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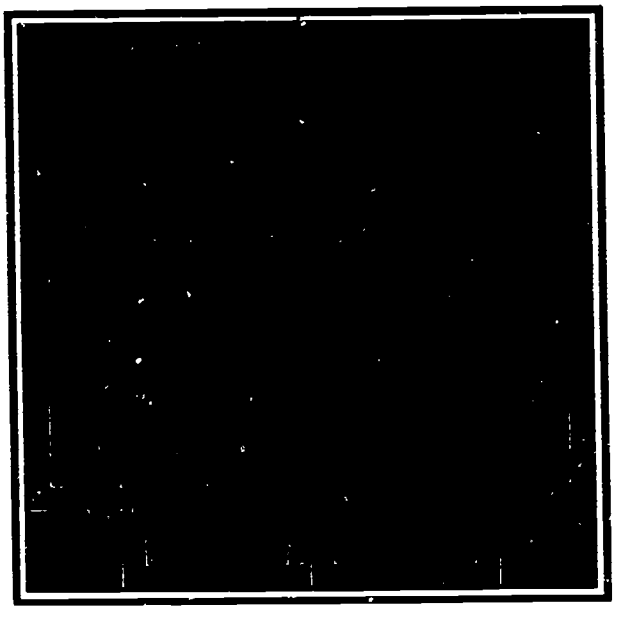
ABSTRACT

The keynote addresses introduced conference participants both to general perspectives on school choice and to a specific focus on Maryland issues, concerns, and problems. In the panel discussion, four educational administrators discussed particular aspects of choice plans in their own subdivisions in different states. In the six discussion groups, participants addressed particular areas of concern related to choice in Maryland: (1) integration (two groups) (2) student achievement and school performance; (3) allocation and distribution of resources; and (4) decision-making and governance powers (two groups). Finally, all speakers, panelists, and participants gathered for a summary session on "Options for Maryland." The document contains the text of two keynote addresses, summaries of the panel discussion, and lists of questions provided to panelists and discussion groups. Participants concluded that choice plans and magnet school programs are one viable means of improving the quality of education, and that parental commitment is vital. (Includes 16 references.) (MLF)

Public School Choice: An Option for Maryland?

A REPORT FROM A WORKING CONFERENCE



Sponsored by

Coppin State College

and

Metropolitan Education Coalition

October 23, 1989

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Individual membership $15.00 Organizational membership $40.00

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I INTRODUCTION

A. Rationale for and Sponsorhip of the Conference

One avenue of improvement of public school education attempted in and across school districts in other states (e.g., Massachusetts, Minnesota, New York, Wisconsin) and in Montgomery and Prince George's Counties in Maryland is CHOICE: offering parents the opportunity to choose, generally within a specified framework, the public school at which their children would be educated. The various CHOICE programs set their own conditions for implementation and have enjoyed varying degrees of success and failure.

In an effort to stimulate discussion of CHOICE as an option for the improvement of public education in Maryland, COPPIN STATE COLLEGE and THE METROPOLITAN EDUCATION COALITION, organized and presented a conference on "Public School CHOICE: An Option for Maryland?" In this "working conference," held October 23, 1989, at Coppin State College, participants were provided with "an opportunity to interact with some of the best thinkers . . . in the nation on CHOICE" and to hear about their experiences in implementing this concept. The conference was designed to "provide a base from which continued exploration, collaboration, and dialogue will emanate," a stimulus to continued discussion of CHOICE leading to decisions within local subdivisions and possibly within the State as a whole about the implementation of CHOICE.

The Conference was organized into four units. The KEYNOTE ADDRESSES introduced the participants both to general PERSPECTIVES ON CHOICE and to a specific FOCUS ON MARYLAND issues, concerns, and problems. In the PANEL DISCUSSION four education administrators discussed particular aspects of CHOICE plans in their own subdivisions in different states. In the six DISCUSSION GROUPS, participants addressed particular areas of concern related to CHOICE in Maryland. Finally, all speakers, panelists, and participants gathered for a summary session on OPTIONS FOR MARYLAND? Specific discussion of those units follows in this report.

COPPIN STATE COLLEGE, one of the historically Black institutions of higher education in the University of Maryland System, is an urban four-year liberal arts college providing academic programs in the arts and sciences, teacher education, nursing, graduate education, and continuing education. Currently a non-residential institution, the College is located in the heart of Baltimore's inner city. The College is fully accredited and focuses on meeting the needs of students from Baltimore's central city. One way Coppin meets these needs is by offering flexibility in course scheduling with convenient day, evening, and weekend classes. The College has a long history and tradition of active involvement in public education, starting with its founding in 1900 as a "colored normal school." Large numbers of Baltimore City Public School teachers and administrators are Coppin alumni. The College has continued its innovative approach to public education in the COPPIN-HOPKINS HUMANITIES PROGRAM IN THE BALTIMORE CITY SCHOOLS, a collaborative program designed to train secondary teachers to teach critical reading and thinking through discussion of classic texts (Plato's Republic, Dante's Inferno, de Tocqueville's Democracy in America). This program is funded primarily by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

THE METROPOLITAN EDUCATION COALITION strives to enable both individuals and organizations to improve the quality of education throughout the metropolitan Baltimore region and the state. It works toward this goal by educating its members and the general public about important issues and by encouraging individuals and organizations from business, community groups, labor, school systems,

higher education institutions, and parent organizations to share resources, talents, and information. The Coalition has sponsored forums to discuss Maryland's proposed math and science high school and the Governor's Commission on School Performance (Sondheim Report), annual workshops on "How to Be an Effective Advocate for Education," regional forums with school board presidents and superintendents discussing local and regional priorities, and twelve issue groups exploring strategies for improving the region's educational opportunities.

The Conference was funded by THE ABELL FOUNDATION, INC., a private Baltimore foundation committed to the examination of civic issues, particularly education. It published its own study of the funding inequities faced by the Baltimore City Public Schools (A GROWING INEQUALITY, cited above), and it provides additional funding for THE COPPIN-HOPKINS PROGRAM, and the METROPOLITAN EDUCATION COALITION.

B. Moderator, Keynote Speakers, Panelists, and Co-Facilitators

MODERATOR:
Dr. Vernon L. Clark
Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Cheyney University, Pennsylvania

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:
Dr. Gary Orfield, Professor
The University of Chicago, Department of Political Science

Mr. Michael Bowler, Op-Ed Editor
The Evening Sun, Baltimore

PANELISTS:
Mr. Thomas P. Friend, Deputy Superintendent
for Educational Research & Development
Worcester Public Schools, Massachusetts

Dr. D. Bruce LaPierre, Professor
School of Law, Washington University
St. Louis, Missouri

Heather Lewis, Director
Center for Collaborative Education
New York, New York

Dr. Deborah M. McGriff, Deputy Superintendent
Milwaukee Public Schools, Wisconsin

CO-FACILITATORS:
Dr. Patsy B. Blackshear, Associate Superintendent
Baltimore City Public Schools

George W. Buntin, Executive Director
NAACP, Baltimore Branch

Mary S. Johnson
MEC Member, BUILD Member

Leslie Jones, Teacher
Fallstaff Middle School, Baltimore

William T. Manning, Member
Governor's Commission on School Performance

Dr. Louise F. Waynant, Associate Superintendent
Prince Georges County Public Schools

II KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

A. Perspectives on CHOICE - Dr. Gary Orfield

Dr. Gary Orfield has been professor of political science, public policy, and education at The University of Chicago since 1982. The author of numerous major studies of minority rights, Congress, and U.S. social policy, including Must We Bus? Segregated Schools and National Policy, for more than a decade Dr. Orfield has worked actively with federal, state, and local agencies, courts, and community organizations in the making and evaluation of civil rights policies. Currently, he is working on several research projects, and he serves as director of the National School Desegregation Research Project, which has commissioned twenty-two new research reports and a series of analyses of changes in the racial composition and segregation of American public schools in the 1980's. Dr. Orfield received his Ph. D. in political science from the University of Chicago; in addition to his research and writing, his professional activities include many consultative positions.

Text of Keynote Address

[Because of problems with the recording equipment, the first few moments of Mr. Orfield's address were not recorded. The paragraph below in parentheses is a summary of that part of the address. The form of the text of the address has been edited for publication.]

(The origins of American public education lie in efforts since 1800 to develop uniform schools, common schools which would provide a common educational basis for all. The roots of the CHOICE concept lie in several developments in American public education particularly since the Supreme Court's 1954 Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education school desegregation decision. Many states in the South, in an effort to maintain separate black and white schools, implemented different CHOICE plans which allowed white students to choose to attend white schools. In 1965-66 in Maryland, every student was given the opportunity to choose the high school he or she wished to attend, and transportation was provided.)

Federal dollars came into play on behalf of CHOICE in the 1970's under the Emergency School Aid Act which was designed to pay the educational costs of desegregation and create some federal assistance for the desegregation process. In Ohio, Senator John Glenn wrote into that law an amendment that provided financing for magnet schools, and that helped spread the idea of magnet schools around the country.

The Emergency School Aid Act, including the magnet school provisions, was repealed in 1981 as part of the first Reagan budget. That Administration opposed this idea and favored vouchers that would permit students to transfer to private schools instead. The Act was reinstated in part on a much smaller scale in legislation that was sponsored by Senator Moynihan that helped finance some of the upper New York State magnet school programs and others around the country.

By the end of the Reagan administration, they had moved from strong resistance to CHOICE plans to seeing CHOICE plans as salvation. In President Reagan's last State of the Union message, he strongly endorsed CHOICE plans. And the magnet school plan was extended significantly, although it's still fairly small in the federal budget.

Another place where CHOICE plans were revised was in most of the court-ordered desegregation plans in the 1980's. One of the basic problems that desegregation planners faced in the 1980's was that the Supreme Court had previously made it very difficult to achieve city-suburban desegregation in the 1970's

in its decision in the Detroit case Milliken vs. Bradley. That created a tremendously difficult set of problems for developing desegregation plans limited to central cities that were largely minority. The basic problem is, for example, that the 25 largest central city school districts in the United States contain about 30% of the minority children, but only 3% of the white children. It's very hard to accomplish desegregation under those circumstances. Those are cities that also have in many cases different racial problems and a lot of white resistance to school desegregation orders.

In order to try to make the system more attractive to whites, to make the desegregation process less conflictual, and to create some tangible reward for the middle class parents who were involved, many school districts moved toward creating magnet schools that would be very attractive, with desegregation goals attached to them. That was done in almost all the desegregation plans in the 1980's as at least part of the plan.

In the very recent years, a new development that you'll hear about later called controlled CHOICE has become important as a desegregation strategy in several large cities. It's now been adopted at least temporarily in Boston, in Little Rock, in Seattle, in San Jose. While it has created a lot of conflict within those cities, the basic idea is to force people to make several CHOICEs and to assign them to the highest possible CHOICE within the desegregation goals and, thus, to alleviate some of the mandatory elements of desegregation assignments by getting the parents to think about what their educational CHOICEs might be.

There are many different roots of the CHOICE movement. They come out of efforts to avoid desegregation, out of efforts to foster desegregation, and out of the conservative idea of market-driven models of school reform.

For the conservatives, the basic problem that they defined about public education in the country wasn't social or economic inequity, unequal financing, or anything else, but that they thought that there was a public school monopoly. The reason the public schools weren't functioning was that there was a monopoly of teachers unions and bureaucracies that were conspiring to limit options and so forth. And they saw vouchers or CHOICE systems as ways to introduce a market mechanism and competition into this monopolistic system.

When the voucher movement failed--and it failed in Congress on a number of occasions because of the strength of public school forces in the country; it also failed in referenda in states, in Michigan and elsewhere, and in Washington, D.C.--they moved towards a CHOICE emphasis within public schools as their way to implement this market model within the system of public education.

Another root for what we're talking about now comes out of the Minnesota reforms that are now several years old which created the right of students to transfer any place they wanted in the state in theory, although the school districts didn't have to receive students until this coming year. It became very popular nationally because it offered a lot of CHOICE, and it cost nothing because there was almost no infrastructure built in, including no public transportation. It got a great deal of attention from the national administration and from The National Governors Association, in part because it was very attractive and very cheap. And also, by the way, it had very small effects and very strong positive public relations, a combination which is almost your ideal political initiative.

So those are some of the various roots that we have. You can see it's a complex issue: there are many different ways of conceiving it, there are many different ways of doing it, and there are many different

roots that come into the evolution of it as an idea.

What do we actually know about how it works educationally? The answer is that we know extremely little so far. There was a national magnet school study, and there have been quite a few reports on CHOICE and magnet schools in particular school districts. A recent summary of them was done by Ralph Black of the Council of Chief State School Officers, who was the principal investigator in the National Magnet School Study; he did the study for a CHOICE conference at the University of Wisconsin this spring, where he reviewed the situation all over the country. He found that there were no national data that had any reasonable controls at all that could give an idea of the outcome of CHOICE plans. He found that almost all studies of CHOICE plans show above-average performance and achievement within CHOICE schools, but that if you begin to ask the simplest research questions, almost none of the studies answers them.

In other words, there are two different ways that you could have positive results from CHOICE schools. One would be that the CHOICE schools made a big difference; the other would be that they got better students to start with. Either way, you'd get a very positive finding. If I were to go into a large campus in this state that wasn't very selective in terms of its admissions policy and select out 10% of the most able students and put them in a small campus somewhere, that campus would look very good. And people would be very excited about it. It would look very good even if it didn't have any net educational benefits just because it would concentrate students that were very high-achieving and highly motivated.

And that's what we call selectivity bias as a research problem. In order to really look at the net effect of that campus, we'd have to look at how the students did in that setting compared with how they were doing in the old setting and see whether or not there was a net benefit.

Basically, the great majority of studies that have been done of magnet schools and CHOICE plans do not do that. They just look at how the students are doing in the new setting, and they don't control for the selectivity issue. And virtually none of them, even those that do control for educational background of the students who come into the magnet schools, controls for motivation, interest of parents and so on and so forth, the other things that would tend to produce the CHOICE that is made.

