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ABSTRACT

In spring 1991, Alaska Governor Walter J. Hickel appointed a Commission for School Choice and charged it with recommending choice options most appropriate for the state. This report first summarizes the commission's findings: (1) public support for more choice in education is ambivalent; (2) Alaskan public education needs improvement; (3) neighborhood schools are free and convenient; (4) Alaska's private schools reflect a strong parental commitment to choice in education; (5) Alaska's public schools are all very similar; (6) some effective education choices are available in Alaska's urban public schools; (7) education choices in rural Alaska are very limited; (8) early childhood education deficits last a lifetime; (9) Alaskan public schools try to be all things to all students; (10) accountability for school performance is inadequate; (11) substantial and formidable opposition to educational vouchers; and (12) Alaska's constitution severely limits use of school vouchers. The report then recommends authorization of public contract schools; creation of afterschool and summer school choices; expansion of preschool, K-3, and early childhood programs; operation of the "America's Schools 2000" demonstration program as an education choice school; expansion of existing public school choices; increased availability of alternative high school choices; development of model choice schools by the state's universities; and increase of contracts for specialized education support services. Subsequent chapters discuss choice in relation to educational organization and resources, constitutional limits on choice, and choices for Alaskans. (MLH)

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Choice & Innovation in K-12

A report by the Governor's Commission on School Choice

EA 024 282

Choice and Innovation in K-12

Prepared for
Governor Walter J. Hickel
State of Alaska

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March 1992

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I. Introduction and Executive Summary

In the spring of 1991 Governor Walter J. Hickel appointed a five-member Commission on School Choice and gave it the task of recommending "the best ways to improve the quality of education by creating greater choice for parents in the schools their children attend..., to explore all reasonable avenues of school choice, including school vouchers, and to recommend choice options most appropriate for Alaska."

This report presents the commission's findings and recommendations, based on several months of deliberations, consultations, and public testimony. Early in its work the commission agreed to focus its attention and recommendations on educational choices that expressly aim to improve students' education; that initially target underachieving students; and that can show evidence of both significant academic success and parental and student interest. The commission also chose to focus on education choices which could be replicated in Alaska but which would not cost more than the current per student education costs, or significantly add to the overall cost of education.

In the next few pages we summarize the commission's findings and recommendations. Subsequent chapters discuss choice and organization in education and the constitutional limits on choice. The final chapters outline the education choices open to Alaskans, discuss commission recommendations in more detail, and offer some concluding thoughts.

Summary of Findings

- ***Public support for more choice in education is ambivalent.*** Parents of children in both public and private schools give their own schools relatively high grades, while at the same time they and the general public give schools overall relatively low grades and indicate support for more education choices.

- ***Public education in Alaska needs improvement.*** Many Alaska students—including a disproportionate share of minority students—leave school unprepared to compete favorably in either higher education or in the market place.

- ***Neighborhood schools are free and convenient.*** Approximately 80 percent of parents with school-age children enroll them in "regular" public school programs. The rest choose public school optional education programs, home school programs, correspondence programs, or private schools. It is not known how many parents with children in public schools would choose to send them to private schools if they could afford it.

- ***Alaska's private schools reflect a strong parental commitment to choice in education.*** While the cost per student is significantly lower for private than for public schools in Alaska, parents bear the entire costs of sending their children to private schools, in addition to whatever local taxes they pay to help support local public schools.

- ***Alaska's public schools are all very similar.*** All of Alaska's public schools operate for the same number of days per year, have similar schedules, and teach similar curricula. They are all subject to the same state regulations and are funded according to the state's School Foundation Program irrespective of school performance.

- ***Some effective education choices are available in Alaska's urban public schools.*** In several urban school districts parents may choose which public schools their children attend, and some schools have optional programs available to children whose parents will furnish transportation to and from school.

- ***Education choices in rural Alaska are very limited.*** Most of Alaska's rural public schools do not offer local school choices, mainly because they are small.

• ***Deficits in early childhood education last a lifetime.*** The care and education offered to the smallest Alaskans varies widely and choices are limited.

• ***Public schools in Alaska try to be all things to all students.*** Public school educators told the commission that a number of factors have combined to make teaching in public schools difficult. Those factors include increased class sizes; widely diverse student learning styles and abilities within the same classroom; and increased incidences of family-related problems affecting student learning.

• ***Accountability for school performance in Alaska is inadequate.*** The absence of a consensus on education goals or standards in Alaska makes it difficult to measure student learning and create systems of accountability for school performance.

• ***Substantial and formidable opposition to school vouchers exists in Alaska.*** Alaska's associations of school boards, school administrators, PTAs, and the teachers' union all testified before the commission in support of increasing *public school choice* but in opposition to education vouchers which could be used to pay for private schooling. In contrast, some parents, students, and representatives of private schools spoke in support of vouchers.

• ***Alaska's constitution severely restricts the use of school vouchers.*** The state constitution mandates "a system of public schools open to all ..., free of sectarian control. No money shall be paid from public funds for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution." Public funds may possibly be used for such education-related expenses as student loans, transportation, and health services. Also, the constitutional question may to some extent turn on the definition of the phrase "direct benefit."

Summary of Recommendations

Against the background of findings outlined above, the commission recommends:

1. ***Public contract schools should be tried as a means of increasing both education choice and school-based autonomy.*** The state Board of Education should ask the Alaska Legislature to enact legislation that would allow contracting for public schools, much like what the State of Minnesota currently does. Such legislation would permit Alaska to demonstrate the potential for expanding education choice. It would authorize school boards to issue performance contracts to educators who propose to operate public schools representing education choices for parents and students. The legislation would limit the number of demonstration schools to perhaps ten for the first two years, while the programs were systematically evaluated by an objective third party.

2. ***After school and summer school choices should be created.*** The state Board of Education, in cooperation with school districts and teachers, should develop and propose to the Alaska Legislature a fund to finance after school and summer school programs. The sources of funding should include pro rata shares of applicable categorical assistance (such as Title I); parent-paid tuition (equalized according to the ability-to-pay); and student loans which would be forgiven if the student (and, if applicable, the parent) successfully completed the program. Such programs would give groups of teachers opportunities to offer—on a performance contract basis—innovative remedial, accelerated, or specialized education courses.

3. ***Pre-school, K-3, and early childhood education programs should be expanded as programs of choice.*** The state Commissioner of Community and Regional Affairs should incorporate the principles of education choice as Alaska strives to make early childhood and pre-school education universally available.

4 .*The "America's Schools 2000" demonstration program in Alaska should be designed and operated as an education choice school.* Under a proposal by the U.S. Department of Education, Alaska has an opportunity to establish a demonstration model school program. The state Commissioner of Education should consult with parents and educators in deciding what Alaska's schools should be like in the year 2000—and design the demonstration program as one of choice, ideally incorporating one or more of the above recommended education choices.

