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ABSTRACT

Outcomes of a series of meetings held in 1990 by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) Roundtable on Public School Choice are summarized in this document's six chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the components (including motivations, vision formation, leadership, the design process, and the types of choice available) involved in creating distinctive schools. Chapter 2 presents strategies for information gathering and outreach efforts. Student assignment policies and procedures are described in the third chapter, with attention to equity concerns. Chapter 4 offers ideas for developing a safe, efficient, and fair transportation system. Strategies for financing choice programs which include keeping plans within funding limits, maintaining equity, and designing funding as an incentive are highlighted in the fifth chapter. Chapter 6 describes specific benefits and new roles associated with school choice. Recommendations are offered in the final section, which concludes that choice offers an opportunity for systemic change. Appendices include information about the OERI Roundtable on Public School Choice, the Roundtable choice programs, OERI publications on choice, selected recent publications on choice, selected sources of information, acknowledgments, and a choice program implementation checklist for communities. (LMI)

GETTING STARTED

HOW CHOICE CAN RENEW YOUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BY THE OERI ROUNDTABLE ON PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE

PROGRAMS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF PRACTICE

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Foreword

A number of districts and states have created programs in recent years aimed at providing families with greater choice among schools. This publication is the product of a series of meetings held in 1990 by the OERI Roundtable on Public School Choice. It includes sound practical advice on the design and implementation of choice initiatives within the public domain by 14 educators who are pioneers in establishing choice in their local schools, districts, or states.

The recommendations are drawn from Roundtable participants' firsthand experience in efforts as widely heralded as District 4 in New York City and the state of Minnesota, and some that are perhaps less well known, such as the state of Nebraska and the Key School in Indianapolis, Indiana. Readers will find valuable tips on creating distinctive schools, providing for adequate transportation, raising start-up funds, and much more. All this in an interesting format that is easy to understand and use.

Diane Ravitch

Assistant Secretary for
Educational Research and Improvement
and Counselor to the Secretary

To the memory of Mary Romer (1947-1991), assistant director of alternative schools in New York City School District #4 and a member of the OERI Roundtable on Public School Choice.

The group fondly remembers Mary and her enthusiastic story telling, in particular the way she described her involvement at the creation of alternative schools in East Harlem:

"I was 19 years old. I came out of college in New York City, and I knew that I wanted to teach in Harlem. I didn't know that there was a Central Harlem, I didn't know there was an East Harlem. I did know that I wanted to go to Harlem and I wound up in East Harlem.

"The first person I met was Sy Fliegal, district deputy superintendent. The second person I met were 800 people on a picket line who were in school for exactly three days when New York City's teachers walked out. Eventually, that strike was settled. And from there, over the course of the summer and before school opened, we had Anthony Alvarado (district superintendent) with three teachers—myself included—who said, we are so bad here that we're going to make changes. He asked for three teachers who had ideas—he actually asked for anyone who had an idea to show up at a specific time at the district office. Three of us showed up."

In the more than two decades that Mary worked in East Harlem she never forgot that she was first a teacher, even as she moved into the administrative positions of school director, district dropout prevention coordinator, and assistant director of alternative schools.

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Introduction

"People turn to choice as a way to provide better schools."

—Sue Fulson, Kansas City School Board

Public school choice can provide the opportunity for every child to excel. By encouraging students, teachers, and parents to select the structure and programs that most engage them, choice can make teaching and learning the rich experiences we all want them to be. Moreover, choice allows each school to excel.

Reform through regulation was the strategy during much of the 1980s for bringing about needed improvement in what and how children learn. Such top-down efforts left the basic structure of our school systems untouched. Today's schools need the freedom to change and innovate locally; and choice can be the catalyst to accomplish this.

Consider the ways by which choice could be a catalyst for changing schooling dramatically:

- School-based management becomes more genuine when staff, administrators, and parents have the freedom to build a program around common values, as in a choice plan.
- Restructuring implies that fundamental changes must occur if what teachers teach and students learn are to meet the higher expectations of American society. Parents, students, and teachers are empowered to bring about such changes in a true choice plan.
- Teacher professionalism, expressed in decision-making over school organization and curriculum issues, is enhanced by choice programs when teachers shape a unique program for a school of choice.
- School improvement seeks an invigorating climate in schools where administrators, teachers, students and parents hold common visions for higher expectations and achievement. By developing and selecting schools of their choice, a sense of ownership and commitment is felt by everyone in a school community.

Public school choice alone will not bring about all that is required to produce far greater excellence in education. "Choice is a means to a variety of ends; it is not *the* end," pointed out Roundtable member Saul Yanofsky, superintendent of the White Plains, New York public schools.

What does the Roundtable mean by "public school choice"? The members agreed that such choice programs stem from

> **A district or state policy which 1) recognizes a right of students and parents to choose the public school they or their children attend rather than being assigned on the basis of where they live, the requirements of a desegregation plan, and/or allows educators to choose the school they work in rather than being assigned by a central administration office; and 2) offers teachers, administrators, parents, and/or students the opportunity to create distinctive schools which recognize that there is no one best school for all children.**

The Roundtable did not address proposals such as tuition tax credits or vouchers, which would extend the right of choice to the options of private and parochial schools. As defined, choice ensures parents and students a right to choose among diverse schools or programs; and educators, the opportunity to decentralize their public school system. It describes many public school choice plans already available to parents and students in hundreds of school districts and in eight states. This definition includes magnets, alternative schools, and open enrollment options plans. It describes small-scale choice plans for a few students

as well as systemic choice programs with many options that cross district lines.

This document explains how educators have developed, implemented, and administered such public school choice programs. Each of the plans of the Roundtable members was developed from local and state needs and values, took advantage of local resources, and remained flexible to accommodate local modifications.

Roundtable members are unanimous in their commitment to greater equity through choice. They view public school choice as a means to further the goals of integration. This can be done, they say, through the options offered, the efforts to reach *all* families with information and support, the assignment procedures, the availability of transportation, and an overarching policy commitment to promoting the goal of integration. By recognizing that unequal schooling opportunities reflect socioeconomic divisions and by building in strong protections against any unfairness in school choice programs, "we are saying that we are aware of the problem and that we are dealing with it," asserts Stephanie Counts.

Another important point emphasized by Roundtable members was that care is needed in developing policies and practices unique to public school choice plans. Choice plans represent a very different way of viewing leadership, relationships within a school, and the use of resources. They offer opportunities to break from the mold, to make schooling exciting for all. Therefore, they need policies and procedures crafted to their special goals.

This report will be useful to those already involved in designing and implementing public school choice plans by giving them resources for continual refinement of their plans. However, it is particularly helpful to those just starting to make decisions about choice.

Those shaping choice plans need to understand the areas to be considered, the approaches which can be used for policy development, and the procedures and systems which are usually found in such plans. The Roundtable organized these points into six chapters:

- Developing Choices, Creating Distinctive Schools
- Information Gathering and Outreach Efforts
- Student Assignment Policies and Procedures
- Shaping the Transportation System
- Financing Public School Choice Programs
- Results of Choice, Specific Benefits and New Roles

Readers should understand that the Roundtable's report is not comprehensive nor exhaustive in terms of data collection and research. Although there was consensus on important points, the discussions illustrated the many ways of implementing choice. Neither is the report typical of a case study analysis approach. Rather, it represents a wealth of information and insights about choice from educators who have accomplished the task.

Chapter I.
Developing Choices, Creating Distinctive Schools

"When we talk about creating distinctive schools, there will be those who will ask 'Why? What's wrong with the ones we have?' We need to help them understand that we can't keep doing what we're doing in this country any longer."

—Susan Uchitelle, St. Louis Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council

Choice means that schools will be different from each other. If parents and students are to have meaningful opportunities for choice, then each of the programs and schools they can select from must be distinctive. Providing a rich diversity is vital for public school choice plans, whether within a district or across districts.

Education is in an innovative, critical period of decentralization. Restructuring efforts seek new means to place greater decisionmaking at the school site, recognizing that those closest to students should have the freedom to shape the most appropriate program for them.

In the view of the Roundtable members, it is fundamental change, challenging the long-held concept of "one best system" for all students, which will ensure that schools respond to the needs of students and parents. This perspective capitalizes on the growing knowledge base about the wide range of student learning styles, adjusting pedagogy and content emphases to find the best way to engage students in learning.

The full benefit of the right to choose emerges when it precedes or accompanies efforts at school improvement. Indeed, it can be the leverage for restructuring. The Roundtable strongly believes that a move into choice should be simultaneous with the move toward school-based management and accommodation to learning diversity.

Everything that is involved in creating such distinctive schools will be covered in this chapter: motivations; forming a vision; the process for designing schools; and types of choices to offer.

Motivations for Developing Distinctive Schools

Why do we need to develop distinctive schools? The demand for public school choice emerges in many ways—as a response to desegregation orders, from parent-teacher sensitivity to student differences, from the desire for innovation, or perhaps as an answer to a community's redefinition of the purposes of education. Such demands have the power to change school systems.

Within public school systems, current experience with choice grew primarily from equity concerns. Families with the financial means always have had the option to exercise choice, either through where they chose to live or by enrolling their children in nonpublic schools. Further, the alternative education movement has created choices for certain students in many school systems. However, court mandates for desegregation of urban school systems led to a broader use of magnet schools to attract a cross section of students to specific curricular or pedagogical programs. When federal desegregation aid shifted to the magnet schools concept, the number of school districts with magnet programs expanded.

At the same time, parents and educators in many communities were seeing value in different approaches to teaching and learning—based sometimes on an appreciation for different student learning styles and sometimes in recognition of interest in certain curricular themes, such as languages, the sciences, or the arts. The benefits of exploiting individual approaches to learning are becoming a fundamental part of decisions about how to teach and how best to stimulate student learning.

Teachers have their own preferences. While educators are professionally dedicated to using whatever strategies are necessary to help students learn, they function best in an environment compatible with their own ideas about how to achieve their goals. For example, it is not uncommon to find wall partitions in schools built for "open classrooms" where today's teachers prefer more traditional arrangements. A demand for choice can be motivated by teachers seeking to exercise their own professional judgments according to their own strengths.

Another impetus for choice comes from the planning undertaken by many schools or school districts to create environments that prepare students for the 21st century. In seeking to understand the personal and intellectual skills required in the next century, the leadership of these schools becomes involved in an assessment of a total school or district program. This may provide the motivation for the decision to offer distinctive programs to parents and students. These leaders are looking ahead and anticipating change.

The Need for Next-Century Schools

Much of our current education system is based on models from the agricultural and industrial ages. Schools of choice can help move education into the knowledge-technology age of the future. It is essential that educators make this paradigm shift so we can ensure a system where students will be comfortable inventing their own personal futures and expanding their knowledge. It is imperative that we acknowledge the consumer/client-based educational philosophy in order to strengthen our schools through the diversity of people, cultures, and learning styles.

—Paul Durand, Brooklyn Center High School, Minnesota

When a school or district finds that student achievement is not improving, the search for "why" may lead to the creation of distinctive schools. For example, the well-publicized success of District 4 in New York City's East Harlem. On the basis of standardized reading tests, District 4 students ranked last of 32 community school districts in the city in the early 1970s. The district's superintendent, Anthony Alvarado, asked teachers to propose unique solutions to the schools' problems. Teachers responded with three different programs, three ideas for junior high schools. After 3 years, according to Mary Romer, the late alternative schools director for District 4, "we had teachers literally banging on the doors of the superintendent and the deputy saying, 'I've got an idea I'd like to try,' and they were told, 'go ahead and do it.'" The choice program's offerings to students, parents, and teachers has expanded to 23 alternative schools in 20 buildings. By 1990, District 4 ranked 19th of 32 community school districts on standardized reading tests.

Dissatisfaction with student progress led one state to adopt school choice as a way to reorganize and improve schools. In Minnesota, many different education groups participated in the governor's discussion group for a year and a half before they decided to support a choice plan and area learning centers for gifted students and for dropouts. "They had different reasons for supporting it, but there was a feeling that they wanted to improve test scores or make things significantly better," says Paul Durand.

The Roundtable recognizes that one barrier to choice is the public perception that local schools are already adequate. Gallup polls consistently indicate that while moderately critical about public education in general, parents generally are satisfied with the schools closest to them. Roundtable members believe that the demands to be made of young people in the future require a challenge to the status quo in education.

Without a new vision of schooling, believes Saul Yanofsky, superintendent of the White Plains, New York, schools, adults will continue to think that the only school districts which need to change are those where students visibly are in academic trouble. "Because their kids are getting into college, they don't see the need to rethink the nature of their own public education system," Yanofsky says. Similarly, Patricia Bolanos, principal of Key Elementary School in Indianapolis, Indiana, explains: "Schools of choice are possible only when the climate of the community is ripe for change. Stable communities, comfortable with the progress of their students, are not sensitized to the need for nor to the benefits of change through schools of choice."

Approaches to Developing Distinctive Schools

What creates a climate for change that will enable choice plans to develop? Roundtable members unanimously agree that the school district leadership, especially the superintendent, establishes the environment in which choice can be considered. It is the superintendent's job to raise the expectation level of parents and students. The job of the person with a vision is to not talk just about where they have been but about where they are going.

When adopting a choice plan, the school district also needs to:

- **Take advantage of any state waiver availability or of local demand for improvement to put choice plans on the table.** The Roundtable cautions that any school attempting to operate differently from the accepted norm in a community or state may find itself in conflict with current policy or law. If it is a district policy, it can be changed. If it comes from higher levels, the interim solution is to seek an exception or a waiver. The Minnesota State Board of Education has gone on record that it will waive any rule a district requests. It has followed that policy, thus affirming its support of choice. Research on choice plans, however, shows that waiver requests are underutilized by local schools and districts, possibly because there are far fewer limitations than are perceived.

- **Provide basic support during the planning stage.** This support could be help with obtaining waivers to suspend hiring rules or textbook requirements, incentive funding, staff time, office space, or financial support. The additional time or activities needed to help parents and teachers become familiar with choice should be supported fully.

- **Offer encouragement and maneuvering room for those wanting to initiate change.** An essential strategy is to have a contact person or group leading the initiative for a choice plan. It is unlikely that the day-to-day support needed can be provided by the superintendent. Whoever takes charge of developing and implementing the plan needs to "keep things moving and provide the resources to evolve into a school or a system of choice," advises George Tsapatsaris, superintendent of the Lowell, Massachusetts, schools.

- **Encourage risk-takers and enable them to make mistakes.** Too often, in the opinion of Allan Warner, director of the Enrollment Option Program for the Nebraska State Department of Education, "the rewards for not changing probably are greater than the rewards for changing."

Certainly, the vision held by the superintendent or school board enables choice to happen, but they cannot create nor implement that vision in a vacuum; coalitions help create the climate for a school choice plan and behind them should be a broad base of community support. As indicated earlier, the interest may begin in a single school or with an individual parent or parent group. In some school districts, community business leaders have been the first to pave the way for a consideration of choice.

