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ABSTRACT

This monograph explores issues related to school choice by examining available evidence for the success of choice plans. It begins with an overview of the choice movement and then describes several specific plans that illustrate the various plan types. It concludes with an appraisal of how choice will change and shape urban school reform in the future and some recommendations for increasing the equity of choice programs. The following types of plans are considered: (1) intradistrict choice; (2) interdistrict choice; (3) intrasectional choice; (4) intersectional choice; (5) controlled choice; (6) magnet schools; (7) postsecondary options; (8) second-chance options; (9) charter schools; (10) workplace training; (11) voucher plans; and (12) tuition tax credits. Some examples of choice in action are described. In Minnesota, all public schools are open to all students throughout the state if there is room and transfer does not harm racial integration efforts. New York City has a city-wide choice plan. In Massachusetts, choice has been a means to achieve racial and ethnic balance in the schools through controlled choice plans. Voucher plans have been implemented in several cities, most notably Milwaukee (Wisconsin). School choice clearly provides students with opportunities that might not otherwise exist, but it is just as clearly not a magic bullet for educational equity. (Contains 31 references.) (SLD)

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SCHOOL CHOICE AND URBAN SCHOOL REFORM

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INTRODUCTION

Few observers would disagree that public education in urban areas is in deep trouble: dropout rates hover above 25 percent; truancy is common; violence is a perpetual threat; students struggle for basic literacy, often without success; a great deal of teaching is uninspired; and the physical condition of most schools borders on the scandalous. Urban schools are particularly unprepared to cope with the challenges they face in terms of the number and types of students who need both education and preparation for life. For example, the total population of children in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Philadelphia is in excess of four million. Most of these children live in poverty, sometimes extreme poverty. The magnitude of this problem is illustrated by the following: four out of every 270 Americans is a poor child living in one of the country's five large cities; most of these children come from minority backgrounds, and the overwhelming number of them attend or will attend public schools. Using New York City as an example of the catastrophic situation facing poor minority children provides a sense of what these statistics mean:

- One out of every four people in New York City is a child.

- Every day 373 babies are born, and of these babies:
  - 4 will die before their first birthday.
  - 181 are born into poverty.
  - 38 are born to teenaged parents.
  - 45 are born to mothers with inadequate prenatal care.
  - 34 are born with low birth weight.
- Every day 711,000 children live in poverty.
- Every day 9,600 children are homeless.
- Every day 51 percent of elementary and middle school students read below grade level.
- Every day 144 children are reported abused or neglected.
- Every week 11,393 children use mental health services.
- Every 12 hours a young person under 25 is murdered.

In the last 20 years, the collision course between the failing school system and the new student population has become more and more evident. A small library of reform books, proposals, and activities has accumulated—and some of the reforms have made a positive impact. In general, however, the condition of urban education remains desolate, and there is a growing sense that piecemeal reforms do not and will not have a lasting impact. As a result, some reformers are calling for a radical change in how schools and school systems are governed. "Choice" is a word that captures the belief that public schools are failing because they are bureaucratic, controlled by teachers' unions, and incapable of meaningful reform. Choice reformers believe that empowering families with education options will radically change the structure and governance of public education, and, hence, will liberate the energy and creativity latent in the system. Choice captures many different types of reforms—from vouchers which deregulate public education to intradistrict choice which allows students to choose schools within their public school district without challenging any of the dominant assumptions about the organization of public education.

Choice is, in fact, a widely adopted reform; New York City, for example, is a choice city, although few parents take advantage of the options available to them. There is hardly a state in the nation that does not have some type of choice plan, and

there is hardly a major urban area that does not have a limited choice plan. Some cities, such as Boston, Massachusetts, and St. Louis, Missouri, have extensive choice plans.

Public opinion polls generally show that Americans support the idea of school choice in principle, although they may not be anxious to avail themselves of the freedom it allows. When, for instance, a poll conducted by *Phi Delta Kappan* (Elam, 1990) asked parents whether they favored or opposed allowing students and their parents to choose among public schools regardless of where they live, roughly 62 percent of all respondents were in favor, 81 percent of non-public school parents were in favor. The poll found that men and women held similar views about school choice, but that non-whites favored school choice more than whites. However, a study by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1992) calls into question just how much the American people are in favor of school choice. In its survey of parents of children attending pubic school, 70 percent answered no to the following question: "Is there some other school to which you would like to send your child?" The choice these respondents were offered could be a public or a private school, within or outside their home district. Moreover, 62 percent of the parents surveyed were against the issuance of private school vouchers funded at public expense. And surprisingly, 87 percent were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the quality of education their children were receiving. These findings suggest that there is still strong support for neighborhood schools among American parents.

Is choice a panacea as some of its advocates claim? Would education be significantly improved if the public school system were marketized? Does choice provide educational equity and excellence? How do differences in choice plans result in differences in education outcomes? These and other questions drive this monograph. Primarily, it examines the available empirical evidence and draws tentative conclusions based on an analysis of the evidence. The monograph begins with an overview of the choice movement and then describes several specific choice plans that illustrate the various plan types. It concludes with an appraisal of how choice will change and shape urban school reform in the future and some recommendations for increasing the equity of choice programs.

AN OVERVIEW OF CHOICE PLANS

Types of Plans

The term "school choice" covers a multitude of student assignment plans that vary significantly in their underlying assumptions and operational procedures. Their common denominator is that they encourage or require students and their families to become actively engaged in choosing a school. Whereas previously most American families simply sent their children to a neighborhood school, the implementation of choice plans makes it possible for students to attend schools inside or outside their district, and sometimes even outside their town or city. Plans have direct effects on student assignment to schools and indirect effects on the design of American education.

Although there is a great variety of school choice plans, a few major types can be identified. In this review, the term "choice" refers to any student assignment policy that permits parents and children to participate in selecting a school. Some choice plans partially restrict the education choices families can make, while others have virtually no restrictions. The former type of plan is often referred to as "controlled choice"; the latter as "open enrollment." Most choice plans fall near the middle of the continuum between these two types. Virtually every state in the nation has either enacted or is considering a choice plan that is uniquely configured by its political environment and education problems. Following are some basic definitions of choice plans:

Intradistrict choice is a plan which allows students to choose schools within one public school district. Depending on the specific plan, the range of choice may include a few to all schools in a district.