The commission believes that the public's interest in quality should focus on results. However, there is no way to know if quality is improved by expanded choice unless the state adopts a comprehensive system of testing and evaluating what students have learned. The commission also recommends:

5. *Existing public school choices should be expanded both within and among public school districts.* Public school boards should work with the state Commissioner of Education to identify exemplary "optional" programs, particularly those designed to help underachieving students. These optional programs should be broadly advertised, emphasizing their focus, availability, and performance. Special attention is needed to remove the transportation barriers to participation in these optional programs; currently, only students whose parents can provide transportation can enroll. Transportation vouchers should be explored as a means of overcoming this barrier to choice, particularly for instances of cross-district transfers.

6 . *Alternative high school choices should be available to all students, especially to those from small villages.* The state Commissioner of Education should work with parents, school boards, and school administrators to propose legislation that would provide high school options (possibly including regional boarding schools) for rural students from small villages, particularly during their junior and senior years. The potential cost savings between expensive small schools and less expensive larger schools should partially offset the costs of providing alternative high school options.

7. *The state's universities should be encouraged and authorized to develop and operate "model" choice schools.* The state Commissioner of Education should consult with university officials and school administrators to identify "model" choice schools that would be the most valuable for expanding education options in Alaska, and propose legislation authorizing universities to develop and operate such schools. Students attending university "model" choice schools should be drawn from the appropriate general student population. The programs should be funded in the same manner existing schools are funded, but with some additional allowance because they would be demonstration programs.

8. *Contracts for specialized education support services should be increased.* School boards should consider increasing the use of contract services as a cost-effective means of providing students with specialized education or support services.

II. What is Choice?

Expanded education choice is required on its own merits, not just as a cheap fix for the present ills of education.

The Historic Roots

Each generation restates anew the American faith in individualism and distrust of the state. In this context, education is an anomaly, one of the few activities that has been assigned, by consensus, to governmental control for over a century. The government role has depended for its success on the viability of locally elected school boards as the instruments of that control. Critics of the institutions of education have been quick to note that the premise is still subject to challenge.

Other industrial nations have arrangements that involve a greater reliance on private institutions, without apparent harm, it is argued and, in most cases, set a narrower top to the educational pyramid. Still, from Plato to Mao Tse Tung, education has been considered a core activity of nation building and national identification. Education sets our collective notions of the future.

Individualism is also used as a misleading label for something quite different: the group interests to which we surrender our individuality out of religious commitment or for social comfort or economic advantage. Recent history provides ample evidence that the American Republic is increasingly a pluralistic nation. Whether pluralism is helping or hurting the nation's success, we hear from every quarter that individualism, expressed through democracy and market capitalism, is enjoying a golden moment of history.

In recent months or years, we have seen the disintegration of collectivist empires, a new wave of immigration to American shores, a resurgence of confidence in ethnic or sub-national group identity, religious revival, and a consolidation of the successes of special interest politics. It is not surprising that as we become a more pluralistic nation, our institutional modeling increasingly reflects that pluralism. Education faces a pluralistic challenge.

Simultaneously, new institutional modeling has been stimulated by the world triumph of capitalist theories of economics and a revival of democratic individualism as a political faith. America's role as the home of individual free enterprise and individual political rights encourages the breaking of new ground in reshaping all our institutions to follow the analogies of market structure and free personal choice. For example, there is no constitutional objection to the extension of support services such as transportation, health, and food programs to private institutions.

The Current Conflict

The coincidence of the revival of these two themes—pluralism and market capitalism—is stirring public attitudes on the organization of education. Many voices are heard calling for more latitude for education to reflect the varieties of culture, religion, and interest that are America. Other voices argue that restraints on the application of market economics to education have deadened competitive impulses that could improve its quality. The international non-competitiveness of American education, and the spectacular examples of collapse of quality in many inner city educational institutions, are pointed to as consequences of rigidity in the established system.

A call for more choice in education is heard throughout the land. In its broadest sense, the call for expanded choice is simply a call for change—change that would allow greater variety in the educational enterprise, in the belief that variety would mean improvement.

On the other hand, some people fear that we may be going too far. The idea that Americans are one nation forging common goals still has vitality. But some believe that vitality is being undermined by greed and provincialism. Leaders in the existing education system worry that the centrifugal forces of pluralism may, by encouraging ill-considered change in the name of reform, destroy much that is good in the existing system of common schools. The defenders of the existing order point out that a wide majority of parents are happy with the education provided by the schools their own children attend. It is the *other* schools in the district, state, and country that have it all wrong.

Range of Choice

Home education—a pure form of individual choice—has enjoyed a mild revival, but practically it is beyond the capability of all but a tiny percentage of parents. Choice, for its advocates, has really meant that they prefer transferring education decisionmaking from a geographically defined group, led by an elected school board, to an institution specific to their group identification. But choice advocates are often unwilling to give up access to public funds for the sake of choice.

Much of the popular interest in choice has focused on voucher plans. Under such plans, the dissatisfied parents of school-age children get a slip of paper that they can use to help pay for private education for their children. As we discuss in Chapter V, a program that simply grafts a voucher plan of this type onto the existing system of public schools—mandated by Section 1 of Article VII of the Constitution of Alaska—would be fraught with difficulties. The use of the voucher technique to fund parts of the education system is not prohibited. However, specific design features are critical to meeting a legal test.

But expanded choice can mean much more than vouchers. The debate should to be enlarged to cover a greater variety of options. Many public educators are already trying to expand choice in education—but the general community is often not aware of these efforts. We need more information on obstacles to the expansion of the many choice options already tested in Alaska. But we also need to look at options that are not currently on the table. We need to learn more about the range of options and make that information generally known; and identify and remove the barriers in existing institutional arrangements.

A Question of Quality

The commission does not have the time or resources to design finished programs based on particular recommendations, or to identify barriers and implement strategies for removing them. Our assigned mission is more limited. But we have come far enough to see that much should be changed and that opportunities abound. Implementation is up to the several new committees intent on reform, and the established institutions of leadership in education.

We agree that the quality of education given to most Alaska children is insufficient to our times and to Alaska's particular circumstances. In particular, the quality of education available to Alaska Natives on average is poor and problematic. It is not hard to find the Alaska Native situation in *Indian Nations At Risk* (U.S. Department of Education 1991), the final report of the Indian Nations At Risk Task Force.

But Alaska Native education apart, Alaskans appropriately ask why their children's scores in mathematics and English are not among the nation's highest, considering the generally high level of education among Alaskans and our high per capita investment in education. At the time of statehood, Alaskans prided themselves on being citizens of an "education state." Too much of both the pride and the commitment seem to have leached away. Alaska is a part of the national dissatisfaction with the conditions of public education, and the national movement to diagnose the problem and reform the system. But the announcement of a national program to improve quality in education is no substitute for local effort and local leadership.

Choice is not a substitute for expanded investment in education. The reorganization of education cannot provide a cheap fix for education problems. But expanded investment in education should go hand in hand with expanded choice. Investing more money in the existing system is not likely to produce visible benefits. By increasing choice in education we can make the required new investment more visible and subject to specific accountability.

III. The Organization of Education

All education is self-education.

It is easy to confuse expansion of choices with expansion in the number and strength of providers. In fact, increasing choices can involve changes in the resources that go into education, in institutional arrangements and teaching techniques, and in the results of education. These factors all contribute to the broad goals of education—goals that can range from preparing students for college to molding responsible citizens and parents. The organization of education could be diagrammed as in Figure 1.