However the idea is launched, its development must continue to spread a wider net, bringing together different players within the community who become informed by similar resources and have roles to play in decisions about choice. Scattershot, uninformed decisions will not lay a firm base for a choice plan. The enthusiasm of individuals is important, but unfortunate results can occur when "people rush in and say 'let's do choice' without thinking about it, without finding out how people feel about it, without exploring the idea, without explaining the idea," says Evans Clinchy of the Institute for Responsive Education. "People feel left out, and they don't understand what you are talking about, what the benefits are and what the problems might be."

To preserve the commitment to choice, everyone participating needs a sense of ownership. "It is involvement in the invention that establishes the commitment and vision within a school community," believes Robert Stalick, former assistant superintendent of the Eugene, Oregon, schools. "This involvement and commitment will carry the new school over rough spots in its developmental years and contribute to its success over the long term."

Choice can emerge from a supportive climate either organically or in a structured way. East Harlem's District 4 choice plan began as an example of the former, instigated by several teachers and a district superintendent who had no real idea about where the choices would lead. The choice plan developed more formally as the number and variety of choices grew, but it always thrived on spontaneity and the investment of individual leadership.

Support for a choice plan in Lowell, Massachusetts, also grew organically over 8 years. A master plan at the beginning would not have worked in Lowell, according to Superintendent George Tsapatsaris. The idea was constantly being pushed to the forefront by school officials and others. The effort began in 1979, and by 1987, "with all k . s of other people pushing

it, the system was ready to begin to offer a system of choice," he says.

Superintendent Thomas Payzant in the Eugene, Oregon, school system introduced the concept of choice in 1974, long before the idea of public school choice had become part of the general public's dialog about education. Choices in Eugene are known as alternative schools. Within different categories, new choices are initiated as parents and teachers develop new kinds of schools and suggest them to the school board. The school district now has language immersion schools that begin in first grade, schools which greatly extend parent involvement in decisionmaking, and choice programs which emphasize certain curricular or instructional features. Site-based decisionmaking paved the way for choice in Eugene. This allowed public schools the autonomy to improve themselves "without the shackles of the district or the state to keep them back," believes Stalick. "At the point that a district and a school permit site-based decisionmaking, the concept of schools of choice can be implemented."

The coalition-based experiences in East Harlem, Lowell, and Eugene show that the objective is to seize the opportunity when it presents itself, gather support, and make change happen.

Leadership

A unique characteristic of the choice movement is the many sources of leadership. As previous examples demonstrate, support can originate at the top, in the leadership of legislators, superintendents, or principals; begin with the enthusiasm of a person or a group of teachers or parents; or arise from a community's search for new definitions of excellence. It can happen because of a combination of interests. The important ingredient is not the position of those who lead the effort but how well they can provide that leadership.

Above all, the atmosphere within a school or school district must allow leaders and stakeholders in distinctive schools to emerge. People with a vision need to be allowed to take risks. Of course, they must be accountable for their efforts, but they need support and a climate in which they can demonstrate their commitment and perseverance. Even with barriers, however, as Patricia Bolanos notes, "The entrepreneurial spirit helps those who are proposing a particular plan to circumvent obstacles. [They realize that] change is not easy and will be resisted by most persons, but not all."

At the Key School, for example, eight teachers, individually and collectively, worked for up to 3 years on developing a distinctive vision of schooling. With the approval of their superintendent, they solicited outside funding and the backing of state officials, garnering enough resources to open their school in downtown Indianapolis. Also, parents in Charlotte, North Carolina, armed with no more than a conviction about the need for schools to change, decided that distinctive schools and programs would be the answer.

Vision-Setting

The visions for distinctive schools must be explicit. A lot of dialog, research, and development of values may precede decisions about educational choice, but early on in the process the vision should be written down and shared. It need not be elaborate—a few words will do—but even such a simple statement as "all students can learn" commits the school to the premise that "all students who show up at the door are welcome and will learn," believed Mary Romer.

The vision's strength will come from how well it matches the unique values and resources of the group that has developed it—a school, a group of schools, or a whole district. As Patricia Bolanos describes the process: "The articulation of educational priorities, the strategies to meet these qualitative goals, and the methods to evaluate progress all form the foundation for and are necessary to informed choice by parents." If schools of choice are developed in this manner, they will foster "respect for differences so necessary in our democratic society," she says.

Setting a vision for a distinctive program or school departs from traditional goal-setting in at least one major way: those who develop the vision are not bound by geography—by attendance zones which constrict the possibilities for ideas. School boundaries are paper "mirages," in the view of Robert Wedl, former deputy commissioner for the Minnesota Department of Education. In a one-size-fits-all school system; or when students could walk to their schools; or when children were born, raised, and later became employed in the same area, boundaries were important. In today's world, however, "boundaries are artificial paradigms that no longer have meaning," he says.

Also, distinctive schools challenge the idea of a single model. The organization and curricula of schools in systems offering choice may be similar, but the stakeholders in a distinctive school are free to create an original. The consistent architecture which characterizes the appearance of most public schools often creates the perception that the human activity within the buildings must also be the same, but it may be very different. Distinctive schools break out of that mold.

Yet, distinctive may not mean radically different. As Evans Clinchy points out, the range can be from very traditional to very nontraditional. "New" is not as important as distinctive. In a large school system there may be several schools sharing a very similar or very different philosophy or organization.

Issues Faced When Developing Choice Plans

Leaders who set out to create a plan for school choice will confront a number of issues:

- **Whether the choice plan will be inter- or intradistrict.** In some instances, such as in Kansas City and St. Louis, Missouri, that decision will be determined by court orders. In others, a community involvement process will set the geographical parameters for the choice plan or they will be established by state law.

- **The demand for a particular choice.** Distinctive schools to be developed with the choice plan need to appeal to a sufficient number of families within a community to draw enough students to justify the choices offered.

- **The preferences of the teaching staff.** When drawing on existing personnel, a distinctive school must appeal to enough professionals within the school or district to staff its programs. When starting from scratch, there may have to be a commitment to hiring new staff with the unique skills to support the distinctive school.

- **Sensitivity to equity consequences.** Developers of distinctive schools must fully understand the attraction of different types of choices to families of varying circumstances within their own communities. There is disagreement on this point. Some agree with Mary Anne Raywid, Hofstra University alternative school expert, who contends that certain choice themes will tend to stratify enrollments. Others agree with Evans Clinchy, whose research shows that choice does not increase race or class divisions.

When racial balance is an overriding concern in the development of a public school choice plan, deliberately designed goals and checkpoints need to be embedded in the plan. In the White Plains, New York, choice program, for example, racial-ethnic averages in the schools must reflect the districtwide average. Superintendent Saul Yanofsky points out that the process is very complicated, needing to combine the value of parent choices with the objective of racially balanced schools (hence the term "controlled choice"). Choice programs which address unique cultural themes or learning styles of minority students can aid integration.

When low-income or minority parents have good information about the advantages of various choice programs for their children's distinctive learning styles, they will be more willing for their children "to leave a familiar surrounding or environment," according to Jim Simmons, principal of Marshall Alternative High School in Seattle.

Who Can Lead?

Who should be involved in the development of distinctive schools and their curricula? Parents and the community ought to be brought in from the very start. And, without a doubt, the teaching staff should be among the first and foremost participants in the process.

When Teachers Act on Their Vision

Fellowships for study away from their school building inspired three teachers at an elementary school in Indianapolis to form a group of teachers interested in developing an interdisciplinary, theme-based curriculum. They applied for and received funds for the project but could not convince a majority of the faculty to join them in their endeavor. Undaunted, they decided to design their own school, based on the multiple intelligences theory of Howard Gardner of Harvard University. They decided that the best place to seek help was at the top. They received support from their superintendent, then took the idea to the state superintendent and to Gardner himself. Their enthusiasm earned everyone's support, as well as seed money from a local endowment. While continuing to teach in their school, the group planned the new school, enlisted parents for the first enrollment, and garnered grants to get started. In September 1987, after 4 years of persistence and commitment, the teachers opened the doors of the Key Elementary School in downtown Indianapolis with 150 students. It has had a waiting list ever since. Key School is one of those rare occasions when teachers have been given the encouragement to pursue their vision of radical changes in public education.

—Patricia Bolanos, Key Elementary School, Indianapolis

For teachers, time is the primary factor. The experiences of Roundtable members convince them that professional leadership is waiting to be let loose by more creative structures in schools, but that finding the time for such development is difficult in the traditional schedule. Principal Jim Simmons received a waiver from the state allowing his school to add an extra period for planning time and personal counseling for students. "If you can carve some time out of the professionals' present load to devote to curriculum development and to the welfare of their students . . . you can generate a whole lot of curriculum," he told the Roundtable.

Teachers Taking Charge

A major objective of the Richmond, California, choice plan was to offer teachers opportunities to pursue distinctive paths in both the style and content of their teaching. The Staff Development Center scheduled training programs for both instructional and support personnel and administrators. During the summer of 1988, more than 200 teachers in futures and international studies schools received stipends from a special grant fund to work through the summer on developing new curricula. They became so enthused about the process that they asked to discuss the experience with the Board of Education, parents, colleagues, and community members at a public meeting.

—Pat Howlett, Richmond, California, Unified Schools

Unions can be either motivators or barriers, depending upon the local leadership and the long-term relations between the union and school management. Where teacher seniority protections are rigid, payment for increased responsibilities may need to be negotiated. Further, where choice plans cross school district borders, different units of unions, even different unions, need to collaborate. The staff development office at Richmond, California, aided the district in working with the teachers' union as initial planning and selection of choice types got under way. Its staff assignment procedures helped teachers choose a school philosophy, not a school building. Kansas City, Missouri, exemplifies the benefits of collaboration with the local union. There, the union "has been particularly willing to work out assignment problems," according to Sue Fulson, former school board president, Kansas City Public Schools. It alerts teachers in advance of plans to convert a school to a particular magnet curriculum, advising them to apply elsewhere if they are not interested in the curriculum emphasis. The school board also adopted a policy allowing the transfer of teachers out of a school building if they are not interested in the magnet theme or did not participate in staff development around the magnet.

Shaping teacher assignments around choice themes is a responsibility that usually falls on the school principal. Roundtable members advise that principals use the hiring and reassignment process wisely, seeing it as a way to give teachers choices, but also balancing

such options with the principal's prerogative to be selective for the good of the program and to consider the need for racial and cultural diversity in the teaching staff. Some schools have depended upon the guidance of committees of teachers and parents to help with staff selection. For example, Piedmont Open Middle School parents sit on the interview committee which screens teachers applying to the Charlotte, North Carolina, school.

Policies to guide principals in teacher selection need to be set early, with the faculty basically decided upon before school preferencing occurs. Otherwise, last-minute budget problems and seniority issues may interfere with forming a strong teaching staff. In developing such policies and any others regarding teachers, school districts may use voluntary transfers, interdistrict staff assignments and staff pools—the sort of agreements often set by collective bargaining.

Parents and Others Can Lead

Parents and the community often take the lead in developing distinctive schools. They are the base of a constituency to support change through choice. Advisory boards formed at the beginning of the process and given access to key information throughout the planning and implementing stages can be essential to the success of choice plans. Parent and community leaders provide essential feedback for new ideas. They act as a sounding board as each strategy is proposed.

District or state education department staff are another source of help for themes for distinctive schools. Such curriculum and organizational experts have access to knowledge and experience which local schools and parents can tap. Outside consultants can offer significant help in changing how schools think about their roles and in organizing around new values. Most often, however, outside consultants supply technical assistance, such as helping schools and school districts design parent and teacher surveys and student assignment and transportation software and systems. They can fill in wherever schools and school districts lack expertise, the Roundtable points out, cautioning, however, that outside assistance should not dictate particular views. A consultant's crucial contribution should be to "convince people that they have the power to make changes," says Evans Clinchy. Also, many schools have created distinctive programs with the support of local or national foundations seeking to bolster the leadership of those willing to break from traditions.

Roundtable members advise, however, that the number and type of people involved in the development of choice plans (or distinctive schools) is not as important as how those involved are used and their commitment. Players without significant roles or strong beliefs about their goals can cause the plan to stumble. Sue Fulson and Evans Clinchy both described examples of how visionary choice programs "lost their heart" when the principals responsible for them moved on and were not replaced by those equally committed. "The program starts mellowing down to an oatmeal state," Sue Fulson noted.

Where to Start? How Soon?

Two major decisions face those leading the development stage of public school choice programs: How extensive should the plan be? How rapidly should the choices be instituted? These questions can be answered by thoughtful consideration of the pros and cons of the following issues:

- **If funds are restricted,** consider beginning with a pilot program. Documented evaluation of the pilot can stimulate additional investments.
- **If conditions allow and level of commitment allow,** consider changing the whole system at one time, rather than proceeding in phases. If the choice plan must be instituted in a hurry because of a crisis, be prepared for the repercussions of insufficient planning time and community confusion.

Total Changeover in Seattle

Working with desegregation over many years, Seattle decided in 1989-90 to substitute its mandatory plan, which included a voluntary choice element as a backup, with a voluntary choice plan incorporating a mandatory backup. The new plan involved all students and was implemented at the beginning of the school year for everyone. It was felt that the sooner the whole district was part of the plan, the sooner we would be able to see the benefits of the new plan in both reducing segregation and improving the quality of education. However, the move did create a huge volume of assignments that completely overtaxed the computer hardware and software resources. In the end, a portion of the assignment work had to be done by hand.

—Collin Williams, Seattle Public Schools, Washington

- **If developing a comprehensive program,** proceed more slowly and anticipate having to work out problems as the plan goes along.
- **If facilities and space availability are limiting factors,** consider schools-within-schools or starting small.
- **If the state is providing incentive funds,** seek collaborative efforts with other districts to stretch the funding and enable choice to have a more systemic impact.

Step by Step in White Plains

The Controlled Parents' Choice Program in White Plains, New York, was designed deliberately to proceed slowly so that students would not be uprooted after they had begun their studies in a particular school. Each incoming kindergarten class, beginning in 1989-90, was offered a choice of schools; all grades will have this option by 1994-95. However, a separate transfer program promotes more rapid racial and ethnic balancing during the phase-in period. Requests for transfers are approved if the new assignment will help the district's integration goals. In the first 2 years of the transfer policy, the more than 50 student moves approved resulted in a better racial-ethnic balance in the schools.