Interdistrict choice is a plan which permits students to cross district lines to attend school. Tuition funds from the state follow the student and transportation costs are usually provided. Unlimited interdistrict choice is equivalent to statewide open enrollment.

Intrasectional choice is a plan which is limited to public schools.

Intersectional choice is a plan which includes both public and private schools.

Controlled choice is a student assignment plan which requires families to choose a school within a community, but choices can be restricted to ensure the racial, gender, and socioeconomic balance of each school. Often such plans comprise a strategy to comply with court-ordered desegregation.

Magnet schools are public schools which offer specialized programs. They are generally designed and located so as to attract students to otherwise unpopular areas or schools, and are often created to promote racial balance.

Postsecondary options are programs which enable high school students to enroll in college courses at government expense. Program courses may contribute to high school graduation requirements as well as to their college programs.

Second-chance options are alternative schools and programs for students who have difficulties in standard public school settings. Most often these students have either dropped out, are pregnant or parenting, have been assessed as chemically dependent, or have been expelled from their previous school.

Charter schools are publicly-sponsored autonomous schools. They are substantially free of direct administrative control by the government but are held accountable for achieving certain levels of student performance and other specified outcomes.

Workplace training programs are apprenticeships which teach students a skilled trade not offered through present vocational training. Costs are divided between the employer and the school district.

Voucher plans constitute a system of certificate or cash payments by the government which enables public school students to attend schools of their choice,

public or private. Vouchers have a fixed value and are redeemed at the time of enrollment.

Tuition tax credits constitute a system of funding choice which allows parents to receive credit against their income tax to subsidize non-public school tuition for their children. Such a system is, by definition, intersectional.

As the above definitions indicate, tailoring a choice plan is itself a creative endeavor. Choice can be limited to one district and thus have minimal educational design consequences, or it can be statewide and intersectional and thereby completely alter the way schools are organized within a state. No one has yet proposed an *inter*state choice plan and no one has yet seriously suggested a classroom choice plan. Thus, choice plans tend to fit within the traditional structure of American education. However, if the movement toward privatization of education accelerates, new types of schools may emerge that do not fit within this structure. If, for example, the for-profit Edison Project were to successfully franchise a thousand private schools, American education would be profoundly transformed. Or, if the New American Schools Development Corporation, established in the Bush Administration's "America 2000" education plan, had been able to create enough "break-the-mold schools" by using the resources of corporations, think tanks, community organizations, and vendors of educational products, then the mode by which educational services are delivered would have been transformed.

Today, many non-education organizations are involved in education reform. Business, in particular, has taken an active interest in altering the structure of public education through policy recommendations, political activism, limited financial support, and technological assistance. It could be argued, therefore, that the traditional separation of public and private spheres is evolving into a new institutional configuration. For now, however, most choice plans have been developed and implemented within the parameters established by state constitutions and by traditional conceptions of a public school district.

The Historical, Social, and Political Context Of Choice Plans

To understand school choice, it is important to return to *Brown v. Board of Education*. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation could not be constitutionally supported on the basis of the "separate but equal" principle affirmed in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), an earlier Supreme Court case. In effect, the Court found that separate was not equal and that minority students in the United States were being deprived of their right to equal protection under the law. The *Brown* decision radically altered American public education; by mandating that public schools be racially integrated, it implicitly called for the redesign of public education. But, despite the Court's decision, *de facto* segregation has continued, North and South, because America's neighborhoods are segregated by race and class. In fact, the first choice schools were "white flight" academies. In their panic to avoid sending their children to school with African American students, white parents throughout the South withdrew from the public school system and established private academies that were often indirectly publicly funded.

By the 1960s it was becoming increasingly apparent that *de facto* segregation was, in the words of the Federally-established Kerner Commission, creating two societies, one poor and minority, the other white and relatively affluent. Numerous studies called for the reform of public education in the inner cities, and several articulate critics testified to the damage that public education was doing to minority students. Jonathan Kozol (1991), in particular, mapped out the terrain of pain with startling clarity, and writers such as Michael Harrington (1962) showed Americans that poverty continued to exist throughout the country.

When Lyndon Baines Johnson became president, he sought to build the "Great Society" by creating an environment of equal opportunity, material abundance, and social justice. Along with the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Johnson and other liberals attempted to integrate the country through court decisions and legislation. The passions aroused by the war in Indochina effectively destroyed the political consensus required to make the Great Society a reality, however. In addition, the black power movement challenged the integrationist ideal

by arguing for separation of the races and racial pride. The objective was to gain control of the schools in black communities so that members could teach African American-centered curricula and the values of the local community. In the minds of black power advocates, public schools were little more than an extension of white power, white ideology, and white control. Attacking the education *status quo* on another front, a number of white education reformers were simultaneously criticizing the public school system as morally and intellectually deadening. Many of these critics formed alternative schools in New York and other major cities.

In the meantime, conservative economist Milton Friedman (1962) was arguing that by its very nature public education was an affront to the ideals of freedom and marketplace accountability. In essence, Friedman laid the groundwork for an alternative model of school governance that emphasized parent choice and was based on the belief that markets are better arbiters of personal and social good than are state-mandated regulations. During the 1960s, however, Friedman was a lone voice in the policy wilderness. The core liberal consensus was frayed, but still intact. He did, however, play a critical role in establishing the ideological credibility of Adam Smith's notion of the invisible hand guiding public policy.

Public education in the 1970s was quite experimental. In particular, the open classroom was idealized, and new curricula such as "Man: A Course Study" were touted as an effective means to help students grasp the structure of knowledge through "discovery" learning. Teachers' unions, particularly under the leadership of Albert Shanker, became increasingly powerful. Public education seemed to be entering an era of optimism and there was a deep belief in experimentation in those public schools with the resources to innovate. This sense of relative well-being, however, stood in stark contrast to the continuing educational disaster within the inner city. In particular, forced busing in cities like Boston created racial confrontations that were often violent. Public education was increasingly politicized, and conservatives, in particular, began to question the viability and advisability of using the public school system as an instrument of court-mandated racial integration. In effect, a politics of resentment developed against the liberal core consensus.

