrator. "There's no question about that." The major expense comes from busing thousands of students outside of their attendance zones.

The only limit on transportation concerns the neighborhood schools. Originally, the district did not provide transportation to a neighborhood school in another attendance area. Thus, if a family with a child in a neighborhood school moved from one attendance zone to another during the school year, the child would often have no way to get back to the original school and would have to switch to a new one. Unfortunately, family mobility is extremely high in some areas of the city, and this policy effectively ensured that some children would be attending four or five different schools each year. To curtail this kind of educational instability, the district last year implemented the Mobility Project in certain attendance zones, whereby transportation is now provided back to the original neighborhood school for the balance of the school year for children who move.

Informing Parents

The district provides an enormous amount of information to parents. Central office administrators:

- Send out to every resident in the city a 16-page newspaper with information on the magnet program as a whole, descriptions of every school, time lines, a map of the district, an application form, and so forth.
- Give on-site presentations to early childhood education groups, Head Start programs, public libraries, private school organizations, PTAs, low income housing community centers, and other groups.
- Take out advertisements in major newspapers.
- Run bulletin boards on cable access TV.
- Produce videotapes of elementary, junior high, and senior high programs scheduled to run on educational TV on a regular basis.
- Send flyers home with every student in every school.
- Require each school to publish a series of articles on choice in the school newsletter.
- Do a press release to all local media.
- Use interpreters during public appearances to reach non-English speaking residents.
- Translate the most important parts of their publications into five languages (Spanish, Hmong, Lao, Cambodian, and Vietnamese).
- Do mailings to ethnic organizations.
- Slip a promotional mailing into everyone's water bill during the summer months to try and notify people who have moved into the district after the April application deadline.

In addition to the information provided by the district, individual schools issue brochures and pamphlets as part of their promotional campaigns. They also hold open houses and parent information nights, make visits to feeder schools, give tours, and spend a lot of time on the phone describing programs to interested parents.

Of course, as with transportation, providing this much information is time-consuming and very expensive. However, such an investment is considered a necessary component of a fair choice plan.

Despite this abundance of information, some parents still slip through the cracks. "We work very hard to try and communicate to everyone, but there are certainly sometimes people that we miss," said an administrator. Inner city residents--those who could benefit most from the program--are the ones most likely to be missed; they may not have a TV or go shopping or read mail or newspapers. Still, it is hard to imagine what additional steps the district could take to reach these people.

Incidentally, several respondents mentioned the opposite problem: too much information because there are getting to be too many choices, especially at the elementary level. "I think that there comes a point where offering too many options can be too confusing," said one parent. She liked the idea of having some basic options in content focus (science, humanities, creative arts) or learning approaches (Montessori, fundamental, gifted/talented). "But when they start splitting hairs with 'Is it math and science basic,' 'Is it math and science technology,' then I think it starts to get confusing for parents. . . . The brochure gets thicker, and reading the brochure gets harder."

This was not a widespread view by any means, but it may be a point worth considering in the overall design of a controlled choice program.

Student Achievement

Even though the student population is getting poorer, K-12 scores on districtwide achievement test have increased 14% over the last four years. An administrator gave three possible reasons for this achievement. First is the Mobility Project allowing students whose parents move to remain in their neighborhood school (see Transportation, p. 39). Second is a commitment to staff development based on the effective schools movement.

Third is the controlled choice program. This administrator believed that when schools compete for students, it only stands to reason that teaching and programs will improve, contributing to increased student achievement.

Parent Involvement

Virtually everyone we talked to, from district administrators to parents, believed that choice has led to greater parent involvement in the magnet schools. "The fact that they can choose their program, I think, helps the parent become more involved with what is going on. Because it was an act of choice, they feel therefore vested in the school," said a parent at a gifted/talented school that had 350 parent volunteers at a school with 650 students.

Granted that the level of involvement at magnet schools is quite high, one still needs to ask whether this is because many already-involved parents choose magnet schools for their children, or because the act of choosing a school prompts parents to be involved. If the answer is the former, that raises the possibility that many of the most motivated parents will be clustering in the magnets, leaving the neighborhood schools without active parent groups--a possibility made palpable by the abolition of the PTA several years ago in a neighborhood school for lack of interest (the PTA has since been reestablished).

Of course, this is only a worst-case scenario. Quite a few parents firmly believe in the concept of the neighborhood school, choose to keep their children there, and stay active in school affairs. At one neighborhood school, for example, there is a parent resource center, the first of its kind in the state, where parents with preschool children can get educational materials for use with preschool children at home, as well as food, clothing, and other basic necessities. Obviously, as many of our respondents pointed out, the success of schools in involving parents--and in educating students--will depend in no small part on the enthusiasm and commitment of the people involved. Any program can only be as good as the people who run it.

Summary of Controlled Choice

By most accounts, the controlled choice plan in New Gotham has been a success. It has accomplished its main goal, voluntary desegregation (although some administrators warn that if minority growth in the district continues at its current rate, suburban districts will eventually have to be included in the plan). Many innovative programs have been implemented in the schools. Schools are actively competing for students, and students and parents are actively shopping around for schools. Many school personnel seem genuinely excited by the opportunity to develop innovative programs and to promote their schools. Student achievement and parent involvement are up by most accounts. The district has installed full transportation and information systems, two touchstones of a thorough commitment to choice.