So that the truth is at this point that we know that CHOICE plans are expanding very rapidly in the country, we know they're very popular, we know that CHOICE schools have generally higher test scores than non-CHOICE schools. But we know almost nothing about their net educational effect independent of the selectivity of their student body. The necessary research has not been done yet. Black found only a couple of studies in school districts around the country that even controlled for the students' educational background. In other words, most of them are totally worthless as serious research studies, and none of them is fully controlled for all of the important background factors of the families.

The fact is that we're moving very fast on the CHOICE issue with very limited knowledge at this stage, and even if we decided we needed to obtain the right body of knowledge we wouldn't have it for several years. Thus, most of the decisions will be made before we know anything for sure about the educational effect of these programs.

In terms of their desegregation effects, the pattern is very mixed. There are some pure CHOICE plans that have had some significant improvement in desegregation levels; there are others that have had virtually none. And it appears that it's most difficult to have positive effects in the larger school districts with larger concentrations of minority children and greater inequities.

What, then, are some of the reasons we might want to consider CHOICE plans? Since we don't know very much for sure, these are reasons that are basically not research based but are probably true.

Central city school systems do have bureaucracies and are rigid and don't have very good schools in many cases, and there is, thus, a lot of incentive to try almost any experiment. And it's a fact that we have been trying many different experiments through the last twenty years, many of them under federal and state direction or with grants from foundations. We need to try many things. Whatever we try, we should make sure that we do find out whether it really does have any effect. Most central city school systems don't have the capacity to do that or don't have the will to do it in a serious way. But the problems that the critics of non-CHOICE plans are raising are real problems, there's no question about that.

If we want to have desegregation with less overt initial conflict, CHOICE plans can do that. You do have less conflict at the beginning of a CHOICE plan than you have at the beginning of a mandatory desegregation plan, there's no question about that. Although the CHOICE plan may be less effective and less equitable in some respects. In terms of desegregation policy, if you're going to have desegregation in largely minority districts with a rapidly declining middle-class of both whites and minority families, CHOICE plans can have some positive effects in identifying and holding some of those families.

CHOICE plans do draw on one logical possibility that's created by student assignment programs that are not geographic: if you're going to have students moving around your school district any way, why have everybody have the same exact educational experience? If you're going to have the transportation system that permits students to move from place to place, why not offer some programs at given school sites that you really can't offer to everybody in the school district but which are valid programs? Why not open up the programs? Nobody thinks all children learn best in the same exact learning style, and nobody thinks all children have the interest to experience, say, creative dramatics or performing arts or advanced computer programming or whatever. Some children do, and some children will benefit. So there are possibilities for offering something that you can't offer to everybody, and there are certainly some benefits to that.

Some of our school districts are in such desperate shape that creating a few schools that function may be a really important policy objective in the short run. In our analysis of big city systems where we're doing some of our research projects, for example, we've concluded that most of the high schools in most of the big central cities we're studying cannot prepare a child for a college that's reasonably competitive, cannot prepare a student for most of the colleges in their own metropolitan area or their own state, in the public system. Most of them feed students only into junior colleges where very few students manage to complete a degree. There should be some places within any public school system that actually lead to college. Every place should, but there should be at least some within a public school system.

If we're going to have serious desegregation in most of our big central cities, we need to get across the city-suburban boundary line, and CHOICE plans that do permit inter-district transfers are one way that that might be done. And it is being done on a fairly large scale in a few cities in the United States now. If we can't have a mandatory city-suburban desegregation plan, having a voluntary one may be a lot better than not having any at all, although it has a good many problems as well. In one of the cities that we're studying, for example, metropolitan Atlanta, 98% of all the white children are outside the central city school systems. If the black children who live inside the central city are going to have any option of middle-class high schools that are connected to colleges, they have to go either to one of the magnet schools in the city or to a suburban school. Although there is no access to suburban schools, it would

be better to have some access to suburban schools.

In Chicago, 91% of the white children are in suburban schools, but over two-thirds of the black and Hispanic children are in central city schools, and the vast majority of them at the secondary level are below grade level. They should have some CHOICEs, somewhere, until the whole system is upgraded.

What are some of the reasons against CHOICE plans? These are pretty interesting and powerful reasons to think about CHOICE plans. They're some of the reasons why people do think about them. Some of the reasons not to go on the CHOICE route that have been raised in the debate are the following.

If you have CHOICE, it's very likely to end up by producing increasing stratification of your school system. In other words, the most desireable CHOICE schools will have very few low-income children in all likelihood and lots of middle-class children whose parents have lots of connections and much more influence than the other parents have. My children have gone to an academic magnet school in Chicago, and although it's primarily black there are relatively few low-income children compared to the rest of the city. This is a problem that's been pointed out in research by Donald Moore, at Designs for Change, an organization in Chicago, who has concluded that the Chicago school system has ended up with six different types of high schools within the public school system (he's found the same thing has been true, basically, in New York and Philadelphia and Boston, too): non-selective low-income schools which are virtually all black; non-selective low-to-moderate income schools; non-selective moderate income schools; selective vocational schools; selective magnet schools; selective exam schools.

All of these different kinds of schools exist within the public school system, and they offer very different kinds of educational opportunities. The non-selective low-income virtually all-minority school system within the larger school system has extremely negative levels of academic achievement, extraordinarily high drop-out rates, and so forth. A large majority of the children in those schools don't complete high school; those who do are in the 13th or 14th percentile and so forth.

You have a school system within the Chicago school system that isn't really connected to anything. And Moore argues that the CHOICE schools get more funding for the most privileged students in the school system. And, of course, they tend to attract the most talented teachers within the school system. Under the teacher contracts and under the provisions that are set for staffing CHOICE schools, teachers will naturally gravitate towards those schools if they're able to get jobs there; they're much easier and more rewarding places to teach.

So, stratification is a problem within CHOICE systems.

Many do not work very well as desegregation plans. They give the appearance of desegregation without much of the reality, unless they have a lot of controls attached to them.

Equal information and opportunity for CHOICE do not really exist. They are systematically unequal in ways that relate to race, income, connection to the school district, and so forth.

There are problems of screening. Many CHOICE schools want to give exams to let students in or auditions or something else. Almost inevitably, the screening increases the stratification, and there's a very strong tendency towards screening in many of the schools as they get more desireable and the demand builds for them.

Another problem with CHOICE plans is that over a time people tend to want to repeal the civil rights provisions in the CHOICE plan and just make it a pure right to choose. There have been major political battles over this, in Minneapolis, for example, where people said they should have the right to their CHOICE without civil rights provisions, and thus it was not accepted there. There is a political battle in Seattle now which has a new controlled CHOICE plan in which one of the candidates for mayor, the one who finished first in the primary, is advocating ending civil rights limits on the CHOICE system. There is a referendum up now in Seattle as well. Thus, CHOICE doesn't always remain attached to the civil rights goals from which it grew initially in many cases, and there is also a tendency of CHOICE plans to expand, to make more and more of the schools into non-common schools.

As schools diverge in their educational philosophy and approach, there is a problem with what to do with students who transfer when there isn't a uniform curriculum. We know a great many low-income students transfer every year, they move, their parents are evicted, they have to move. But there are many schools in inner cities that have a 30-40 or more percent turnover in a given year. If the schools aren't common, what happens to the students who move among them? It's great to be in an advanced accelerated computer magnet school in which you don't have a normal math curriculum, but what if you move to a school that does? Or what if you move in the opposite direction? Can you possibly function in that new school?

How do we come out on all this? Everybody balances these things differently. My basic feeling is that if you're going to have CHOICE, you have to think about the equity provisions, and that some of the things you have to build in as major considerations are the following.

First of all, if you're going to have CHOICEs, there should be real CHOICEs: they should be distinctive educational options that students can't get everywhere; and you shouldn't just have an open enrollment plan, you should have one that's combined with some kind of magnet programs.

The second is that you should not have screening unless it's absolutely essential. And the screening should be basically on the basis of the students' and families' interests not on the basis of anything the school does to keep students out. You should absolutely do everything you can to minimize the social class and racial consequences that come with screening. And you can do many kinds of magnet schools without screening efforts.

A third thing is that you cannot assume information exists equally in your population, that's absolutely absurd; there is absolutely no evidence to suggest that information is equally distributed. Thus, you have to have very active outreach especially to low-income and disadvantaged groups, and especially to groups, for example, that do not speak English. Sending out a complicated brochure with fifty different magnet school CHOICEs is as good as giving a family that's not literate or does not speak English no information at all. The information has to be on a personal level, and you have to make a major investment in information if you're going to have equitable CHOICE.

Another thing that you have to have in a CHOICE plan that's going to be equitable in any meaningful sense is free transportation. Not to have free transportation is to introduce a social class sorting mechanism into your school district that's really serious. In Chicago, for example, about half of the black families in the city don't own a car. Many others don't have a car that's available every morning and every afternoon to drive and pick up a student, and many don't have money for bus fare or other means of transportation. If the school district doesn't provide a way to get to school, it's not giving those families a CHOICE: it's saying they only have a CHOICE if they're over a certain income level. And

to operate a public school system with that kind of a screening mechanism goes against everything that's basic in our tradition of common school education. But we're not having any serious discussion of transportation costs in the debate over CHOICE. Transportation costs in CHOICE plans are huge. They're the most expensive kinds of transportation because you have to take students from everywhere and bring them to everywhere. And it's low density at both ends. You have to be prepared for real costs if you're going to have an equitable CHOICE plan.

There should be efforts not to allow all the best teachers to concentrate in the schools that have the most demanding educational curricula. The two most important resources in the school are the children's background and the teachers. Both of those things tend to be disproportionately concentrated in the most desireable CHOICE schools. There should be efforts in fact to lean the other way, to have special incentives to draw teachers and resources to schools that are not designated as highly selective CHOICE mechanisms.

An absolutely essential part of a CHOICE system that has equity is very firm civil rights requirements: students should not be allowed to make CHOICEs which increase segregation. There should be racial goals that are actually enforced for magnet schools, and there should be special recruitment when the system falls short of those goals.

If you are to move towards CHOICE and you want to preserve equity, you have to take into consideration each of the aspects that tends to push this system towards inequity and the considerable amount of money that this system costs. And then you have to balance the costs of this system against its benefits. Unfortunately, most of its benefits are not very clearly established yet, although I think there are real benefits attached to it if it's properly implemented.

You have a complicated job of sorting out what you mean by CHOICE in your own mind, figuring it out and putting it into law or policy so that it's clear to everyone; and if you're going to have CHOICE with equity, there are a number of provisions that you really have to take into serious consideration, and they do cost real money. Thank you.

B. Focus on Maryland - Michael Bowler

Michael Bowler is editor, Other Voices page, THE EVENING SUN (Baltimore). A former high school English teacher, Mr. Bowler has a graduate degree from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. After working at newspapers on Long Island and in White Plains, New York, Mr. Bowler joined the Sunpapers eighteen years ago. At the Sun he was a reporter and an editorial writer before assuming his current position. Mr. Bowler has reported on both public and postsecondary education for a number of years; he is a past president and a member of the board of the National Education Writers Association.

Text of Keynote Address
[The text of Mr. Bowler's address was edited for publication.]

I want to thank Coppin State College and the Metropolitan Education Coalition for inviting me today. I also must thank the funder of this conference, the Abell Foundation, which, as most of you know, is quite literally the foundation that created the sweat of my brow and the brows of my colleagues at what used to be the A. S. Abell Newspaper Company until it was sold to The Times Mirror of Los Angeles four years ago.

My assignment here today is not to deliver an editorial--a few of you will be most appreciative. Rather, it's to provide an overview of the "CHOICE" status in Maryland as I see it, to take what Gary has said and to narrow it down to focus on the state where most of us are employed and where many of us send our children to school. I'm happy to do that, and in so doing I'll use a technique that editorialists employ when they don't want to take a stand. I'll ask questions--and leave it to you to make the editorial decisions as we continue the discussions today.

Before I get to Maryland, though, a couple of words on "CHOICE." This is the most unfortunately labeled movement in the history of American education. I realized this the other day when I went to write a paragraph to precede the article Gov. Perpich of Minnesota wrote for Friday's Evening Sun on the much ballyhooed CHOICE plan for his state, one that is being considered and copied widely--or so we're told--across the country. The word "CHOICE" is too all-encompassing, so universal, so general that it almost lacks meaning.

Isn't CHOICE really a metaphor for what all of us do many, many times every day as we negotiate life? As Coppin's Bill Carroll and Jack Furlong can tell us, it's the basis for the study of philosophy. I think of poor St. Thomas Aquinas and his agony of CHOICEs. Of Robert Frost and his famous poem about the CHOICE of roads and of how, once we've made a CHOICE, we always wonder about the CHOICE we didn't make, perhaps the road less traveled. Then, too, there's the unfortunate CHOICE over which our society is split down the middle (I can attest to this as an op-ed editor and an editor of letters-to-the-editor)--the CHOICE of whether to abort a fetus. It's perfectly reasonable, it seems to me, to be pro-CHOICE on abortion and anti-CHOICE on schools. It's also perfectly reasonable to be just the reverse. Indeed, as I look at the literature on CHOICE and as I slide through my 40s, I find myself pulled from two directions on the subject of school CHOICE -and both are essentially conservative positions (as you would expect from someone of my advancing age). The one pull says, dammit, we pay for these schools, pay dearly for them, and they're not delivering what we're paying for. I have every right to send my child to another school, even to another district. The other pull says no school was ever perfect, none will ever be. I had to stick it out when things weren't going well. Presumably, that helped make me a

better person -- overcoming adversity. Why shouldn't my child have to do the same thing?