It was not until 1980, however, that this underground current of hostility broke through the surface of politics as usual; the conservative coalition led by President Ronald Reagan challenged the existing consensus by arguing against state power and for market power. The ideas of Milton Friedman emerged from the back offices of policy think tanks to take their place in the Oval Office.

Choice made its first major national political breakthrough at the National Governor's Conference in 1986. In their report, *Time for Results*, the governors said, "If we first implement choice, true choice among public schools, we unlock the values of competition in the marketplace. Schools that compete for students, teachers, and dollars will, by virtue of the environment, make those changes that will allow them to succeed" (Paulu, 1989, p.14). Fiscal conservatives were then joined in this struggle by a wide variety of Protestant evangelicals who characterize public schools as repositories of secular humanism.

According to Rofes (1992), the choice fervor that swept through America was generated by a confluence of cultural, economic, and political developments. Among them were: (1) widespread concern about the quality of elementary and secondary public education; (2) diminished confidence in the effectiveness of government and an increasing faith in the private sector; (3) international comparisons, especially with Japan, and the economic threat posed internationally; (4) desire for an ease in taxes, especially by the middle class; and, (5) resentment by parents who choose to educate their children in private institutions and thus feel that they should not have to contribute part of their income to the public school system.

The popularity of choice is partially attributable to the major public relations campaign undertaken by its advocates. The Washington lobbying infrastructure includes a variety of private school organizations which are strong advocates of school choice. Prominent among them are the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and the Council for American Private Education (CAPE). These groups have forged a collaboration with a number of religious and other private education groups, called the National Coalition for the Improvement and Reform of American Education. In the struggle to capture the minds, hearts, and votes of

Americans, the school choice coalition has been aided by think tanks, interest groups, and individuals not based in Washington and which do not approach school choice from a religious or other private school perspective.

In sum, school choice is a "hot" education, political, and social issue. Unlike many school reforms, choice has caught the public imagination and prompted policy makers to work with legislators, business, and educators. As a consequence, choice is a national movement, and, as such, is changing not only the way American education is organized, but how Americans think about education. The impact of this national effort on urban school reform has been significant because choice has compelled educators and other education stakeholders to rethink and redesign how public schools are organized, evaluated, and supported.

As demonstrated above, the term "choice" covers a multitude of public philosophies, student assignment plans, and conceptions of school organization. Below some major choice initiatives are described. Where evidence is available, the outcomes of choice in terms of organizational change, public support, and educational impact are examined.

STATEWIDE CHOICE: MINNESOTA

Since the 1980s, Minnesota has been a pioneer state in the school choice movement. In 1988 it became the first state to enact statewide open enrollment for all students. Subsequently, statewide open enrollment has been enacted in Arkansas, Idaho, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, Nebraska, and Utah.

PLAN DESCRIPTION

In Minnesota, all public schools are open to all K-12 students for enrollment throughout the state, provided that the receiving school has room and that the transfer does not harm racial integration efforts. In 1995, 15 percent of its 750,000 public school students participated in various school choice programs throughout the state. State funding per pupil follows the student to the school district of choice. The receiving district pays transportation costs, though parents have to transport the child to its boundary. There is some aid available for low-income families for transportation, however (Addonizio, Juday, First, Kearney, & Muller, 1991).

The Minnesota school system also offers numerous other options for students. Postsecondary options, enacted in 1985, enable high school juniors and seniors to take courses at public or private higher education institutions for both high school and future higher education credit; state per-pupil spending follows students and covers tuition, books, and materials. A "second chance" program, the High School Graduation Incentive Program, was established in 1987. It enables students who risk not graduating, or who have already dropped out, to attend public or private nonsectarian schools which offer education programs specially designed to help them graduate. Other initiatives include Diploma Opportunities for Adults, designed for students age 21 and over; education programs for pregnant minors and minor parents; and Area Learning Centers, which offer personalized education programs for students age 12 to adult. Finally, families are allowed to claim a tax deduction for any school expenses, including private school tuition. The maximum annual deduction for students in grades 7-12 is $1,000.

In 1991, Minnesota passed the Charter Schools Act, which permits teachers to create and operate new public schools on contract to the local school board. Charter schools offer innovative or alternative education opportunities for students and are accountable to public authority and parents. Each school receives a charter from a local public school board with the approval of the State Board of Education. Charter schools turned down by the local school board may appeal to the State Board of Education if at least two members of the local school board support the proposal. Charter school funding depends on the enrollment the school attracts, and the school is accountable to the school board and community for attaining its goals.

The impetus for the creation of charter schools was that thoughtful competition would provoke educational improvements. The license for teachers and educators to create innovative schools is seen as complementing Minnesota's open enrollment policy by allowing the public, including teachers and parents, to respond proactively to the education needs of its youth. In 1993, the Charter Schools Act was expanded, increasing the number of charter schools permitted in the state from 8 to 20. The Act also made it easier for schools to be granted charter status. Then, in 1994, the Minnesota legislature increased the number of charter schools allowed in the state to 35 (Shokraii & Hanks, 1996).

Outcomes

Enrollment

As of the 1992-93 school year over 113,000 students, 15 percent of the state's 750,000 public school students, participated in some form of school choice. In that year, over 12,500 students attended schools outside their home district, up 26 percent from 1991-1992, and up 110 percent from 1990-91. In 1987, the first year of the High School Incentive Program, over 2,000 dropouts returned to school. In 1992-93, 14,000 students took advantage of Minnesota's second chance programs (Malone, 1993).