School year	*Elementary school grades phase-in*
1989-90	*K - - - - -*
1990-91	*K 1 - - - -*
1991-92	*K 1 2 - - -*
1992-93	*K 1 2 3 - -*
1993-94	*K 1 2 3 4 -*
1994-95	*K 1 2 3 4 5*

—Saul Yanofsky, White Plains, New York, Public Schools

- **If voluntary participation by districts is a state policy,** consider creating a timetable for eventually shifting to mandatory participation.
- **If the choice system is to cover all grades,** include articulation possibilities in the plans, allowing for a K-12 sequence. This means high schools may need to offer schools-within-schools programs instead of their traditional comprehensive organization.
- **If the choice system need not cover all grades,** focus the development of choices for either elementary- or secondary-aged students.
- **If student travel distance is restricted,** consider creating zones that offer a variety of options.
- **If the inventiveness of the plan is limited by local, state, or federal regulations,** consider seeking waivers or obtaining permission for an experimental program. Freedom from regulations is especially important when the plan needs to hire noncertified teachers for course offerings.

The roles of teachers, administrators, parents, and the community will be changed considerably by a public school choice plan. But those undergoing these changes may require help in developing new skills. Depending upon their responsibilities, those involved in developing choice types may need training in decisionmaking and consensus-building; program evaluation; and school-based management, especially budgeting. Learning to handle these new roles effectively requires the time to develop and practice skills and to develop a sense of ownership in the program.

Results from Diversifying Schools and Providing Choices

Distinctive schools can develop in two ways: from a clean slate or from the reshaping of existing programs which need only further nudging and support to become true choices for students, teachers, and parents. Either way, the varieties of choice which can emerge from the process described in this chapter are extraordinary (see page 43 for descriptions of the various types of choice programs represented by the Roundtable).

The types of programs which have been developed in public school choice plans include those:

- **Based on a particular educational philosophy** (e.g., Montessori, open education, or back-to-basics schools);
- **Based on teaching and learning styles** (e.g., team teaching, cooperative learning, or continuous learning);

- **Based on student needs or characteristics** (e.g., alternatives for at-risk students, those students needing language alternatives, or gifted and talented students);

- **Based on subject matter or curricular emphasis** (e.g., math, science, foreign languages, performing arts, or technology);

- **Based on themes that are substantive but do not coincide with a curricular area** (e.g., the Lowell, Massachusetts, Micro-Society magnet school);

School as a "Micro-Society"

The Clement G. McDonough City Magnet School in Lowell, Massachusetts, has been designed by parents, faculty, and students to apply hands-on learning across the board. Conventional subject compartments such as reading, writing, science, or music have been replaced by in-school simulation of the real world—using knowledge as it would be applied in the world students will enter when they leave school. The Micro-Society magnet school, implemented over a 4-year period with constant evaluation by parents and school staff, has proven especially effective at improving the progress of underachievers.

—George Tsapatsaris, Lowell, Massachusetts, Public Schools

- With different governance structures (e.g., school-based decisionmaking, or parent site councils);

- With differentiated calendars (e.g., year-round schooling, weekend or evening schools); or

- With schools-within-schools (e.g., several options of total school programs for students within the same building).

This list is not exhaustive, and some schools of choice will combine several characteristics of the various types. Basically, Roundtable members urge educators to view choice as a process, an opportunity to create distinction, either in forming schools-within-schools, in reinventing a whole school, or in restructuring a whole school system.

The Importance of Tailoring

The key to a viable program is having the power to invent the type of choice most suitable to the stakeholder, emphasizes Robert Stallick. Patricia Bolanos talks of individual "learning communities" which address the "idiosyncratic manner whereby the teaching and learning process is scaffolded onto the unique qualities and resources of the particular community." This process, in effect, sets aside mere tinkering or minor changes in a school program and focuses on profound and fundamental departures from past practice.

Schools and programs also are more effective, in the Roundtable's view, when they are tailored to be small, enabling teachers and students to know each other well and teachers to work collaboratively on the program's theme. In East Harlem, for example, each floor of the junior high school is devoted to a distinctive program, reducing each choice school to a few hundred students. When the choice program remains small, problems are more readily addressed, remediation is more realistic, and enrichment becomes a concrete process. More meaningful attention, both academic and emotional, also can be paid to students. However, students are not the only ones to benefit. Both teachers and parents, working more intimately, have opportunities for growth in understanding each other and the students.

Distinctive schools must also be more than just "token inventions." Patricia Bolanos, whose Key School represents a radical departure from traditional student expectations and teaching methods, emphatically believes that the effort to be distinctive is not worth the bother "if we just try to patch things up and make a few little modifications to keep everything in order the way it is now." Sometimes distinctive school ideas are not supported because they replicate a popular choice program, and they are not seen as different. But when a type of school appeals to great numbers of parents and students, there should be support for replicating it.

As the Roundtable underscores, distinctive schools can develop from reform efforts other than those dependent upon a public school choice plan. However, if choice is the overall framework, the tasks described in the remaining chapters of this report must be addressed.

In Sum . . .

To produce fundamental changes in the education system requires a great deal from choice advocates.

- They must have a vision of what schooling should be in their community.
- They must decide what type of choice program fits their vision. While there are advantages, as well as disadvantages, to one type or another, the challenge is to determine which is most appropriate for the community.
- They must decide how quickly to proceed toward establishing their choice program. The pros and cons must be weighed against the readiness of the community—the parents, teachers, administrators, school board members, and others.

Roundtable members emphasize that the move to choice and the move to school-based management should go hand in hand.

Chapter II.
Information Gathering and Outreach Efforts

"Advertising, knowledge, opening up of the district, making sure people get into your school—all of these are critical."

—Mary Romer, New York City School District 4

Knowledge is power. And never more so than in a public school choice program where success depends upon everyone involved having all of the information and knowledge they need for informed decisionmaking.

Good communication and information-sharing should be built into the choice plan process at the very beginning and should continue through all stages, no matter what type of plan is adopted. Communication between educators and parents is particularly important as well as consistent gathering of data, opinions, and recommendations.

Gathering Information

When parents, the community, or school leadership begin to consider a choice plan, there are many ways to gather data and sample opinion, including:

- **Analyzing school statistics and records.** This includes analyzing the present and future demographics of student enrollment, coursetaking trends, absenteeism and dropout rates, and graduation rates.
- **Surveys.** These could include conducting surveys of students, parents, teachers, and the community. "Conducting systemwide parent surveys and asking what kinds of schools they would like for their kids, giving them a whole raft of possible choices, can sell the idea of choice," says Evans Clinchy of the Institute for Responsive Education.
- **Small group discussions.** Forums, living-room chats, and face-to-face meetings personalize the process leading to decisions about a choice plan. Parents particularly need to have all of their questions answered about how choice will affect their children. Kansas City, Missouri, for example, used surveys supplemented with focus group discussions, primarily in suburban areas where school officials felt they needed to know about potentially serious concerns on the part of parents early in their program development.
- **Test the waters.** Informally, proponents of a public school choice plan can "float" ideas internally to teachers and externally to parents, systematically documenting reactions. This strategy also can help build momentum for choice.
- **Advocacy efforts.** Sometimes a group of committed parents can start the ball rolling toward the adoption of a choice plan, but the push can also come from outside the school or parent community. In Minnesota, for example, the Business Partnership and the Citizens League both supported research on the state's school system and the recommendations to shape a state plan for choice.

Strategies used to gather data and sample opinion will vary, depending upon whether choice is to be intra or interdistrict. If the latter, cooperation with neighboring districts is a first-order priority. Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, which pioneered an interdistrict agreement 3 years before statewide choice was approved by the legislature, approached the planning

"with great sensitivity," according to Associate Principal Paul Durand of Brooklyn Center High School. "We were very careful not to go out and start pulling public domain information from the neighboring school districts and surveying them," says Durand.

Shaping a School in Eugene

Responding to national studies recommending an emphasis on international studies and Oregon's strategic ties to the Pacific Rim, the Eugene school board decided to establish a secondary school of choice focusing on languages and international studies, based on surveys indicating which areas were most interested in such a choice. About two-thirds of the favorable responses came from families at a high school close to the university campus. Student surveys indicated that students at a second high school where there was some interest would not be willing to transfer. But the school board, however, felt obligated to provide more academic options around the district. Its sampling of public attitude found a perception of preferential treatment for the university-related high school. So two sites were established, sharing curriculum, faculty, and budget. Using alternate block scheduling, the faculty can teach at both schools. The surveys, public discussion, and faculty planning led to a solution that has satisfied everyone and created serendipitous results. For example, students at the two campuses come together regularly for seminars and convocations, which helps to foster a more cooperative spirit between the schools.

—Dwayne Adcock, former curriculum coordinator, Eugene Public Schools

Information gathering, Roundtable members agree, is an important strategy for developing a constituency favoring public school choice. "It doesn't matter what the constituency is," says Dorothy Jones (retired director of desegregation for the Cambridge, Massachusetts, Public Schools), citing a District Court judge, parent group, school board, or school administration. "If you're going to succeed, you've got to have a constituency that will protect the program and help it to grow."

Initial efforts to test the community's readiness for a choice plan also offer immeasurable opportunities for parent input and involvement; it is also a prime period for leadership development. A parent council, for example, provides "a forum where parents will have the opportunity to become informed and, as they become more knowledgeable about options, to drive their point home to the superintendent and the school committee," says George Tsapatsaris.

Information gathering needs to be carried out with sensitivity. Teachers and parents in a neighborhood school do not want to be told that their environment does not promote learning. However, they probably would welcome realistic information that does not single out a particular school and would welcome discussion about possible options for improvement.

Data gathering is also essential to establishing a vision for schooling as discussed in chapter I. If provided opportunities to express opinions, weigh alternatives, and seek innovative ways to improve schooling, a community can also develop a common mission—a common philosophy and goals for educating its children.

When the planning process gets into the specifics of the plan, such as developing the types of choices that will be offered, all of the information gathered (data, surveys, forums, informal feedback) will be useful. Visiting existing public school choice program sites is also helpful.

Reaching Out With the Information

Now comes the task of "marketing" choice programs, with the major consumer of information being parents. The effort is geared toward letting parents know four pieces of information:

- that they may choose the school their child attends;
- how to choose a school;
- deadlines for school selection; and
- whom to contact.

The extent of the marketing effort will depend upon whether parents are required to be involved in the choices or if the choice enrollment policies allow parents to voluntarily choose.

If the policy requires active parent participation in the selection of schools, every means of communication needs to be explored. In some Massachusetts districts, for example, information on registration procedures is attached to welfare checks. In Richmond, California, because parents must sign off on forms in order for students to be admitted to particular programs, they are aided by home-school coordinators. The coordinators help parents or guardians select courses.

Outreach efforts for all choice plans must go beyond sloganeering and provide full explanations, because informed choices are critical, especially if the choices have limitations imposed by zones or racial formulas.

School districts should not be timid about the ways they use to reach parents and the community. In addition to traditional public relations channels, outreach efforts could include:

- **Media campaigns (e.g., flyers, information on grocery bags, posters), road shows, fairs, videos, and radio and TV public service announcements.** Using recruiters and placement specialists, the St. Louis choice organizers conduct immediate follow-up when parents attend a school meeting or call for information. They make appointments with the parents, provide them with information, and give them tours of schools.

- **Hotlines.** These are particularly useful for statewide choice plans. A former state PTSA president, serving as a parent consultant to the statewide choice plan, provides assurance to parents by answering their questions and counseling them through an 800 number in Minnesota. A grocery chain printed the hotline number information on 1 million grocery bags.

- **Distributing brochures, guides, or pamphlets about individual schools.** Make sure that updated versions of printed materials are always available at every school. Question-and-answer formats are popular among the Roundtable districts.

- **Setting up information booths at supermarkets and shopping malls.** This can pique interest about the choice program in the community.

- **Scheduling school open houses and arranging other times to invite individual visits.** School visits by students and parents should be encouraged before choices are made.

- **Informing realtors about the choice program.** Local real estate agents can provide accurate information to their clients. Therefore, they must be educated about choice plans and kept up to date.

- **Having placement specialists provide information in a personal manner.** The placement specialist helps the parents decide what type of school or program would be best for their child.

Parent Information Centers

The most detailed strategy for reaching parents is to establish information centers. They serve as "home base" for placement specialists or home-school coordinators as well as readily available locations where parents can drop in for information. The Lowell, Massachusetts, schools have turned to parent information centers because many of the immigrant parents in the district are not literate in their own language.

Choice Information in Any Language

From 1984 to 1989, the minority population of the Lowell, Massachusetts, public schools increased from 18 to 46 percent, primarily because of an influx of immigrant families. Similarly, the number of children on welfare escalated—to one-fourth of the enrollment. Communication with these families through traditional approaches of sending home notices with children or advertising in the local newspaper or through the local radio and television stations have been ineffective and inefficient. That is why the core of outreach for Lowell's choice plan is its parent information center. The center is open at night and in the summer to enroll children of immigrant families in the school of their choice. All notices from the center are translated into the five most prominent languages of Lowell's school families: Khmer, Vietnamese, Laotian, Spanish, and Portuguese. Flyers about choice registration in these languages can be found everywhere, from libraries to doctors' offices, and from laundromats to homeless shelters.

The center's staff reside in the community; many are bilingual, so they are called upon to speak to community groups. The staff also walk through the neighborhoods talking with residents, disseminating information through booths at popular stores, and asking social service agency staff to inform new residents about the choice program. A direct and personal approach is time-consuming and costly, but the benefits can be seen quite clearly in the ever-increasing number of parents who want to choose a school for their child, frequent the center looking for information, and attend parent workshops.

—George Tsapatsaris, Lowell, Massachusetts, Public Schools

Parent centers can produce exciting benefits. Building on the ideas used in Massachusetts, White Plains, New York, established a parent information center for its choice plan which has become a valuable link with the parents. The center finds parents, especially minority parents, who want to be more involved with the schools, and notifies the principals so they can encourage and nurture that involvement in ways that never would have happened before," says Superintendent Saul Yanofsky. Recognizing the increasing number of grandparents who were registering young children through the centers, the White Plains school district set up a support group and training program for grandparents at the parent information center.

In the Cambridge choice program, parents must register their children for school at the parent information center. The center also offers general information about the community, such as the availability of English language classes and day care services. At registration, parents are asked about what they like and dislike about the choice program. This provides an informal feedback loop about the program.

Creativity in Cambridge

One day an Arabic-speaking man came into the parent information center to register his son for kindergarten. Everyone except the secretary was out of the office, and she couldn't find help through the usual sources. The man was well dressed, so she assumed he probably had a bank account. She asked, bank? He nodded vigorously, reached into his pocket and brought out a bank book. She gathered up a set of the forms he needed to fill out, wrote a note to the bank soliciting help in getting them completed, including the notary seal required on one, tucked them inside his bank book and told him, "bank!" He left. Later, the gentleman returned with all the forms completed and with a note from the Arabic-speaking bank employee reflecting his pleasure at being able to help. We later learned that some insurance companies and travel agencies also have staff who can give similar help.