The other problem with "CHOICE" is that it has such negative connotations. Twenty years ago this month, I took two flights across Georgia in the official state plane with Governor Lester Maddox. I was covering education for The Atlanta Constitution. Maddox, who traveled with a bag of peanuts that he shared with aides and the press, was addressing "freedom of CHOICE" rallies. "Freedom of CHOICE" then was the rallying cry across the South as public schools grappled with the mandates of the Supreme Court's Brown vs. Board of Education decision and the subsequent Federal Court rulings carrying out the high court's mandate. One county I covered extensively, Hancock County, Georgia, had no whites left in the public schools. All of them had exercised a kind of CHOICE in opting for a private academy just outside of Sparta, Georgia. I called it a "segregation academy" in print, and I was sued--unsuccessfully, I hasten to add--by the academy. Today, two decades later, I know that there are families in my neighborhood, only a few miles from here, who are doing everything they can to have their children transferred from the majority black Milford Mill High School to the majority white Pikesville Senior High School. This is a kind of CHOICE, too. Is it one exercised by racists and segregationists, '80s-style? I find it difficult to make that judgment. But I find it ironic that the only two full-fledged "CHOICE" plans in Maryland, those in Prince George's and Montgomery counties, are designed and carefully monitored largely to enhance desegregation, the former under court order, the latter voluntarily.

My point is that I wish the educators had come up with something more, shall we say education-like?, in describing this movement. Something with a touch of Orwellian gobbledy-gook in it, something that the school people could claim as their own. Gary Orfield talks about "pure" CHOICE. Why don't the educators come up with the acronym PURE--Pupils Unrestricted in Recombinant Education? Or, if you prefer something more upbeat, how about Pupils Unrestricted in Regenerating Education?

But I am straying from my assignment. Let us talk about Maryland. Maryland is not, by and large, a CHOICE state. It may be a prime state, but it isn't a CHOICE one.

Naturally, we like to think of ourselves as living and working in a progressive state. And in many ways we do. But we also think and talk of ourselves as America in miniature. And in many ways we are. That is, we're fairly traditional in many of the ways we structure and operate public education. If you look on page 53 of the State Education Department's Fact Book, you'll see that we were eighth in teachers' salaries among the 50 states in 1987-88 but 42nd in per capita state expenditures for all education. We're eighth in per capita income nationally but 13th in current expenditures per pupil. Given our proximity to Washington and our generally bustling economy, this is about where we should be. The vast majority of Maryland youngsters in public schools attend "neighborhood" schools. The vast majority, I dare say, have no desire to exercise a "CHOICE" outside of the neighborhood school--certainly not outside the district. The Maryland State Teachers Association has done us a great favor in reporting for this conference on policies of the 24 school systems that allow for exceptions to the requirement that students attend zoned or neighborhood schools. They're summed up on the first couple of pages of the MSTA report. Seventeen districts, for example, allow exceptions for students to pursue a course or program of studies not offered in their neighborhood schools. These statistics appear fairly impressive, but consider, as you look at them, that they are overlapping and that they are logical and historical. I'm going to claim here, without statistical evidence in front of me, that most other districts in most other states allow similar exceptions --that Maryland, as reflected in these statistics and others--is America in miniature.

All of us are familiar with the schools in our districts that draw from far and wide--offering a kind of

CHOICE that shouldn't be overlooked. I refer to the gifted and talented centers in Baltimore County, the vocational and technical high schools around the state that have been in operation for years. The sesquicentennial of Baltimore City College last week marked a mind-boggling anniversary of a school offering education city-wide, and City, of course, is joined by the likes of Poly, Western and that upstart youngster, the School for the Arts. These are not open enrollment schools; students have to qualify to be admitted. (And I must add here that when I came to the city nearly 19 years ago, all high schools practiced open enrollment. It was a wonderful, egalitarian idea on paper, but the city simply couldn't handle it.)

The two exceptions in the state are Prince George's and Montgomery. I'm sure we'll hear much about these two magnet plans today. I'll summarize them, hoping that I'm not too far off in the particulars.

Prince George's, operating under what might be called Phase II of its sixteen-year-old or so court-ordered desegregation plan, has installed thirteen different programs in forty-seven of its 171 schools. Students can attend traditional classical academies, French immersion schools, schools for the creative and performing arts, a school for the humanities and international studies, among many others. Prince George's has earned a national, even international, reputation for its magnet program, and if you spend time in one of these schools, you can't help but come away impressed. You'll also be impressed by the lines of anxious parents waiting overnight in the spring cold each year to sign up for the 70% of slots that are filled on a first-come, first-served basis. (The other 30% are filled by lottery.) Next door, Montgomery's nineteen magnet schools, sixteen elementary and three secondary, provide an equally impressive array of CHOICEs. Of course, officials in both counties maintain their magnet programs have had a desegregating effect--that is, that they at least mirror the counties' racial balance as a whole--and that the schools that aren't designated as magnets--that is, 266 of the 332 schools in the two districts--aren't being short-changed in behalf of the magnets. That is a question that I'm sure this conference will take up with gusto.

Having walked us through this land of minimum CHOICE in the Free State, let me close by asking three questions and a subsidiary to the third question that I think we ought to tackle today.

Number 1: Maryland is twenty-second in the United States in a ranking of student enrollment but has fewer districts than all but three states. How much more intra-district CHOICE, that is, CHOICE within districts, is feasible? For example, the logistics of offering a wide CHOICE to students in districts like Baltimore and Anne Arundel counties are mind-boggling. The former has 614 square miles and is shaped like a horseshoe. Any of you who were on the Beltway getting to Coppin this morning know what a nightmare moving about in the county has become, and it will only get worse. Consider that most of the students at Baltimore City's School for the Arts live within ten miles of the school. To fairly offer an arts program to all high school students in the county, we would have to establish three or four magnet high schools--and considerable busing still would be required. The majority of districts with sparse population have a similar problem. What kind of magnet program can Queen Anne's county hope to achieve, with 3,000 students in all, one high school and three middle schools?

Number 2: Then you say, why not allow students to cross district lines, as does the much-discussed CHOICE plan in Minnesota? Well, Minnesota has 435 districts which are not coterminous with political jurisdictions, as are our twenty-four districts. This is an important distinction that deserves discussion here today. One of the claims for CHOICE plans is that they induce schools to spiff up so as not to lose students to competitors in the next district. But, realistically, how many Maryland delegates and senators will be likely to allocate funds so that students can transfer from their districts to others? As we know

from the long-standing tension between Montgomery County and Baltimore City, Maryland legislators think of themselves as representing political districts as well as school districts and I suspect this isn't the case in the land of 10,000 school districts.

Number 3:Can we afford to expand CHOICE? One person advised me yesterday that CHOICE plans are easy to implement because they don't cost anything; the teachers and the schools are there anyway. I don't think that is true. Between them two years ago, again, using Maryland's fact book, Montgomery and Prince George's accounted for $63 million of the $173 million spent on pupil transportation in Maryland--some 36%. Prince George's, as you know, has an enormous busing program, and this is money that, once spent, is gone forever; it's not like money spent on books and computers that can be used year after year. Not all is spent on magnet schools, but a lot is. For instance, Prince George's gets an extra $11 million from the state to finance its magnet program. That money, by the way, began appearing in the state budget a few years ago and I'm told came as something of a surprise to state education officials. It proves that the CHOICE of CHOICE plans is very much a political, as well as an educational one.

And that raises the subsidiary question, which is probably the most important of all. It is this: given the political atmosphere and school district configuration in Maryland, given the accountability program recently launched as a result of the Sondheim report, and given the growing disparity in spending between rich and poor districts--a disparity ably documented by the Abell Foundation--do we have priorities of spending in Maryland higher on the list than CHOICE?

Thanks for inviting me, and I look forward to hearing what your CHOICEs are.

C. Commentary

Even though their tasks required them to approach the issue from somewhat different perspectives (Orfield from a national and Bowler from a state point of view), it is clear in their keynote addresses and in their responses to some of the questions and comments which followed that they share key concerns about CHOICE programs, concerns which are as much social and economic as they are educational.

Both of them call attention to the problem of de-segregation versus re-segregation. Where Orfield notes in general that one of the roots of CHOICE schools was the attempt to maintain segregated school systems, Bowler recalls the visits of then-Governor Lester Maddox of Georgia to "freedom of CHOICE" rallies which supported the establishment of what Bowler called "segregation academ[ies]." In Maryland, the CHOICE plans of Prince George's and Montgomery Counties have been specifically "designed and [are] carefully monitored to enhance desegregation." Where Montgomery County acted on a voluntary basis, Prince George's began its plan under a court order.

Unfortunately, according to Orfield, two factors may lead to re-segregation. Efforts in some areas to eliminate civil rights requirements from CHOICE plans may lead to both racial re-segregation and socio-economic stratification. And the lack of clear information and knowledge about educational programs and options puts minority parents and parents of lower socio-economic status at a disadvantage in making educational decisions for and about their children: they tend to believe that their schools are successful when in fact the schools are not preparing their children adequately for postsecondary education.

Indeed, as Orfield said in response to a participant's question, "built on the racial and income segregation that we have in this country is a deep ignorance on the part of the principal victims of how unequal their education really is . . . . [The failure of the school system to tell the truth] is one of the principal scandals of our system."

Related to this concern is the problem of developing workable inter-district transfer systems which are essential to de-segregation efforts. When CHOICE plans or de-segregation orders are restricted to the school districts within a city's borders, de-segregation efforts are bound to fail because the ratio of minorities to whites is so disproportionate. The problem of breaking the city-suburban line is compounded in a state like Maryland where the school systems are coterminous with the political subdivisions; i.e., each of the twenty-four political subdivisions in Maryland (twenty-three counties and Baltimore City) has its own separate and distinct school system, and both elected political officials and school administrators are jealous of their prerogatives, responsibilities, and budgets.

And budget or cost is another area of shared concern. Both Orfield and Bowler pointed to the two areas of highest cost: development of the magnet schools or schools of CHOICE and provision of transportation. While Orfield did not note any specific figures, Bowler pointed out that Prince George's and Montgomery Counties in Maryland accounted for $63 million, or 36%, of the total $173 million spent on transportation in 1987.

Both agreed, in word or in principle, with the comment made by one of the participants during the question session about another element critical to CHOICE plans, free transportation: "in order for me to have that CHOICE, somebody's going to have to pay the transportation tab." Or, as Orfield put it himself, "Another thing you have to have in a CHOICE plan that's going to be equitable in any meaningful sense is free transportation. Not to have [it] is to introduce a social class sorting mechanism . . . that's really serious."

Budgetary concerns included broader areas than magnet schools and transportation. Essential resources (e. g., equipment, supplies, properly paid teachers), program development and support, and building maintenance and construction--that is, the whole gamut of personnel, materiel, and buildings essential to the full and proper operation of a school system--were seen by both Orfield and Bowler and by participants as sorely lacking and desperately in need of funding in addition to any special funding for the various aspects of CHOICE plans (e.g., magnet schools, transportation, special information programs and community liaison persons). Thus, in response to a participant's question, Orfield noted that one of the essential "elements of any kind of CHOICE plan should be to try to put resources into schools that are not designated as CHOICE schools and to upgrade them so that they are more competitive." Another participant echoed that concern: "The school systems really need to look at the programs that they say they want to offer, and make sure that the teachers and . . . the equipment [and the] resources they might need would be there."

There is, thus, a clear awareness not only that financial resources are critical to the success of any CHOICE programs but also that they are critical to the improvement of any school program. Bowler encapsulates this fiscal dilemma in the "subsidiary question" with which he closes his keynote address: given the issues which confront education in Maryland (i.e., political atmosphere and school district configuration, accountability, and funding inequities among the subdivisions), "do we have priorities of spending in Maryland higher on the list than CHOICE?" As Bowler said in his response to a participant's comment about the importance of money, the failure to provide equitable adequate funding across political and thus educational subdivision lines in the State of Maryland has created a gap which is "getting wider, and that's not insignificant and inconsequential . . . . It may not be unconstitutional, as the state courts have ruled, but it's certainly immoral."

Thus, Orfield and Bowler are equally indignant about and offer their strongest condemnation of two related problems of public education, problems which lie at the heart of the CHOICE movement, at the heart of the potential success of that movement, and at the heart of the failure of public education in the inner cities in general. Orfield calls the failure of the school system to tell the truth about its failures in education "one of the principal scandals of our system." Bowler says that it is "immoral" that the State of Maryland does not provide equitable funding for education. In both cases, it is the minority student and family and the lower socio-economic student and family who suffer: stuck in the central city schools which have been deprived of the kinds of financial resources (moneys for textbooks, supplies, equipment, buildings, teachers) essential for the proper development of stimulating and challenging educational programs, in schools in which the system commits its most egregious failures as a system of what Orfield called "common" schools for "common" education, and in which the system allows the "ignorance" of educational reality to fester and the "lie" of educational success to continue to be perpetuated; they are as much the "victims" of a failure of the political system as of the educational system.

In spite of their cautions about the problems involved in CHOICE (problems fundamental to education in general), Orfield and Bowler do view it as a valid option for improving education. Orfield in particular lists a number of good reasons to develop and implement CHOICE. It provides one means to develop good schools in those central city school systems where there is little quality and where the bureaucracy is rigid. CHOICE programs provide an opportunity for the kind of educational experimentation which is part of the tradition of American education, especially over the past twenty years. Such experimentation offers at least the possibility of finding new--and better--solutions to the problems plaguing education. In addition to being a vehicle for the improvement of educational quality, CHOICE also allows for the development of the kind of educational variety which can meet the needs of a varied student body: children have a wide diversity of learning styles and intellectual/creative

interests, and that diversity can be satisfied through CHOICE programs. The success of CHOICE schools and programs can have a beneficial effect on a school system mired in severe problems: it can serve as a stimulus to administrators, faculty, and students in other, more traditional schools. And those successful CHOICE programs provide their students with the kind of education they need to make the transition to postsecondary education. Finally, in spite of the problems associated with desegregation efforts, CHOICE programs do offer a sound, education-based option for achieving the goal of desegregation, particularly in plans that involve city-suburban student transfers.

When CHOICE programs are carefully planned and include strong parental involvement, an equitable allocation of the best teachers and of financial resources, and a strong commitment to civil rights, those programs can be both educationally and socially successful.