The only dissenting voices were those in inner city neighborhood schools. There was some resentment about the special treatment accorded magnet schools. There was concern about the effects of skimming the cream off the student body. Most importantly, there was the sentiment that choice was irrelevant to the people in these neighborhoods, to the neediest and most disadvantaged students, in other words, to those who perhaps could benefit most from the plan. The solution to this problem is not clear. It could in mean eventually turning all schools into magnets, as in some cities around the country (most notably Cambridge and East Harlem). It could mean maintaining some schools as neighborhood schools (after all, many parents want to send their children to neighborhood schools) and giving them additional funds on a par with what the magnet schools get. Whatever the solution, the status of neighborhood schools is something that developers of controlled choice programs must take into consideration.

A final question for policymakers persists. This choice plan was accompanied by the provision of additional funds to designated schools. How much of the success of the plan is the result of competition among schools and choice among parents and students, and how much is simply the result of the old-fashioned practice of

putting money into the schools? How this question is answered will make a difference in the development of future programs.

Statewide Choice

As explained above, by far the most consequential form of choice in New Gotham is the intra-district controlled choice plan. However, we did ask some of our respondents questions about the statewide postsecondary options and inter-district open enrollment plan and.

Postsecondary Options

Teachers and counselors at the one high school we visited generally approved of the postsecondary options program for students who were ready for it. However, they cautioned that it could pose serious problems for unprepared students.

In the first year of the program, some parents were overeager to get free college credit for their children. A number of students suffered as a result. Fifteen students from this high school did not graduate because they failed a college course. Another student got such low grades in the college courses he took that his GPA was too low to get into a prestigious college that he wanted to attend.

In 1988, the postsecondary options program was amended so that only students with a B average or better could participate. Still, the counselor said she discourages juniors from taking college classes, and tries very hard to screen seniors so that only those who can succeed will participate.

The principal, teachers, and counselor all said that loss of funds for students who take college classes was no factor at all in considering whom to recommend for the program.

Open Enrollment

Although few of our respondents had any direct experience with open enrollment, they did provide some interesting insights into the program. One administrator declared that the impetus for Minnesota's choice program came primarily from the Minnesota Business Partnership: "Arguably, there's one reason and one reason only we have choice in Minnesota, and that's because of the activities of the Minnesota Business Partnership." This group of business leaders commissioned a study by a California consulting firm (for $250,000). The study called for school restructuring initiatives—many of which have not occurred—along with postsecondary options and open enrollment. Ultimately, the governor, his education commissioner, and business leaders sold the idea to the public, and it was embraced as a distinctively Minnesotan approach to school reform.

Respondents cited many of the same arguments heard in the literature about the merits and disadvantages of choice. Those in favor said:

- Choice creates a climate in which the schools must become service- and customer-oriented, serious about satisfying people. "Choice makes schools sit up, take notice, and work hard to attract students," according to one respondent.
- Competition makes schools better. "School staffs come to understand that their right to exist in the universe is on an almost daily basis challenged by their effectiveness," as an administrator put it.
- Choice can foster cooperation as well as competition among school districts.
- Choice gives schools a reason to experiment with new programs.
- One size does not fit all. Parents and students get to choose, from a variety of different schools, one that fits their needs.
- Choice can lead to equal opportunity for disadvantaged students.

Those opposed said:

- Choice sounds good politically, but practically it will make little difference. More money for programs would make a real difference.
- Students will transfer for all the wrong reasons: sports, friends, convenience.
- Choice poses a threat to some fine small rural districts, which may be forced to consolidate. Even if that doesn't happen, schools with declining attendance will be forced to cut opportunities for the students left behind. (One administrator suggested funding the resident as well as the receiving district for transfer students for the first year or two of the program to offer some stability to districts losing students.)
- Choice jeopardizes loyalty to schools, which in turn may jeopardize loyalty to communities.
- Choice disrupts the district budget process.
- Without adequate arrangements for transportation and information, choice will not be equitable. Some New Gotham administrators felt that the state policies in this regard were inadequate. Regarding transportation, for example, one administrator said, "The provision of transportation to the [district] border is ridiculous. It's a bureaucratic fiction."
- Choice is expensive, if you do it right.

The following statement by a district administrator provides a fairly good summary of feelings toward open enrollment and toward choice in general in New Gotham:

> I have great confidence in choice being a portion of the answer on reform and improvement, and being a portion of the answer on racial balance and equal opportunity. I'm always careful to point out it's not sufficient. Representations by Cavazos and others, Bennett before him, notwithstanding, I think it does a great disservice to the choice agenda to politicize it and to represent it as the bargain-basement alternative to school reform. School reform requires additional money.