Education could be organized in virtually endless combinations and varieties of resources, of delivery systems, and of measurements of results. Each of the indicators in Figure 1 could vary in many ways.

Resources and Choice

Those studying how to improve the quality of education need to ask themselves whether they are addressing the right issues. In diagramming the organization of education, areas of relative neglect emerge. For example, our difficulties may lie more with our neglect of important intangibles that go into education—such as student motivation and parent and student time—than with more concrete factors.

We believe that all education is self education. It is what students put into their own heads that becomes their education. Thus student motivation and the investment of time by the student may be the points of

Figure 1. The Organization of Education

Resources	Institutional Structure	Results	Goals
Public money Local property tax other tax State dedicated funds resource revenue tax revenue Federal categorical aid general aid Private funds Parent Other Student motivation Big/small school Parent interest Teacher skill Teacher commitment Teacher time Student time Established infrastructure	K - 12 Grades Tracking Systems Curriculum Grading systems Schools within schools special collegiate collegiate vocational ABC or Optional Conditions of teacher employment Public or private management Contracted service mix Regulatory environment School governance	Grades Diplomas Student effort measures Test scores Dropouts Health records Juvenile crime data Prizes Income Community involvement	College admission Other school admission Job vs. unemployment Career recognition A moral citizen Personal satisfaction in education Personal satisfaction in life Healthy community Parent satisfaction

beginning for improvement in the quality of education. The public's intuitive understanding of this basic truth explains much of the appeal of choice: students who choose their own education are more likely to be motivated to pursue it.

Administrative Structure and Decisional Control

Parent and Child

There are choices in selecting decisionmakers. Parents and children must work out their own division of power over time as the children mature. Wishes of parent and child often do not coincide. Parents' monopoly on wisdom erodes as older children learn to know themselves and take charge of their lives. Parent and child must share power with teachers, principals, and other school authorities (public or private), as well as with the public that has no children but derives a stake from citizenship and taxation.

Delegation of Authority in Schools

Public Schools: Organizational choices are made collectively. School boards, PTAs, school advisory councils, and local, state, and nationally elected officials share with individuals the authority over education and its resources. These often maligned officials are surrogates, making choices for individuals, providing a majority will, where majority will is required—but in the best of worlds also giving weight to the wishes of minorities. They also provide time and technical expertise that most parents don't have.

Private Schools: In a society which defines itself as pluralistic, the majority will may be the enemy—not the choice of citizens whose primary identifications are with their religious persuasion, cultural or ethnic perspective, socio-economic class, or even political-ideological perspective Such citizens may prefer private schools that perpetuate their own perspective or persuasion.

Public and Private Delegation of Choice

There are few obstacles to private schools, as long as no public funds are involved—though the general society may set limits if it believes its broad values are threatened. For example, private schools that attempt to recruit from the general public thereby lose some of their private quality and become subject to general regulation. This general regulation is similar to that applied to public accommodation, transportation, employment, and housing, or the specific regulations of content and quality applied to commercial products.

When public funds are used for privately defined educational purposes, constitutional limitations intended to protect a broader range of public interest become a critical factor. By and large, these privately defined educational purposes are congruent with the larger public purposes. Accordingly, public policy—whether in a constitutional or a legislative setting—should have a light touch, reflecting the commitment to diversity and independence of a free society.

Existing Private Delegation

The choices of bureaucratic structure are not black and white between public and private. A continuum of situations exists in which different facets of administration are controlled by different entities. Start, for example, with the degree of autonomy given to that irreducibly private person, the teacher.

In a public system, the students and parents may have a wide latitude in choice of school (limited by practical economic considerations such as transportation), teacher (a secret better known to more aggressive parents), and curriculum. Or, depending on local constraints, choice may be limited to a prescribed school, teacher, and curriculum. These constraints usually apply in small schools.

The school structure itself may allocate power to identifiably private decisionmakers. All employees who contract with a school district are private persons who carry with them a broad range of discretionary judgments. This is particularly true of classroom teachers. The collective bargaining agreement privatizes a wide range of decisionmaking about working conditions, salary, and benefits. Janitorial and food services and transportation may be handled through the same or different labor contracts or may be contracted out to private providers.

Institutional Styles of Control

The styles of control in a bureaucracy that administers schools can be displayed as in Figure 2.

Any of these forms of organization can be applied to parts of the education system—for example, school transportation, school design and construction, security, food service, janitorial services, extra-curricular activities (by subject), curriculum (by subject), and textbooks and other materials. Any of these can be delivered through public or private management structures. There is nothing that makes any portion of education inherently public or private, except of course that the individual is always private.

Purely private education with private choice is exemplified by home instruction. But even in that case, it is rare when instruction is not supported by a base of public resources. Alaska has a lively, if small, home school sector for kindergarten through 12th grade. It is subject to limited state regulation.

Education can also be mandated under public authority but with the provision of service fully contracted out. A national example of this is the Chelsea, Massachusetts school district, where the district let a general contract to Boston University to operate the schools. Schools can have a mixture of services publicly provided and contracted out. It is often the case that all education services are publicly provided.

Figure 2. Institutions Delivering Education

Private
(Either Proprietary or Non-profit)

Private Regulated

Private Contracted

Mixed Public and Private Contracting

Public

Contracting Out

Parts of education systems are commonly contracted out—including food, janitorial, and public health services and building space. There is no public sector in school design and construction. Recently, school districts have experimented with contracting out support services for exceptional children; this is an area of some promise. The Anchorage School District has actually contracted for the use of the Montessori system of training and teaching for younger children.

But generally, public school systems have approached contracting out cautiously. Contracting out has sometimes been used as a method of avoiding unions and their associated higher wage scales. If school districts do contract out in the expectation of saving or redistributing money, they should not ignore the potential trade-offs involved—such as increased turnover, reduced esprit or skill levels, and contract oversight costs.

Contracting In

Depending on its size, an existing education institution can include a variety of sub-institutions each delivering a specific educational approach. A large school may offer many choices, or a school district may offer variety among its schools.

Issues of scale are often at the heart of interest in choice. Particularly at the high school level, the conventional wisdom of the past half century has produced the extra-large school—on the grounds that we need large schools to provide a multitude of choices in curricula and in extra-curricular activities. But while large schools have somewhat expanded choice, they have tended to reduce the individual student to a faceless and sometimes powerless unit—which has encouraged the formation of social subsets that create discipline problems or otherwise work against the goals of the school and inhibit education.

To increase individual choice in this environment, many schools have experimented with university models of delivery, which allow students more choice in classes and place more responsibility on them generally. Some schools have sought to improve the interface of high schools and universities, in some cases by offering university courses or giving high-school students the opportunity to attend classes at the university. Larger districts have also crafted schools with specialized curricula, either as "schools within schools" or by identifying smaller schools as sites. Transportation costs and time immediately loom as inhibiting factors when school choices are geographically distributed.

Contracting Out With The Parent

While the commission is not aware of any examples of actual operating models, analytically there is a potential niche in the contracting out model for a procedure that would have similar results to the voucher system. If it is possible to contract with professional providers for specific services or with individual teachers as tutors, it should also be possible to contract with parents for particular educational results, to be measured by standard tests.