—*Dorothy Jones, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Public Schools*

As part of the public information campaign, a district will need to advertise its parent centers. Roundtable members suggest that businesses, particularly large employers within the community, consider establishing parent centers at the job site that are staffed by school personnel. States could also create model centers and provide training for local center staff.

Direct Recruitment

Providing information is only half of the outreach effort. Word of mouth is a valuable vehicle to attract parents to distinctive programs, but as the time nears for actual launch of the program and schools move into the marketing mode, they should consider enlisting a group of recruiters.

The staff is a logical nucleus for recruiters. When the Key School in Indianapolis was being formed, the entire staff went into the community looking for students. "We targeted communities where we wanted to recruit students and made contact with the neighborhood associations," explains Principal Patricia Bolanos. "It was one of the most effective ways to have person-to-person contact."

A recruitment program requires multiple strategies and avenues, especially if it is an interdistrict effort. Activities could take place at municipal sites, such as city halls or recreational facilities; through invitations to visit other schools, both public and private; or in church and community group meetings.

Special efforts need to be made to reach minority and lower socioeconomic families. The District 4 schools of East Harlem created an environment that encourages all parents to use the schools as community centers. In Cambridge, where the families range from welfare mothers to department heads at Harvard University, the choice program staff was particularly concerned about recruiting poor and non-English-speaking families who might be intimidated by the school structure. That is why the school district developed specific mechanisms, including a highly successful parent center, to recruit among those "hard-to-reach" parents.

With Bullhorn and Bravado

A large number of children whose school was to be merged lived in two Cambridge public housing projects across from the school. Few of the parents attended our meetings, and most who did never spoke up. So, one bright sunny morning, we moved tables, chairs, coffee urn, and refreshments into the main courtyard of the projects and, with a bullhorn, invited them to "Come on down!" A few did, then more and more, with still others leaning out of their windows calling out comments. It was a good meeting because parents finally accepted the idea that we really wanted their involvement.

—Dorothy Jones, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Public Schools

To ensure fairness in recruiting students—that all members of the community know about choice program offerings—school districts have made extra efforts, including the following:

- **Using community activities to help design and carry out outreach activities.** School officials should look for trusted allies who understand the nuances involved in recruiting from the communities. They can help form networks of valuable contact.

- **Being flexible with waivers after the official deadlines have passed.** Information may not travel in certain communities as quickly as it does in others. Once a choice plan is fully implemented, perhaps 3 years into the process, such waivers should not be necessary.

- **Organizing parent groups in hard-to-reach communities, such as those with the same language.** In some Massachusetts districts, various ethnic groups organize classes for themselves and the school system provides a teacher or a translator.

Above all, those with the special responsibility for recruiting need to respond creatively and quickly to parents who show any interest in opting for a choice school.

Evaluation

Although it is not normally seen as a marketing technique, the evaluation of choice schools in terms of their stated mission can produce results worth broadcasting. Most school evaluation data are mandated for collection and are traditional in scope, but what really will count with schools of choice—and their potential customers—are measures which determine progress on the long-range goals of the school. How well the school is trying to live up to its own vision is a powerful way to retain and recruit parents to the program.

Included in the ongoing information resources which should be available to families and the community are bulletins that include progress on all of the goals of a distinctive school, not just its test scores; feedback opportunities, such as public hearings; and follow-up surveys with parents and students on their attitudes about the choices they have made.

For accountability purposes, the families and the community should receive annual reports from the school about progress toward its goals. The reports should provide more details than regular bulletins on standard measures such as numbers of students and teachers. They should also report on changes in school demographics, both among faculty and students; progress on education goals that surpass the minimum standards established by the district or state; and indicators such as absenteeism and suspension rates.

Evaluation reports should give families and the community a long-range view of what is being accomplished through the choice plan and what can be expected in the future. Longitudinal data, for example, can tell what happened to the program graduates, by such measures as college attendance rates, college academic achievements, job placement, and job success.

The best way to disseminate evaluation data is to make sure that it gets covered by the local media. Suggestions for feature stories in local newspapers should be part of the overall administrative outreach efforts to publicize the choice plan.

Extensive outreach efforts ensure parents and students maximum access to choices. It is the fair way to conduct the planning and administration of public school choice. As the next chapter explains, student assignment policies and procedures form the core of the information that needs to be communicated, once a choice plan has been decided upon.

In Sum . . .

Reliable, constantly available information is essential to a successful choice program.

- Choice program developers must create a two-way information flow between the collection of information (what the community desires in the programs) and the dissemination of information (providing the parents with the tools to make knowledgeable choices).

- Choice advocates must develop a detailed information plan deciding which approach is best to gather information and which marketing strategies are most appropriate to their community.

Roundtable members emphasize that outreach measures far beyond traditional information services will be needed to inform parents, especially those not accustomed to being involved with the schools, about the choices available to them.

Chapter III.
Student Assignment Policies and Procedures

"You need to have a set of procedures that are very explicit, with rules."

—Saul Yanofsky, White Plains, New York, Public Schools

When preparing to implement public school choice programs, student assignment plans should be carefully thought out. The principles undergirding these plans will reflect the reasons for deciding to create distinctive schools and will represent planners' best efforts to provide appropriate choices for students and teachers.

Policy Development

Because of state or federal regulations and communitywide interests, the process for developing policies on student assignment usually is conducted by the district staff and school board with advice from parents and school building personnel. The board's role is to make explicit the concerns which brought about the decision to offer choices and what the plan is expected to accomplish.

Policymakers need to weigh and prioritize community concerns, such as equity, extent of demand for various types of choices, and transportation distance. Once these concerns have been organized, a student assignment policy can be constructed that addresses these issues.

Without firm, clear policies on student assignment, a school choice plan can be buffeted by individual demands that do not follow the principles of the plan. In the moderately sized White Plains, New York, school district, for example, the assignment manual is purposefully very detailed and explicit. "By our mutual agreement, our school board has removed virtually all discretion from the people who administer the procedure," explains Superintendent Saul Yanofsky. "We didn't want pressure generated that would lead staff to make subjective judgments about individual cases."

In contrast, the New York City District 4 student assignment system depends upon the staff's subjective opinions. After student school preferences are reviewed, students are "matched" to the schools of choice through an interview process. John Falco, District 4 alternative schools director, thinks their schools work because their approach to learning fits their students.

Factors Influencing Student Assignment Policies

Seven factors that influence student assignment policies are described in this section. For some communities one factor, racial balance, will dominate policy development. This does not mean that the other factors cannot be weighed in as well. Equity issues raised by racial balance formulas are addressed in the next section.

Student assignment decisions will be based upon several factors, including:

- Racial balance. Student assignments must take into consideration the desirability and legal necessity for integrated school settings. Including a mechanism to maintain racial balance was very common among the plans used by the Roundtable members. In St. Louis' interdistrict plan, for example, the student assignment must enhance racial balance in both the sending and the receiving school.

Developing a Formula for Balance

Cambridge's goal for choice was desegregation, requiring the least possible disruption for students while making sure that grades and classes were racially balanced. The planners rejected setting a specific, acceptable percentage of minority and nonminority students because constantly changing demographics could make such percentages useless. Instead, it was decided that each school, and each class, should reflect the total diversity of the system, coming within 5 percent of the citywide total for that grade level. For example, if the total fifth grade, in a given year, is 35 percent minority, the third grade for each school should be between 30 and 40 percent minority. As vacancies occur, assignments are made to keep or return the grade to the proper balance.

—Dorothy Jones, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Public Schools

- **Instructional capacity.** Student assignment policies must take into consideration the danger of creating an imbalance in the instructional capacity of a school. If too many parents either select to attend (or to leave) certain schools, the school's teaching mission might be strained or compromised. Therefore, it is not surprising that the second most common policy consensus among Roundtable districts is the assurance that school enrollment can be predicted accurately. Roundtable members advise schools to reserve a "cushion" in their instructional capacity so that unexpected opening-day enrollments do not overload the school.

- **Replication efforts.** Policies regarding school capacity should be linked to policies which ensure that oversubscribed schools will be replicated. Undersubscribed schools should be closed and then reopened as distinctive schools created by collective efforts. Instead of violating desirable student/teacher ratios to accommodate choice, such a policy uses choice as a lever for school improvement. Information gleaned from the preferencing procedure can be used to fine tune the choices offered. For example, if there are more than 100 children on a waiting list or more than 100 do not get into the school of their choice, "then it is the obligation of the district to replicate the preferred type of school," recommends Evans Clinchy of the Institute for Responsive Education.

- **Space availability, both within a school and by grade.** Schools must outline classroom use needs long before the school year begins. Developing a table of authorization that designates all space needs, including those for special education and bilingual education programs, is recommended.

- **Neighborhood school priority.** A percentage of places in a school should be reserved for neighborhood families, as long as racial balance is maintained, to allow for continuity for the students and a connection for the school to the neighborhood.

- **Preferences for siblings.** As a convenience for parents and to promote the sharing of school experience between brothers and sisters, preference for sibling requests should be given some priority.

- **Gender balance considerations for certain schools.**

Avoiding Gender Gerrymandering

When Eugene, Oregon, began to plan its technology-based alternative school in 1987, school officials and parents realized that it would attract many more male students than female students. A school district study revealed that males constituted as much as 80 percent of the enrollment in computer-related courses, both in Eugene and nationwide. As a response to this problem, a specially weighted lottery system was used to select students for the school. All applications were divided by sex; selections were made evenly between the two groups so that an even gender balance was obtained. Success rates of both groups have been followed, and it appears that no significant differences in outcomes now exist between girls and boys.

—Robert Stalick, Eugene, Oregon, Public Schools

Addressing Equity Concerns Through Student Assignment Policies

Assignment policies establish the fairness of the choice plan. Desegregation plans involving choice usually must conform to court-ordered percentages in racial balance at each school. In Seattle, for example, the racial balance of any given school is supposed to be within 10 percent of communitywide percentages, but may vary 5 to 15 percent from the student population. According to Marshall Alternative High School Principal Jim Simmons, "schools must determine their ethnic lid overall," then make individual determinations for each grade level or class (i.e., the lid may be reached in fourth grade but not in a fifth grade class). All of these racial balance decisions are implemented through Seattle's assignment policies.

Nine of the 14 Roundtable member districts use racial balance formulas in their student assignment policies. However, the Roundtable membership includes a large proportion of urban areas where student enrollments are more diverse and desegregation is either a legal requirement or a political priority. In some cases, desegregation is a voluntary goal of the school district; in others, integration is a serendipitous result of choice.

By using specific formulas for racial balance, the designers of public school choice programs make it clear that they are sensitive to and aware of the need to avoid resegregation of the schools. In fact, districts are using choice as a means of furthering desegregation by maintaining racial balance within individual schools of choice and requiring racial balance considerations for interdistrict transfers to schools of choice.

An equally complex concern is that of using selection criteria for admission. On principle, all members of the Roundtable do not favor student-based admissions criteria for schools of choice. A few members believe that sometimes it may be necessary to fulfill the goals of a small-scale choice program, such as a magnet program requiring a certain grade-point average or one requiring auditions and interviews for its specialized program. For example, state regulations may require that students participating in a gifted and talented program have a certain grade point average, if the school district wishes the program to be funded.

In larger choice programs, policies and practice tend to err on the side of controlling school selection carefully, especially in interdistrict programs. The justification for any such control, as understood by Roundtable members, is that denial of admission to a choice program should not be based on student characteristics. Admissions criteria are controversial, Roundtable members acknowledge, and they will become even more so if used indiscriminately. Exceptions should be very rare. In Minnesota, for example, interdistrict transfers cannot consider such factors as grades, behavior, or criminal records as criteria for admission. Only racial balance and space availability are acceptable reasons for denying parents their choice. In Seattle, decisions rely upon "objective bases, with the maintenance of racial balance being the most prevalent underlying consideration," says Principal Simmons.

Formal policies governing student assignments provide parents and students with an equitable means of obtaining their top choice of schools. Such policies promote active selection by parents. Without them, some parents will manipulate the system to become assured of their choice—for example, by using a relative's address in a more desirable zone or school district or obtaining a privately consulted psychologist's opinion supporting a child's transfer.

The Roundtable recognizes that in smaller districts more personal contacts might lead to subjective decisions and interfere with fairness. But, by far, a majority of the Roundtable members consider their policies to be objective and thus fair.

Other Policy Concerns

Should parents or students be required to choose a school? The answer depends upon the scale of the choice plan, which will be influenced greatly by the decision to use either a "required" or a "voluntary" registration policy. There are pros and cons for both registration strategies.

A required registration policy for a public school choice plan mandates parental involvement—a benefit that can grow as a child progresses through a choice school. However, providing for such parent involvement demands a great deal of consistent effort. The Cambridge and Lowell school systems in Massachusetts are excellent examples of required registration policies.

A voluntary registration policy provides the choice options to those who choose. The children of parents who do not opt for choice are assigned randomly or directed to a neighborhood school by central office procedures. Susan Uchitelle notes that of the 142,000 students in the St. Louis metropolitan area schools, only 25,000 have voluntarily chosen to enroll through the interdistrict choice plan. While this type of student assignment is easier to administer, it does not encourage parents to become actively involved in their child's education.

If districts or parents elect to participate voluntarily, reasons for nonadmittance must be very limited. The only reason for refusing a choice is to maintain racial balance.

Student assignment policies will necessarily be complex because they must respond to community concerns, which sometimes conflict. Times change and interests shift, so such policies should be reviewed and revised on a regular basis.

Translating Policy into Student Assignment Procedures

Although student assignment policies may be fair and balanced, implementing them will require thoughtful, well-communicated procedures. The policies often present "a set of tradeoffs that are difficult to keep in sync," says Superintendent Saul Yanofsky. In White Plains, for example, a strong commitment to desegregation needed to be meshed with efforts to reinvigorate programs at elementary schools and to provide parents with alternatives.

The community needs to be educated about the fairness of the procedures, and parents need to have faith in the objectivity of the exceptions and appeals procedures. "As long as parents know that you are not making exceptions for them, they accept it as fair," points out Superintendent George Tsapatsaris of the Lowell, Massachusetts, Public Schools.

The Roundtable foresees that critical decisions will need to be made on the following student assignment procedures:

- **Registration, centralized or decentralized.** While centralized registration is more efficient, decentralized registration is more personal and keeps control of the process at the local school level. If the choice plan is statewide, state officials may be responsible for tracking the assignment process or for making the assignments. If the choice plan is adopted locally, there will be staff and training costs. Richmond, California, as well as other Roundtable choice plans, assigns a full-time staff member to handle choice enrollments, monitoring racial balance policies and other choice plan details.