CHOICE IN INDIANA

K-12 students in Indiana have some opportunities for choosing their school, but these opportunities are relatively limited. For example, the state's transfer tuition statute (IC 20-8.1-6.1) enables a student to request a transfer from the resident district to another district if the student would be better accommodated in the public schools of the receiving district. If the petition is approved, the resident district retains state aid for the student but must pay the student's tuition to the receiving district. Relatively few students take advantage of this option. In 1990, for example, 1,290 out of Indiana's almost 1 million students transferred to another district under the tuition transfer statute.

Also, several urban areas in Indiana have magnet programs. For example, students in the Indianapolis Public Schools may choose from among Montessori, performing arts, humanities, math/science, or several other school options. However, unlike those cities with comprehensive controlled choice plans—where all or most schools are magnets and all parents automatically receive information and application forms—parents in Indianapolis must request application forms, and their options are relatively limited.

Of course, Indiana students can choose to attend a vocational program. But again, options like this exist in every state and generally are not considered to be significant choice programs.

New choice options are emerging, however. The state has adopted a postsecondary enrollment program that lets high school students take college courses for both secondary and postsecondary credit. Also, three Indiana districts are now experimenting with versions of intra-district open enrollment. Policymakers around the state are keeping their eyes on these programs to see if the time has arrived for expanded student choice in Indiana.

Postsecondary Enrollment

Indiana's Postsecondary Enrollment Program gives 11th and 12th grade students an opportunity to take courses at "eligible institutions"—accredited Indiana public or private colleges/universities that grant a baccalaureate or associate degree—for both secondary credit (towards graduation) and postsecondary credit. Students must meet with a representative of the school corporation to discuss issues such as the student's eligibility in the program, the courses in which the student is

authorized to enroll, and the financial obligations of the student and the school under the program.

Students are responsible for applying for admission to the postsecondary institution. Most importantly, students are responsible for paying tuition to the institution, and state aid to the student's district is not affected. (In this respect, Indiana's program differs markedly from comprehensive programs such as Minnesota's, in which the state covers the student's tuition by reducing aid to the school district.) The program has established guidelines for financial assistance to participating students based on need; to date, however, no funds have been set aside for this purpose.

Intra-District Open Enrollment

Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation

Elementary, middle, and high school students have the option of attending any school in the district that, in the opinion of the students and parents, best meets the educational needs of the student. The school corporation provides no transportation; all transportation must be provided by either the student or parent. Transferring students are ineligible to compete in school sports if the transfer was made primarily for athletic purposes or as the result of "undue influence" (i.e., recruiting).

Requests for transfer are granted unless they will result in overcrowding or an imbalance in class sizes. At the grade school level, overcrowding means exceeding an enrollment cap, defined as one student more than Prime Time or districtwide guidelines for a given grade. And neither high school may gain more than 100 out-of-attendance-area students. If transfer requests to a particular school exceed capacity, a drawing will be conducted to establish a priority list and transfers will be granted to the extent that space is available.

In 1990-91, the program's first year, 260 out of the district's 4,183 elementary students (6.2%) transferred to a new school. Figures were unavailable for the high school level.

Vincennes Community School Corporation (VCSC)

The VCSC limited choice policy is available for elementary students only. (There is only one middle school and one high school in the district, so intra-district open enrollment is not an option at these levels.) Parents may enroll their child in an elementary school other than their designated attendance area school, but their application is subject to the following criteria: Random student selection will be used on a space available basis; preference will be given to handicapped children who are already transported by special bus to another district and

to siblings of handicapped children; and potential transfer students from outside the VCSC would not be given consideration for admission into the VCSC until all requests for local students are honored. Parents must provide transportation for students attending a school other than the attendance area school.

In 1990-91, the program's first year, 82 students originally requested transfers. However, 26 of these requests were denied, 26 other students withdrew their requests, 4 left the district, and 3 moved into the new attendance zone. So overall, only 23 of the district's 1,681 elementary students changed schools.

Metropolitan School District of Washington Township

Washington Township has a choice program for elementary and middle-school students. (As in Vincennes, there is only one high school in the district.) The limited choice program for elementary students became operational in the 1989-90 school year; the middle school option will begin in the fall of 1991.

Since the Washington Township choice program has a longer history than the programs in the other two districts, we visited the district to examine the program in more detail.

The District. Washington Township is a suburban district located 10 miles north of downtown Indianapolis. The district comprises seven elementary schools, three middle schools, and one high school, serving a total of 9,808 students. While the district is predominately composed of middle and upper-middle income families, the community includes some families (7%) on rent subsidy and free lunch programs as well as some of the richest families in the state. Approximately 68% of the district is white, 29% is black, 2% is Asian-American, and less than 1% is Hispanic.

Mechanics of the Limited Choice Program. Parents may apply for their children to attend an elementary or middle school outside of their assigned attendance area within Washington Township. Transportation is provided for all students accepted in the limited choice program. Parents must submit applications to the school district between April 1 and May 1 to become eligible for participation in the program the following year. All applications for each grade-level in a given school are placed in a pool of applicants by May 15. Once it is determined that classroom space is available, the names of the applicants are drawn by lot to establish the order for acceptance. Parents are notified of acceptance or non-acceptance by mid-July.