In the 1994-95 school year, more than 18,000 students participated in the open enrollment program, and over 6,100 students participated in the post-

secondary options program (Shokraii & Hanks, 1996). Use of within-district choice was greater in urban cities, and the use of open enrollment was more likely in smaller districts and rural areas. Use by minority students was on the rise (Colopy & Tarr, 1994). Minority and low-income students are well represented in the second chance option (Nathan & Ysseldyke, 1994). Reasons for using open enrollment mainly concerned the school's academic reputation. Parents chose non-neighborhood schools primarily because of their dissatisfaction with their neighborhood school's education services or administration (Tenbusch, 1993). Students, too, were most likely to be searching for better academic offerings and a more positive environment. Another study showed that parents identified the school's academic reputation as the main reason for participating in open enrollment (Rubenstein, 1992).

Parent Information and Satisfaction

Parent information remains key to determining the level of usage of open enrollment, or any other choice alternatives in Minnesota. According to a 1989-90 school-year survey, Minnesota parents were fully aware that open enrollment existed, but were mostly underinformed about other school choice initiatives available to them. The sole statutory responsibility for information dissemination to the parents regarding school choice options resides with their local school districts, although districts may have a conflict of interest in supplying parents with full information about school choice options because of the threatened loss of students and, therefore, funds. Other sources of information about choice options include information hot lines, information on Aid to Families with Dependent Children checks, and public service announcements, but they do not seem to be adequate. What is missing is the use of centers that are more accessible to minority and lower income families, including places such as churches, community centers, and social service agencies.

Parents who selected charter schools were very satisfied, according to a survey conducted by the Minnesota House Research Department in 1994. Most parents liked their special curriculum features, small size, and environment. Major sources of dissatisfaction were a lack of school resources, transportation,

inadequate space, school administration, and turmoil during the first year (Shokraii & Hanks, 1995).

Public Support

Initially, the Minnesota plans did not have a great deal of support, as indicated by the relatively small number of students actually participating in them. However, studies now show that support for cross-district choice plans is increasing: the percentage of the public favoring school choice grew from 35 percent in 1985 to 76 percent in 1982 (Nathan & Ysseldyke, 1994). According to the studies, support increased because many students who dropped out returned to school, the number of advanced courses offered by schools increased, school choice brought families back into the public school system, and choice allowed educators to develop innovative schools.

Impact on School Districts

There is mixed evidence concerning the impact of open enrollment on promoting program improvement in school districts. The findings of a 1991-92 study that looked at high impact districts (those that experienced a gain or loss of 50 or more students or 5 percent of their total enrollment) indicated that there was little validity to the belief that choice prompts schools and districts to change and/or improve programming to meet the demands of families. However, some evidence did show that those districts losing a large number of students were motivated to improve their school programs, while other evidence suggested that the improvements were not due to open enrollment. Only some districts which lost a large number of students experienced teacher layoffs; cancellation of academic courses, extracurricular activities and student support services; and school closings (Funkhouser & Colopy, 1994).

Equity

Open enrollment has spurred a slight migration of families from urban to suburban centers, and from lower income to higher income school districts

(Rubenstein, 1992). Minority youth comprise about 40 percent of charter school enrollments (Nathan, 1996). Open enrollment has stimulated a noticeable increase in the ethnic diversity of Minnesota public schools. In addition, it has fostered a more equitable distribution of educational resources at the local school level (Tenbusch, 1993).

Student Achievement and School Improvement

There is no conclusive data on the effects of open enrollment on academic achievement, but there is widespread satisfaction with the education services provided by schools of choice. In addition, students feel that their self-esteem, attitude, and attendance are greatly improved at their chosen school (Rubenstein, 1992).

There are no studies of the outcomes of open enrollment and other school choice initiatives in Minnesota as yet, but charter schools have been known to encourage improvements in local school districts in Minnesota by offering educationally innovative ideas. Certain charter schools are indicative of the improvements that open enrollment has promoted in Minnesota. The City Academy in St. Paul, the country's first charter school, is an example of a school that has succeeded in creating a program suited for alienated young adults who wish to return to school. The students are typically between the ages of 15 and 21, come from different racial backgrounds, and have experienced combinations of academic failure, chemical dependency, violent or delinquent behavior, and physical or sexual abuse. In three years, the school has graduated 54 percent of its students (Shokraii & Hanks, 1996).

There still exists a stratification of resources among charter schools, however; compare, for instance, the Miltona Science Magnet School and the Urban League Street Academy in St. Paul. Miltona is located in a rural community, while the Street Academy is in the heart of an inner city. Both are specialized schools: Miltona has a science-oriented curriculum, and the Street Academy is designed to personalize the education of at-risk students. However, there are stark inequalities in resources between the two schools. The lack of infrastructure, too few faculty, and inadequate resources all add up to a lack of morale at the Street Academy.

CITYWIDE CHOICE: NEW YORK CITY

New York City is the largest public school system in the United States. It consists of 32 community school districts with over one thousand public schools. It is projected that by the year 2000 the city will have nearly 1.5 million public school students. Currently, 62 percent of public school students are eligible to participate in subsidized lunch programs, 73 percent are either of African American or Hispanic background. Many students are from families that have recently immigrated, and over 80 languages are spoken by New York public school students.

Plan Description

Former New York City Schools Chancellor Joseph Fernandez initiated a citywide choice plan that is described in a six-page regulation issued in February 1993 . According to the plan, parents of children enrolled in the New York City public school system have the right to transfer their children to any public school they choose, provided that space is available (Shokraii & Hanks, 1996). No child can be discriminated against on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, or special needs. The rationale for this plan is based on five assumptions:

(1) The old structure of the city school system had created a bureaucratic environment that made reform impossible.

(2) City schools must be improved so that all children can be academically successful.

(3) All parents, irrespective of social and economic status, should have the right to choose where and how their children are educated.

(4) By forcing individual schools to compete in the education marketplace, administrators and teachers gain the incentives and autonomy needed to develop innovative and creative educational programs.

(5) Schools should be held accountable, because, in theory, accountability forces teachers and administrators to improve curricula and pedagogy.

A parent who wants to take advantage of the interdistrict choice plan must

contact the Board of Education to obtain a copy of the Chancellor's Choice Regulation, and become familiar with the chosen school's procedures and requirements. The parent must then write a letter to the superintendent of the school's district to request a transfer. The time period for the superintendent's response is not specified. The parent has the right to appeal a rejected request to the chancellor. There is no guarantee that siblings will be transferred to the same school and, most importantly, transportation is not provided.