Avoiding Some Pitfalls

At the beginning of Cambridge's open enrollment plan, parents were to register at the school of their choice. However, this put principals under pressure to bend the rules for certain families and allowed them to arbitrarily decide they did not have space for an applicant whom they considered to be "from the wrong part of town." Central registration relieved principals of any pressures, political or otherwise. A commitment to equity and careful supervision of the process in the Parent Information Center resulted in a system widely recognized as fair. In fact, the assignment officer earned the reputation as "Mr. Clean."

—Dorothy Jones, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Public Schools

- Preferencing, methods for submitting choices. Some school districts allow choices to be made by mail or on forms distributed through the schools; others require parents to make the choices in person. Some choice programs offer parents a choice of school program instead of a choice of school building. In the case where school programs are offered in more than one school in a district, parents or students select a school program, and then administrators determine which building to assign the student.

- **Number of preferences allowed any student.** On the one hand, preferences should be limited in order to prevent confusing the choice process. On the other, allowing a larger number of preferences increases parents' chances of obtaining their top choices. Among the Roundtable members, the average range of the number of preferences was 2-5 choices.

- **Lottery, first-come first-served, or combination (hybrid) method of assigning students.** The choice plans of the Roundtable represent each of these methods, indicating once again that successful plans take different approaches to the policies and practices needed to implement choice. All of the plans, however, make exceptions for special education and limited-English-proficient students. Kansas City and Seattle are examples of the hybrid method of assignment, combining both lottery and specific request characteristics. Kansas City, for example, uses "day blocks," three working days in which parents can register by mail. The applications in each day block are computerized, then

randomly assigned input numbers by race; the final procedure is a placement run. Each day block is processed this way, thus combining the characteristics of first-come with a lottery.

Registration choices, by student assignment method

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Lottery	Equalizes all	Eliminates value of participants parental effort
First-Come First-Serve	Rewards parents for extra efforts	Penalizes those parents unable (due to time constraints) to make the extra effort
Hybrid	Allows parental effort and compensates for it	Administratively complicated

- **Computerized or manual assignment method.** In most instances among the Roundtable schools, staff assignments are still done manually; only two have computerized systems. This lack of technological systems is due to the newness or small scale of many choice programs. As choice plans multiply and better software becomes available, the Roundtable expects more assignment procedures to be computerized, simply because they can make the process more efficient and objective than manual efforts. Computerizing assignments precludes multiple applications for one child from being processed and it also frees up staff for other tasks such as guiding the development of the software. Roundtable members advise that the manual system stay in place as an essential back-up method during the transition to a computerized system.

- **Timing of assignment process.** Among Roundtable members, late winter and early spring are the most popular times for the assignment process. Early timelines are needed to guarantee a smooth process and to avoid shifts in the fall, which would adversely affect state funding based on average daily attendance. This allows time to plan staffing for the following school year and to consider such issues as the needed number of buses and routes. Timing also will depend upon the size of the district. The larger the number of students to be considered, the longer the process. These districts can stagger preferencing days and the deadlines for applications by grade.

- **Appeals review and resolution process.** Even after assignments are made and a child is enrolled in a school or program of his or her choice, some parents or students will change their minds and want to transfer. Among Roundtable members, a formal written appeal is required in such cases. The final review and decision is made by the superintendent. If a transfer is granted, it should only be allowed at the end of the semester or the year.

A Plan for Problems

Lowell, Massachusetts, manages to provide 73 percent of its children with their first choice in schools. To alleviate the anger and distress of those who cannot be accommodated, the school system provides counseling on available options as part of its registration and assignment procedure. Parents are informed about the process. Any child not attending a first-choice school is placed on a waiting list for that school, with priority depending on the date of request and whether a sibling attends the school. Parents have the right to appeal in writing a non-first-choice placement. Letters may be written in the families' native language, and when necessary, parent information center staff will help a parent write an appeals letter. About one-half of the appeals heard annually result in a change in placement. The Parent Appeals Board meets monthly and is composed of a member of the central administration, a parent liaison coordinator, and five members of the citywide parent council. Interestingly, about 50 percent of the parents on the waiting list turn down placement when a vacancy occurs.

—George Tsapatsaris, Lowell, Massachusetts, Public Schools

The student assignment process is difficult, logistically complex, and produces paperwork; but it produces no more headaches than a traditional school organization plan where there always will be parents who do not like their child's school assignment.

In Sum . . .

Student assignment policies and procedures need to be firm, fair, and consistently applied.

Choice plan implementers must decide how to ensure the fairness of their programs. They must ask themselves the following questions:

- Are racial balance formulas desirable in the community?
- Are student-based admissions criteria preferable to other means of objectively controlling choice?
- Is mandating that parents choose needed to increase parental involvement, or would simply allowing parents the right to choose be sufficient?

These are sensitive and controversial issues, but the Roundtable emphasizes that the policies and procedures chosen will establish the purpose of the choice plan in a community. Therefore, administrative convenience should not outweigh fairness in choosing student assignment policies and procedures.

Chapter IV.
Shaping the Transportation System

"There's a need to emphasize to anyone going into controlled choice that the transportation people and the student assignment people have to live in each others' pockets."

—Jim Simmons, Marshall Alternative High School, Seattle

Safe, efficient transportation for students is essential to the success and fairness of public school choice. Schools-within-schools programs may not have as much of a concern about transportation, but transportation systems are the base of interdistrict plans and are vital to intradistrict choice plans, particularly in larger districts.

Unfortunately, transportation also can be a limiting factor. It is costly and complicated, and some choice programs have had to compromise on what would be the most desirable system in order to stay within financial limits or a reasonable travel distance.

As with student assignments, designing transportation systems for a choice plan may seem terribly complex on the surface, but when school officials tackle the issue realistically, the task becomes "doable." The Roundtable's hallmarks for transportation procedures are fairness, safety, and efficiency. New technologies put these characteristics within the reach of school planners.

Developing Transportation Policies

The first important decision to be made by choice program planners is whether to provide transportation or to reimburse its cost. The decision depends upon whose responsibility transportation is seen as primarily being—the state's, the school system's, or parents.

It is cheaper and more politically feasible in statewide programs to let districts or parents provide transportation, and then to reimburse them. But if the public school system covers the costs and handles the logistics, more students may be able to participate in the choice program. When choice plans cross districts, state reimbursement for transportation costs should consider family income and enable those who could profit most from choice to attend schools in other districts. In Minnesota, for example, special state aid is available for parents in financial need (based on free and reduced lunch eligibility), which pays the transportation costs. With interdistrict plans, state reimbursement may range from zero to 100 percent, depending upon state policies regarding interdistrict transfers.

Another major policy decision to be made regarding inter- or intradistrict plans is whether to have a separate transportation system for those who are choosing to attend distinctive schools. Roundtable members believe that a separate system for students in choice programs is inherently inefficient but sometimes necessary for bookkeeping purposes. This might be an interim policy dilemma, but as choice programs become more popular, the integration of transportation services may become the norm.

Transportation policy development also entails developing guidelines that ensure fairness, safety, and efficiency. For example, the guidelines for the intradistrict Cambridge, Massachusetts, choice plan are spelled out in manuals for the transportation staff and include such items as distance traveled must be less than one mile from the residence for students who

walk to school and no primary school-age child can cross a dangerous barrier, such as a wide thoroughfare or railroad track.

After-school activities present another decision. About one-half of the Roundtable plans provide transportation for students who stay at school for such programs. This is one of the big attractions of the choice plan in Kansas City, Missouri, according to school board member Sue Fulson. Her school district's transportation system is larger than that of the city, with 600 daily runs accommodating not only after-school programs at choice schools but also the district's extensive extended-day program.

These and other issues are routine considerations for any district which provides its own transportation system. Often, the transportation system is only questioned when the issue of additional cost arises. It is at this point that planners may need to speak frankly to critics because, as Sue Fulson explains, some people prefer to think that students should do as they did—"walk uphill both ways" to school and home.

Components of the Transportation System

Public school choice programs have presented urban areas with new challenges in transportation services. They have had to develop computer systems designed specifically for the scale and the number of students participating in choice plans. However, even with such systems, the Roundtable cautions that transportation systems cannot change overnight. It takes time to work out the bugs in any computer program, so the existing manual system should be available during the transition to a computerized system.

In addition to having one transportation system to hold down costs. school districts have come up with other cost-effective approaches, including:

- **Zoning the district and limiting choices to those within a given zone.** For example, in the Lowell, Massachusetts, public schools, two zones each have 13 distinctive schools for parents to select from. The zones were created intentionally to respond to transportation complaints. Eventually, says Superintendent George Tsapatsaris, "these administrative imaginary lines will disappear as we create more systemwide schools of choice. But even if the zones remain, there is sufficient choice." Because of freeway problems, the Richmond, California, plan is restricted to a three-mile radius planning zone, but there are four distinctive schools in each zone. The more options within a zone, the better, Roundtable members agree.

Staggering the Buses

In the first year of Lowell's controlled choice program, students from several schools with the same hours often were scheduled for the same bus—which couldn't possibly deliver and pick up the children on time in all cases. In the second year a new bell time schedule was instituted. Schools were grouped geographically and paired in transportation combinations to allow maximum efficiency of available buses. The number of buses now depends on how many schools are in each grouping, how many students are transported to them and where the students live. Schools in a grouping are assigned bell times five minutes apart to allow for travel between buildings, resulting in one or more buildings opening almost every five minutes over a period of about an hour. This staggered time schedule has created an efficient transportation system.

—George Tsapatsaris, Lowell, Massachusetts, Public Schools

- **Extending route schedules.** Although limiting the round trips to each school in a choice plan may seem to infringe upon after-school programs, transportation systems can be designed to do otherwise. St. Louis, for example, arranges for activity buses to pick up children later in the day and also matches children to host families. Children go home with their "host" friend, then return to school for an extracurricular activity. A limit of one round trip per student keeps costs reasonable and is simpler to administer.

- **Using alternative vehicles.** Several Roundtable districts use taxicabs or vans instead of buses when only a few students need to be transported. In addition to contracting with four bus companies for its vast transportation system, the Kansas City schools use between 350 and 400 taxicabs. Even though this is a cheaper way of providing transportation than buses, it is very hard to convince the public of that fact, admits school board member Sue Fulson.

- **Carpools or bus token arrangements.** In a few Roundtable districts, parents help organize carpools to transport their students to choice schools. This is not an uncommon practice in isolated rural areas where parents sometimes are reimbursed for transporting their children to central pickup points. Because some metropolitan school districts do not

operate any transportation system (except for special education students), their choice programs arrange for student tokens, reduced fares or reimbursements with local public transportation. If a school system relies on the public system, there can be problems caused by delayed buses.

- **Reaching the district border.** The main attraction of reimbursement is that it holds down costs. Another way of holding down costs, while avoiding the vagaries of extended public bus rides, is to require students in an interdistrict plan to reach the district boundary in order to be picked up. While this is not an efficient use of the transportation system for all of the districts involved, it is required where state laws prohibit one district from sending its buses into another district. The Roundtable strongly recommends that districts request waivers or a change in such state laws.

- **Creative responses to small transportation problems.** Common sense and creativity can help a transportation system work more smoothly. Do not rely solely on experts for ideas.

Picking Buses by Pictures

An East Cambridge parent who was volunteering to assist the school system during the first week of classes was riding the bus with her daughter to school. She noticed that the youngest children, those who could not yet read, tended not to remember their bus number but the face of their bus driver. These children would even get on the wrong bus if the driver was familiar. So this crafty parent made some symbols out of construction paper and put them in the front window of the buses. The principal took it a step further. He arranged it so that the first child in line for each bus would hang a duplicate of the symbol around his or her neck so children know to line up behind the symbol. The concept of naming and labeling elementary school buses has since been adopted systemwide. Now waiting for the buses are such groups as Brown Bears, Green Turtles, Blue Cars, or Chocolate Cones.

—Dorothy Jones, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Public Schools

So, no matter what transportation components are used, or whether the transportation system is operated by the school or contracted out, careful management should result in safe and cost-efficient ways of transporting children to their schools. This is true of any school system—not just those involved in public school choice programs.

Transportation systems, as well as all other components of successful choice programs, depend upon adequate financing, as the next chapter explains.

In Sum . . .

Transportation is key to providing all students equal access to choices. Without adequate transportation policies, a choice program will neither be fair nor effective for all students. With any transportation system, procedures should be designed for safety and efficiency.

- Choice program developers must decide how to ensure equitable access within their community's constraints. Their options range from reimbursement plans to separate transportation systems. The former is the easiest to administer, while the latter provides the greatest amount of data on the transportation dimension of a choice program. And, while computerizing transportation routes is costly, it frees staff for other tasks.

The Roundtable emphasizes that whether choosing an appropriate use of geographic zones or the right mix of buses, vans, or cars, the challenge is to balance cost and efficiency with safety and fairness.

Chapter V.
Financing Public School Choice Programs

"There are far more differences in funding school choice programs than similarities."

—*Susan Uchitelle, Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council, St. Louis*

Sometimes it is difficult to tell just how costly a choice plan may be, since it is very often just one part of a larger school reform effort. By the same token, the financial benefits of choice may be obscured. Roundtable members agree, for example, that choice plans can save money if they actually cut administrative costs.

Throughout its discussions, the Roundtable kept coming back to three fundamental concerns about financing public school choice: finding ways to keep the plans feasible within funding limits; maintaining equity as a goal; and designing funding to be an incentive, rather than a disincentive, to those who want to restructure the system by providing diverse schools or programs.

Specific Costs of Choice

There are certain costs for public school choice plans which are specific to them and which can be separated from funding for general school improvement. Principally, these are costs related to the startup of a choice plan. The Roundtable cites:

- **Planning time.** This includes costs for release time and substitute teachers, opportunities for staff and school board members to visit sites, information-gathering surveys, forums for constituency-building, and planning seminars.
- **Student assignment.** Expenses cover information services and outreach efforts; operating information centers to monitor racial balance and to train center staff; and computerizing the assignment system, including software development and training staff to use the programs.
- **Transportation.** A large, initial cost can be the development of computer software for the routing. After that, however, transportation costs can be reduced if choices are planned within zones. For multisite choice plans, Roundtable members suggest naming or hiring a coordinator of transportation who can integrate disparate systems if necessary.

Saving Money with Choice

While the greatest savings in a public choice plan might come from closing unpopular or marginally needed schools, the real purpose of choice is to reinvigorate schools, not shut them down. Schools should be given time, resources, and guidance on how to improve before closure is considered. Sometimes just having a specific policy toward closing ineffective schools provides the incentive needed to turn them around. "If you tell a school it is going to be closed if it does not improve, what might happen is that you would draw in a group of people who didn't want it to close and who would start trying to make it better, working on things that can be done without extra money," says Sue Fulson. The net effect is a better education for students and more satisfied parents—at no additional cost.

Another way to reduce costs through a choice plan is by collaboration among schools in the plan. If a staff specialist in art or music, for example, can be shared by certain programs in different buildings, the

districts can split the cost of one salary. If they do not collaborate, these schools either must do without a specialist or not fully use the ones they have.