In order for an application for the choice program to be accepted, two conditions must be met: (1) Classroom space must be available, which requires that the projected class size of the transferee school be no larger than the district average class

size, and (2) racial balance must be maintained, which requires that the resulting change in racial balance does not cause the receiving or sending school to rise above or fall below the district average ratio of black/white student enrollment by more than 5%. If the superintendent approves and space is available in the receiving school, exceptions to the racial balance provision may be made for those students who have siblings in a special education program within a school, when extenuating medical or personal circumstances exist, or for those students who have siblings previously accepted in the school under the limited choice program.

Development of the Limited Choice Program. According to a district administrator, the idea for a choice program occurred during discussions of redrawing school attendance areas due to the opening of a new elementary school in the fall of 1991. In order to meet the expected resistance of some families to the new school, the district decided to give parents a choice of elementary schools to attend.

Principals in Washington Township offered other reasons for the development of the limited choice program. Some suggested that it was the need to improve racial balance; others thought the district was just following the national trend. One principal noted that the district contains two distinct types of elementary schools: traditional and individually guided education. Over the years, parents have expressed concern that one type may be educationally superior to the other. To this principal, choice says to the parents "see, they're both good." This principal believes that choice does not equalize the playing field--it tells parents that the playing field has been equal all along.

A district administrator commented that choice is not a means to drive school improvement. Indeed, he stated that the market driven aspect of choice makes for unwarranted competition, which does not suit the collegial ethos of Washington Township. Choice is seen here as a community service rather than as a means for school improvement. To this administrator, "choice puts us in tune with serving our customers in the district." The notion of community service was repeated several times throughout the interviews, even to the point of bending the rules of the choice program. He noted that the district's explicit "window of opportunity" to apply for the limited choice program (April 1 - May 1) is occasionally ignored: "You can't blame the deadline as a reason to reject someone--we are a service industry."

Implementation. According to a district administrator, only a few problems have accompanied implementation of the program. Transportation has become more complex, maintaining the racial balance is becoming increasingly cumbersome, and the special education provision (whereby siblings of students in the special education program can be admitted to the same school as the

special education student, regardless of the other limited choice criteria) has proved difficult to maintain. Funding has not been a concern because costs are relatively low. The district only needs to pay for brochures and other promotional materials. The primary expense, transportation, has been funded through increased local property taxes.

The principals commented that the initial orchestration of the program can be difficult, pointing to details such as keeping track of new students and maintaining bus schedules. Principals also discussed other problems. First, they felt that many parents have been discouraged by the racial balance criterion. Because of this criterion, many parents do not believe they have any choice at all. Principals also noted that the families that have made a choice to move to a new school need extra attention--they have taken a risk by coming to a new school and need additional help to adjust to their new surroundings. Further, the principals felt that the deadline for application has been somewhat troublesome, that "you really have to do a good 'p.r.' job to tell a parent they missed the application deadline."

Another problem arises when students request to move back to their home school. Effectively, once students are accepted into the limited choice program, they must reapply to the program (and face the same race/space criterion) if they wish to leave. Finally, there is a concern among some of the principals that parents may not really understand what it is that they are choosing in the limited choice program. One principal asserted that the differences between schools within Washington Township are so minimal that moving a child without having a very specific reason may do more harm than good.

Results. While the program has been well received by the community, it has been utilized in moderation: There are 4900 students in grades 1-5, and in the first year of operation there were only 146 applications to the program (107 accepted). This year there were just 141 applications (79 accepted). This minimal program participation does not surprise the district administrator. He noted that the main function of the limited choice program is that "we don't want folks to feel like they're being held down," which does not necessarily mean that the people in the community want to choose new schools. Certainly, they are not applying in droves. He noted that applications to the program may increase next May, when the new elementary school is scheduled to open, causing approximately 800 students to be assigned to new schools. With the threat of forced reassignment, many families may wish to choose for themselves which schools their children will attend.

Overall, both the principals and the district administrator are very satisfied with Washington Township's choice program. As one put it, choice has enhanced the school system by saying to parents, "We value your input and decisions."

LESSONS LEARNED

A number of themes with implications for policymakers have emerged in our case studies of choice programs in Indiana and particularly in Minnesota, which has the most extensive choice program in the nation. Bear in mind when reading these lessons that choice programs are very young in both states; those involved in the programs may have very different impressions several years from now.

- **The phase-in, voluntary approach to statewide open enrollment in Minnesota was a constructive way to allay the fears of choice opponents.** Voluntary participation gave skeptical school boards and superintendents the chance to observe the experience of others, and convinced many of them that concerns over a mass exodus of students, school closings, and loss of jobs were unfounded.

- **Although choice is grounded in the belief that competition between schools will fuel improvement, many respondents noted that the implementation of choice has been accompanied by an increase in cooperation.** Some believed that greater cooperation was a form of self-protection on the part of school districts, others that there was a tacit agreement among districts not to compete, still others that educators were simply more interested in collaborating to serve children than in competing among themselves. The desegregation/controlled choice plan in Minnesota's urban district was an exception; parents and teachers in that district seemed to thrive on the challenge of improving and promoting their schools.