Since the plan's implementation in 1993, a new chancellor has taken charge of the city's schools. He has been faced with so many difficulties that choice seems less urgent than the asbestos crisis, teacher contracts, reorganization of the Central Board, and raising standards.

Response to school choice has been far from enthusiastic, possibly because there has been almost no publicity about the choice option following its official implementation by the Board of Education or in the districts. In fact, the only detailed information available to the public is contained in a special *New York Newsday* "pull-out" section published in 1993. This newspaper article, "School Choice: A Guide to Picking A Public School for Your Child," provides a detailed overview of the schools in the 32 community districts (Cookson & Lucks, 1995).

Community School District Four

Strategy

One of the most well-known choice districts in New York is Community School District Four. It lies in East Harlem, one of the city's poorest neighborhoods. At the onset of the process leading to school choice, the district ranked last among the 32 city school districts. At that time it served over 13,000 students: 60 percent Hispanic, 35 percent African American, 4 percent white, and 1 percent Asian. Almost 80 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced lunch; 10 percent were classified as Limited English Proficient (Fliegel, 1993).

This was the situation where a group of educational innovators, parents, and community leaders came together to respond to a dire need for educational

reform. Beginning in 1976, teachers were given the autonomy to redesign and create new schools, and a system of controlled intradistrict choice was instituted at the junior high school level. Parents were required to choose the junior high their child would attend from the options available to them within the district.

The choice system implemented differed greatly from typical districts in the city, where students move from elementary to junior high school in a very automatic, impersonal fashion. District Four's junior high schools are all open-zoned, that is, admissions applications are accepted from all interested students. The choice process starts in the fifth or sixth grade, where students move from elementary schools to one of the district's alternative schools. Parents receive an information booklet in the fall with descriptions of each program, and they are invited to orientation sessions to obtain more information. Throughout the process teachers advise both parents and students.

Organization

Over the 1970s and '80s, the district replaced its 13 middle schools with 29 alternative programs. These schools-within-schools each served 200 or fewer students. Community School District Four now operates approximately 44 schools in 20 buildings. A school, according to this philosophy, is not a building; a school is "an educational program organized around a central theme and headed by either a director or a principal" (Fliegel, 1993, p.9). Teachers are given great autonomy in creating and innovating new educational programs at each school.

The first alternative school started was the Beta School, designed for students who "act out." Other examples of alternative schools include a progressive school, whose focus is open education, and the East Harlem School for the Performing Arts. The old building that was Benjamin Franklin School now holds three schools: River East, an elementary school; Isaac Newton, an alternative science and mathematics school; and the ninth grade of the Manhattan Center for Science and Math.

In the 1970s, Deborah Meier opened Central Park East, arguably one of the

best alternative schools in the district. The school is organized according to the learner-centered philosophies of Theodore Sizer, founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools. Central Park East focuses on: (1) building democratic community; (2) promoting strong respectful relationships with families and the local community; (3) fostering "habits of the mind," rigorous critical inquiry that challenges students' curiosity and builds on the natural drive toward competence; (4) integrating the curriculum and teaching fewer subjects to avoid superficial knowledge; and (5) relating learning to the real world (Meier, 1995). Small size is a key to achieving these goals. At the present time, there are four Central Park East schools in District Four.

Admissions

Students are required to submit an application listing up to six selections. Admissions decisions are primarily made by the schools themselves, and each school has a high degree of control over its programs and admissions policies. Each school has three weeks to make its decisions. There is one stipulation to the admissions criteria: schools can accept no more than 20 percent of their entering class from outside District Four's boundaries. Applicants rejected by their first choice school are sent to their second choice, and so on for three rounds. The application consists of standardized test scores, teacher ratings on work habits, attendance records, and academic abilities. Recently, subjective criteria were included in the application, including personal interviews (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1992). Because choice is mandatory in this district, there is a reduction in the split between what Elmore calls "active choosers," who usually end up in the best programs, and "inactive choosers," who feel unable to make education decisions or do not have adequate information to make decisions (Elmore, 1987, cited in Wells, 1990).

In 1992, 60 percent of the applicants were accepted by their first choice school, 30 percent by their second choice, and 5 percent by their third choice school. The remaining 5 percent of the applicants were placed in a school deemed to be appropriate after consultation with the student's parents and teachers.

A school that experiences a decline in applicants must assess its overall operations, and make reforms where necessary. If a school cannot improve after much work, then it will be forced to shut down. As of 1992, the school district has closed two schools because they were not attracting an adequate number of applicants (Fliegel, 1993).

Student Achievement

District Four is often heralded as the paradigm of the power of public school choice. According to many, the results of the reform efforts are striking. Before the creation of alternative schools, Fliegel notes, "only one child in six in District Four was reading at or above grade level; after the implementation of school choice, more than five are doing so" (cited in Tyack, 1992, p.17). Two indicators of academic achievement are cited, reading and mathematics, but reading achievement levels are usually the standard whereby districts are compared. Prior to the establishment of school choice, only 15 percent of the students could read above grade level, less than half the citywide average. By 1988, 62.5 percent of the students were reading at or above grade level. In terms of ranking, which may be a better relative indicator due to slight variations in reading achievement tests over the years, District Four's ranking rose from 32 in 1974 to 15 in 1982, and was 19 in 1988. The district's mathematics ranking in 1983 was 23 out of 32; it rose to 19 in 1988 (Fliegel, 1993). Thus, for both indicators, the district climbed to the middle range of performance among the city's districts.

Further, District Four student admissions into New York City's selective high schools rose from 10 to more than 250; the placement of graduates into selective high schools met or exceeded the citywide rate for each of the most selective high schools (Fliegel, 1993). Finally, 139 students were admitted into the most elite public schools: Stuyvesant, Bronx Science, Brooklyn Tech, and LaGuardia School of Music and the Performing Arts (Tyack, 1992).