The state Department of Education's home schooling program is similar to this concept, but there is no specific contract with the parent and no parent purchasing of educational resources. In a commission hearing James Gibbs of Soldotna suggested that parents at least be allowed to make choices from a variety of approved home schooling curricula, instead of being limited to just the established state curriculum. Particularly when dealing with children with exceptionally inhibited learning, more choice would seem to be an urgently required reform.

In the home schooling model the state allocates part of its budget to curriculum. But is state purchase of curriculum a requirement of a public school system? While the state might need to approve alternative curricula, surely it could delegate the responsibility of choice to parents. If the state offers to contract with parents for the achievement of certain goals, and the quality of their performance is measured, it is not the state's business how the contract money is used—as long as parents accomplish the agreed goal at a reasonable price. However, if parents don't meet the goal, the state should impose some sanction for the benefit of the child, or the contract should be cancelled and the family required to seek a more conventional route to education.

Curriculum Choice and Institutional Arrangements

While the choices in organization of curriculum and method cover a broad spectrum, this aspect of variety can be roughly represented as in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Choices in Organization

Type of Institution	Curriculum	Student Control	Other Variables
Single institution multiple programs Multiple institutions narrower educational offering	Vocational Voc-collegiate Collegiate "Back to Basics" or "No Frills"	Open classroom ABC classroom SAVE type Multi-graded	Student selected classes/teachers Location Hours and days committed Technology use Parent involvement

IV. The Resources of Education

Student Time

The resources of education are often represented as being exclusively public. However, by neglecting the less visible or less tangible resources, we miss opportunities for strengthening education and can misdirect tangible resources.

In any education program, students are investing time. In a wage equivalent, the time high school students contribute is worth billions of dollars—much more than federal aid to education, for comparison. Small increases or decreases in the amount of time students commit may have vast impacts on the quality of education. This time variable can be expressed in longer hours, longer days, starting school at an earlier age, or more time spent on homework.

Television

The average student seems to express choice by watching television for more hours than he sits in class. Variations in the small effort that our society makes to influence the quality of television as a provider of education could also have huge results. While censorship is prohibited by the First Amendment, there may be inducements that could encourage commercial television to acknowledge its enormous effect on young people and encourage more responsible programming. If manufacturers can pay to have their products seen, used, and mentioned in television dramatizations, perhaps useful knowledge could be better represented—even at a price. The endless parade of violence is surely not the only form of artistic competition available.

Japan spends twenty times as much on public television as the U.S. spends. Those who look for a widespread breakthrough in the quality of education rather than incremental change should look to the role of television. The commission believes there are many options for choice in improving the educational value of television, but this is a topic for others to address.

The Head Start Model

How parents influence their children's education is another less visible variable. Parents' input is mixed with the general social conditions of society in various areas. Any new teacher will soon find that the wall between home and school is illusory. All the problems of society—broken homes, drugs, violence, and poverty—inevitably affect the classroom in major ways.

In this respect most private education seems to have a decided advantage in its ability to acknowledge the whole child, even though private schools do not have the resources that public schools do. Private schools are less inhibited in dealing with spiritual and value issues. Public schools must take into account legal and political constraints, and in addition they have a tradition of avoiding family intrusiveness. Religious schools, by contrast, do not operate in the same way. The success of the federal Head Start program is in no small part attributed to its commitment to the whole child. Head Start teachers do not complain that the school is being asked to do "too much" by going beyond basics. They accept that responding to the whole child is their mission.

Head Start is administered through private contracts. It supplements rather than competes head on with the existing organization of public education. But it does compete as an alternative model. It uses the untapped resource of the early childhood years. Its program responds to what we know from psychology about the learning process and the importance of the early years. It can be more responsive to the pluralistic pressures of the society. It flourishes on individual initiative. These are all good reasons why the commission recommends a magnitude increase in the support for this program as the most promising avenue for expanding choice in education.

Head Start also more effectively taps the parent contribution and can bring resources from a broad range of community sources. With Head Start as a leading example, variations in funding systems and other inputs create choice options, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Variations in Funding

PRIVATE RESOURCES	PUBLIC RESOURCES		
	LOCAL PUBLIC	STATE	FEDERAL
Parent/student contributions	mix	mix	mix
Private endowments corporate religious and private foundations	mix	mix	mix

To the extent we take more or less from any of these sources, the nature of the education itself varies in quality and structure. This matrix only partially represents the possible mixes.

A recent study by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) of the University of Alaska Anchorage showed that the lion's share of education funds in Alaska come from the state government. But the local share is still significant, particularly in some districts and particularly considering the non-cash contribution. The ISER study examines only public contributions to the cost of education. It does not examine the contributions of the private sector or parents. Student contributions are rarely considered as a factor in education, despite their material and psychological importance.

Student Motivation

In addition to variations in funding, student time, parent time, teacher time, and administrator time, the commission considers student motivation as among the most important variables. Changes that enhance student motivation or remove obstacles to student motivation are accordingly of great consequence.

Equity

Options that allow for greater contributions from parents, students, and localities raise issues of equity in public policy, as do options calling for enhanced public support of private education. However, these are considerations that can be worked with to allow for enhanced contributions that do not always reflect a community's material wealth. Such considerations are a first line of policy debate, before we consider the equity issues as elucidated and mandated in the equal protection clause of the state and federal constitutions.

Politics

Options that call for a change in the fiscal contribution from any source raise political questions, particularly if that source is taxation. Dramatic improvements in education are unlikely without a major increase in tax money. However, the Alaska public in particular has almost always been ready to support education. The existing problem may be in part that the public does not perceive it is getting more value for more money. The public may well be more open to paying more if it can see changes, as opposed to incremental funding for education, with cause and effect buried in the budget. But if "choice expansion" becomes a code for denying increases in the standard budget for inflation or increased student enrollment, the public school system could be demoralized and crippled—possibly with implications under Alaska's constitutional article on public education.

V. Constitutional Limits on Choice

Constitutional limitations alone do not define what is good public policy. The public must still decide whether any particular expansion of choice is good education policy and good public policy.

Federal Constitutional Interpretation

We are embarking on a long-term experiment with a more religion-friendly climate of constitutional interpretation in the Supreme Court of the United States. One of the first signs of this new mood is likely to come from a case recently argued before the Supreme Court on the use of prayer at graduation exercises. (*Lee v. Weisman*, 111 S Ct. 1305 [1991].) We can anticipate that the court will approve the practice of prayer at graduation ceremonies, thereby sharply limiting the rule established in *Engel v. Vitale*—a case that prohibited the requirement that children in classrooms in New York state recite the Regents prayer.

But even if the court surprises us on this one, the "establishment" clause and the "free exercise" clause of the first amendment to the Constitution of the United States are likely to be irrelevant to new Alaska constitutional experience with the mix of religion and education.

Standards of Alaska's Constitution

The language of Alaska's state constitution is more restrictive than that of the U.S. constitution with respect to public schools and private religious schools. Therefore, we must look to the language of the state constitution in examining permissible expansions of private institutional roles in school choice.