III PANEL DISCUSSION

A. Moderator and panelists

MODERATOR:

VERNON L. CLARK, V.P. FOR ACADEMIC AFFAIRS AND DEAN OF FACULTY, CHEYNEY UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Dr. Clark holds a Ph.D. in Special Education from the University of Connecticut. He has taught at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Norfolk State University, and The College of the Virgin Islands. He is a past Dean of Education at Coppin State College. Dr. Clark, who is a Maryland resident, has administrative appointments at numerous institutions and corporations and has served as a consultant to many agencies including the Maryland State Department of Education and the Federal Department of Education. He is a past member of the Maryland State Department of Education Accreditation Teams evaluating various teacher education programs in Maryland and is the author of several books. The most recent, published in the fall of 1989, is entitled, The Vanishing Black Public School Teacher.

PANELISTS:

THOMAS P. FRIEND, DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT FOR EDUCATION/RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT, WORCESTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

With a Masters Degree in Education from Worcester State College, Mr. Friend began his career as an Elementary Teacher in the Worcester Public Schools. He is a former principal and elementary school supervisor. He also serves as adjunct faculty at the Department of Education, Clark University and at Worcester State College. Mr. Friend has an extensive history of community involvement projects and programs and serves as a member of the Superintendent's Advisory Council and the Committees of Declining Enrollment, Ethnicity and Cultural Pluralism, Writing Math Goals and Development of Career Education Curriculum K-12.

D. BRUCE LA PIERRE, PROFESSOR OF LAW, WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW, ST LOUIS, MO.

With degrees from both Princeton and Columbia University School of Law, Bruce LaPierre has been associated with Washington University since 1976. His academic interests are comprehensive: administrative law, constitutional law, federal jurisdiction, civil rights, energy and environmental regulation, and legislation. He has many publications to his credit including "Voluntary Interdistrict School Desegregation in St. Louis – The Special Master's Tale" and "Voluntary Metropolitan School Desegregation in St. Louis – An Opportunity Lost or a Second Chance?

HEATHER LEWIS, DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR COLLABORATIVE EDUCATION, NEW YORK CITY DISTRICT 4

CCE is a consortium of New York public schools committed to small, democratically run schools, where decision making is shared among teachers and parents and students are respected members of the learning community. Ms. Lewis has worked with CCE since its inception in February, 1988. She is a parent of four children who all attend public schools in New York. She has worked as a parent organizer in District 15, Brooklyn, New York, helping to create the Brooklyn New School, a member of CCE. Ms.

Lewis was elected to the District 15 School Board in May, 1989. She speaks regularly before parents and educators about CCE and its approach to education. She is becoming increasingly involved in the restructuring of the New York City Schools, and is a member of a city wide group of elected School Board members seeking to improve the system which serves more than 900,000 children.

DEBORAH M. MCGRIFF, DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT, MILWAUKEE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Dr. McGriff has built her entire career around the pursuit of excellence in urban school districts. Previous positions include executive director of middle school programs; teacher; reading program coordinator; adjunct professor; and Assistant Superintendent responsible for curriculum and instruction. These experiences have been with large urban school systems in New York, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and currently, Milwaukee. She has earned a Master of Science in Education and a Doctorate in Administration, Policy, and Urban Education. Dr. McGriff holds memberships in the American Association of School Administrators, American Educational Research Association, International Reading Association, and the National Association of Black School Educators.

B. Policy Questions

In preparation for their presentations, the panelists were sent a list of eight questions to serve as guidelines in their discussions of their CHOICE programs:

1. Why was CHOICE implemented? Who defined the problem? On what basis? (e.g., racial or financial inequities, at-risk population, academic achievement, more accountability/less regulation, site-based management)

2. What type of CHOICE do you have? (e.g., magnet, inter/intra-district, controlled, qualifications for admission, drop-outs only, post-secondary options)

3. Within your program, what are the CHOICEs available?

4. Is the CHOICE program paired with any other restructuring or special program? (e.g., Milliken II, Comer process, Coalition for Essential Schools)

5. What impact has CHOICE had on the originally delineated problem? Has it improved academic achievement? racial balance? Please provide statistics. Are there other indicators of success?

6. What problems have you encountered? Have you remedied them? How? (e.g., racial balance, transportation, parent involvement in the process, administrative/teacher involvement, quality of program for children not in CHOICE schools, special education needs)

7. What is the overall and per pupil cost of the program? Does this constitute an increase in expenditures? Who pays the cost? Did the program attract additional funds that would not have come without the program?

8. What recommendations do you have for those interested in some form of CHOICE for Maryland?

C. Summaries of Presentations

1. Deborah McGriff

McGriff provided an overview of CHOICE programs in three school districts: Community School District #13 in Brooklyn, New York; Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The first was described in an article by Dr. Jerome Harris, former Brooklyn School Superintendent, in The Journal of Negro Education; the second is described in a book entitled Public Schools by CHOICE by Joe Nathan; and McGriff is currently working on an article about the third for publication in The Educational Workshop.

District #13 started with four sub-schools, four middle schools started on the third floor of elementary schools. The goal was to design "middle school programs that would prepare our children for all of the programs in New York City that screened or provided examinations," that is, that would "get our children in[to] the specialized high schools." This was done by providing gifted and talented programs.

In order to foster school improvement programs alongside the CHOICE program, they transformed all of the junior high schools which had 1,000 children into "intimate theme sub-schools." All four of the schools followed the same core curriculum, but each had its own distinctive theme curriculum. The schools were kept to between 120 and 244 students, and both students and teachers were assigned to the schools by their CHOICE.

In order to provide adequate information, the district held an annual "Articulation Night" at which all four schools had displays. Teachers were required to participate, and the number of sixth-grade parents and students who attended grew each year. In order to provide an opportunity for parents and children who could not come at night, the district required teachers to take sixth-grade children to the middle schools to learn about the programs. The children were then asked to identify their first, second, and third CHOICEs of middle schools.

The process of selection was decentralized: all applications were distributed first to the children's first-CHOICE schools. Before being sent to the second-CHOICE schools, the applications were screened to see "if any child who was minimally qualified had been excluded from that process."

One of the schools that was redesigned was Junior High School #113. Renamed the Ronald Edmonds Learning Center out of the district's high regard for the "school effectiveness movement," the school had three different theme sub-schools in it: on the first floor was a school of performing arts; on the second, a school of communication; and on the third, a school of office and business careers. After gaining experimental staff status from the State Department of Education and parental permission, the district mainstreamed exceptional education students into those programs.

Influenced not only by the school effectiveness movement, which became the district's philosophy of organizing and providing leadership but also by what they called "developmental supervision" (more commonly as school-based management), the district, under the superintendent's leadership, separated schools into three groups, based on past performance:

> non-directive schools: those that had performed above the national average and had teacher satisfaction for three or more years; given local autonomy;

collaborative schools: those that had improved for one year but not for three successive years; did not have total autonomy but had more than third group;

directive schools: at the bottom of the middle schools; school #113 was in this group; superintendent sent in team to work with the schools on school-improvement efforts.

Between the time the program began (date unspecified) and 1985, the district went from 20% of the children functioning at or above grade level to 60%. Also, the number of children accepted to the specialized high schools increased each year (although no specific numbers were given). No information was collected on the success rate of those students in the specialized high schools and on how many went on to postsecondary education.

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, a community of approximately 8,000 students, about half middle class and half poor, about half minority (black, Hispanic, and Asian) and half white, the program was controlled CHOICE, and it was designed for the elementary schools (there was only one high school and most of the elementary schools were K-8).

Every CHOICE school was both neighborhood and city-wide; that is, 50% of the students came from the walk zone, and 50% from around the city. Preference was given for children who had siblings already in a given school. Because racial balance was defined in terms of "white" and "other," racial integration could be achieved by any mixture of "white" and "others." The city also developed schools-within-schools, thus fostering a school improvement program that accompanied the CHOICE program (e.g., a computer specialty school in the Tobin School).

Cambridge maintained waiting lists for those who did not receive their first CHOICE; over 90% did get their first CHOICE, and most chose to go out of their neighborhoods. The school system also provided an appeals process: the Assistant Superintendent, a community member, and someone from the parent information center heard appeals.

To support its CHOICE program, Cambridge developed strong parent-outreach programs: parent information centers, centralized counseling, information, and registration centers, staffed by people who work for the school department and by parents from the community; parent liaisons not only for each school but also for each program within each school (the liaisons serve as advocates for the parents, make sure parents have adequate information, and support parents in preparing and submitting applications).

A team of staff developers worked with teachers to ensure that the teachers were prepared to respond to the new diversity in front of them in the form of black, Hispanic, and Asian students who had previously gone to a small, select group of schools; teachers had to refine their curricula and instructional strategies to be effective with the poor and minority students. The state of Massachusetts funded the parent information centers, the parent liaisons, and the staff developers.

Like District #13's articulation night, Cambridge had a "Kindergarten Night" for children entering kindergarten; two such nights were held, one on each side of the town.

When Dr. Peterkin became Superintendent in Cambridge, he brought with him a planning process he called "Key Results," a process critical to the school improvement initiatives designed to support CHOICE. This process was applied especially to a group of schools in East Cambridge (a largely working-class and poor section), schools which middle class parents never selected as CHOICE schools.

The district undertook to improve the programs in these schools. Dr. Peterkin also brought a set of what he called non-negotiables:

1. The belief that all children can and must learn;

2. That educational programs will be "based on student need and interest, not on staff convenience";

3. That "race, sex, ethnic origin, or socio-economic level will not be used or accepted as an excuse for low expectations of or low achievement by students";

4. That "parents are the consumers of our products and our efforts";

5. That teachers must be seen "as allies and assets, not adversaries and liabilities";

6. That it is the superintendent's responsibility "to set system-wide standards which meet the goals and priorities of the community," and the responsibility of the administrators and principals "to determine the programs, activities, and plans to fulfill those standards and create new goals and programs to meet your particular priorities."

In East Cambridge, new programs were developed: a two-way bilingual program in the Maynard School, an arts and basic skills program in the Kennedy School, a special middle school program in the Fletcher School, and a writing across the curriculum program in the Fitzgerald School.

Specific figures regarding academic performance also demonstrate the achievements of the new school programs: in 1984, 77% of the students met the state's minimum standards for mathematics, in 1987, 88% did; in 1984, only 59% met the standard for writing, in 1987, over 90.9% did; in 1984, 75.9% met the reading standard, in 1987, 83.% did; in 1984, only 54% passed all three tests, in 1987, 87% did. The school improvement program also resulted in a significant increase in the percentage of kindergarten pupils attending public schools, from 78% in 1978 to 89% in 1987; given the large concentration of high quality private schools in Cambridge, this increase is very significant.

The Milwaukee CHOICE program is probably the most complex one with which McGriff has had the opportunity to work. The Milwaukee area is about 60% black, 30% white, and 10% Hispanic and Native American, with the city population being about one-third black. Racial balance in the public schools is defined as any building having between 25% and 65% of the school population black. Except for eighteen which by court order can remain one-race schools, all of the Milwaukee schools are racially balanced.

The CHOICE program is comprised of forty magnet schools andthe Chapter 220 Program, a collaborative between the city and the surrounding suburban districts; in that program 1,000 white students come into city schools and about 4,000 minority students go out to suburban schools. Students who do not go to magnet schools do have an opportunity to select a school of their CHOICE.
The student assignment process is currently under study for possible revision. The State gave the city settlement agreement funds to be used to improve the one-race schools; that money has been used to implement all-day kindergarten programs over the last two years.

The school administrators working on the Milwaukee CHOICE program have the following concerns:

1. The cost of transportation;

2. The fact that blacks constitute 80% of the children who are transported, an undue burden on the black community;

3. The fact that 12 of the 18 racially identifiable schools are in the bottom quartile in student performance;

4. The fact that the program is difficult to explain to people;

5. The fact that student assignment is decentralized and is controlled by the principals (the most effective CHOICE programs have centralized screening to give control and consistency);

6. The fact that there is any screening for selection to schools;

7. That children cannot get into programs in areas that are drawn so large around schools.

2. D. Bruce LaPierre

The St. Louis CHOICE program is unique in that it is the product of a settlement of a city-county school desegregation lawsuit: in it, white students in the predominantly white suburban school districts can choose to remain in their schools or go to schools in the predominantly black city school system; black students in the city have the same option in reverse, except that their city schools were intended to receive "a substantial infusion of funds [both] to improve the quality of education and to make capital improvements in severely dilapidated . . . school buildings."

Three points should give a clear overview of the St. Louis CHOICE program: an outline of the city and county school systems, the three major provisions of the settlement agreement, and finally the implementation of the agreement.

First, the city and county school systems. The St. Louis school district is coterminous with the city boundaries and comprises an area of about 62 square miles. In 1982-83, of 59,000 students, about 47,000 or 80% were black, most of them in the predominantly black northern half of the city.

St. Louis County surrounds the City on the south and west; in its 510 square miles there are 23 sub-school districts as well as a special district for handicapped children. In 1982-83, of about 131,000 students, 27,500 or 21% were black, and about 103,500 or 79% were white; but 74% of the black students were in the six districts adjacent to the north, predominantly black, side of the city, and four of those districts had black enrollments in excess of 50%, two of them in excess of 90%. Seven other districts had minority enrollments between 12% and 29%. Of the remaining ten districts, none had a minority enrollment above 4%.

Second, the settlement agreement, negotiated in 1983 and implemented in 1983-84, has three major provisions: inter-district student transfers, provisions for magnet schools, and provisions to improve the quality of education in the city schools and to make capital improvements in the school facilities.

The voluntary inter-district transfer program is what constitutes the CHOICE aspect. The desegregation

agreement calls for the sixteen county districts with 1982 minority enrollments below 25% to increase by 15% or to reach 25%, whichever is less. While it was anticipated that those districts could accommodate approximately 15,000 black students from the city, the courts have now called that figure a cap. However, on a first-come-first-served basis, those students can choose the particular school in the county they wish to attend. The state of Missouri is required to pay transportation costs.

While the magnet school provisions have been modified over the years, the agreement now calls for about 12,000 magnet school slots inside the city to be used as a vehicle to bring white students into the city and "to enhance the opportunity for integration inside" the city.

Even with the first two provisions fully implemented, it was anticipated that 10-15,000 black children would remain in all-black schools on the north side: the provisions for improved educational programs (both for the district/city and for the all-black schools in particular) and for major renovation and modernization of school facilities would significantly improve the quality of their education.