Once again, experience teaches that in a system of choice, creativity is paramount. According to Joe Nathan, director of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota and a leading researcher on choice programs, "many alternative schools organize themselves differently and spend no more than traditional schools."

How Choice Is Funded

With few exceptions, public schools generally must set priorities and operate with fewer resources than they believe desirable. This reality needs to be part of the planning for choice programs from the very beginning. The funding that is available for choice plans is influenced by the following factors:

- **The type of plan (inter or intradistrict).** How extensive will it be? In an interdistrict plan, will both state and federal funds be used?
- **The integration of other funding sources.** Can foundation funds or desegregation monies be used for startup costs?
- **Use of temporary incentive funding.** Can funding stimulate choice programs which cross district lines?

In an intradistrict plan, state funding sometimes is available for related startup costs as an incentive for planning and development, though not usually for basic operation of the plan. Lowell, Massachusetts, for example, received approximately $1 million from the state education agency—one-half of it as a discretionary grant and the other half because of enrollment shifts from one school to another. (Massachusetts state law provides financial incentives to any community wanting to develop magnet schools which foster desegregation.) The funds are used to support Lowell's Parent Information Center and its schools of choice.

Interdistrict plans usually include the provision of some state funds for operation of the plans. Most statutes allow the funding to follow the student to some extent, with compensation to the school of residence in order to lessen the impact of transfers. However, school districts need realistic timing for the transfer of funds among participating districts. If the state payment is held until the end of the semester, districts may experience cash flow problems.

In Minnesota, startup funds are not provided. Funding per student is equalized by the state, and the total revenue (state and local) follows the student. Thus, districts that lose students to others with a more attractive school program see a drop in their funding, while those with expanding enrollments are adequately funded to cover the costs of educating those students. Minnesota's is a pure incentive/disincentive system.

Funding is more generous when a choice plan is the result of a court-ordered or state-initiated policy. Under such circumstances, there is greater potential for startup costs than when a district devises a choice plan on its own.

The funding formulas vary considerably. Some of the issues embodied in the formulas include:

- **The proportion of funding from host school(s) and from residence school(s).** These ratios depend on how much state funding will follow the students and on the transfer of local tax dollars. For example, in the St. Louis interdistrict plan, each school district is reimbursed by the state for its per pupil cost for accepting students. Fund transfers are handled by an intermediary unit, the Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council.
- **The results of political compromises.** Formulas usually result from political compromises because interdistrict plans, particularly those in metropolitan areas, sometimes are hard to sell. When the state actively intervenes with incentives, some of the reluctance dissipates. For example, school district participation increased about 10 percent in Nebraska when the legislature agreed to provide partial funding of a student's transfer to the receiving districts; before, the residence school district covered the transfer costs.
- **The requirement of state laws pertaining to per pupil expenditures.** In light of the growing judicial activity related to school finance, those considering public school choice should keep in mind that courts are questioning the equity of having wide disparities among districts' per pupil expenditures. There are potential serious problems or, conversely, great opportunities for public school choice which could result from the state finance equity movement.

Creative Funding of Choice

Public school choice opens up the whole issue of funding to creative, nontraditional approaches. Because it represents a major change in how schools view their role, choice often attracts funding from corporations and foundations interested in education

reform. Choice plan supporters need to know that such additional funding or resources are available.

The ***private sector*** is a good source for targeted funds, such as for science labs, media efforts to publicize choice plans, or help with computerizing student assignment and transportation plans. Private sector personnel can be "loaned" to school districts as resources for developing and managing a choice plan. Many school districts create local foundations to encourage private support of schools. The Roundtable recommends that choice plan advocates seek to establish foundations specifically for support of the startup or continuing expenses of public school choice.

Interdistrict collaboration is another avenue for alternative funding sources. Rural school systems throughout the country have established very effective, cost-saving means of collaborating on transportation, purchases, services, and even teaching and administrative staffs. In Minnesota, for example, such arrangements can net a school district $60 per pupil from state and local taxes if the cooperative agreements expand student learning opportunities.

Seeking flexibility of funding and of the rules is important for choice entrepreneurs. Successful choice plans almost always require some sort of waivers for unorthodox use of federal and state monies. The Minnesota state board of education, for example, has challenged school districts to identify innovative ways to deliver education and has assured districts that waivers will be granted, according to Robert Wedl of the Minnesota Department of Education. Minnesota does not allow funds allocated for one accounting area to be spent in another area. While it is necessary to have proper accounting of funds, says Brooklyn Center (Minnesota) High School Associate Principal Paul Durand, "you also have to have flexibility in the use of funds, because you cannot always anticipate where the needs will be."

Policymakers and administrators need to run interference for choice schools. "If you really want them to do better, they must be allowed to hire uncertified personnel who can get results or to do different things with pupil/teacher ratios," says Susan Uchitelle. "You are going to have to go out on a limb and allow them to do things and see if they can get the results they want."

Another way to obtain flexibility is to frame the choice plan as ***experimental***. Experimental status from the state education department gives schools of choice the freedom to do whatever they need to do, especially in creating brand new schools, says Sue Fulson.

Prioritizing or reallocating funds can also free monies for the choice plan. When reallocating funds, however, the Roundtable suggests that there should be site-based decisions about how long the reallocation will last and how it will be evaluated.

Finally, Roundtable members suggest that planners look afresh at ***human resources***. Stephanie Counts, principal of Piedmont Open Middle School in Charlotte, North Carolina, recommends forming task forces in each school of choice that work specifically at finding alternative funding. Just changing a school's expectations of parent involvement can produce results, she says. "It may take a month of a student's work to raise a few thousand dollars from magazine sales as a fundraiser, but that student's parent could get on the phone and make a call to a business leader and get thousands of dollars in five minutes."

Fairness in Funding Schools of Choice

The Roundtable emphatically supports funding and resource practices that are fair to all students and to all schools. Public school choice must not create inequities which lead to a two-tiered system of education, the members believe. The Roundtable faults some magnet school plans for failing to keep fairness and equity as goals, resulting in a few schools receiving a large share of resources and then "creaming" the best students from around the district.

Researcher Mary Anne Raywid, director of the Center for the Study of Educational Alternatives, Hofstra University, points out that while the average costs of elementary magnet schools was found to be lower than other elementary schools within a district, magnets at the secondary level averaged somewhat higher costs than traditional high schools within a district.

Roundtable members acknowledge that the costs among schools are not always going to be the same at the same time. Distinctive schools may require startup costs that are higher than normal or need to maintain higher operating costs. But, says the Roundtable, over time the gap in spending among all schools within a district should diminish as choice becomes universally available and all schools offer superior quality education.

Equally important, financing policies should not penalize schools or districts which offer choice. They should be given incentives for wanting to change the status quo, not discouraged from doing so. Incentives could take the form of public school choice startup funds or demonstration projects.

The Roundtable sees perverse signals in interdistrict incentives which allow schools losing students through transfer to keep their funds while receiving schools are not compensated for the full cost of the transferred students. The experience of the Roundtable is that, in interdistrict choice plans, school districts are unwilling to lose funds or to be only partially reimbursed for actual pupil costs as a result of participation in choice plans.

In the next chapter, the Roundtable concludes with a list of specific benefits that accrue to those who implement public school choice programs and an explanation of the new roles taken by parents, administrators, and faculty.

In Sum . . .

Approaches to funding public school choice programs vary. Central decisions must be made by choice planners about overall program costs:

- Should they reprioritize yet spend at the same level of funding?
- Should they streamline management, establish school-based management, and spend less money?
- Should they use staff and technology more intensively and seek more funds for their program?

Decisions about transferring local or state funds to follow the student must be made by state and local officials. These decisions must match the vision of schooling developed by the choice advocates. Finally, the Roundtable believes that funding compromises which seem to penalize the risk takers and reward those unwilling to change should be avoided.

Chapter VI.
Results of Choice: Specific Benefits and New Roles

"If people are interested in starting a public school choice plan, what kind of incentives will appeal to the stakeholders?"

—Mary Anne Raywid, Center for the Study of Educational Alternatives, Hofstra University

Putting in place a system of public school choice may take some doing, but the benefits can be profound. Roundtable members learned from implementing and administering their own choice plans that results or "incentives," as researcher Mary Anne Raywid calls them (things that help students, parents, and teachers recognize the worth of doing and thinking differently about public schooling), can emerge.

Although the paths to choice have not always been smooth, all but one site represented on the Roundtable has stayed with their decision to provide choice, believing it to be in the best interests of students and parents and having found out that public school choice leverages meaningful change in the education system.

Specific Benefits

Those involved in public school choice are beginning to accumulate evidence of tangible benefits in their individual plans. The Roundtable members also testify to the many intangible benefits which can be traced fully or at least partially to the introduction of choice, such as higher self-esteem, better peer relationships, and improved social relations achieved with a more diverse student enrollment. Critics of choice tend to narrow assessment of choice to its effect on academic progress, notes Susan Uchitelle of the Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council in St. Louis. Benefits of choice include:

- **Continuous enrollment of students whose parents move within a district or state.** A major problem in large urban districts is the mobility of families, but in a choice system students can stay in the same school throughout the year and from year to year. Choice stabilizes the student population, says Patricia Bolanos, principal of Key Elementary School in Indianapolis. "If the child is from a family that moves constantly, he or she is just in and out of schools all the time . . . With choice, a sense of belonging grows for the child." Remembering a 50 percent turnover in a school where he once was assistant principal, George Tsapatsaris of Lowell, Massachusetts, says such trauma for students and schools has been eliminated because where a child attends school "is no longer controlled by geography."

- **Re-enrollment of dropouts** lured by the opportunity to attend a school different from the one they had attended previously.

A Way to Drop Back In

Minnesota's choice plan has encouraged thousands of students to stay in school or to come back to school. In a 1987 study, 5 percent of the students participating in the Postsecondary Enrollment Options Program had been high school dropouts. Participation in the High School Graduation Incentives Program and Area Learning Center Program enabled students to attend school in the summer, evenings, part time, and through independent study. Day care centers for the students' children and transportation for the students and their children resulted in improved attendance. Individual learning plans which not only identify the educational services needed but also the services to be provided by the county human services and health departments better meet the needs of the whole child. With this type of program, school and community agencies design a program which fits the schedule of the student. The objective is to ensure that all will be successful students. More and more often, that means the structure of the educational institution must change.

—Robert Wedl, Minnesota Department of Education

- **Less truancy and fewer discipline referrals.** Cambridge discovered that the excitement and interest of students in the new choice programs curtailed the habit of missing school, common among students from immigrant families, who rely upon older siblings to babysit. Drawing upon his research on open enrollment in Minnesota, Roundtable member Paul Durand says fewer discipline referrals are a major result of giving parents and students a renewed sense of ownership and responsibility. A troubled youth living in one of the toughest housing projects in Minneapolis transferred to Durand's Brooklyn Center High School as a last-chance option. "He matured and became really serious about school and his educational future," says Durand. "It was not so much what we did, but that he now takes ownership for his future."

- **Better use of space and facilities.** Not only does public school choice eliminate the annual hassle over boundary lines, but the preference assignment process also yields valuable data on the use of facilities, which can be used for long-range planning. For example, in Cambridge, schools which were losing enrollments even though other schools were overcrowded, recouped their enrollments because of the special programs they designed, thus evening out space usage among the schools.

- **Creation of alternative assessment of students.** With a specific curriculum or pedagogical approach or new organizational patterns, a school of choice can be free to go beyond traditional testing programs and explore alternative assessments that further the goals of teachers and parents, such as the use of portfolios and performance-based assessments.

- **Creation of a sense of mission.** By working out a mission and a philosophy for a school or program, teachers, students, and parents have a stake in meeting its goals.

- **More involvement by parents and the community.** The act of making choices means that parents usually become more intimately involved with what is going on in a school than they might under a traditional system. For example,

  — Parents who select the Key School in Indianapolis do so knowing that they must provide transportation for their children. This has turned out to be a plus, says Principal Patricia Bolanos. Many of the parents are at the school on a daily basis, interacting with staff and other parents. But the most important thing we ask of parents, explains Bolanos, is that they agree to participate in three out of four parent-teacher conferences. We tell parents that if they want their child to be a part of this unique learning opportunity, they must come to the school every 9 weeks and talk with the staff about their child's education and progress. There have been some semesters where parent participation was 100 percent. "That's unheard of in urban education," Bolanos exclaims.

  — The Brooklyn Center High School, partially to offset isolation of families living outside of the district, invites several parents in for lunch once a week to talk with school administrators and to tour the building. "It changes the attitude of the community," says associate principal Paul Durand. "Those parents go out and talk at their bridge parties or when bowling about how clean the building is and how disciplined the students are."

- **Invigoration of the faculty.** Roundtable members report that schools of choice make much better use of faculty expertise, uncovering interests and

talents that might not have been expressed before. Faculty, as well as faculty in almost every choice school, have opportunities to collaborate on curriculum and on monitoring the progress of individual students. Some choice schools receive additional personnel for their specific programs; in others, head teachers are given compensation for their extra work.

Teachers Making Decisions, Being Challenged

One of the reasons I left a really wonderful school to come to Key was because the teachers at Key were making decisions which would mean new challenges for themselves and their students. In a summer planning week and in weekly staff meetings each person's input is accepted; and the diversity of approaches, interests, and talents is appreciated. Opportunities for personal and professional growth abound in this setting. The many research projects associated with the school have brought the staff in contact with outstanding individuals in many fields, including other educators from across the country and some other countries. The schools emphasis on community involvement results in our working with groups and individuals in local business, artistic, historical, and educational settings on a regular, ongoing basis. The Key School is truly a school of choice not only for students and parents but also for teachers. All of the teachers at Key either participated in the conceptualization and design of the school or learned of the unique professional opportunities offered here and chose to become part of this project.

—Bobbie Brinson, Key Elementary School, Indianapolis

- **More diversified curricula and schools.** To meet the different learning styles of children, choice promotes diversity among schools and their curricula. At-risk or minority children especially benefit from a richer curriculum offered in schools of choice, instead of being limited to regular school programs which tend to have low expectations of at-risk students.

- **Advancement of racial integration.** The Roundtable members' experience indicates that choice produces shifts in enrollment which achieve greater racial balance within school buildings and within school districts participating in an interdistrict plan. In St. Louis, for example, the voluntary transfer goal was to encourage 15,000 inner-city black students to suburban districts, with each receiving district reaching a black student population considerably higher (with percentage goals) than in 1980, the year of the settlement agreement. City magnet schools were created to attract white suburban students. By 1989, 18,000 city students had transferred to about 100 suburban schools, and 2,000 county students had chosen to attend city magnet schools. "All students in the metropolitan area now have the opportunity to learn in a multicultural environment," points out Susan Uchitelle, executive director of the voluntary program.