Constitution of Alaska, Article VII, Section 1:

"The Legislature shall by general law establish and maintain a system of public schools open to all children of the state, and may provide for other public educational institutions. Schools and institutions so established shall be free from sectarian control. No money shall be paid from public funds for the direct benefit of any religious or other private educational institution."

Three features of this provision provide a focus for its interpretation. First, it imposes an obligation on the state to establish a public school system open to all children. This is the dominant feature of the section. The prohibitions that follow are there to protect the system of public schools. The constitutional fathers didn't want any particular religion or group of religious institutions governing the public schools, and they didn't want the system to be diluted by having public money which would otherwise go to public schools being drained off to private schools. By adding that prohibition, "...the convention made it clear that it wished the constitution to support and protect a strong system of public schools." *(Sheldon Jackson College v. State*, 599 P2nd 127 [Alaska 1979])

The second feature to notice is that this prohibition, unlike the prohibitions derived from the federal constitution, is a prohibition on aid to any private school, not just schools sponsored by religious institutions.

The third special feature of Section 1 is that the prohibition is on "direct" aid to private schools, not "indirect."

The grant of authority to "provide for other public educational institutions" contemplates community college systems and vocational or other specialty institutions which may not be open to all children of the state, though they must still respect equal protection standards of access.

Alaska's Leading Supreme Court Ruling

The leading case interpreting Section 1 of Article VII is *Sheldon Jackson College v. State* (*supra*). In that case the Alaska Supreme Court struck down a state program granting to each student attending a private college an amount equal to the difference between the tuition charged by the state university and the private institutions (to a limit of $2,500).

In its opinion, the court articulated a three-pronged analysis to test whether a state program provided a "direct as opposed to indirect benefit" to a private educational institution.

Standard: Size of Benefited Class

First, said the state Supreme Court, the class benefited by the program, while it may include private educational institutions, must be more broadly defined. For example, under this rule a school choice program that extended benefits only to students attending private schools would likely be unconstitutional.

Standard: Private Educational Mission

Second, if the public financial aid supports a specifically private educational mission of a private institution, it may infringe on the constitutional prohibition. Surprisingly, the court said there was no problem with general programs that support the health and welfare of students. In making this statement, the court essentially (footnote 20) overruled *Quinton v. Mathews* (362 P. 2d 932 [Alaska 1961]), which had prohibited public support of busing services for private schools.

Standard: Magnitude of Benefit

The third consideration set out by the court is the magnitude of the benefit conferred. The court did not want to get hung up on small items. A "trivial" though direct benefit may pass muster. By the same token, a very great benefit must pass a closer scrutiny.

Student as Conduit

The court dismissed an old line of argument in defense of indirect aid: that aid to a student is not the same as aid to a school. If the student is "a mere conduit," it is the same as direct aid, the court said. But some specific features of student aid in the tuition differential program attracted the court's attention. For example, the state required an oath that the money would be paid to the college. The incentive the tuition equalization program created to enroll in college was only an incentive to enroll in a private college.

Alaska Student Loan Program

The ill-fated tuition equalization program might be compared with the Alaska Student Loan Program, where the funds are exchanged for a contract with the student that requires no specific institutional recipient. We believe this program is constitutional, though it has never been tested in the Alaska Supreme Court. In this program the student is making the choice. In giving aid, the state makes no discrimination between the public and private institution that the student may be attending.

Intervention of Individual Choice

It can be argued that to complete the court's analysis, there is a fourth prong implicit in the "conduit" discussion of the *Sheldon Jackson* case. The proposed fourth prong: If the "conduit" is interrupted by individual choice, and has no negative effect on public education, the aid is indirect.

The Alaska Supreme Court did not have the advantage of access to a later U.S. Supreme Court basis)—Witters v. Washington Department of Services for the Blind, 106 S. Ct. 748 (1986)—that made the first part of this distinction central to an interpretation of the federal establishment clause. Looking at the mandate of the Alaska Constitution, the Alaska Court, in adding the Witters test would now include a reference to the affirmative purpose of Alaska's constitutional provision: the state's commitment to provide access to a public school system. A negative effect on public schools will likely invalidate the aid providing benefits to private schools.

Constitutionality of Vouchers in Alaska

Let us now review the implications of the state constitutional environment for choice and voucher programs, starting first with vouchers.

Any voucher program that merely allows existing students to take their public school money and spend it on private education must survive the constitution's prohibition on public educational expenditures that weaken the public educational system. This brings us to the $64,000 question: does this interpretation also invalidate a system where every child could get a voucher to be used for any institution, public or private? Suppose such a program were put into place in a factual setting, with the existing pot of money spent on K-12 re-allocated by vouchers to public and private education. Those who would defend this kind of voucher plan have a heavy burden in explaining the benefit to the public system, against a chorus from the public system itself, explaining the adverse effects.

In considering this kind of program, the court would go back to the original mandate for a public school system and look at the evidence: does this program impair the public school system? Opponents would present evidence that the resource deficit in shifting funds to private schools would have a detrimental effect, notwithstanding the presumed benefit from having fewer students in the public schools.

Opponents of the program would also produce evidence regarding the dilution of the education effort, particularly in smaller communities, resulting from the publicly financed pullout of selected students.

Proponents of the change would present evidence of improvements in the system to be gained from the proposed change—a better focusing on individual needs, for example. A battle of expert opinion would take place. The outcome might depend on the refinements added to the system that would help negate adverse consequences. It is highly probable that a program that simply voucherized the existing School Foundation Program, making all the private school students eligible for the same number of public dollars, would be struck down.

However, constitutionality would turn on the specifics of the program adopted. To the extent that the particulars of it did no harm to the public system, the voucher plan should survive. For example, it has been suggested that if a school district's student population was growing rapidly, the district might offer a voluntary voucher as an alternative to building a new school. This voucher approach might represent a substantial cost saving to the district and improve quality in the existing system by reducing classroom overcrowding. A voucher that was worth less than the child's share under the School Foundation Program would more likely survive than one that was on a par with or greater in value. Any survivable voucher system would need a variable value to reflect variations in student need, regional costs, and other factors.

However, some of the limits to use of such programs were suggested in commission hearings. Many of the education providers most interested in public funds are supported by religious institutions with religious goals permeating all aspects of curriculum and related services. Heath education, as it would be characterized by the state, includes topics in human physiology and sexuality that some religious schools simply do not want taught. Some religious schools want history taught through the lens of a perceived advance of Christianity and a continuing war between good and evil. And of course the teaching of the sciences is considered to include parallel instruction of biblical literalism as a revealed, superior truth, through creationism or other doctrine. Selection of classical literary canons by a religious body might well miss many texts included in a secular list. Under these circumstances, some schools will find state testing unfair, intrusive, and objectionable. While there may be some agreement at a very basic level on what constitutes literacy in arithmetic and English, consensus ends very quickly as we move away from the very basics.

Public Support of Service Functions

If the state chooses to break out service functions from educational programs, it can provide aid without restriction for these functions, by voucher or otherwise, as long as the aid goes to all students, public and private.