Both the State of Missouri and the City Board of Education had been found to be liable for constitutional violations, for segregating children by race in the school system. A complex formula was set for the payment of the costs of these three provisions: the State makes payments to both the home district and the host district of students who transfer; on average, the State pays twice the amount it would pay if there were no transfer. The home district is most often the city school system. The City School Board asked for funds to be retained within the city system because the anticipated net loss of students in the inter-district transfer system would result in a net loss of state funds otherwise. The State also pays all transportation costs and the bulk of the cost of the magnet schools. The State and the City Board of Education bear equally the cost of the city school program and facility improvements.

The drafters of the settlement agreement were not thinking of CHOICE as an educational concept; they saw two alternative remedies for the black children: a high quality of education in integrated county schools or an improved quality of education in the city schools, be they integrated regular schools, integrated magnet schools, or all-black schools. For the most part, the first alternative is available, but the second remains "much more of a myth than a reality."

The voluntary inter-district transfer program has been successful. In the first six years, the number of students making the transfer has grown from about 2,500 to about 11,400, and the number of black children in the all-black schools has declined from about 30,000 to 17-18,000. And fourteen of the sixteen suburban districts met the five-year goal of either increasing minority enrollment by 15% or reaching a level of 25%. But there are some problems. The withdrawal rate hovers around 12% per year, and the suspension rate around 14+%. Transportation presents another problem: about 24% of the students ride more than one hour each way to and from their host schools.

The major problem is the one-sided nature of the program: 11,400 black students transfer from the city to the county, but only about 600 transfer the other way; the percentages are 95% black and 5% white That disparity is "in large part a consequence of the failure . . . of the magnet school program." That failure stems from the District Court's toleration of years of bickering between the State and the City Board of Education over the magnet school program. Thus, in the first seven years of the settlement, only three or four magnet schools were established. And those were not especially good. But even the good magnet schools failed to attract white students--on the ground that even a good magnet school exists in a "deteriorated, dilapidated school system."

There are, however, prospects for improvement: just one year ago, the District Court judge approved a comprehensive magnet school program and established a budget of $51 million for the schools.

With regard to the final component of the settlement agreement, the efforts to improve the quality of education and to renovate or rebuild the school facilities in the city, the results are mixed. While most of the district-wide programs have been fully implemented, "the unpleasant reality is that many of the special remedial and compensatory programs designed for the schools on the north side . . . have either been long delayed or only partially implemented." For example, it took six-and-a-half years and threats of contempt to get the City Board of Education to lower the pupil teacher ratio from 35-1 to 20-1. The capital improvement program fared little better: only in 1987 did the District Court finally approve a $114 million capital improvements program; but the funds are to be paid out and the improvements made over a nine-year period.

Thus, St. Louis has the first alternative--inter-district student transfers--working reasonably well, but the second alternative--magnet schools and an improved quality of education--"simply is not yet available." And what it has has cost a great deal. The combined cost of the intra-district plan begun in 1980 and the inter-district plan begun in 1983 was $512 million through 1987-88. In 1987-88, the cost of the payments to the home and host districts amounted to $38 million; the cost of inter-district transportation is around $20 million per year; the cost for the magnet school program is set at $51 million, and for the capital improvement programs $114 million. And there still has not been full funding for the quality education programs.

3. Heather Lewis

I am here today as a parent. I am a school board member in my district and I'm the director of the Center for Collaborative Education, but I want to speak today from the heart of a parent.

About five years ago, when I put my child in a local school, I had three CHOICEs: I could choose my neighborhood school, I could choose a gifted and talented program (80% white in a district 80% African American and Latino), I could choose to lie about where I lived. I chose the neighborhood school. With other parents, I worked for five years to make changes in the school, to start a creative arts program and to improve the building, to bring in consultants to work with the teachers.

But there were problems. The principal tracked the school, and in spite of complaints and threats of court orders, the tracking continued; the ethnic and racial composition changed, but the socio-economic composition stayed the same. We asked for changes in the teaching of reading as well. But the school leadership, the principal, did not support us.

Thus, although we did not view it as a solution, we had to start an alternative school. We wanted to build a model to help the children learn to think independently, work independently, and eventually become independent learners. We built the school with great attention to equity, using a lottery system and accepting students to reflect the ethnic and racial composition of the district. The school has been successful enough to generate two other programs within the district.

The magnet programs in the district tend to foster segregation rather than integration. While the federal government looks at buildings to determine desegregation, it does not look at classrooms and programs within the schools which continue to foster racial isolation. The magnet program has become simply the top track. It has not affected equity in a positive way.

I'd like to look at District 4 briefly. The system of CHOICE began in 1975 with Anthony Alvarado, the Superintendent at the time, who was not looking for CHOICE but who was looking to improve his schools and attract students to under-enrolled, under-utilized schools. He began slowly, offering teachers an opportunity to develop their own programs within schools, within three schools at the start. Now, in the nineteen buildings in District 4, there are fifty-two schools, most of them in junior high schools. There is a system of informing parents about the schools, although it is not as developed as the one in Cambridge. All parents in the sixth grade put down their first, second, and third CHOICE of schools, and most receive their first CHOICE. Selection is done in a meeting of the directors of the alternative programs in order to achieve equitable distribution of students. On the basis of test scores, attendance rates, and teacher mobility, this district has been successful. This system is based on parent-initiated schools, on teacher-initiated programs.

In District 2, where Anthony Alvarado [subsequently] moved, the type of CHOICE implemented was a top-down mandated system. Because he thought his approach in District 4 was too slow, he decided to speed it up here by mandating that a junior high school be divided into three mini-schools. By the end of a year, the principal left and the directors of the mini-schools left; the school had not changed. The teachers decided to take the programs over, and after three years one of the mini-schools is run by a teacher-director and is attracting students for the first time.

This shows that we need to look at how schools are structured. We need to talk about CHOICE within a school, about teachers creating a place within a school for teachers and parents who share that type of education. What we need to talk about is greater teacher autonomy, one of the major elements that will bring change in the schools. We need teacher-directors in the mini-schools to lead those programs. We need to convince principals that schools could become more effective if teachers and parents have CHOICEs, if teachers have more autonomy.

Recently, the late Chancellor Green in New York started an initiative called "the corridor initiative," corridors of excellence composed of a cluster of three-four elementary schools and the junior high school for which they served as feeders. Within those schools there would be a system of CHOICE, a system of support services, and a system of school-based management. And while the districts responded to his proposal, at one conference principals and teachers from my district complained that no one had told them what to do. My answer was that that was just the point of the conference--school-based management; it was up to them to make decisions and CHOICEs based on models. And that leads ultimately to accountability within each school.

There are a number of things that schools of CHOICE--indeed, all schools--need to offer both to parents and to the general public:

1. They should be able to waive state and federal regulations, with the exception of health, safety, and non-discrimination regulations. We need to waive those regulations which keep us bound to practices that are no longer successful.

2. We need to be more public with our practice. We need an accountability system which provides parents and the general public with a more in-depth look at school and student performance than they can get with standardized test scores.

3. Parents need direct access to their schools, to records, meetings, curriculum and assessment documentation. Parents and students need to be able to ask, "How am I

doing?" and "What is the evidence?" And this kind of evaluation should go on continually through-out the school year.

4. Schools should be visited periodically by outside experts who prepare an assessment of how the schools are working. And this should be reported to parents on a three-year basis. (It's done in England, and the experts issue a very detailed report.)

5. Most importantly, parents and teachers should be in a position to choose and not be chosen. People have criticized me for starting the school I did, saying that change has to be made from the top down, that every school needs to be changed before you can offer CHOICE. But that school was not an elitist school.

What I propose is that CHOICE is itself a vehicle toward change. We have to create models for people to see where they want to go. We have to do it with parents and teachers deciding which direction they want to take and not being held back by restrictions or by administrators who want to run business as usual. And my argument to those who question this approach is precisely that it can't happen overnight, it is a very long-term process. But if enough people see the models and get excited about the possibilities and parents get involved, then there is a chance for change.

Because "the fundamental issue is whether or not CHOICE is developed in the spirit of improving all schools for all children, [t]he debate on CHOICE provides an opportunity to push for the changes that would make CHOICE meaningful for all children. CHOICE, if implemented properly, can help us move in the direction of increased participation, commitment, and diversity."

4. Thomas Friend

Today you'll learn about a very parochial situation from a very parochial person: I've been in the Worcester Public Schools for 48 years, as a student for thirteen years, a teacher for about 17 years, a principal, supervisor of elementary schools, Assistant, Associate, and Deputy Superintendent. I'm going to try to tell you about the politics and the emotion that surround a community when it has to come to grips with issues of minorities and race and movement of students. I'm going to tell you that our 41 elementary schools are enrolled in the Northeast Association and go through the accreditation process every five years.

Twenty years ago, as schools began to face the issues of de-isolation (desegregation), Worcester, Massachusetts, didn't seem to have those issues to face. It was a city surrounded by a whole series of towns in which probably no more than 1 or 2 % of the students were minority group members. For years, the City of Worcester had a minority population of about 4%; that 4% was black, and that 4% existed in 1900, in 1910, in 1920, in 1930, in 1940, and in 1970 and in 1975.

In 1973 I was assigned to be the principal of the Clark Street School in Worcester, a school that serviced a very large low-income housing project. It was 88% white, 12% black; by 1977, it was 92% Hispanic and black, and 8% white.

Except for the Clark Street and Chandler Street Schools, the city's forty-six elementary schools had minuscule minority populations: in Chandler Street School, it was a problem because it was a brand new school built with state funding, and it opened at 72% minority. You can imagine the concern of the State

Department of Education in Boston to have a city with a minority population at that time of 7 or 8% with two schools imbalanced and for the State to have built one and opened it at 72%. And you can imagine the concern of the City of Worcester to be hearing those concerns.

As principal of Clark Street School from '73 to '77, I began to get concerned because the school's population was 92% minority while the minority population in the other nine elementary schools which fed the same middle school was 2 or 3 or 4%. I was concerned about how the youngsters I was responsible for would fit in to their new environment with classmates from a different race and a different culture. But perhaps the concern might have been more for the other nine schools who, for the first time probably in their lives, were going to deal with black and Hispanic youngsters.
Thus, we developed a magnet program in 1975 to have some interaction among Clark Street's fifth and sixth grade students and those from all of the other schools in the district: one afternoon each week, the students mingled in an educational program so that when they became seventh graders they would have some knowledge of different cultures, and they could begin the process of learning to live together and having everybody contribute to the community.

Worcester had to deal with the two schools that were badly imbalanced. But what set off the whole process of a forced look at planning was only the City's decision to close an elementary school that had four classrooms in it since enrollments were declining and it was on the opposite end of the city from where our minority populations were living. The State Department of Education came in and told the people of Worcester that it would have to address the de-isolation issues at Clark Street and Chandler. The people could not believe such issues.

I'd been almost like a voice in the wilderness because since 1973 I'd been dealing with issues of de-isolation, magnet schools, schools of CHOICE. A group of us had gone about the business of trying to maintain a school system that keeps intact the entire community. We were not anxious to have any part of the community leave the public schools. We wanted to have a system that provides quality of education for everybody without facing the issues that had so divided Boston and tend to divide other communities.

By about 1982 it was apparent to the fathers in the City of Worcester that some change would have to be made, so we prepared a de-isolation plan that was subject to approval in 1983 by the Board of Education. It was my task to go into the communities where the Clark Street and Chandler Elementary Schools were and talk to parents in those schools as well as parents in primarily majority schools, schools that over a period of time had not a single black student in them. I started that process in the Fall of 1981, trying to explain in majority schools that they had to become part of the solution, that they had to plan and work together, that they had to recognize what the needs of the city were and what the needs of the students and their parents were.

I became virtually a persona non grata as the messenger went about to deliver the message. But I attempted to make the people I had to deal with become part of the solution rather than trying to impose a solution upon them, and began to work together and to plan. And as a result of two years of meetings, parents and principals and staffs got together to plan on how their schools would look when we had to make the change.

In June 1983, we had 12,000 students in forty-six elementary schools; in September 2,000 of them changed schools, one out of every six. In this massive first step that reorganized the schools, there was never a phone call, no one complained. The plan established several magnet schools, one to draw majority

students: Clark Street School, which dropped from 92% minority to about 30%; and several others that drew minority students, which increased from 2 or 3% minority to 30 and 35% minority.

The City of Worcester was organized into quadrants in terms of convenience, nothing more. In each there are one high school, one middle school, and about ten elementary schools; each of the high schools has a segment into the inner center of the city; and we have about 5,000 high school youngsters, 21,000 youngsters altogether. And our four high schools and four middle schools are all about the same in terms of majority-minority population. But it's in the elementary schools where most of the emotion exists and where the great discrepancies existed: within each quadrant at that time some elementary schools had very small minority populations and some had very high minority populations.

The minority population in Worcester increased unexpectedly. In 1975 it was 4%; in 1980 it had risen only to about 10%. This is now October of 1989--the minority population in Worcester is 33%. That population change has come about primarily through a rapid increase in Hispanic and Vietnamese students. We anticipate that the minority population will grow perhaps to the low 40's. What will keep it at the low 40's, if anything, is the fact that there's no housing in the City of Worcester. It has very few empty apartments.

By 1987, we have a de-isolation plan that was approved by the Board of Education in 1983. But we find that the schools that were problems in the early '80's are bigger problems now. Bilingual programs are playing a tremendous part in our efforts to de-isolate the city. Our Hispanic and Vietnamese bilingual programs are getting larger: the four schools that house the Hispanic programs now become schools of 200-250-300 Hispanic students. And because they have to go there for bilingual education, we cannot meet an assignment policy to have all schools represent the city-wide average to within plus-or-minus 10% or plus-or-minus 15%.

In 1987, we looked at our special-permission transfer policy to see if that was contributing to the deepening trouble. What we found was that in the very high socio-economic neighborhoods we have a lot of majority kids attending the schools. Of the 129 kids out of district in the school that has the highest socio-economic clientele in Worcester, only five were minority.