Student achievement dropped off in later years, however, according to the Special Report from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1992). As measured by standardized test scores, achievement rose considerably in

the early years, but has declined recently. The report states that East Harlem's reading scores in 1991-92 were 27 percentage points lower than what was cited, and only 38.3 percent of its students in grades 2-9 scored at or above grade level in reading, 8.1 percent lower than the city average. Also, according to the report, mathematics scores were overstated. In 1991-92, District Four ranked 23 out of 32 districts, a slight improvement over the previous year, when it ranked 26. In 1991-92, 48.7 percent of East Harlem students scored at or above grade level, a drop of 1.7 percentage points from the year before, and below the city average of 58.4 percent. In addition, the Carnegie report cited sharp disparities in achievement among various choice programs. In 10 of the programs, at least half of the students scored at or above grade level on standardized math and reading tests, while in three of the schools, 90 percent of the students scored at or above grade level, and at four other schools, fewer than one in every ten students scored at or above grade level. Despite discrepancies in results shown by this report, it is still clear that District Four has had some positive impact on student achievement in East Harlem (Carnegie Foundation, 1992).

One other concern identified by the Carnegie report is the competition between programs for the "better" students, not necessarily in terms of test scores, but those who show signs of effort and motivation. However, the report acknowledges that teachers and administrators are confronting the tensions between excellence and equity. Intense and heated meetings to deal with the issue of competition among the programs have resulted in a slight modification of the admissions procedures to expand the mix of students in each program, and to increase the power of the district board to monitor admissions.

The dramatic achievement results in District Four cannot be attributed only to the implementation of choice. Behind the movement are inspirational educators, administrators, and parents who had the vision and ultimately gained the support, both financial and moral, to carry it out. Also, there is widespread agreement that smaller schools—like District Four's—offer better educational environments. School reformers including Deborah Meier, Seymour Fliegel, then the district's director of Alternative Programs, and Anthony Alvarado, the district's superintendent in 1972 and a former teacher, all have argued for smaller schools.

Moreover, they were able to secure large amounts of funding and promote a culture of change. As Alvarado stated, "Choice is just one arrow in the strategic quiver. District 4 did not succeed just because of choice. We got loads of money to deal with innovation. Bold leadership was an extraordinary factor" (quoted in Carnegie Foundation, 1992, p.45).

In the last 20 years, East Harlem has become a mature choice system. The drop-off of some of the initial benefits of choice can be attributed to a few changes. A major factor was the reduction of the funding level, forcing a tightening of resources and slowing the pace of innovation. However, it cannot be denied that District Four is a model of intradistrict choice and an example of how choice may boost academic achievement and create inspiration and excitement in a school system. Choice has succeeded in this district because it stimulated creative planning, community effort, and a strong desire for equitable change.

Magnet Schools

New York City has experimented with various other forms of choice at the high school level. The State Magnet School Initiative was organized to promote the development of magnet schools that reflect the cultural pluralism of the city's school districts. A magnet is a public school that offers specialized programs and is designed to attract students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. The concept of magnet schools was developed in the 1970s as a way to encourage racial integration and foster educational innovation (Cookson, 1994). New York City currently has over 300 magnet schools. There are academic, vocational, and academic career magnets that offer a combination of academic and career curricula. Other schools center on special education or bilingual programs. Programs that are focused on science and engineering, medicine, the performing arts, humanities, law and criminal justice, business, fashion, and many other themes provide additional academic and/or career opportunities. Some magnets are housed as schools-within-schools in neighborhood comprehensive high schools, while others have their own buildings. Financing for magnets includes redesigning funds, which are granted by the Board of Education when a failing school converts to a magnet. Many schools apply for federal or foundation grants for additional funding (New

York State magnet schools program, 1995).

Magnet programs are loosely formed, with a great deal of autonomy for educators. The resulting freedom has sparked extensive innovation throughout the school system. Schools with a focus or a theme enhance student motivation and create identities that have brought the student body, faculty, and administration together. Magnet schools have been successful in fostering an increase in parent involvement and faculty morale. However, student achievement depends on the school ethos, the organization of the school, inspiring teachers and leaders, and the program plan. Some have been effective in lowering dropout rates and raising reading scores. Many magnet schools in NYC are still in the experimental phase, though, and do not offer conclusive evidence about whether the strategy has a positive effect on academic achievement.

Application and Enrollment

The student application process requires every student to complete and submit an application listing his or her choices. Even a student opting to remain in the neighborhood comprehensive is required to submit an application indicating the selected school. Admissions procedures vary according to the school; some admit students by special audition or test, others by review of academic records and student interest. Academic career magnets admit students half by school review and half by random assignment through lottery. The magnet schools in the city provide seats for more than 60 percent of the high school students (Tokarska, 1992).

Over 81 percent of high school students applied to magnet schools in 1988, one year after the program began. Half selected academic programs, one-tenth vocational programs, three-tenths academic/career programs, and one-tenth special education programs. This demonstrates a very high demand for magnet schools, far exceeding the supply. Most of the interest lies in academic magnets, even from students with low achievement scores, indicating that students want a high quality education, and possibly hope to pursue a higher education. This interest also suggests that students are choosing schools to get away from comprehensive neighborhood schools.

Equity

Magnet schools have sparked considerable controversy. One outcome that was to be expected in a magnet school program is a "creaming process." That is, the higher achieving students, with the most involved parents and the most resources, gain more information and access to better quality magnet schools, which affects who is admitted to the most selective schools. By default, some students are left behind in weaker schools or schools with fewer resources. Because magnets select their students, and academic magnets select half of their students, it is inevitable that weaker students will be placed in weaker schools. When students with lower achievement scores are placed with like students, it may be harmful to all students in that school. Peer context is another form of tracking; it creates a two-tiered education system, where the better-prepared or more motivated students go to the better schools, and the weaker students are left in under-funded schools lacking adequate resources.