- **Greater options and support for minority students.** Receiving schools in the St. Louis plan are making extra effort to meet the academic and social needs of minority students. Transferred students, on the average, are achieving a 1-year gain for a year's work, and more of them are making the honor roll. The choice plan in Lowell also created systemwide advocacy for certain groups of students instead of isolating them in a few schools. "If we didn't have controlled choice," says Superintendent George Tsapatsaris, "language-minority children would be concentrated in the areas where new immigrants live. Because we distribute the student population throughout the system, they have become a systemwide concern."

New Roles for Parents, Administrators, and Faculty

Choice creates a different environment for *parents*. They are called upon to be

- Active choosers of assignments for their children, requiring them to think about and acquire greater understanding of different approaches to education;

- Shapers of options in the process of developing distinctive schools;

- Decisionmakers about meaningful issues in schools through greater use of school-site governing councils; and

- Recruiters of students as parent-school liaisons, requiring parents to become knowledgeable advocates of the diversity among their district's schools.

A Mentoring Program for Parents

To help parents feel comfortable in their schools of choice, a group of parents in the St. Louis area designed and implemented a buddy system. The Parent Mentor Program helps to link parents going to a new school with parents already familiar with that school or district. The mentors receive training and organize meetings at their school for all parents covering such issues as academic standards, discipline concerns, working effectively with the school system, and the rights and responsibilities of parents.

—Susan Uchitelle,
St. Louis Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council

Choice is not just the selection of a school, points out Robert Wedl of the Minnesota Department of Education, "it is choosing a program which addresses the unique needs of a learner." Making such informed choices is a new role for many parents. It also places the district in a new role. In the traditional system, Wedl points out, parents usually have little recourse but to accept the program that is available. Under a choice plan, parents become very important decision-makers and must determine the unique needs, strengths, and aspirations of their children. The school needs to assist parents in this analysis.

A growing number of young parents count on schools to make decisions for them or lack understanding of how to determine the best program for their child. To prevent "elitism" from affecting choice programs, Stephanie Counts advises schools to develop comprehensive training programs for parents.

Roles also change dramatically for school *administrators*, including those involved with choice plans at the state education agency level. Administrators in central offices and school sites become enablers and monitors rather than controllers and protectors of regulations.

Working with parents on decisions about their children's education can alter the way administrators think about their role. Education researcher Mary Anne Raywid points out that teachers, counselors, principals, and others who help parents with choices become client-oriented rather than institution-oriented.

Another challenge for administrators is developing more creative funding resources for schools. Not only do they have an opportunity to reallocate funding priorities, but it is their leadership which will make a difference in getting private sector support for schools of choice. Stephanie Counts explains that this funding challenge involves contacting business and community groups, designing foundation programs, and seeking collaborative arrangements.

Choice also makes better use of *principals*. As they become involved in the development of distinctive schools or programs, principals rely on their own professional knowledge and philosophies much more than in traditional systems. They serve as brokers for research and other resources that can be used by their faculty and parents. Their commitment to schools of choice becomes broader as they work for systemwide change.

Principals' contacts with communities and families broaden because of their responsibility in coordinating information about choices. It is shortsighted, notes Kansas City School Board member Sue Fulson, for educators to think that recruiting or helping to shape commitment within a community will not be their responsibility, especially when the population is aging and becoming less concerned about public schools.

Some principals can assume even greater communication roles. In many choice schools, principals have become tour guides, not only for parents and community groups but also for representatives of the national media, observers from other districts, and visitors from other countries.

Choice plans benefit *teachers* as much as students, asserts the Roundtable. The school program development process creates a new collegiality among faculty, and continuing modification and evaluation sustain it. This new empowerment produces greater satisfaction among teachers, presumably resulting in better teaching and schooling. Professional growth occurs because:

- **Teachers have significant roles in diversifying schools.** It is teachers' knowledge and insights which provide the base for distinctive schools or programs. This is especially true if teacher assignments are strongly aligned to particular schools based on their skills, interests, and abilities. In developing distinctive programs, teachers become researchers, searching for resources to justify their interest in certain programs.

- **Teachers act as recruiters of students for their school.** Teachers learn to become articulate about their school's mission and develop pride in its program. This marketing role brings teachers out of their classrooms and into new relationships with each other, with parents, and with their

communities. Choice plans tap into teachers' competitive spirit, or, in some cases, "their will to survive," says Associate Principal Paul Durand about his school when it faced the probability of a severe enrollment decline. Instead of hiring recruiters, teachers "got fired up" and spread the work about their school, he says. The threat of losing teaching jobs became a real motivator and coalition-builder.

- **Teachers can have professional responsibilities in choice programs.** Schools designed around special missions require a greater role by teachers in managing schools. There will be too many new and crucial decisions which could either allow or prevent old patterns of authority from prevailing in choice schools. Therefore, if teachers are empowered, part of their management role will be to fine-tune the structure they have agreed to, constantly using their knowledge of student progress to modify and improve the school's efforts.

In Sum . . .

Benefits will accrue to those who challenge the status quo and create schools of choice within the public school system. Parents, administrators, and teachers take on new roles and responsibilities when implementing choice programs.

Some benefits are:

- greater parent involvement,
- invigorated faculty,
- diversification of curricula and schools, and
- better use of space and school facilities.

Examples of the new roles are:

- parents as choosers of schools,
- administrators as recruiters of students, and
- teachers as school designers.

Roundtable members emphasize that these new roles can be experienced and these benefits realized if a community plans and implements a choice program.

Conclusion

"Choice, more than other reforms, has the potential to drive system change and reform."

—Robert Wedl, Minnesota Department of Education

Choice should not be viewed as a task, but, rather, as the opportunity to succeed at systemic change. With the experience that is accumulating around the country, those now considering adopting policies and programs for choice can draw upon a rich base to shape their individual visions and plans—and move toward transforming public education.

Roundtable members offer the following reminders for those exploring public school choice:

- **View choice as a catalyst for school restructuring.** Understand that public school choice can help schools better serve students by helping to diversify schools; aiding school-based decisionmaking and restructuring; increasing teacher professionalism; institutionalizing the empowerment of parents; and by furthering integration and equity in American education.

- **Encourage communities to tailor their public school choice plan to their own needs and strengths.** It is the process of developing the vision and the plan which empowers the individuals involved, a process which would be compromised if the plan is copied or imposed.

- **Be patient.** Building momentum, creating a vision, coping with the many practical problems, training people, monitoring the implementation—all of these take time to plan and to come to fruition.

- **Be prepared.** School districts and schools should commit time and resources to training staff—including bus drivers, custodians, secretaries, and volunteers—for their new roles. Researcher Mary Anne Raywid suggests that it is the long-range responsibility of university training programs and state certification procedures to prepare teachers and administrators for the new skills required in designing and operating choice plans. And since some districts are going to be motivated to change by the action of parents, this is an argument, says Stephanie Counts, for giving parents the training and knowledge base to make choices.

- **Recognize that making new and profoundly different decisions as those regarding choice may create, at least temporarily, contradictory policies.** The old and the new exist side by side for a while, and there will be different levels of understanding by different groups. For example,

  —In Lowell, Massachusetts, the school board voted on the same evening "for all schools to be schools of choice, and then for all schools to have a unified curriculum," says George Tsapatsaris.

  —In Minnesota, says Paul Durand, school officials have to balance increasing state requirements for curricula and graduation while fulfilling a statewide choice plan.

  —In New York, Mary Anne Raywid cites the Board of Regents' policies that call for interdisciplinary instruction but the state testing program does not reflect this mandate.

- **Be committed to your plan's goals.** Do not decide to implement choice merely because it is a "hot" topic. The Roundtable believes that public school choice is no longer a fringe issue in education; it is moving to the center of the reform movement in many school districts and states.

The Roundtable provides this report to education practitioners with hopes that they will thoughtfully consider designing and implementing a public school choice program in their community.

About the OERI Roundtable on Public School Choice

Since January 1989, when OERI selected 14 innovative and experienced individuals to sit on the Roundtable, 5 have switched jobs or been promoted in their school systems, 2 have moved to other systems, and 1, tragically, died. Remarkably, with all those changes, only one of the choice programs has folded. OERI staff could have purged that program and its controversial superintendent from the Roundtable's report, but chose not to do so. Instead, here is some background and a caveat.

In December 1990, Walter Marks was fired by the school board, as the Richmond Unified Schools District's financial situation deteriorated. To avoid bankruptcy, the district decided to discontinue the system for choice in the 1991-92 school year.

Marks' vision and enthusiasm for choice are still admired, but his disregard of his fiduciary responsibilities to his district is not. To rapidly build his expansive "system of choice," he drastically deepened his district's debt. The ideas and lessons that can be learned from Richmond's efforts are valuable. Because of this, and because it was not Marks' vision but execution that was flawed, the one Roundtable public school choice program that has failed has been retained in this report. If anything, that failure underlines the success of the programs that have used more responsible approaches to school choice finance.

Description of Roundtable Public School Choice Programs

Richmond Unified Schools
Richmond, California

Dissatisfied with the poor performance of their 48 schools, the Richmond Unified Schools Board of Education hired a new superintendent in July 1987. Walter Marks brought to this economically and ethnically diverse district a plan for a system of choice, an intra-district open enrollment program. The plan was phased in, starting with 5 schools in the middle of the 1987-88 school year, 24 more in September 1988, and the last 19 in 1989.

For more information, contact

Patricia Howlett
Executive Director
School Community Relations Foundation
3692 DeRosa Court
Concord, CA 94528
(510) 687-8313

The Key School
Indianapolis, Indiana

Patricia Bolanos and seven other elementary teachers independently developed the concept and structure of the Key School. When it opened in 1987, it was the eighth magnet school among the district's 68 elementary schools. Key currently enrolls 175 students in prekindergarten through sixth grade. Key's theme-based, interdisciplinary curriculum is grounded in these teachers' work in urban education and their understanding of child development, student motivation, and Harvard University Professor Howard Gardner's theories of multiple forms of intelligence.

For more information, contact

Patricia Bolanos
Principal
The Key School
Indianapolis Public Schools
1401 East Tenth Street
Indianapolis, IN 46201
(317) 226-4297

Cambridge Public Schools
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Cambridge's controlled choice desegregation plan was put into effect in 1981. The plan, the final step in completely desegregating the district's elementary (K-8) schools, eliminated local attendance zones and allowed all students equal access to all schools and special programs. Some choices encompass an entire school building, others are school-within-a-school options. Among the choices offered are a Spanish/English two-way language immersion program, open classroom programs, computer-assisted instruction, arts in education, conversational Spanish, and traditional programs.

For more information, contact

Dorothy Jones
208 Holland Street
Sommerville, MA 02144
(617) 623-5610

Margaret Gallagher
Citywide Parent Coordinator
Parent Information Center
850 Cambridge Street
Cambridge, MA 02141
(617) 349-6550

Lowell Public Schools
Lowell, Massachusetts

As part of a voluntary desegregation plan developed by the school superintendent, choice in the form of magnet schools was first offered to Lowell parents and students in 1980. When, in 1987, the magnets were found to be insufficient for desegregation purposes, a systemwide program of controlled choice was established. Today, 11,000 of the district's 13,500 enrollment select a school on the basis of its theme. Parents and students are assisted in making their choices by specialists at the parent information center located in the central business district.

For more information, contact

George Tsapatsaris
Superintendent
Lowell Public Schools
89 Appleton Street
Lowell, MA 01852
(508) 937-7614

Kansas City and Suburban Public Schools
Kansas City, Missouri

This choice program resulted from a series of school district-proposed, court-ordered desegregation decrees beginning in 1985 that established a comprehensive system of well-financed magnet schools and required related capital improvements. Under the plan, all the district's 21 secondary schools are magnets, with specialized themes and extra resources, and 34 of the district's 52 elementary schools are magnets. Students from surrounding public school districts are eligible to apply for enrollment in the city magnets.

For more information, contact

Sue Fulson
Kansas City School Board Member
5342 Lydia Avenue
Kansas City, MO 64110
(816) 871-7621

St. Louis City and Suburban Public Schools
St. Louis, Missouri

This interdistrict choice program resulted from the 1980 settlement agreement of a law suit by one urban district and two other plaintiff parties against the suburban school districts. The program encourages minority students to choose which school they wish to attend, either a magnet school, a suburban school, or one of their home district's schools. White students from the suburbs are encouraged to select a city school. All transfer-related matters, such as recruitment, assignment, transportation, finance, and staff development, are handled by the Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating Council created by the settlement agreement.

For more information, contact

Susan Uchitelle
Director
Voluntary Interdistrict Coordinating
Executive Council
10601 Clayton Road
St. Louis, MO 63131
(314) 432-0079

Chester Edmonds
Director
St. Louis Recruitment and Counseling Center
1520 South Grand Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63104
(314) 771-4500

Minnesota Public Schools
Minnesota

Minnesota has instituted five programs which offer a variety of choices to its students: **area learning centers**, to provide students with different methods of teaching and learning to assure success in school; **school district enrollment options** (open enrollment), to give families the opportunity to select the public schools their children attend outside of the district in which they live; **high school graduation incentives**, to provide incentives for students to enroll in alternative programs in order to complete their high school education; **postsecondary enrollment options**, to provide 11th- and 12th-graders the opportunity to take college courses for high school credit; and **outcomes-based charter schools**, to offer teachers the opportunity to create and run a school of their own design.

For more information, contact

Robert Wedl
Assistant Manager for Special Education
Minnesota Department of Education
711 Capitol Square Building
550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, MN 55101
(612) 296-9298

Brooklyn Center High School
Brooklyn Center, Minnesota

Three years prior to establishing statewide choice in Minnesota, Brooklyn Center High School (BCHS) made an interdistrict agreement with a neighboring district. Open enrollment between the two high schools alleviated overcrowding for one and reversed declining enrollment for the other. Now under the statewide program, the nonresident portion of Brooklyn Center High School's enrollment has grown to almost one-third. BCHS offers a variety of special programs to its students and their parents and members of the community.

For more information, contact

Paul Durand
Associate Principal
Brooklyn Center High School
6500 Humboldt Avenue North
Brooklyn Center, MN 55430
(612) 561-2120

Nebraska Public Schools
Nebraska

The state legislature enacted a law in 1989 establishing an interdistrict enrollment option for all Nebraska students. For the fall of 1990, district participation was voluntary since the program does not fully become operational until the 1993-94 school year. The program will reimburse schools approximately 50 percent of per pupil cost for each nonresident student from a $954,000 tuition fund allocated by the legislature. Additionally, enrollment option participants who qualify for free or reduced-price meals will receive some transportation cost reimbursement.