- **Relatively few students are transferring to new schools under inter- or intra-district open enrollment, but few respondents viewed this limited participation as an indictment of choice.** Most respondents viewed open enrollment as a valuable way to meet the needs of students with special problems and interests. They also viewed choice as a parental right worth having, even if few parents exercised that right.

- **Where an extensive magnet school program offering diverse options is the basis for intra-district choice, student participation rates are significantly higher.** Between one third and one half of all students participate in the urban district's controlled choice plan, for example.

- **A number of respondents were concerned that students would transfer to other schools for the wrong reasons, particularly athletics.** There seems to be no hard evidence of abuse of choice for non-educational purposes, however. Community attachments and friendships seem to militate against use of open enrollment for any but the most compelling of reasons. Incidentally, other respondents felt that the reason for transfer was irrelevant and should be the business of the students and parents.

- **Because of limited student participation, inter-district choice has had little impact on school districts' financial status or planning capacity.** The only exceptions mentioned were cases like Mountain Iron-Buhl, Minnesota, involving highly unusual circumstances (in this case, protest over a school closing). Moreover, the exercise of parental choice in situations like this one might be viewed as having positive educational and political effects.

- **Choice is not a cost-free education reform.** Many respondents felt that to accomplish the goal of better schools for all students, a choice program should include funding for school improvement, transportation, marketing, and increased administrative costs. One reason for the success of the intra-district controlled choice program in the urban district is that these program components are adequately funded. One reason why inter-district open enrollment has not had greater impact on schools in Minnesota is because little new funding was provided.

- **Providing transportation to all students who choose new schools is expensive. Failing to provide transportation makes these options less accessible to low income families.** Under the urban intra-district program, transportation is provided for all students within the district, but this policy costs a lot of money. Under the statewide open enrollment program, no transportation between districts is provided. The state offers aid to low-income families, but many do not know about this aid or fail to take advantage of it. Also, many families are too poor to provide their own transportation but not poor enough to qualify for aid.

- **Lack of effective communication about choice options to parents of all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds remains a key concern.** The Minnesota Department of Education is making some attempts to inform parents but has been given no budget for this task. Neither the rural nor the suburban district we visited actively marketed their programs, nor did they know of many districts that did. Some parents felt that their home districts withheld information about other districts to discourage participation. Even in districts like the urban one, where the central office and the schools

make extensive--and expensive--attempts to provide information, the perception was that some people slipped through the cracks, particularly low-income or non-English-speaking residents.

- **Respondents in the urban district were troubled by special treatment for magnet schools: extra funding, extra teachers, and the perceived cap on class size.** Also, there was some concern that magnet schools attracted the best students away from neighborhood schools, thus removing potential role models for the students left behind.

- **Although some respondents suggested that open enrollment may encourage parents to seek ownership of school programs, most agreed that it did not significantly affect parent involvement.** Parents who were active before choice remain active, while uninvolved parents tend to remain uninvolved. The urban district was an exception, where most respondents felt that the magnet program had contributed to greater parent involvement, at least in the magnet schools. Having diverse programs and genuinely free access to them may create an expectation among parents that they have a right to be involved in their children's schools.

- **Neither inter- nor intra-district open enrollment has yet been a significant incentive for school improvement.** None of the districts we visited in Minnesota had made any attempts to improve or diversify school programs as a result of inter-district choice, and according to most respondents, few other districts had done so either. Nor had the intra-district open enrollment plan in the Indiana district prompted significant changes. Apparently, the pressure of competition, the prospect of gaining students through superior programs, and the threat of losing them through inferior ones have not yet served to stimulate innovation. However, it must be remembered that the programs are all very young.

- **Although inter-district choice has received all the publicity in Minnesota, the most significant choice activity seems to be occurring inside particular districts, for reasons unrelated to the statewide plan.** The rural district has undertaken a number of significant innovations under the direction of the superintendent (decentralized budgeting, magnet programs, year-round schooling). The urban district has instituted a comprehensive magnet program for the purpose of desegregating the schools. However, both of these efforts predated the statewide choice initiatives. The urban district also provides funds to schools for improvement efforts, something the statewide program does not do.

- **If the purpose of choice is to stimulate the implementation of new and different educational programs, strong leadership by administrators is important.** In both the rural and urban districts, where program experimentation is flourishing, superintendents and principals have played a significant role in encouraging change. By contrast, in those districts where administrators do not have a strong commitment to innovation, inter- and intra-district choice plans seem to have marginal effects on educational programs.

- **The reaction of teachers to school improvement efforts can vary from exhilaration to burn-out.** Redesigning a curriculum or transforming a traditional school into a magnet school requires a huge investment of time and effort on the part of teachers. In the rural district, this effort—unsupported by funding for planning or staff development or equipment—was accompanied by some resistance and frustration on the part of teachers. In the urban district, teachers—supported by federal magnet school grant money and desegregation dollars—often thrived on the opportunity to create new programs.