Our previous assignment policy simply said that you could go to any school in Worcester so long as there was space available and you provided the transportation. But if you have to provide the transportation and you're a poor minority family, you're not going to go to those schools that might provide those opportunities. But the school committee did not want to change that policy. We prevailed upon them in a couple of ways: only minority kids can go out of district to those schools that are 70% or more majority; and majority kids can go to those schools that are more than 30% minority. And we've had some success in moving majority students primarily through our fifteen magnet schools.

As we look at the issues facing us in terms of de-isolation, we look now have at the next step: the State is pressing us to have a new plan in December. Of the seventeen communities that have de-isolation plans, sixteen have some form of student assignment that might not be considered strictly voluntary. We are trying to maintain the essence of a plan that will allow every parent to send their children to a school that offers a quality program. We will try to maintain a voluntary plan in Worcester despite the growing percentages, despite the pressure from the State. But the stumbling block now is, what happens if we say every school will be plus-or-minus 10% or plus-or-minus 15% of the district average, and we fail? It's clear that the State is going to insist that we have a plan that has a mandatory aspect to it.

Several problems, coming on top of de-isolation, make the task extremely difficult.

First of all funding. We needed an additional $9 million this fall just to maintain the same level of service as in the previous year, but we received just $2.5 million. Then three weeks before school opened, we were cut $4 million. A 1980 state law, Proposition 2 and a half, limits the ability of a community to raise taxes, but the State filled in for a while to fill that gap. After years of increases in tax revenues, the rate of increase dropped substantially, and local aid was killed this year; local aid to cities and towns (and that's what supplies the money for education) was cut by $225 million three weeks before school opened. And whenever money gets cut, the school departments are disadvantaged in the process. We have not had sufficient funding to run the public school system for the last eight years, and now with the pressures of reduced state revenue, the pressures are even greater.

Our school population at the elementary school level is increasing by about 500 pupils each year, and that increase is beginning to show up in the middle schools: we do not have a single empty classroom in the city of Worcester. When you don't have any empty classrooms and you're trying to de-isolate and change the mix and you don't have any money, you can imagine the kind of pressures those things bring about.

But we're going to have to make some commitments this year, and the city's going to have to face up to those issues. We will have a plan and we will have a mandatory aspect to it and we will work with parents because that's the key; and somehow we'll fund parent information centers --we have one now, we're going to need one in each quadrant. We're going to have to build additional space so that we can have eight or ten bilingual education sites rather than four or five. We're going to make a commitment to those kids in those schools who are apparently being disadvantaged so that they'll have a lower pupil-teacher ratio, and they'll have more supplies and they'll have more textbooks. And they'll have to have the things that they need so that they don't lose ground to their counterparts while we go through this process.

And while the State is saying to us, "We'll pay you Worcester, 90% of the construction and 100% of the interest for the buildings that you build to address de-isolation," we have some school committee members who are saying, "We'll get by with the amount of space we have. If we don't need any space then they have no leverage and we don't have to do anything."

But even that foolish view is an incorrect one because we do have both a legal and a moral obligation to provide a quality program for all our kids in Worcester.

D. Commentary

The four panelists approached the issue of CHOICE from the different perspectives of their personal and professional experiences: LaPierre and Friend faced the issue in the context of specific desegregation pressures, a city-county lawsuit in LaPierre's case, and State pressures in Friend's case; McGriff and Lewis faced it in the context essentially of voluntary action they took as public school administrator (McGriff) or as parent (Lewis). In spite of those differences, however, like Orfield and Bowler before them they shared some common social and economic as well as educational ideas and concerns.

Three specific ideas emerge as essential to the development of a sound CHOICE program: parental involvement, some form of school-based management, and an emphasis on improving the quality of education overall. From McGriff's descriptions of the "Articulation Nights" in District #13 and the "Kindergarten Nights" in Cambridge, through Lewis's emphasis on "parent-initiated schools," to Friend's plans for the establishment of Parent Information Centers in the four educational administrative quadrants of Worcester, the common thread is clear. Parents must have representative involvement in discussions leading to the development of CHOICE programs, and parents as a whole must be kept informed about the nature of the educational programs and options available to their children. Public school administrators and staff, including principals and teachers, must work with parents at every step and at every level, "because [as Friend put it] that's the key."

Some form of school-based management--of both freedom for creative staff initiative and accountability for the results of the development of that initiative--is also essential. McGriff spoke about the designation of certain schools in District #13 as "non-directive schools," i.e., schools which had demonstrated their ability to operate on the basis of the professional competencies and initiatives of the teachers and principals. Lewis spoke of the need for greater "teacher autonomy" and for "teacher-initiated programs" in those "parent-initiated schools." The results in both cases were more stimulating, challenging programs and schools which succeeded in attracting more students precisely because they were more stimulating and challenging.

Both parental involvement and school-based management can help lead to the third concept--improving the quality of education overall, but they are not sufficient in themselves. All of the panelists, like Orfield and Bowler before them, stressed the key point that school-improvement actions are essential not only for the success of CHOICE programs but for the success of entire school systems as well; that CHOICE programs should not be developed in a vacuum, with CHOICE-designated schools being developed and improved while the other, "regular" schools are left to languish. McGriff's remarks about the success of CHOICE in District #13 showed clearly that those "redesigned schools," the "intimate theme sub-schools" developed for the program, were critical to its success. Perkins's "non-negotiables" cited by McGriff are elements designed to improve the quality of education in all schools. Lewis spoke of the need to develop CHOICE schools and programs not separate from the rest of the school system but "in the spirit of improving all schools for all children." Indeed, Friend expressed the consensus most concisely in his closing statement: "we do have both a legal and a moral obligation to provide a quality program for all our kids in Worcester." His statement echoes the statements of both Orfield and Bowler in their emphasis on the moral nature of the problem of inequities in public education.

Indeed, the panelists focus most strongly on the failure to provide quality education to all students as their most serious concern about public school systems. That concern finds its most vivid representation in the racially divided school systems in the cities. McGriff notes, for example, that of the eighteen racially identifiable (i.e., minority) schools in Milwaukee, twelve are in the bottom quartile in measures of student

achievement. LaPierre points out that the failure of the St. Louis City Schools to attract white suburban students is based primarily on the failure to develop high quality magnet schools and on the general perception that the city schools comprise a "deteriorated, dilapidated school system." Thus, the option of higher quality integrated or one-race (i.e., black) schools in St. Louis is "much more of a myth than a reality" because the promised special remedial and compensatory programs and the renovated or reconstructed school buildings have been "long-delayed or only partially implemented." Friend notes that what the students in those one-race schools need--and have not gotten--are a lower pupil-teacher ratio, and more supplies and textbooks: "they'll have to have the things that they need so that they don't lose ground to their counterparts while we go through this process."

The failure to improve the quality of education in "all schools for all children" is related to the failure to maintain the quality in all schools for all children and to another, consequent problem in CHOICE programs: the separate and unequal schools have led to a drastic imbalance in the proportions of students taking advantage of city-suburban desegregation CHOICE plans. As McGriff points out, in Milwaukee fully 80% of the students exercising their CHOICE options are minority students being transported to majority schools. And in St. Louis, as LaPierre notes, the percentages are even greater: 95% (11,400) of the students moving across lines are minority students; only 5% (600) are white. As both McGriff and LaPierre point out, this imbalance is viewed as an unfair burden upon the black community. The conclusion of both is inescapable: if the quality of education offered in the one-race (black) schools were significantly improved, fewer blacks would opt to leave for predominantly white schools, and more whites would opt to move to the predominantly black schools.

IV DISCUSSION GROUPS

A. Policy Questions

Four sets of questions were developed and given to the discussion groups for consideration. GROUPS A & E focused on Integration; GROUP B focused on Student Achievement and School Performance; GROUP C focused on Allocation and Distribution of Resources; GROUPS D & F focused on Decision-Making and Governance Powers.

GROUPS A & E: INTEGRATION

Here in Maryland, how could CHOICE have an impact on integration?

Questions to Consider:

1. Should CHOICE be used as a tool for racial integration?

2. Will there be greater support and acceptance for integration efforts when parents and students can choose the schools they attend?

3. Will this support and acceptance be compromised when parents and students understand there may not be a neighborhood school for their child to attend and neighborhood classmates? How will kids feel about leaving their neighborhoods? Will they be accepted by those already "at home" in their school of CHOICE?

4. In a school system with a majority African American student population, how could a CHOICE plan encourage integration? Should it?

5. Will most students and their families have the drive to strike out on their own to find the "right" school? Who will be left behind and what resources will there be for them (teachers, equipment, supplies, parent and business involvement)? What needs to be in place for them to do that?

6. Would there be attempts to make the actual classes more integrated, or will the nature of the courses and the background required to be in them deny access to many students?

7. Should any CHOICE plan be instituted at all levels at once? (e.g., elementary, middle, senior high). What are the (dis)advantages of implementation at all levels at the same time vs. gradual phase-in?

8. What considerations does a school system need to take into account to allow CHOICE of school, while maintaining racial balance?

9. Will a CHOICE plan that is only inter (within) district work in your area if racial balance must be maintained? What kinds of transportation issues will arise?

10. How can there be that crucial active parent participation if the school is far from the neighborhood? For instance, should enrollment in selective schools mirror the racial makeup of

the city/county or portions of the city/county?

11. Should participation in any CHOICE plan be mandatory on anyone's part?

12. In an effort to promote racial desegregation, could a CHOICE plan unintentionally replace racial segregation with economic segregation?

GROUP B: STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Here in Maryland, how could CHOICE affect the achievement of students, and the performance of schools and districts?

Questions to Consider:

Keep in mind the ranges of students: at-risk, gifted and talented, special education, teen pregnancy, drop-outs returning and prevention:

1. How could CHOICE create programs suited to students' diverse interests and talents? Will the matches be better for all students? How will enrollments be handled? Is it important to keep a mix of students in the same school?

2. Will CHOICE motivate principals and teachers to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their schools and develop plans for improvement? To whom and how should a school district be accountable for its programs and their success?

3. Should CHOICE be implemented if individual school performance varies so much that parents question whether there are "enough good schools to go around"?

4. What happens to the concept of "neighborhood schools" in a CHOICE plan?

5. What could happen to those schools that lose more students than they gain? How could the schools that have had the most students at risk of school failure become attractive options? Where will they get the resources to improve their performance if they are left behind?

6. If a particular program/school is extremely successfully, should it be expanded/increased even if it means upsetting a racial integration plan which may have been the original reason for implementation?

7. What factors are inherent in CHOICE that will contribute to student achievement? Pros? Cons? How can that be evaluated?

8. If students can "buy into" a school of their CHOICE, and have some input to their daily life at school, what effect can that have on their achievement levels?

9. How can involvement from the business community and other community agencies and orgznizations enhance programs of diversification? How could this affect student achievement and preparation for "life after high school"?

GROUP C: ALLOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

Here in Maryland, how could CHOICE implementation affect adequate and equitable allocation and distribution of resources?

Questions to Consider:

1. If a CHOICE plan is to succeed, it assumes adequate resources. Are there such resources in Maryland? In each division?

2. If the amount spent per pupil in Maryland's school systems ranges from $3761 to $6112, will there be CHOICE among equals?

3. If funding formulas remain the same, would any CHOICE program really increase options? For whom?

4. When a student chooses to move within a district or within the state, what happens to the resources at the school that is left behind (e.g., teachers, equipment, buildings, parent involvement)? What happens to per student funding? What happens in other states?

5. If a statewide equal funding formula were adopted to support a statewide CHOICE plan, what impact would that have on local tax structures?

6. Does a CHOICE program in any district necessarily cost more than what is in place now?

7. Can any CHOICE program be successful without a commitment of funds for such items as transportation and parent information and involvement programs? What has happened in other states?

8. What changes in Maryland's funding formula might be necessary to implement inter/intra district CHOICE programs?

9. Would a CHOICE plan necessarily stop large population movements from one county to another or to a particular part of a county specifically because of the schools?

10. If school enrollments are based in advance on "CHOICEs" rather than population influx, does it necessarily follow that projection planning for funding and resources becomes an easier process?

GROUPS D & F: DECISION-MAKING AND GOVERNANCE POWERS

Here in Maryland, how could CHOICE impact on the decision-making and governance powers of students, parents, administrators, teachers, and local government?

Questions to Consider:

1. In this state, how could CHOICE affect disposition of building funds, hiring of staff, utilization of non-instructional staff time, selection of textbooks, design and content of curricula, district policy development and planning, and sharing of resources?

2. Are there models of school restructuring and decentralization that stand out for improving school performance and student achievement? What are the characteristics of these models? Are measures of teachers' performance and effectiveness included in these models?

3. Should school strengthening strategies be in place before a CHOICE plan is introduced throughout a district? How much assistance would any individual school or school district need from the state to implement a CHOICE plan?

4. How will active participation by teachers and administrators be encouraged? Parents? Students? Legislators? Support personnel?

5. If the public needs to make informed CHOICEs and influence policies at their school of CHOICE, what kinds of information do they need? How should it be provided? To what extent should this be an on-going process?

6. Because parents would have the ability to select their school of CHOICE, does that automatically guarantee there will be more parent involvement in the day-to-day school activities? How do you guarantee parental involvement?

7. How can CHOICE be assessed? Who should be involved? What kind of evaluation tools should be used? What criteria should judge success/failure?

8. What groups/individuals do you see supporting specific CHOICE plans? Why? Opposing? Why?

9. How could parents be included in the CHOICE implementation process? What kinds of information and training would parents need to participate in this process?

10. How, and to what extent, should students be able to participate in all decision-making processes involving a proposed CHOICE plan? What kinds of information and training would students need to participate in this process?

11. To what extent, if any, does the federal, state, and local government play a part in the implementation of CHOICE?

B. Summary of Each Group

GROUP A: INTEGRATION

Co-facilitators: Gary Orfield and George Buntin
Recorder: Ray Suarez

The group members arrived at a consensus on five basic points:

1. CHOICE offers little or no hope of serving as a vehicle for achieving meaningful integration in Maryland. The primary obstacles to that hope are the reluctance of wealthier suburban school districts to participate, the loss of black political power, the lack of large black populations in adjoining suburban school districts, and the reluctance of suburban planners to include low-moderate income housing in new developments.