Private education providers can certainly share in the benefits of general legislation that aids health and welfare—including, for example, transportation and meals, boarding costs, health, school nurse programs, some electronic communication systems, probably sports benefits, standardized educational testing and diagnostic services, and medically related services for exceptional children in aid of education. In this last category, constitutional interpretation is aided by federal law that requires states to provide such aid and requires that students enrolled in private educational institutions be included as beneficiaries.

Contracting Out is Not Unconstitutional

As long as there is no sectarian control, education functions can be contracted out to private education institutions reflecting public goals set out by contract. To the extent that private schools were made to serve publicly defined ends rather than draining off public money for privately defined ends, the court would likely allow inclusion of new varieties of schools in public financing schemes.

Governance

The system of public schools mandated by the constitution does not indicate a governance structure, except to say that it must be non-sectarian. A system may include schools enjoying a great deal of autonomy—for example, private incorporation and independent governing boards. Neither does prohibition of "sectarian control" negate the possibility of limited sectarian involvement. Alaska's Mt. Edgecumbe school in Sitka, open to all rural students pursuing an academic curriculum, is something of a model. (Compare *Reuben Quick Bear v. Leupp*, 210 U.S. 50 [1908], in which the court held that Indian trust funds could be spent to provide education at religious schools designated by Indians.)

The Quasi-Public School

Private schools integrated into the public system, like contracted out services for individual students, must be justified on the grounds that they support publicly articulated goals and provide systematic arrangements for education. They must also be publicly accountable. In other words, they become quasi-autonomous elements in the "system of public schools," subject to rational criteria (testing for admissions, for instance) as a part of a pattern in exchange for receiving public funds.

Head Start schools appear to be in this category and provide a model to build on, possibly integrating some of the other private pre-school programs in the state and upgrading day care. Earlier we discussed limits to this approach involving schools sponsored by some religious institutions.

New Initiatives

The constitutional article calls for a system of public schools "open to all children." But it includes a phrase allowing the legislature to "provide for *other* (emphasis added) public educational institutions." That phrase offers openings for experiment. It allows the state to establish institutions that are not a part of the "open to all" guarantee of educational rights. The state may establish schools with selective admission criteria, schools outside the system administered by the Alaska Department of Education. This provision may well protect the special admissions qualifications and unique curriculum of the Mt. Edgecumbe school, for example, as well as special vocational schools and community colleges.

VI. Choices for Alaskans

Constitutional Opportunities

What then are the privatization choices that meet Alaskan constitutional standards? Looking at resources that go into the education system, we can mandate a higher contribution of private resources from parents, from the public, or from students, as already described. There are also several choices to consider in institutional structures.

The Alaska constitution allows us to make a wide variety of education support services more universal in their application. This could be done through the use of vouchers for any of the services considered supportive of education. We could expand such support services by selling entitlements—for transportation or tutoring, for instance—on a sliding fee scale according to need and ability to pay, to be purchased from any licensed source.

We can create greater opportunities for contracting in and greater opportunities for contracting out. We can allow existing private educational institutions to qualify for independent public school status. Such status would depend on the willingness of the school provider to meet standards of public accountability and contractual performance requirements.

The seeds of all these variations are already sown, in one form or another. The question is whether we are ready to remove obstacles to implementation or expansion.

Choice and America 2000

Under the U.S. Department of Education's "America 2000" proposal, funding and technical expertise would be set aside for one model school program in Alaska at a cost of up to one million dollars. Within the context of Alaska education, the state government should consider establishing a framework, open to proposals, for three model schools using a comparable age grouping, implementing the three principal styles of management discussed in this report: one contracting in (a school district operating a school within a school); one contracting out to an independent contractor to operate a public school; and a third contracting out to parents who will in turn contract with a quasi-public school of their invention.

The University of Alaska can play a role by acting as the monitor and evaluator of the overall program, setting the standards for measuring results. Additional requirements should include cultural cross-section compatibility and a proportionate number of at-risk students in each school. Other variables and constants could be considered—such as student hours committed, or a health and wellness focus. But differences in variables should not be allowed to confuse the basic comparative modeling of overall management operations. The probable focus of this educational experiment should be on the two pre-school years and on kindergarten through third grade.

That general plan was outlined in a discussion Senator Ted Stevens held with the Alaska education community.

Who Decides?

The commission of course does not recommend that any proposal be rammed down the throat of any community. But if existing state law is an obstacle to local choice, then the policy of the law should be examined to see if limitation on choice is necessary to implementation of the policy.

The commission's recommendations include wider use of contracting out, with implications for oversight. This oversight function should usually be exercised with some monitoring at the school district level. The Chelsea School District in Massachusetts contracted out its total performance requirement to Boston University. There is no reason that pieces of district performance requirements cannot be contracted out, with payment in script issued through the district and redeemable from the state.

It is not enough, however, to say that decisionmaking should be local. Local decisionmaking should be sensitive to minority opinion within the locality. Often these minority interests can be recognized without doing harm to the whole system. For example, a district board of education may be of a mind that the best education is one done on an ABC curriculum and system of discipline. This belief should not be imposed on everyone in the district. Some parents may believe that optional classrooms are preferable. We know enough about educational performance to say that there is no right and wrong on this or dozens of other choices to be made in education: school districts should consider allowing variations.

Commission Recommendations

The commission has no monopoly on wisdom in picking those options deserving to be expanded. But our best judgment is that the following are especially promising. Many of the options we recommend would require adjustments in the delivery system for all education.

Early Childhood Education

Resources: Increased student time
Institutional structure: Contracting out to quasi-public institutions
Results: State established measures of success
Goal: Enhanced performance or standing in kindergarten

We recommend that the state government move to include early childhood education as a part of every Alaska child's guarantee of access to education. Evidence that deficits in early childhood education last a lifetime have already stimulated programs in this area. Head Start is the leading public program for children of low-income parents. Parents with means take care of their own in a variety of ways. Other children are relegated to child care centers and are subject to variable standards of protection. In school, child care is incidental to education. In pre-school, education is not required at all. We must move to change this system through carefully structured incentives.

This is not an arena where harm would be done to an existing public school system by making greater use of private institutional arrangements. Many are already in place. There is simply a lack of public funding. Increased early childhood education should be effected to cover the expanded time commitments of the next recommendation.

The state does not have to use purely public institutions to expand early childhood education. It could issue script to parents to purchase licensed educational support through providers—which may be public school districts or private institutions.

In implementing this proposal, the state would need to acknowledge the considerable minority of parents who do not have day care needs requiring public support and who want to have a fully private care and education routine in early childhood. It would be regressive to lower the compulsory school age to force such a program on those unwilling to participate.

As with schools at every other level, there will always be institutions that—as a matter of choice or because of the pervasive religious aspects of their own programs—do not want to participate in any program involving public funding. They should not be coerced into participating (*Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510 [1925]).

Corporate employers who provide day care for children of their employees may well be appropriate recipients of voucher receipts. Such programs could be upgraded to Head Start quality, and the availability of vouchers would encourage many employers who do not provide this service as yet to begin providing it.

This goal could be accomplished by selling early childhood education script, at a price calibrated on ability to pay and child need, so that those without resources would automatically be issued the script. Supplements should be allowed based on cost of delivery by location and at-risk status of children.