- **Despite limited participation, the absence of funding, and the rather insignificant impact of choice on school improvement efforts thus far, most respondents remained quite favorably disposed toward open enrollment.** They thought it might encourage some parents to seek ownership in school programs, prompt some teachers to reexamine their programs, and redirect some schools toward a service orientation. They saw choice as an extremely valuable way to meet the concrete needs of a small number of families and students. They liked the principle of giving parents and students more options, even if only a few of them took advantage of those options. Recognizing that choice alone is not a panacea for inferior schools, they believed that it is a worthy and promising policy.

APPENDIX

Interview Protocols

Minnesota State Department of Education

Name of Interviewer _____
Position of Interviewee _____

____How long have you worked in this position?
____What are your primary responsibilities?

Objective 1/Rationale for Choice:

___ What factors do you believe led to the decision to implement school choice in Minnesota?

___ What do you think that school choice can accomplish that the traditional education system could not?

Objective 2/Implementation:

____ What problems did the state face in implementing the various choice programs? What factors facilitated successful implementation?

Objective 3/Finance:

____ Were there great disparities in per-pupil expenditures across districts prior to open enrollment?

____ How were these disparities addressed in the implementation of open enrollment?

____ Please explain the funding mechanism for students transferring from one district to another?

___ Were state supplements added to existing state aid to cover additional costs of education in more expensive districts?

____ What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach?

____ What impact does choice have on districts' short- and long-range financial planning? (e.g., hiring, equipment, school construction)

___ How are these difficulties being addressed?

____ What state funds are earmarked for choice programs?

____ How has special education and federal funding fit into this choice plan?

___ What difficulties have you encountered?

____ What financial costs of choice have been assumed by parents?

Objective 4/Equity:

____ What efforts have been made to ensure legitimate choice for poor families within the state?

___ How much transportation aid is available?

___ Who is eligible for these funds?

___ What portion of a student's transportation costs is covered through these funds?

___ How have transportation costs affected the participation of poor families in choice programs?

___ How does transportation reimbursement work for low income families?

____ Is socioeconomic status a factor in participation in choice? How about race?

____ What reactions have you had from parents and/or students who are not allowed to leave schools because of racial imbalance?

___ If negative, how do you plan to address this problem?

____ Have students in rural districts benefitted from choice?

___ How has the limitation of access impeded effective use of choice options in rural districts?

___ What efforts have been made to increase access to choice options for rural students?

____ Have any schools or school districts suffered extensive loss of students or funds as a result of choice initiatives?

___ What has been the impact of these problems?

____ Have any schools or school districts shut down as a result of choice?

___ If so, what impact has this had on students, parents, teachers?

____ Have any schools consolidated as a result of choice?

___ Was this an expected result?

Objective 5/Parent Involvement

____ What role has the state played in ensuring that all parents are adequately informed about educational options for their children?

___ Have additional people been hired to handle these responsibilities?

___ How much has this effort cost the state?

___ How successful has this effort been?

___ What difficulties have you encountered in ensuring comprehensive parent awareness of choice across the state?

____ How does the state ensure that children who do not have strong parent advocates are not left behind in declining schools?

____ Are parents becoming more involved in the children's education as a result of the choice initiatives?

___ If so, how do you know?

Objective 6/School Programs and Curricula:

____ What changes have occurred in school programs and curricula as a result of choice?

____ How have these changes been funded?

____ Which programs are most popular?

____ How have programs and curricula changed to meet the specific needs of minority groups within the state?

____ What has been done to make urban schools more attractive to suburban district students?

___ How successful have these initiatives been?

____ Are schools or districts that are losing students actually changing programs and curricula to be more competitive?

Objective 7/Student Participation/Outcomes:

____ What reasons do students give for changing schools?

____ When students do elect to transfer, can they choose a specific school within the nonresident district, or do they just apply to the district as a whole?

___ If just the district as a whole, how has this policy affected inter-district choice?

____ When students transfer, how long do they commit themselves to the new district?

___ one year? more? less?

___ What effect does this policy have on district planning?

____ What efforts have you made to assess the effect of choice on student outcomes?

____ What effect has choice had on student performance?

____ What effect has choice had on student attendance?

Objective 8/State and Local Interaction:

____ Have existing state rules and regulations interfered with the attempts of schools and school districts to develop innovative programs?

___ What has the state done to assist local schools in their efforts to change (provide waivers, eliminate requirements, given them more flexibility, etc.)?

____ Has choice had any effect on state testing requirements?

Objective 9/Final Questions:

____ In your opinion, is choice working?

____ Have there been any unanticipated problems accompanying the implementation of choice?

___ athletic recruiting, for example?

____ What advice would you have states that are interested in adopting school choice?

School Districts/Central Administration

(This interview protocol was developed for school districts in Minnesota and was modified for interviews in the Indiana district.)

Name of Interviewer _____
Position of Interviewee _____
Circle one: Urban Rural Suburban

___How long have you worked in this position?
___What are your primary responsibilities?

Objective 1/Rationale for Choice:

___ What factors do you believe led to the decision to implement school choice in Minnesota?

___ What do you think that school choice can accomplish that the traditional education system could not?

Objective 2/Choice Programs and Implementation:

___ What types of choice programs do most students in your district participate in?

___Intra-district choice
___Inter-district choice
___Post-secondary enrollment options
___Area learning centers
___High school graduation incentive
___Other:

___ What problems did your school district initially face in implementing choice programs? (e.g., lack of personnel, finances)

___ How have these problems been resolved?

___ What local/state efforts were made to facilitate successful implementation? (e.g., increasing personnel, specific programs to inform parents; relaxing local/state policies, waivers)

__local efforts:

__state efforts:

___ Has "limited access" to schools due to racial imbalance impeded the effective implementation of choice options in your district?