For more information, contact

Roger Hudson
Director
Enrollment Option Program
Nebraska State Department of Education
301 Centennial Mall Street
Lincoln, NE 68509
(402) 471-2743

New York City School District 4
New York City, New York

New York City School District 4, in East Harlem, instituted its system of choice slowly and deliberately in 1974. What started as 3 small alternative schools has evolved into 23 alternative and 9 bilingual schools, many of which are schools-within-schools. Having adopted an open zoning model, the district is free to design schools that extended ownership of the schools to students, parents, and professional staff.

For more information, contact

John Falco
Director
Alternative Schools
319 East 117 Street
New York, NY 10035
(212) 860-5974

White Plains Public Schools
White Plains, New York

As part of a comprehensive restructuring effort initiated in 1988, a controlled parents' choice plan was developed to ensure that all the district's schools would be racially and ethnically balanced; to provide programmatic options to parents; and to stimulate more creative program planning in the schools. The Controlled Parents Choice Program offers parents of incoming youngsters the opportunity to choose among the district's five elementary schools. Each school has a special theme: science and technology, communications arts, partnerships, center for active learning, and global education. The school themes were developed by school-based management groups called Leadership Councils.

For more information, contact

Saul Yanofsky
Superintendent
White Plains Public Schools
5 Homeside Lane
White Plains, NY 10605
(914) 422-2019

Laurette Young
Coordinator
Parent Information Center
128 Grandview Avenue
White Plains, NY 10605
(914) 422-2113

Piedmont Open Middle School
Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina

In the mid-seventies, the parents and staff within this local district initiated the development of an optional open education program. It started with Piedmont Open Middle School, which serves 655 students in grades six through nine. The school usually has thousands of applicants for those spaces. The school emphasizes open educational ideologies, such as self-directed learning, and offers specialized programs and more than 125 diversified courses. The school features a nationwide exchange program, a contemporary technology lab, and a video production studio.

For more information, contact

Stephanie Counts
Coordinator of Magnet Schools
Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System
Box 30035
701 East 2nd Street
Charlotte, NC 28230
(704) 379-7337

Eugene Public Schools
Eugene, Oregon

Back in 1974, choice programs were first promoted by then-Superintendent Tom Payzant. Eugene offers both open enrollment to all students to any district school and alternative schools to provide special approaches to instruction or curriculum. Typically offered in a school-within-a-school format, examples of alternative schools are language immersion schools, where from first grade the standard curriculum is taught for half the day in French, Spanish, or Japanese and the other half in English; and parent involvement schools, where parents set the elementary school's goals by working as the school's board of directors.

For more information, contact

Jerry Colonna
Director, Secondary Education
(503) 687-3351 or

Tom Henry
Director, Elementary Education
(503) 687-3246
Eugene Public Schools
200 North Monroe Street
Eugene, OR 97402

Seattle Public Schools
Seattle, Washington

Controlled choice was initiated in Seattle in September 1989 in order to provide a more equitable student assignment plan for all students and to maximize the ability of students and families to select their most desired school assignment. (A more limited choice program was made available to Seattle's high schoolers in 1976.) Among the many options available at the elementary level are a basic skills school emphasizing the use of educational technology in providing instruction in all subjects and a school with a curriculum organized around the exploration of world cultures. At the high school level one of Seattle's magnet programs—the Marine/Health Science Magnet—draws upon the areas' marine, zoological, and health science resources.

For more information, contact

Larry Matsuda
Assistant Superintendent
Seattle Public Schools
Administrative Service Center
815 4th Avenue North
Seattle, WA 98109
(206) 298-7000

Description of OERI Publications on Choice

Choosing a School for Your Child

(Released in English May 1989 and in Spanish August 1990)

U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs
Consumer Information Center–Department 597V
Pueblo, CO 81009
One English copy free or ERIC ED302872

National Clearinghouse
Bilingual Education
1118 22nd Street NW
Washington, DC 20037
1-800-321-6223
One Spanish copy free

Parents can learn about the options currently available to them in *Choosing a School for Your Child*. It takes the reader step by step through the process of finding the best school. It also includes a checklist of questions to ask when requesting information from a school and when visiting a school.

Choosing Better Schools: The Five Regional Meetings on Choice in Education

(Released December 1990)

U.S. Department of Education
Center for Choice in Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202
1-800-442-PICK

In the fall of 1989, the U.S. Secretary of Education convened five regional meetings to encourage support for school choice at the state and local levels. This booklet summarizes the meetings held in East Harlem, New York; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Charlotte, North Carolina; Denver, Colorado; and Richmond, California.

Improving Schools and Empowering Parents: Choice in American Education

(Released October 1989)

Superintendent of Documents
Government Printing Office
Washington, DC 20402
Stock #065-000-00386-4
Cost $3.00

or

ERIC ED311607

To demonstrate the value of allowing parents more choice in where their children attend school, the White House and the U.S. Department of Education hosted a workshop in January 1989. This booklet summarizes the workshop and outlines the benefits of carefully planned choice programs. It also describes successful choice programs in Minnesota, New York, Massachusetts, and California.

Choice of Schools in Six Nations

(Released December 1989)

Superintendent of Documents
Government Printing Office
Washington, DC 20402-9325
Stock #065-000-00388-1
Cost $7.50

or

ERIC ED316478

While the idea and practice of school choice are surprisingly new in the United States, they are not so in France, Great Britain, West Germany, Canada, The Netherlands, and Belgium. The book's author, Dr. Charles Glenn, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Department of Education's Office of Educational Equity, explains how the education desires of parents are respected and accommodated by these nations.

Progress, Problems and Prospects of State Education Choice Plans

(OPBE Monograph, July 1989)

U.S. Departm. of Education
Center for Choice in Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20202
1-800-442-PICK

This commissioned paper includes a survey of actions taken by all 50 states as well as an analysis of those efforts. The paper covers four areas: the public's interest in public school choice, state and federal response to this growing interest, research on existing choice programs, and prospects for expanding state efforts to promote public school choice.

Selected Recent Publications on Choice

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's Panel on Public Schools of Choice, *Public Schools of Choice* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1990).

Chrisse Bamber, *Public School Choice: An Equal Chance for All?* (Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1990).

William Banach, *Creating Change in an Era of Choice: A Principal's Step-by-Step Workbook for Educational Planning and Marketing* (Romeo, MI: William J. Banach Associates, Inc., 1991).

Joseph and Diane Bast, eds., *Rebuilding America's Schools: Vouchers, Credits, and Privatization* (Chicago, IL: The Heartland Institute, 1991).

William Boyd and Herbert Walberg, eds., *Choice in Education: Potential and Problems* (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan Press, 1990).

John Chubb and Terry Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1990).

Evans Clinchy, *Planning for Schools of Choice: Achieving Equity and Excellence* (Books I-IV) (Andover, MA: New England Center for Equity Assistance, 1989-90).

William Clune and John Witte, eds., *Choice and Control in American Education* (Volumes 1 and 2) (Bristol, PA: The Falmer Press, 1990).

Richard Elmore, *Working Models of Choice in Public Education* (New Brunswick, NJ: Center for Policy Research in Education, 1990).

Anne Lewis, *Choices in Schools: What's Ahead and What to Do* (Arlington, VA: National School Public Relations Association, 1990).

Myron Lieberman, *Public School Choice: Current Issues, Future Prospects* (Lancaster, PA: 1990).

Joe Nathan, ed., *Public Schools By Choice: Expanding Opportunities for Parents, Students, and Teachers* (St. Paul, MN: Institute for Learning and Teaching, 1989).

Allan Odden, *A New School Finance for Public School Choice* (Los Angeles, CA: Center for Research in Education Finance, 1991).

Ruth Randall and Keith Geiger, *School Choice: Issues and Answers* (Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service, 1991).

Mary Anne Raywid, *The Case for Public Schools of Choice* (Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappan Foundation, 1989).

Rona Wilensky, *Policy Guide: A State Policy Maker's Guide to Public School Choice* (Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States, 1989).

Selected Sources of Information

Center for Choice in Education

U.S. Department of Education
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Washington, DC 20208

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1-800-442-PICK

Center for School Change

Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of
Public Affairs
University of Minnesota
140 Humphrey Center
301 Nineteenth Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Contact: Joe Nathan
(612) 625-3506

Center for the Study of Educational Alternatives

Hofstra University
Hempstead, NY 11550

Contact: Mary Anne Raywid
(516) 560-5766

Institute for Responsive Education

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Office of Educational Equity

Massachusetts Department of Education
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Quincy, MA 02169-5183

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A Checklist of Things to Consider and to Tailor to YOUR Community When Implementing a Public School Choice Program

[Note: This checklist is not exhaustive.]

Set the stage:

- Define your vision of schooling in a choice program
- Tap all leadership and community resources
- Be motivated

When developing choices, creating distinctive schools,

Consider:

- ☐ How fast your community wants to proceed
- ☐ If your community wants to provide "choice" to teachers as well as parents and students
- ☐ If your community wants to collaborate with neighboring districts to expand the choice program's offerings

Gather information through:

- ☐ Surveys
- ☐ Community discussions
- ☐ School statistics and records review

When developing an outreach plan for informing your community about choices offered,

Consider:

- ☐ Ways to reach all those who can or must choose
- ☐ Ways to ensure fairness
- ☐ Ways to use all community resources
- ☐ Ways to be flexible

Decide which modes of communication fit your choice program and your community:

- ☐ Media campaigns
- ☐ Brochures
- ☐ Hotlines
- ☐ Parent information centers
- ☐ Direct recruitment

When establishing student assignment policies and procedures,

Weigh and set priorities for accommodating:

- ☐ Racial balance
- ☐ Building capacity
- ☐ Gender balance
- ☐ Sibling preferences
- ☐ Neighborhood resident preferences

Consider:

- ☐ Requiring all parents and students to submit school preferences
- ☐ Using preferencing data information to guide the replication of schools
- ☐ Providing an appeals process when assignments are not satisfactory

Decide which of these or other means of preferencing fit your choice program, your community:

- ☐ Number of preferences allowed
- ☐ Timing for submitting preferences
- ☐ Centralized collection of preferences

Decide which method of student assignment fits your choice program, your community:

- ☐ Lottery by computer
- ☐ Assignment by staff after student interviews
- ☐ Blend of random or subjective approaches

When shaping the transportation system,

Consider:

- ☐ Maximum distance or time students should travel
- ☐ Safety of routes traveled by foot
- ☐ Fairness of transportation offerings
- ☐ Efficiency and cost of transportation offered

Decide which transportation solutions fit your choice program, your community:

- ☐ Geographic zones offering an array of school choices
- ☐ Staggered bus schedules
- ☐ A mix of cars, vans, buses, or taxicabs to provide transportation
- ☐ Reimbursing transportation costs

When deciding how to finance your public school choice program,

Consider:

- ☐ Providing incentives for participation
- ☐ Providing flexibility for participation

Determine if your community should:

- ☐ Shift budget priorities
- ☐ Share costs with neighbors
- ☐ Search for private sector funding

Overall, remember to:

- Keep your focus on improving student learning
- Be creative, think big
- Tap ideas and efforts of those who have implemented choice
- Be committed to your vision

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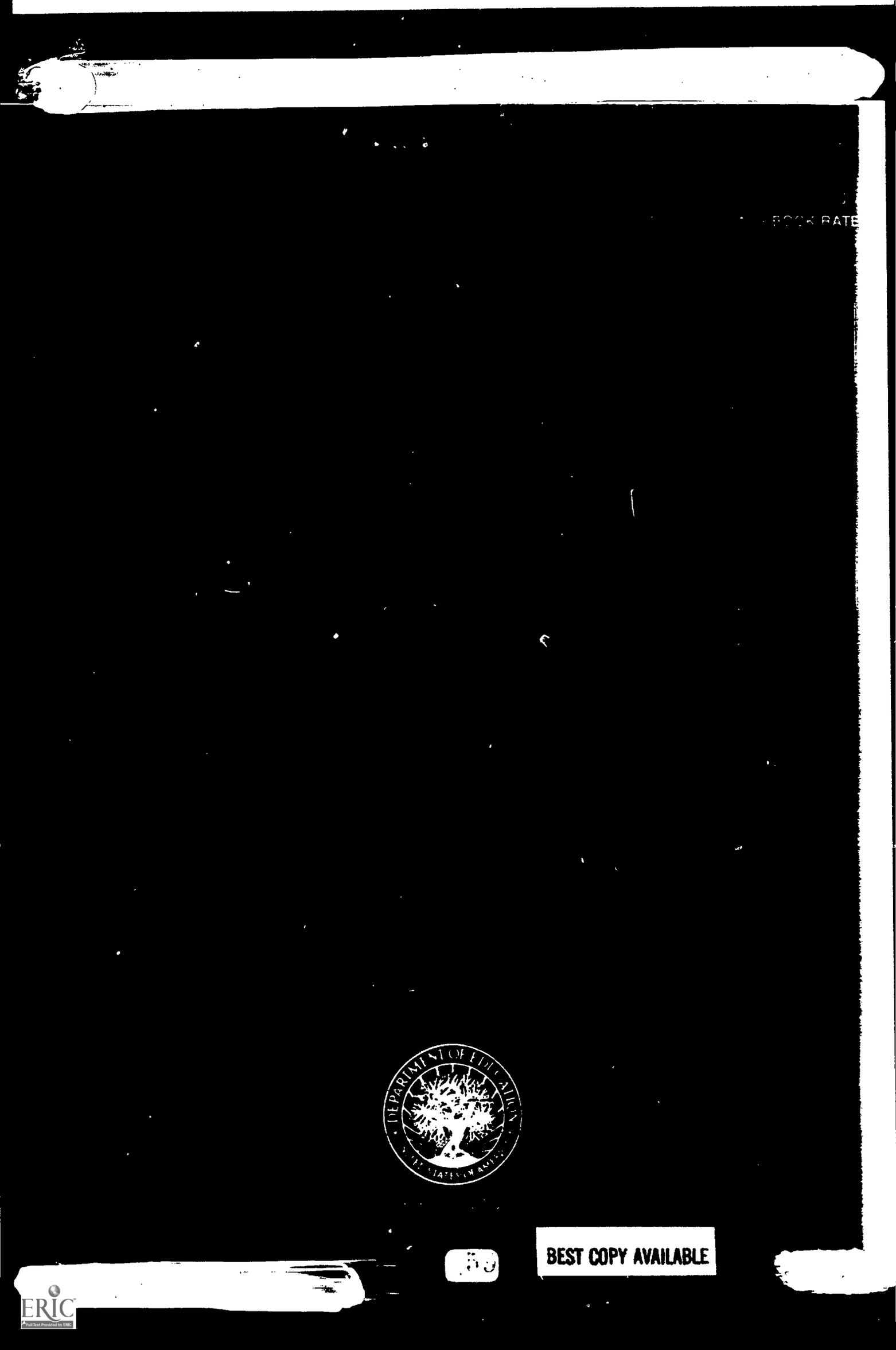
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