Expanded School Day and Year

Resource: Increased student time

Institutional Structure: Contracting out to quasi-public institutions

Result: State established measures of success

Goal: Accelerated completion of grades, or higher grades.

The commission recommends that the state system move to expand both the school day and the school year. One of the largest resource potentials available to improve quality in education is student time. The origins of the current school day and school year lie in the history of the United States as a predominantly rural and agricultural society. Schools were closed in the summer so students could help on farms. But the U.S. has become a predominantly urban society. The commission has been disturbed by studies showing substantial erosion of learning, particularly among those who can least afford it, during the summer recess.

American students attend school fewer hours than their counterparts in either Japan or the nations of the European Economic Community. The American school day lacks symmetry with the American work day, now normally a work day for both parents, causing the "latchkey children" problem and a demand for child care services subject to problematic quality control. Therefore the commission recommends that the state system move to expand both the school day and the school year.

While the commission recommends in principal that the school year expansion be universal, an introductory program could start with the pre-school level and work through, grade by grade. In addition, for those who can't wait—at-risk students or others for whom extra schooling is a priority—summer and after school contracting could be extended immediately. Under this approach, a private provider would contract for a program for selected, presumably at-risk, students so that these students could keep up with the regular school year. Contract performance is both within and outside public school walls, and includes intensive encouragement of parent participation.

The contracting out or voucher system lends itself well to greater use of after-school time. Sports programs are not a part of the core curriculum, but they contribute to the health and welfare of children. The importance of extra-curricular activities to student social and intellectual growth is widely acknowledged. Most people know that based on their own experiences. There may be particular reasons to use after school time, as it is used now, for enrichment programs for at-risk students and for some students to gain experience in the workplace.

There are several important implications in use of the summer days as well as or in lieu of after-school hours. We are talking about a one-third strengthening of schooling effort. For the after school program, we assume that some costs can be covered by redistributing resources committed to existing course offerings, and by foreshortening K-12, with the balance coming from new parent money.

This assumption is tenuous at best and cannot be stretched to cover the summer interval. Student scholarship requirements would go up sharply while existing foundation funded expenses would not obviously go down. Unless the state were willing to offer new scholarship funds by appropriation, the source of funds would have to be from a shortening of the regular school time resources committed to each student—a solution we find unacceptable. An alternative may be to introduce "thin" summer programs, where the usual privately supported employment or recreational activities are mixed with some hours of continuing tutorial or other formal schooling.

Expanded Use of Alaska Student Loan Program

Resource: Increased student/parent financial contribution
Institutional Structure: Contracting out to quasi-public institutions
Result: State established testing of academic performance
Goal: Early school completion and higher educational quality

We recommend that the part-time and family loan program of the Alaska Postsecondary Education Commission be amended to allow 18-year-old students, or parents of students enrolled in primary or secondary educational institutions, to use the program for after-school enrollment by their children in institutions licensed by the commission or other authority for enriched educational opportunity.

This new lending authority should be used only with expanded choice options. This is a funding source that could be used on its own in support of contracted in or contracted out schools or in conjunction with the education script plan described above.

Extended school day contracting may be limited to at-risk students or others for whom extra schooling is a priority. This suggests a special problem. State foundation formula funding is based on per year, per student, regardless of performance. There is no fiscal incentive for accelerated education. Consideration should be given to enhanced foundation support for accelerated programs. The school year change might be accomplished by integrating the summer program into a 3-year high school program with 3+ years of funding. (This may be considered a separate proposal.) We assume then that high schools could use the funds saved from what would otherwise be the fourth year of high school to provide the fast track three-year full time program. Students would go on to college a full year early, or move into equivalent advanced placement programs. It might make more sense to enable larger school districts to set up a superfunded, three-year school by requiring that they offer a Request for Proposals (RFP) for such a school, which could be met by a consortia of existing teaching staff or by an outside group.

New Schools

Resource: Increased input from college sector of education
Institutional Structure: Districts or state directly established schools
Result: State established testing of academic performance
Goal: Early school completion and higher education quality.

Laboratory School

The commission recommends the establishment of three new kinds of school organizations. First, the commission believes we should attempt to replicate, at a lower cost, the success of Mt. Edgecumbe. This effort would involve establishing a laboratory school in association with the campuses of Alaska Pacific University and the University of Alaska Anchorage, and possibly also the University of Alaska Fairbanks and the University of Alaska Southeast. This could be accomplished through a contracting effort including the municipal school district as a party.

A university laboratory school should extend to at least grades 11 and 12. The function of the school would be to allow for greater variation of delivery technique and content, under the supervision of education experts and under experimental evaluation procedures.

Such a school could also more readily bridge the gulf that now faces most students between high school and college. Early completion of the existing high school curriculum would allow students to move on to bodies of knowledge (calculus, for example) now regularly a part of Japanese and European curricula but rare in this country.

Rural Magnet School

A variation on the concept of laboratory schools involves targeting one or a few magnet schools, most likely in smaller places that are sufficiently large to provide home boarding facilities for students. In some ways this might be seen as a supplement to Mt. Edgecumbe, but giving students from northern regions an environment less radically different from their homes. This type of school has been tried before but with limited resources and lack of the supervision and consolidated residential support provided at APU or Mt. Edgecumbe. Reports are available describing why this variation has failed before, and the obstacles that need to be addressed.

Charter School

Resource: Increased input from teachers and parents

Institutional structure: Contracting in with parents, teachers, and students.

Result: State and district established testing of academic performance

Goal: Early school completion and higher education quality.

Under this recommendation, a version of which is being tested in Minnesota, a group of teachers within the system can propose a charter to a school district for a school within the public system that is evaluated on outputs established in the charter. The commission encourages contracting in of this type as complementary to contracting out for individuals or groups. In exchange for its charter, the school group, which may be organized as a non-profit corporation or a co-operative, is freed from all regulations not made specifically applicable.

The contracting option can involve private or public delivery of services. Every contract involves changes in the terms of control, but no contract necessarily provides more control by the parents or students. A teacher is a private contractor. Contracts can also provide for contracting out of curriculum determination functions, counseling functions, teaching functions, building and grounds provisioning, janitorial services, policing, and more. The means of education are broadly divisible. The service can be contracted out individually or under a broad package, of which the Chelsea School is perhaps the most famous example. The Chelsea, Massachusetts School District contracted out everything to Boston University's School of Education. But even in Chelsea, existing buildings and teachers are provided (effectively) by sub-contract.

Following the Chelsea model, the state might well want to encourage support of a Rural Innovation Model of educational delivery, by providing supplemental script to all parents in a district with particularly difficult educational problems. The school would be initiated by a petition of parents, a district, and a private provider so that more than one educational delivery modality could be tried.

A variation on this kind of proposal might arise when the existing public school district, based on some formal determination, was failing to provide a quality, free public education— if, for example, school overcrowding as a result of a lack of school buildings forced extreme measures affecting quality. Under such circumstances, a group of parents with the aid of either a public (see charter schools) or private provider group could be enabled to take its pro-rated foundation share to provide an alternative educational plan.

Teacher Choice

Resource: Increased student and teacher motivation

Institutional structure: Student/parent evaluation and choice of teachers.

Result: State and district established testing of academic performance.