The career magnets, on the other hand, work to reduce racial and ethnic segregation through a lottery system. In New York City, the career magnets have produced a system that is fairly equitable for three primary reasons: (1) the number of magnet schools is quite large, providing seats for many students; (2) the application system is relatively simple for students of lower English proficiency, less knowledge of the school system, and fewer family resources; and (3) the requirement that schools accept students on a random basis, regardless of reading levels, decreases the effects of creaming (Crain, 1992). However, there is still considerable segregation throughout the system because poorer students, who remain inclined to attend a neighborhood school, usually attend a school that is academically weaker than most magnet schools. Magnets do have the ability to provide educational benefits and reduce racial and ethnic segregation, depending upon the selection process employed. A critical variable in determining who applies to which schools is access to information through parent information centers; the more that parents are aware of their options, the more they will take an active role in pursuing their option of choice to the fullest.

DESEGREGATION PLAN: MASSACHUSETTS

Plan History and Description

In Massachusetts choice has primarily been a means to achieve racial and ethnic balance in schools. In 1974, after busing was instituted in Springfield, the state legislature amended the 1965 Racial Imbalance Act, which rejected mandatory school assignments as a remedy for violations of state law. However, schools which were more than half non-white were obligated to take steps to reduce racial isolation. The State Department of Education, though it could no longer mandate busing, could require voluntary and involuntary measures to promote racial balance. Under Chapter 636, the state could offer incentives such as transportation reimbursements, facilities reconstruction reimbursements, funding for magnet schools, and other quality improvements aimed at reducing the segregation pervasive in the state schools (Thernstrom, 1991). Choice was a revised desegregation strategy to replace past measures.

Experiments with choice grew out of efforts to attract whites into inner-city schools. In the mid-1970s, Massachusetts appropriated funds for the creation of magnet schools to promote desegregation. The initial funding for the creation of magnet schools was $2 million, it grew to $5 million, and then went up to $500 million, including funds for new facilities and transportation. Though magnet schools did expand the options available to parents, they left schools more racially imbalanced than before. The limited capacity created a number of disappointed applicants and drained much of the motivated staff, parents, and funding away from non-magnet schools (Glenn, 1991). The selection process of magnet schools, for the most part, benefited the more academically prepared, and in doing so, excluded a sizable minority population. This created a two-tiered education system that stripped neighborhood schools of many resources. Since the focus had been on achieving racial integration, magnet schools proved to be ineffective. The state acknowledged the negative effects of a system of choice based solely on magnet schools, and as a consequence encouraged cities to experiment with other forms of choice.

Controlled choice evolved as a result of the failure of previous efforts at school reform. It is a form of choice which does not rely upon the market rationale of educational reform. Controlled choice is a form of parental choice that attempts to achieve racial and ethnic balance in schools. Automatic assignment based on a child's address was abolished and replaced by a system whereby the family selects schools after receiving counseling and information about available options. Assignment is made based on family preferences, available school capacities, and integration efforts. Controlled choice is designed as a strategy to increase the effective participation of low-income and minority children, while stimulating every school to be productive (Glenn, 1991). Controlled choice, according to Glenn, has four main objectives: (1) to offer all students in a community equal access to all public schools, regardless of geographical location; (2) to involve all parents in an informed decision-making process; (3) to create pressure for all schools to improve over time, and eliminate enrollment on the basis of residence; and, where necessary, (4) to achieve racial desegregation of every school with a minimal number of mandatory assignments. Many Massachusetts cities have implemented controlled choice, including Cambridge, Boston, and Chelsea. More than 25 percent of the state's public school students attend schools in communities that are actively encouraging choice (Glenn, 1991).

Controlled choice indirectly promotes educational improvements by putting pressure on poorer performing schools, which must either become acceptable or be shut down. It aims at providing access to quality schools for all students by encouraging all schools to be schools of choice. If students do not get assigned to their first choice school then controlled choice seeks to ensure that there are other acceptable options that provide education at the same level. "A well designed system of choice ensures that schools go through changes that make them more attractive" (Glenn, 1991, p.95). Schools that attract fewer applicants are assisted in making improvements, and if improvements do not occur over a period of time, the schools are forced to change staff or close down. The plan assumes that schools cannot remain seriously inadequate so long as parents are given access to information and the power to make informed decisions.

CAMBRIDGE

Strategy

Cambridge is one of the smallest urban districts in Massachusetts. In 1981, when the city had a K-12 enrollment of under 8,000, and a student population of about 50 percent white, 33 percent African American, 14 percent Hispanic, and 7 percent Asian, it became the first city in Massachusetts to adopt controlled choice. The Cambridge Plan, designed by Michael Alves and Charles Willie, evolved in response to the failure of magnet schools (Thernstrom, 1991). The plan was developed as a result of grassroots efforts such as community meetings, school mergers, and redrawn neighborhood lines. The controlled choice plan ended neighborhood zoning and provided transportation to all students who needed it. It affected only students in grades K-8 because Cambridge had only one public high school at the time. Students could choose any school in the system as long as admission did not create a racial imbalance in the school. The aim was to "maximize competition and choice among desegregated schools" (Alves & Willie, cited in Cookson, 1994, p.59). Eventually, the purpose of controlled choice is to make all schools choice schools.

Registration is centralized with a rolling admissions policy. Admissions decisions are made at the end of every month for the applications received that month. Every school, every grade, and every program within a school must reflect a white-to-minority ratio that is within five percentage points of the proportional racial composition of Cambridge (Thernstrom, 1991). Students who have siblings in a particular school are more likely to gain admission into that school than those who do not. The only students not required to go through the regular assignment process are those who need special or bilingual education.

The crux of the controlled choice plan in Cambridge is the Parent Information Center which operates in each community. Cambridge has invested $65,000 in the centers (Carnegie Foundation, 1992). Each center provides information in six different languages about the schools in the community, encourages parents to think about their children's education, and also gets them involved in the school improve-

ment process (Cookson, 1994). Parents are invited to visit schools to talk with faculty and administration.

Outcomes

The Cambridge controlled choice plan is one of the most successful controlled choice programs in the nation. The city has invested the funds, resources, and time in implementing a successful program. The plan involves information, transportation, and improved education services. Because of this approach Cambridge has created a working model for how choice can promote equity of access and strive to improve schools at the same time.

Student Achievement. The city reports that its students outperform students nationally in eighth grade reading, mathematics, social studies, and science. However, scores are lower for the fourth grade and twelfth grade than the national norm (Carnegie Foundation, 1992). "After four years of controlled choice, it was found that minority students were outperforming white students in math and reading citywide. The attendance rate had risen nine percent" (Alves & Willie, cited in Cookson, 1994, p. 60).