2. Meaningful CHOICE relates more directly to neighborhood schools with strong parental involvement and a strong teacher role in decision-making.

3. On the basis of the Baltimore City experience with magnet schools and the "skimming" effect of magnet schools throughout the nation, open enrollment and magnet schools do not constitute particularly attractive CHOICE alternatives.

4. CHOICE efforts should be focused most strongly at the pre-K and elementary levels.

5. With regard to the possible effects of CHOICE in Maryland, more effective schools seem a more likely immediate goal than racial integration.

A number of specific comments related to various aspects of CHOICE in general and the group's guideline questions in particular.

Buntin suggested that CHOICE is not a solution for the integration problem. Most people would not support it in an interdistrict form, and Baltimore County itself is too large for a county-wide plan. Rather than CHOICE, public education needs a more systematic form of accountability and increased resources to improve education in general.

Seeing civil rights as an uneasy background issue, Orfield disagreed. No school system has ever spent sufficient money to make the "separate" (i.e., all minority) schools equal to the majority schools, even where more money is spent in cities than in suburbs, e.g., Atlanta. Parents, he felt, would make CHOICEs: in St. Louis, 12,000 black students did go to CHOICE schools. Part of the problem is that central city school systems have not spent effectively whatever additional money they might have had: bureaucracies, politics, and social atmospheres have worked against school improvement.

Buntin viewed the District #13 schools as described by McGriff as an excellent model, but he had reservations about the loss of control experienced in schools in the wake of desegregation.

In response to whether the District #13 experience could be replicated, Orfield said that the Chicago experiment would certainly try to do so.

Concern was expressed about educational funding, specifically that more money had been spent on busing than on improving the quality of education in inner city schools and that pressure is put on teachers to do more with less funding. There seems to be a connection between lack of quality in public schools and the location of schools in poor socio-economic areas. The eight-year waiting list for Section 8 housing is a major drawback to access to effective schools. The recent withdrawal of developers' plans for low-moderate income housing in Owings Mills demonstrates part of the problem: the lack of housing mitigates against moving to areas with better schools.

The Baltimore City Public Schools need more help from social service agencies; the schools should not be expected to serve in that capacity themselves.

Orfield offered responses to several questions. In Wilmington ten years ago, a court-ordered interdistrict desegregation plan worked, but in that case the order set up a new district. In Chicago parents will have to take thirty hours of training to prepare them to assume parental authority over their schools. The Court's Milliken decision requires proof of intent to discriminate; proving intent is difficult if the suburban districts have no one against whom to discriminate; thus, the courts have ordered only three redistrictings since Milliken--Louisville, Wilmington, Indianapolis.

NAACP efforts at helping CHOICE gain a foothold in Maryland could focus on ensuring full parental awareness and on minimizing "skimming." While CHOICE does not have to be related to integration (Baltimore's open enrollment of the 1960's led to double shifts in some schools and did not really result in integration), it seems that some Baltimore politicians will not endorse interdistrict CHOICE plans because of a loss of black political power.

Although there is no meaningful research yet on the educational effects of CHOICE, if parents are fully informed about what is happening in each school and what their options are, they could decide more readily which schools are "good" as opposed to being "popular." Attainment of a 90% first-CHOICE level is unclear; it depends on definitions of the different kinds of schools and on parent access to full information about the schools. That parental knowledge is critical to successful CHOICE plans, including at the elementary level.

GROUP B: STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Co-Facilitators: Deborah McGriff and William Manning
Recorder: Sandra French

In the course of a discussion on magnet schools, a Baltimore City Public School student felt that they were successful since approximately 80% of the graduates go on to higher education. McGriff expressed some concern about the need to reexamine testing for the "examination schools" on a racial/ethnic basis. S he noted that most such schools ensure that no sub-group is excluded at least partially by reserving some seats for students from low socio-economic groups near the cut-off scores and by providing summer enrichment programs for those students.

Lois Martin, Executive Director of the Sondheim Commission, noted that the group did not examine the question of CHOICE schools since they were not part of the group's directive. Nevertheless, in appreciation of the morning discussion of accountability by Heather Lewis, Martin emphasized the need to place emphasis on results attained by such schools: CHOICE must not be an end in itself but a means

to the end of improved educational results.

McGriff cited Joel's list of CHOICE goals: parent involvement, student achievement, teacher morale, and desegregation.

A discussion of student testing revealed a variety of viewpoints, concern over too-rigid reliance on standardized tests, and concern over the kinds of tests being used. With so little with which to assess student achievement other than standardized tests and with CHOICE such an open-ended concept that it would be naive to expect it to achieve all of the goals discussed in the morning session, the suggestion was made that what Maryland needs is a central group to gather data on schools to see what is actually being done and what the schools are actually achieving. Achievement test scores simply point out different socio-economic levels; they do not reveal the actual goals which the schools are achieving. Concern was also expressed that standardized tests are placing too much emphasis on the what and not enough on the why of learning or on the application of the learning, i.e., how the information relates to the "real world."

While many educators still do not accept the concepts of Ron Edmonds or data showing that children at lower socio-economic levels can achieve, some are going beyond reliance on student achievement tests: in Milwaukee, for example, a "report card" on the schools is prepared for parent use.

A discussion of criterion referencing tests in comparison with body of knowledge tests led to a consensus that the goal is to have every school develop the highest possible level of quality: the standard can never be simply the average; in Maryland, the body of knowledge test would be used for all children, not just those who take the equivalent of New York's Regent courses.

There was some difference of view about the relationship between curriculum and performance goals, with some apparently feeling that the curriculum itself would reflect the performance goals and others calling for statewide performance goals without a statewide curriculum. There was, however, a consensus that there should be multiple measurements of student achievement: there is no such thing as a fixed test which works in all cases with all children.

In response to a question, McGriff clarified the points she had made in the morning with regard to parental and community involvement in the CHOICE programs: District #13 was primarily a teacher-designed process with parents getting information; Cambridge included a much higher degree of community involvement, with specific community-set goals; and Milwaukee was more of a central office-designed program intended to emphasize decentralization.

The discussion turned to the first question for consideration, the relation between new programs and students' diverse interests and talents. The question assumes the identification between CHOICE and quality where there could actually be two models: one based on students' different learning styles and interests, and the other based on a conservative market competition in which parents shop for quality. In such a situation, do parents choose the diversity of programs or do they rank schools on the basis of quality?

In response, McGriff noted her own bias toward theme schools; students who had been bored became enthusiastic in their theme schools; they had picked schools with the talent they wanted. Parents made their selections on the basis of the quality of the schools' outcomes as well as on the basis of their philosophies. But such programs must be built slowly, one grade at a time.

Questions about administration reluctance to change and about special needs children elicited specific responses from McGriff. In the case of administrative reluctance, McGriff cited the New York example in which "teacher-leaders" took over programs and "grew their own." The conflict has, in some cases, resulted in litigation; principals and teachers are in different unions and have different professional interests. Teachers are beginning to look at their "career ladder" and are seeing that becoming a principal is simply one step on the ladder.

With regard to special needs students, she pointed out that District #13 had a Resource Special Education teacher in each magnet school and integrated special needs students in the regular programs. Milwaukee did not solve the problem of what to do with special education and bilingual students; now they will deal with the assignment process for those students. While the special education students are still in a separate program, the aim is to have 10 of these sub-groups in each school.

Concern was expressed about educational "buzzwords"; that is, before CHOICE became the buzzword, school-based management (or site-based decision making, SBM) was the buzzword. If SBM preceded CHOICE, wouldn't there be fewer problems or no need even for CHOICE? The goal of all the discussion and implementation of various CHOICE programs is the improvement of education for our children, regardless of buzzwords.

A discussion of question four (i.e., on neighborhood schools) pointed to the potential conflict between neighborhood schools and CHOICE schools: the very existence of the CHOICE schools could be threatening to neighborhood schools. When CHOICE schools are given some form of material advantage, parents in neighborhood schools want the same for their children. Pressures are thus increased to spread already limited local dollars out to all schools, and boards of education are forced to dilute. A strong superintendent can lead to monies being given to historically underfunded schools which traditionally have been weak politically.

Comments on question three (i.e., parental concern over the wide variety of school performance) revolved around a discussion of racial proportions in neighborhoods and reaching out beyond those neighborhoods. McGriff noted that Cambridge's 50% neighborhood walk and 50% CHOICE balance worked with parental participation and approval.

A student at Baltimore City College High School, a liberal arts magnet school, questioned the need to put the discussion on the basis of race: students will pick a school based on merit, not on race. While the consensus was that most parents would also choose schools on the basis of merit not race, McGriff noted that there is still a tendency in some areas to deny black students access to certain schools on the basis of race; it is unfortunate, she said, that "we ask our children to do what we're not willing to do as adults."

GROUP C: ALLOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES

Co-Facilitators: D. Bruce LaPierre and Patsy B. Blackshear
Recorder: Lois Hybl

The group did not reach consensus on any issue. There was a particular difference over the issue of the relationship between CHOICE and funding. Some members felt that parents should have an open

CHOICE of schools even if no money were provided: the mere threat of students' leaving would stimulate the "home" schools to improve or stimulate the school administration to replace "ineffective" principals. Others questioned the value of a CHOICE plan in which no additional funds were provided for school improvement or for the additional transportation costs for students traveling to their CHOICE schools.

Much time was spent asking LaPierre questions about the St. Louis experience. In his responses, LaPierre reiterated the information contained in his morning presentation.

It was noted that Washington, D.C., compares its school funding to that of Montgomery and Prince George's Counties, partly because they are neighboring districts and partly because Baltimore City (the closest large city with similar problems) is also grossly underfunded.

Because of past court decisions and political considerations, it seems that improving the inner city schools is a more viable option for Baltimore than developing and implementing interdistrict CHOICE plans, but finding the additional funding for that goal remains a problem. Perhaps not entirely facetiously, one participant suggested dissolving the city and dividing it among the suburban counties. The city does, however, plan to ask the General Assembly for funds for magnet schools.

GROUP D: DECISION-MAKING AND GOVERNANCE POWERS

Co-Facilitators: Heather Lewis and Leslie Jones
Recorder: Marilyn Hunter

This group arrived at consensus on five major points.

The exact nature of CHOICE needs to be clarified, that is, what are the educational and social contexts in which it is to operate? What are the conditions under which it is to be implemented? Some of those conditions may involve de facto busing; some may lead to improvement of schools not originally designated as "CHOICE schools"; some may lead to a kind of "two-tiered" education which actually undermines the quality of education in those areas most in need of support.

CHOICE must be seen as simply <u>one</u> of the options available for the improvement of education and not by any means <u>the</u> option that will solve all problems. Some members of the group expressed the somewhat cynical view that CHOICE is a self-serving ploy put forward by those who want to be able to talk about educational improvement without committing the funding essential for that end.

Whatever its merits, since CHOICE is on the educational-political agenda, people interested in the improvement of education must stay informed and involved so that no options are implemented without full and open discussion of their implications and public consent.

Any CHOICE option requires <u>informed</u> parental involvement on the part of parents in <u>all</u> groups; parents must be educated about education. Too often, some people assume that parents know what a good school is, can make an informed decision, and are equally prepared to choose options for improved education. However, there are parents--among them the young and those whom poverty or illiteracy has robbed of options--who lack the necessary information.

Ultimately, every school should be a CHOICE school. That is, schools must be equal in the quality of education they provide; otherwise, the system will deny quality education to some of its constituents. Indeed, if there were equity in funding and support for education, there would be less need for CHOICE as a mechanism either for competition for students or for educational improvement.

GROUP E: INTEGRATION

Co-Facilitators: Vernon L. Clark and Louise F. Waynant
Recorder: Robert Clark

This group reached consensus on several key points:

1. Integration is important, but it must not be the primary goal of a CHOICE program;

2. CHOICE should never be used to concentrate or segregate schools by race;

3. Desegregation may be a positive outcome of a CHOICE system, but such a system can be defended only if its primary goal is the improvement of the quality of education and if it actually results in the improvement of the quality of education.

In arriving at that consensus, the members of the group expressed and agreed on a number of concerns.

Is CHOICE a movement to improve schools, to bring about desegregation, or to do both? Can both improvement and desegregation be achieved?

There needs to be greater variety in the classroom in order to achieve a high quality education.

While children in integrated schools may develop mastery of content, they may lack an understanding of diversity in human heritages and cultures.

The concepts of "magnet schools" and "CHOICE" need to be clarified.

After strong efforts 15-20 years ago to desegregate schools, the schools are in fact re-segregated; maybe resources should go into other efforts.

There can be no real CHOICE if information on all schools is not easily available to everyone. Parent involvement is critical, and it depends on full information.

How can magnet schools be developed without seriously draining resources from neighborhood schools?

Although Baltimore has strong neighborhood communities, people transfer because their schools are bad. Many people would prefer to improve the neighborhood school rather than spend resources on magnet schools or CHOICE programs.

The discussion needs to eliminate terminology seen as "harmful"; e.g., the term "minority" can assume

a negative connotation.

It is difficult to compare schools when there is such a discrepancy in funding resources available.

Prince George's County Milliken II schools, while greatly improving performance due to added resources, may be creating or furthering racial isolation.

In the course of the discussion, Louise Waynant offered some highlights about the Prince George's County system. In the 171 schools in the county, there are 47 magnet programs of thirteen different types. A desegregation court order led to the development of the magnet schools.

The Milliken II schools were those which could not realistically be desegregated. They were given more resources in order to improve the quality of education, e.g., 20:1 pupil:teacher ratio; computer laboratories, new textbooks.

Among the results of the Prince George's County program are (1) greatly improved desegregation resulting from the magnet schools, (2) drastic improvement in student achievement at the Milliken II schools, and (3) general school improvement as a result of system incentives for educational quality and response to competition provoked by the magnet concept. In addition, the county has received extra state money due to the court order, and federal money has been concentrated in the Milliken II schools. There have been increased efforts to involve parents in the planning for and managing of schools; these efforts have been especially beneficial to the neighborhood Milliken II schools. Each year, data on student performance at each school is collected and examined. Principals are evaluated by their schools' overall achievement and by how successful they are at closing the gap between black and white achievement.