Goal: Early school completion and higher education quality.

The commission recommends that students and parents have more choice of teachers. It was once said that a great university would consist of Socrates sitting on a log with his students. Part of our dissatisfaction with the existing array of school choices is that we are not getting the teachers we want, or the teachers we have are not allowed to teach what we or they think our children need.

As a practical matter, selection of teachers is one of the few ways that choice can be expanded in the smaller communities of Alaska. While we have a collective responsibility to see that children are not badly taught through unqualified teachers, we have a complementary responsibility to see that choice is also satisfied. Creation or expansion of choice of teachers, while it must be subject to some restraints to safeguard the rights of teachers, will make teacher selection and retention more responsive to the concerns of parents.

No one argues with the fact that students vote with their feet in the choice of teachers at the college level (though monopoly and shortages tends to minimize this choice). In the Middle Ages, and at other times, students have paid their professors directly. Some recognition should be given to exercise of the same values at pre-college levels.

For example, teacher evaluations should systematically include the opinions of those taught and their parents, and greater freedom should be allowed than now exists to move teachers around or to require retraining without destroying teaching careers. Teachers themselves must be empowered to adjust their teaching curriculum and teaching styles to their students. Therefore the commission also endorses the movement to empower teachers through decentralization and through democratizing school governance.

Individual Pace

Under increased choice, each student will need an individual education plan, and must be allowed to select educational content based on tested performance. A large number of adjustments in calendaring, regulatory regimes, curriculum choice, and more will be required by the changes proposed here. One likely consequence is that every student will be moving at a separate pace which will not necessarily match age. At the present time in Alaska, only special education students have individual education plans. Students with individual plans must demonstrate observable educational skills from grade level to grade level, or work in an ungraded classroom setting—preferably the latter.

Student as Unit of Aid

The commission recommends that the School Foundation Program, which now distributes funds based on classroom units, be amended to provide for distribution based on the student as the unit—reflecting also cost of delivery differentials such as smaller classes for the early years. This change will also enable funding to follow the student in choices given to and taken by the student. This proposal is without prejudice in the question of whether the student should be able to carry state resources outside the public system. At the present time, though many school districts have regulations which nominally allow students to choose among schools in the district, there is no incentive to any school to take on a transfer. Funds are allocated by school and are not enhanced by transferring in. Nor do schools lose funding when students transfer out.

Use of Work Study

If both after school and summer school hours were expanded, there would be many cases when the students' studies should be mixed with work-related experience. Many colleges have a required quarter- or semester-away work project each year. The same principle could be extended, and credit given for students who went to fish camp or who did vocationally related activities. The basic principle to be observed is that the Individual Education Plan be followed and that students be accountable to the plan, not that they spend all their waking hours in a classroom.

Variable Classroom Size

Consideration may be given to recommendations that secondary schools consider more variation in classroom size, and expanded use of teaching assistants and mentors as in the collegiate model. The commission is aware of many studies indicating that in the higher grades, class size does not correlate with student performance.

Comprehensive Support Services

The legislature and the governor should consider whether they are ready to commit to basic norms in support services for all school children. This is already in place, though imperfectly implemented, for exceptional children. There is already a consensus on health, but transportation—the historic sore point—should be reconsidered in light of the invalidity of *Quinton v. Mathews*. Some school districts may have already implemented this innovation, but there is a statewide interest in seeing it done.

Expanded Choice In Testing and Evaluation

The commission believes that the public's interest in quality should focus on results. There is no way we can know if quality is improved by expanded choice unless the state adopts a comprehensive system of testing and evaluating what students have learned. The commission is examining changes in the organizational structure of education delivery systems that might allow those engaged in education to improve its quality. In most cases, these changes are likely to loosen regulatory or central administrative control, based on the informed speculation that the rigidity of the system sometimes stifles creativity and limits choices in education. On the other hand, this is not a universal problem. In many Alaska school districts, creative boards and superintendents encourage innovation and bring in experimental models from outside for discussion.

As a substitute for proxies of educational quality such as regulations governing who teaches, when and how, specified curriculum, buildings and—above all—the investment of money, the commission believes that the public's interest in quality should focus on results.

The commission at this juncture needs advice on the following questions related to its tentative conclusion that Alaska needs a comprehensive system of testing students:

1) On what topics are students to be tested?

2) Who should be tested?

3) How often should testing be conducted?

4) How is cultural exceptionality to be treated? For example, should the tests include a cultural literacy section that would vary according to the cultural background of the child? How many sets should be established?

5) How is individual exceptionality to be treated?

6) Schools also deliver or are assigned responsibilities in a variety of other functions, in loco parentis, or otherwise: public health education and oversight, citizenship and parenting skills, elective education including physical education, vocational skills, and extra-curricular activities. What effect will testing have on these functions and what can be done to mitigate adverse impacts?

7) What other major questions must be asked and what are the preferred answers within what range of possibilities?

VII. Some Concluding Thoughts

The goal of this commission is to develop proposals that will improve quality in education. There are two elements of quality: subjective consumer (parent and student) satisfaction, and objective educational quality as required to meet the needs of the nation as a political and economic entity. The "nation's need" is an amorphous target. We start from the assumption that basic literacies and proficiencies are required and that results are paramount. This is not a totally obvious conclusion. It is not clear, for instance, that investing in substantially higher math skills for rural Alaskans has much to do with the nation's need, or that fluency in French among Iowa school children will enhance the U.S.'s international competitiveness. Drastic conditions in some inner city schools suggest remedies that may not make sense in Alaska.

Formal schooling is one of the predominant and shaping experiences of everyone's life. Neither should we forget that school days should be of quality from a subjective perspective. School days are not just to be endured. At least some should be remembered fondly—as a part of a life—as well as for the personal or national benefit obtained.

There is an untested assumption in our work that expansion of choice will result in improvement in achieving both of these goals. We return to a proposed threshold recommendation. Any development that results from a commission recommendation must be subject to ongoing testing to determine whether the hoped-for improvement imagined is in fact being achieved.

Two quite different strains of thought are included in the concept of expansion of choice. One is that the offerings be expanded: an expanded market choice. A second is that individual parents and students—the consumers—should be given more real power to make choices. Though this is a popular concept, poor and deceptive quality in market information and lack of interest among consumer parents could make consumer choice a disaster. Should demand be privatized by providing parents and students with choices of providers as well as choices of programs? Should this include private providers as well as public? If public monies are to be used, what role should the school district and elected boards—which we now use as the conduit of accountability—play? These also are questions to be answered.

Whatever we provide by way of change should not waste existing school buildings, trained teachers, and other assets. The existing framework of school boards still offers the most legitimate expression of informal majority opinion at the grassroots.

For each proposal, the policy decision to be made includes the degree to which the public, acting through some instrument of government, will determine goals, financing, and delivery of service.

It is not just that public funds are involved. The government must protect the rights of minors and advance a social interest in having a population educated to basic levels of employment proficiency and able to participate in government, based on some understanding of how it functions and where it came from. But there is room to experiment with a range of alternatives meeting public needs and mobilizing private sector resources with public funds. A basic shift to expand the private role is desirable, and can be accomplished without harming the values of existing systems.

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