___yes (if yes, what has been done to expedite voluntary
___no integration?)

___ Have parents expressed concerns about this? (if yes, how have parental concerns been addressed?)

____ What local/state efforts have been made to increase access to choice options for rural students? (How successful have they been?)

__local efforts:

__state efforts:

____ What local/state efforts have been made to ensure access to choice for low income families within your district? (How successful have they been?)

__local efforts:

__state efforts:

Objective 3/School Choice and Finance:

____ How has school choice affected long range financial planning for your district? (What problems have been encountered? e.g., construction, consolidation, transportation)

____ How are these problems being addressed?

____ What role have local, federal, and state funds played in implementing school choice options? (e.g., new programs, transportation)

____ Have special education funds been used to support school choice?

___yes (if yes, how have they been used?)
___no

____ Do parents get reimbursed for transportation costs incurred as a result of participation in school choice?

___yes (if yes, how does the reimbursement plan work?)
___no

___ Does the reimbursement plan limit participation in choice programs for low income students?
___yes ___no

___ What other costs are associated with school choice that might limit the participation of students from poor families?

Objective 4/School Choice and Participation:

____ Have many students in your district opted to participate in choice programs? (if yes, how many?)

___ What reasons do students/parents give for selecting to change schools?

____ How has the "year-by-year" acceptance policy of students affected participation in school choice? (no difference, increase, decrease)

____ Has there been a difference in student attendance with school choice?

___yes (absenteeism up?, down?)
___no

____ Has your district or any schools in your district suffered extensive loss of students or funds as a result of open enrollment?

___yes (if yes, what has been the effect? e.g., consolidation,
___no school closings)

Objective 5/School Programs and Curricula:

____ What changes have been made in school programs or curricula as a result of choice? (Is there increased differentiation in progs./curric.?)

___ How have these programs been funded?

___ Which of these programs have waiting lists?

Objective 6/Parent Involvement:

____ What steps did your district take to inform parents about school choice options?

____ Has parent involvement increased as a result of these efforts?

___yes
___no

____ What has the district done to ensure that children who do not have strong advocates are not left in declining schools with low per pupil expenditures and poor quality of education?

Objective 7/School Climate:

____ What effect has school choice had on your job? (e.g., more administrative responsibilities, development of new programs)

____ How has school choice affected the attitudes of:

administrators:

teachers:

school board members:

Objective 8/Wrap-up:

____ In your opinion, is choice working? is it a good program? why?

____ Have there been any unanticipated outcomes? What are they (e.g., affect on athletic recruiting, other)?

____ What advice do you have for school districts that may want to implement school choice?

School Districts/School Personnel

(This interview protocol was developed for school districts in Minnesota and was modified for interviews in the Indiana district.)

Name of Interviewer _____
Position of Interviewee _____
Circle one: Urban Rural Suburban
Grade level: Elem. Middle High Sch.

____ How long have you worked in this school district?

____ What is your position and what are your primary responsibilities?

____ How has the implementation of choice impacted your job?

Objective 1/Rationale for Choice:

____ What factors do you believe led to the decision to implement school choice?

____ What did people believe school choice would accomplish that the current educational system could not?

Objective 2/Student Enrollment:

____ How many (what percentage) of your students have left their residential school to participate in the:

__ Intra-district Choice program
__ Inter-district Choice program
__ Post Secondary Enrollment Options program
__ Area Learning Centers
__ High School Graduation Incentives

____ What have been the greatest factors contributing to the success of these programs.

____ What factors have impeded successful implementation of these programs?

____ What is the demographic make-up of students opting to change schools through choice options?

__Urban, __Suburban, __Rural
__Socioeconomic level
__Race
__Elementary, __Secondary, __Post Secondary, __At Risk
__Academic performance (low--average--above average--gifted)
__Female, __Male

____ What reasons do students (or their parents) give for selecting a different school?

Objective 3/State and School Finances:

____ What have been the financial costs of choice for the school district/school within each of the options areas and what are the primary costs associated with each program?

- __ Intra-district program
- __ Inter-district program
- __ Post Secondary Enrollment Options program
- __ Area Learning Centers
- __ High School Graduation Incentives

____ How have rural districts benefitted from choice?

- __ How has the limitation of access impeded effective use of choice options in rural districts?
- __ What efforts have been made to increase access to legitimate choice options for rural students?

____ Were there great disparities in per pupil expenditures across districts prior to choice?

- __ How were these disparities addressed in the implementation of choice? (Were state supplements added to existing state aid to cover additional costs of education in more expensive districts?)
- __ How has district reimbursement based on per pupil amount of the home district's state aid worked in implementing choice initiatives?
- __ What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach?