GROUP F: DECISION-MAKING AND GOVERNANCE POWERS

Co-Facilitators: Thomas P. Friend and Mary S. Johnson
Recorder: JoAnn Robinson

This group arrived at a consensus on three major points.

1. Because CHOICE is an elastic term which may have different meanings for different people in different contexts, before embracing the concept parents, students, teachers, administrators, and local government leaders should determine exactly what is meant when they offer or are offered CHOICE as an educational policy.

For some people, CHOICE means an opportunity to make a private school out of a public one. In Worcester and St. Louis, it has meant an option exercised more by minority students than by white students. While it calls for parental involvement, in Worcester only about 5,000 of 21,000 eligible families are taking advantage of it or are getting involved in their CHOICE schools. In Montgomery County, it may mean program options within schools. City or regional demographics have serious effects on the nature of CHOICE plans and on such economic factors as transportation costs.

Thus, CHOICE plans must be tailored to fit the needs and realities of the school systems for which they are proposed. Parents, educators, and political leaders need to develop both criteria by which to determine the applicability of a particular CHOICE plan to their area and assessment instruments by

which to measure any proposed plan. Without clear definitions and assessment measures, parents, educators, and political leaders need to exercise caution.

2. CHOICE plans already in effect in Maryland, including Baltimore City, should be encouraged, enhanced, supported, and publicized. Care should be taken not to allow new plans to overshadow or undermine existing effective and promising plans. Parents should be informed about and refer to the Maryland State Teachers Association study of CHOICE plans in the State, e.g., various inter-county student transfers, interdistrict student transfers within Baltimore City (e.g., Theodore Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools program and the older, citywide public high school CHOICE).

When existing plans are overlooked or are overshadowed by the novelty and publicity of a newer plan, people working in existing plans may be discouraged. Prior to adoption of new plans, a committee should work to strengthen and publicize the effective programs in the schools.

When new programs draw students away from schools, the resulting population decline may seriously weaken the schools that are left behind, undercutting and demoralizing teachers and the community. Such a population decline generally will result in staff reallocation from the affected school.

Because enhancing existing programs and supporting new ones require substantial funding, there is some suspicion that politicians' calls for CHOICE appears to be the invocation of a "buzzword" which will enable them to support educational reform without making the essential funding commitment.

3. Before any significant decisions about CHOICE can be reached, it is critical that the unavoidable issue of funding be resolved; any suggestion that CHOICE can significantly improve the quality of education without increased and equitable funding is misleading.

CHOICE itself will most likely entail increased spending, especially in the area of transportation. But if money is reallocated from existing budgets to cover the cost of busing, both the existing and the new CHOICE programs will suffer severe funding losses. Existing programs in Baltimore City have already been weakened by inadequate budgets.

Some group members felt that education will always suffer from a chronic shortage of funds and suggested fund-raising activities or cooperative relationships with business. Others suggested the need to call for a public examination of national and state priorities involving the funding of education and other public services. While education is generally considered the most important public investment interest, we spend $24,000 per year on each inmate in a correctional facility, yet we spend only an average of $4,000 per year per student in the public schools. And while Maryland is fifth among the states in per capita wealth, it is 42nd in its contribution to public elementary and secondary education. Friend indicated that the Massachusetts statistics are roughly comparable. The disparity in wealthy states between fiscal capacity and fiscal support for public education indicates that some citizens in those states may feel that they do not have to set equal educational opportunity for all as a priority.

If CHOICE is to become one of the avenues to such equal educational opportunity, it can only do so when adequate, equitable funding is available to meet the educational needs of children of all classes and conditions. Striving to attain that goal is often discouraging and reaching it extremely difficult, but, as Friend noted, "we simply cannot give up: the children are too important."

C: Commentary

Across the boundaries of the six afternoon discussion groups, there were some common threads, issues, and concerns. These commonalities crossed not only within each of the two sets of groups which dealt with the same issues (i.e., Groups A and E on Integration, and Groups D and F on Governance) but also among the six groups generally.

Because CHOICE is a broad concept subject to varying interpretation, the exact nature of any CHOICE program must be clarified especially as it relates to specific educational and social contexts; any such program must be clearly and specifically tailored to fit the realities of the local school system.

CHOICE must be seen as simply one of the options available for improving education, not as a panacea which can solve all problems. The ultimate goal must be the improvement of the quality of education in all schools. Thus, traditional neighborhood schools must not be abandoned in favor of CHOICE or magnet schools. Indeed, in the sense that every school should offer the kind of high quality educational programs which its students need and their parents demand, every school should be a CHOICE school.

The key to the success of CHOICE schools will be the quality of education which they offer. Thus, too, the primary goal of CHOICE programs must be the improvement of education, not integration. While integration is certainly an important goal and a desired outcome, it should not take precedence over educational improvement. Particularly in Maryland and Baltimore, given the social, political, and educational contexts, the development of more effective schools is seen as a more likely and attainable goal than is integration of and by itself.

Another critical factor in the likely success of CHOICE programs--and, indeed, in the improvement of educational quality in general--is informed parental involvement; to the extent possible, all parents from all constituent groups need to be involved. They must participate to the extent possible, and they must be kept (and must keep themselves) fully informed about the state of the public schools both in general and specific to their own children, regardless of whether the schools are neighborhood, CHOICE, or magnet schools. Parents in Maryland should be familiar with the MSTA study on CHOICE plans within the state.

Essential to the improvement of education and to the success of CHOICE programs is adequate funding. CHOICE can serve as a viable avenue to equal educational opportunity only when adequate, equitable funding is available for all schools and all student populations. In addition, CHOICE itself will entail increased spending both in the development of educational programs and in the provision of transportation. Without the additional funding, CHOICE plans are doomed to failure.

A broad range of evaluative measures must be developed and implemented in order to ascertain the actual levels of student achievement and school performance in both traditional and CHOICE schools. No single test or measuring tool can adequately evaluate all individuals and all groups in all educational and social contexts. Testing itself should not be used unilaterally as a device for excluding any of the school population subgroups from any schools or programs within the system. What is needed is a central body which would gather data on school and student performance and which would make that data (and any recommendations or conclusions) available to the public. The public in general and parents in particular have both a right and a need to know what the schools are doing and achieving and how the students are performing. At the same time, public and parents need to be cautious about the imposition of statewide

curricula as opposed to the setting of more general student performance goals.

The development of CHOICE programs and schools must focus on two key aspects: attention to the individual differences in students' learning styles and interests and attention to the development of high quality regardless of the nature of the curriculum or "theme." A school which focuses on meeting students' needs for an arts curriculum but which fails to provide rigorous quality standards will ultimately fail to meet the needs of its constituents, students, parents, and public. A school which prides itself on firm, high standards but which imposes a lock-step curriculum for all students will also ultimately fail to meet the needs of its constituents.

V COMMON THREADS, ISSUES, CONCERNS

Through the keynote speeches and the question-and-answer session which followed, the panelists' presentations, and the group discussion sessions, several key ideas were repeated and re-emphasized. They are ideas and concepts which the METROPOLITAN EDUCATION COALITION offers for consideration by all of those interested in the improvement of public education--parents, teachers, education administrators, members of the general public.

The first and most critical point is this: a high quality public education is both the right of the citizens of this state and the responsibility of public officials, educators, and parents alike. Neither this nation nor this state can thrive as a political, social, economic, or cultural entity without a strong, creative, disciplined public education system which meets the needs of the students, their parents, and the broader economic and social community. Indeed, one might question whether this nation or this state can even survive as a viable entity without that education.

Such a system costs. It costs money, substantial quantities of money distributed equitably among the components of the system without regard to the ability of the direct constituency of any individual component to pay for that education. Equitable funding of education is critical to the delivery of equitable high quality education: no child should have to suffer from a sub-standard education simply because he lives within the confines of a low-income school system.

But such a system also costs energy. Building it and sustaining it requires the commitment of time and energy on the part of public officials, on the part of education administrators and teachers, and on the part of parents and others in the community. Elected officials must be responsive to the educational wishes and needs of the electorate. Education administrators and teachers must be creative and imaginative as well as disciplined in developing high quality programs which meet the educational needs of their students. Parents must insist on being fully informed and must commit themselves to active involvement in their children's education, not only through contact with classroom teachers but also through membership on planning and coordinating bodies.

If, as the saying goes, war is too important to be left to the generals, education is too important to be left to the educators. Children are in the hands and care of teachers and administrators roughly six hours a day, 180 days a year: parents need to know what they are doing and need to participate in the planning of what they are doing. In any educational plans or programs, it is critical that parents keep informed about them, participate in discussions about them, and participate in planning and implementation of any changes.

CHOICE plans and magnet school programs are one viable means of improving the quality of education. They offer a meaningful alternative to "traditional" schools and programs, and they offer many potential benefits if they are properly planned and implemented. Such programs have worked not only to improve the general quality of the education offered within the particular schools but also within the system as a whole, creating a kind of positive educational "domino effect," leading not to the downfall of other schools but to their uplift. They have also increased student interest and motivation by focusing more directly on actual student interest at a sound educational, academic, and professional level, e.g., schools/programs concentrating on such areas as the creative arts, computer science, engineering, the humanities. They have led to a significant increase in the level and quality of student interest and participation in their education and in the quality of student performance.

They have also had a strongly beneficial social side effect. Properly planned with awareness of the ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds of the student population in mind, CHOICE plans and magnet school programs have led to a greater mixing of these populations, and this mixing can serve to increase the kind of cultural, ethnic, and social exchange critical to the development both of culturally responsive, growing human beings and of a cooperative social body: each of the parts grows individually, and the group grows as a whole. Seen in this light, the traditional "problem" of desegregation-resegregation can cease to be a matter of numbers, percentages, and proportions; it can resolve itself into the development of culturally and ethnically aware individual human beings who live in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society.

Developing sound CHOICE plans and magnet school programs requires careful attention to several key points: the educational, political, and socio-economic contexts; quality and focus of the program in relation to curriculum, staffing, and student components; parental involvement and information; necessary funding; transportation; centralized vs. decentralized CHOICE arrangements; student performance and system outcome measures; and community discussion and decision-making.

No single plan will fit the needs of all communities interested in CHOICE/magnet school programs. The specific elements of any plan must be carefully tailored to fit the educational, political, and socio-economic needs of the community it is designed to serve. A geographically large subdivision of unusual shape (e.g., Baltimore County) could not easily accommodate a single creative arts middle or high school, for example, because transportation problems would likely be insurmountable. A subdivision with a large minority population would need to cooperate with another, majority-based subdivision to develop a plan which would encourage desegregation or cultural/ethnic exchange.

The actual development of the programs of the schools participating in the plan must take into account considerations of both quality and a student-interest theme as they relate to curriculum, staffing, and students. The most successful CHOICE schools will be those which combine a clear focus on student interests (e.g., creative arts, computer science) with a firm academic emphasis on quality. These two characteristics must be part of curriculum planning and staff and student selection. The right program will fail if the teachers and the students are unwilling to commit themselves to it. The two most valuable resources in any school system or in any individual school are the teachers and the students.

To the extent possible, consideration should be given to some form of school-based management. That is, both teachers and principals (or teacher-directors) on the site of specific schools must have both direct responsibility for development of programs within the school (e.g., school "theme," curriculum, staffing, performance measures) and accountability for actual outcomes (e.g., student performance, student post-program accomplishments).

For any such program to succeed, the parents must also be committed to it. And parental commitment can only be earned and held through solicitation of active parental involvement: parents must not only be kept informed about the options available to them once a system is in place, they must also be invited and encouraged to participate in the planning of the system before it is put in place. Obviously, as with teachers and education administrators, not all parents will have the time or the inclination to be involved in the planning. But they must be given full access to information about the plan, about the performance levels of both students and schools, and about their children's educational options: a positive, active parental outreach program is critical.

As with high quality educational systems as a whole, high quality CHOICE plans and magnet school

programs are expensive. Everything about the plans costs money: planning, public information, implementation, staff training, transportation of students. Sometimes that latter cost is overlooked, but if student options are to be meaningful, free transportation must be provided for those who need it, and that transportation cost can be much higher than traditional transportation costs. Students must sometimes be moved across relatively long distances, distances greater than those they might normally have to face. Such transportation can also take significantly longer periods of time than traditional transportation: trips of one hour or more each way are not unheard of.

An equitable system of parental CHOICE allocations is critical; parents must have the certainty that their CHOICEs are being acted upon in as fair a manner as possible. In order to ensure the fair establishment and application of criteria, a centralized system is generally preferred. However, each community must decide which meets its needs most fairly--centralized or decentralized.

Parents, education administrators, teachers, the local community, and the community at large have a right to know what effects the plan is having; they have a right to know how well both the students and the system are performing. Accordingly, it is critical that substantive and fair student performance and system outcome performance measures be included as part of the plan. Because there is such a broad spectrum of teaching and learning styles and performance goals, these measures should be of as wide a variety as possible; plans should not rely on any one performance measure, be it an objective, standardized test or some other test.

Finally, and what may in fact be one of the most important qualities, there needs to be open and extensive community discussion of all of the issues and possibilities before any decisions are made, and there must be as much community participation in decision-making about the planning and implementation as possible.

Indeed, it is this last point on which this report will close, the same point on which the conference itself was based: the METROPOLITAN EDUCATION COALITION and COPPIN STATE COLLEGE sponsored this conference on CHOICE specifically to stimulate public discussion about education in general and about CHOICE in specific. Whether we favor CHOICE or not is, in one important sense, irrelevant at this point. What is relevant is that the education community and the general community within and across specific school districts, within and across political subdivisions, and across the state in general, continue the discussion about how to improve education in their areas. The purpose of this conference was not to provide answers to all questions, was not to promote CHOICE as a panacea. The purpose was to stimulate additional questions and discussions and to foster realistic consideration of CHOICE by parents and educators working together to improve the quality of education. This report should be simply one of the resources available to and used by local communities as they address the question of improving the quality of education.

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