____ Have any schools or school districts closed as a result of choice?

- __ If so, what impact have these closings had on other schools within the district?

____ How are long range district finances impacted by choice? (e.g., school construction)

- __ How are these difficulties being addressed?

Objective 4/School Programs and Curricula:

____ What changes have occurred in school programs and curricula as a result of choice?

____ How have these changes in program and curricula been funded?

____ Which of these programs are most popular?

____ Do schools/school districts share new programs and curricula?

__ If so, what examples exist of this exchange?

____ How have programs and curricula changed to meet the specific need of minority groups within the state?

____ What has been done to make urban schools more attractive to suburban districts?

____ What evidence exists that schools or districts that are losing students are changing programs and curricula to be more competitive?

__ How successful have declining schools been in bringing about qualitative changes in their educational programs?

Objective 5/Equity/Desegregation:

____ What success have you had in creating programs that result in voluntary integration? (e.g., white students busing into predominantly black urban schools?)

____ What reactions have you had from parents and/or students who are not allowed to leave schools because of racial imbalance?

__ If negative, how have these problems/concerns been addressed?

____ Is socioeconomic status a factor in participation in choice?

____ Do you monitor participation in choice by socioeconomic status?

__ What have you learned about addressing the needs of lower SES students? parents?

Objective 6/Parental Involvement:

____ What role do school districts play in informing students of their educational options?

__ Have additional people been hired to handle these responsibilities? (if so, what is the cost?)

__ How successful do you believe your parent involvement initiative has been in ensuring that parents are informed about choice initiatives?

__ What efforts have been made to assess the effectiveness of your parent information program?

____ Has parental involvement increased as a result of choice? How are they becoming more involved?

____ How has choice impacted parent involvement among poor, uneducated populations?

Objective 7/Student Performance:

____ What evidence do you have to suggest that choice impacts student performance and success?

__Which students seem to be benefitting most from choice?

__Urban, __Suburban, __Rural
__Socioeconomic level- poor, middle class, upper-middle class
__Race
__Elementary, __Secondary, __Post Secondary, __At Risk
__Female, __Male

Objective 8/School Culture:

____ How has choice impacted the roles and responsibilities of:
___ Teachers? ___Administrators? ___School Boards?

____ How has choice impacted the attitudes and commitments of:
___ Teachers? ___Administrators? ___School Boards?
___ How do you know?

____ What difficulties has choice posed for school district administrators?

__ How are these difficulties being addressed?

____ How was planning for new programs and curricula accomplished in local schools and school districts? (e.g. when did it take place? Were teachers paid? Was participation voluntary?).

____ What staff development initiatives were supported through the implementation of choice?

____ How has special education and federal funding fit into this choice plan?

Objective 9/Transportation:

____ How has limited access (transportation) impeded choice initiatives for students in the state?

____ Have parents expressed concerns about these issues?

__ If so, what efforts have been made to address these concerns?

___ How does transportation reimbursement work for low income families?

- __ Does the reimbursement approach (rather that paid up front approach) exclude poor families from participating?

Objective 10/Wrap-up:

___ What have been the intended outcomes of choice?

- __ How have these outcomes been measured?
- __ How is the post-secondary options program measured?
- __ Has there been any effort to expand this program to apprenticeships and vocational programs?

___ What positive and negative unanticipated outcomes have arisen? (e.g., athletic recruiting)

- __ How are negative outcomes being addressed?

___ What advice would you have for states that are interested in adopting school choice?

___ What must a state do if choice is to be successful?

Minnesota School Districts/Parents

Name of Interviewer _____
Circle one: Urban Rural Suburban
Grade level: Elem. Middle High Sch.

Objective: To learn what parents think about choice; has choice made a difference in their involvement or their child's attitude, grades.

____ How did you learn about school choice programs? (e.g., info from the district, state?)

____ Which choice program is your child(ren) participating in? (e.g., open enrollment, post-secondary, area learning center)

____ Who made the decision to enroll your child in this program? (parent only; parent/child)

____ Why was the decision made (e.g., to change schools)?

____ Why did you choose the school (or program) you did?

___ Was this school (program) your first choice? (out of how many?)

____ What is different for your child(ren) in this school (program) as opposed to his/her last school?

____ Since your child(ren) has changed schools, have you seen any difference in his/her attitude about school? (What do you think is making that difference?)

___ What about their grades? (Why?)

____ Are you more involved in school activities now that your child has changed schools? (why? how?)

____ What do you think about choice?

Minnesota School Districts/Students

Name of Interviewer _____
Circle one: Urban Rural Suburban
Grade level: Elem. Middle High Sch.

Objective: To learn what students think about choice; has choice made a difference in their attitudes, grades.

____ Which choice program are you participating in? (open enrollment, post-secondary, area learning center)

____ Who made the decision to enroll you in this program? (parent only; parent/child)

____ Why did you/your parent choose the school (or program) you did?

___ Was this school (program) your first choice?

____ What is this school (program) like? How does it compare with the school you were in before? (e.g., teachers, students, class work, homework)

___ What makes the difference in this school (program) for you?

____ Has your attitude changed about school? What about your grades?