Enrollment. "91% of all students entering the Cambridge public school system at the K-8 levels have gained admission to a school of their choice, 75% to the school of their first choice, and 16% to either their second or third choice" (Cookson, 1994, p.60). Students who are involuntarily assigned are placed on a waiting list for the schools of their choice. Student assignment officers make the final decision regarding placement; there is, however, an appeals process that goes to the school committee if a family is not satisfied with its child's placement.

Parent Involvement. The Parent Information Centers, along with a citywide parent coordinator and 13 school-assigned parent tour guides, have elevated the level of parent involvement in the Cambridge school system. The centers serve as community centers that invite the participation of all parents, encouraging them to be active in choosing their children's education, as well as to voice their opinions and ideas on ways to improve the school system. They are

provided with information about current and incoming students to promise equal access to information; the centers' mission is to reach language minority and poor families who may be neglected by the traditional system. Indeed, "[t]wo out of three Cambridge parents actually visit schools while choosing, indicating a fairly high level of involvement" (Carnegie Foundation, 1992, p.37). Also, 21 homeless families have been brought into the school system.

Equity. All of Cambridge's magnet schools have achieved racial balance, and "Alves and Willie have found that there was no drift toward resegregation in the public schools and the system's desegregated schools have remained desegregated" (Cookson, 1994). However, poor, immigrant, non-English-speaking students remain relatively isolated in one or two schools.

Though there are still imbalances in resources and staffing, which are counter to the goal of equity in controlled choice, there is an elaborate budgeting process to assure that each school gets appropriate funding. A centralized budget office handles the distribution of funds to all schools.

Boston

Strategy

Between 1975 and 1989, school placements in Boston were made under a court-ordered desegregation plan that involved mandatory busing. The city established a few magnet schools, such as Boston Latin, which required entrance examinations for admission, but this exacerbated the racial separation between schools because the more competitive schools were predominantly white. Forced busing spurred white flight out of the inner city and out of the city school system, changing the social class composition of the city.

Controlled choice in Boston was implemented in 1989 on a pilot basis. The city is divided into three geographic zones for the purposes of assignment to elementary and middle schools; high school choice is citywide. Families can choose any elementary or middle school in the zone where they live. Students are assigned

random numbers, and each applicant is admitted in order of his or her number. All assignments are made to ensure a racial balance in each school. Usually, those with the lowest numbers are assured admission to their first choice school. If their first choice is filled, they are granted admission into their second choice school, and so on through their options. Those students whose choices are all filled are contacted and encouraged to make new selections based on what is available. Or, they may be placed on waiting lists. The aim also is to encourage families to investigate unknown options and possibly to discover some surprises. The goal for school improvement is not to eliminate the alternative schools, encouraged through the magnet school initiative, but to make all schools and programs roughly equal in terms of educational quality. Choice is extended by creating more real options.

Enrollment Outcomes

A majority of the students are accepted into their first choice schools. For example, in 1991, 74 percent of sixth graders were assigned to their first choice school, 10 percent to their second choice, and 15 percent to schools they did not select. Involuntary assignment cannot be blamed on desegregation efforts. Rather, space limitations dictated much of the placement decisions; many schools did not have enough space to accommodate all of its applicants, and many other schools did not attract enough applicants. In that year, only one Boston high school had to deny admission to students who chose it as their first choice while admitting other students based on racial and ethnic desegregation criteria (Glenn, 1991).

Controlled choice has emphasized abolition of the traditional system of involuntarily placing poorer and minority students in least popular schools, and it has tried to create pressure on the education system to improve or close failing schools. Controls are still needed, however, to decide whom to admit, beyond race and ethnic considerations, when there are too many applicants for a particular school, and to reduce the number of involuntary assignments.

Critiques of the Plan

There are critics of the Massachusetts model of controlled choice. Some say

that counselors often do not know which schools lack available space, and therefore waste many parents' efforts at securing admissions. Thernstrom sees problems when students are assigned involuntarily to schools. She asserts that desegregation causes many involuntary assignments and she questions at what point controlled choice becomes too much control and too little choice. Thernstrom contends that when counselors are unable initially to guide parents away from schools that most likely would not honor their choices, they then pressure parents whose choices have not been accommodated to choose unpopular schools. She states that the lines between help and guidance and between information and pressure are thin. She does not blame school authorities, but the limited space in schools of choice and the slow pace of improving all schools.

Thernstrom and other critics feel that controls for race, ethnicity, and gender compromise choice and do not give parents the right to choose their children's schools freely. Thernstrom feels that an improved, restored neighborhood system involving magnet schools would offer a better solution and make all schools schools of choice. This would encourage more families to rejoin the public school system and avoid racial and ethnic labels placed on all students (Thernstrom, 1991).

VOUCHER PLANS

School vouchers are cash certificates that enable students to attend any school of their choice, whether public or private. Vouchers have a fixed value and are redeemed at the time of enrollment. Public funds follow the student. It is one of the most controversial forms of school choice. According to most teachers' unions and other public service organizations, a school voucher program would destroy the public school system because it removes funds from public schools and allows the best students to opt out of the public school system. Free-market conservatives, the strongest voucher advocates, however, are taken with the concept because they believe that the marketplace is a mechanism for reform, and they are philosophically committed to public policies that lessen the authority of the state.

A key voucher plan issue is church and state relations; most plans could result in the expenditure of state money in private religious schools (Cookson, 1994). Such an expansion of voucher plans adds numerous constitutional complexities. As it is, voucher plans are politically heated issues. Proponents espouse the patriotic ideal of freedom of choice; opponents criticize voucher plans because they neglect the current ailing system by directing public money and attention away from schools that need help most, creating a segregated and more stratified system of education, one where choosers would be the winners and non-choosers would be the losers.

Milwaukee Plan

History and Description

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, implemented the nation's first pilot voucher choice plan in September 1990. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), a limited intersectional voucher plan for the Milwaukee school district, entitles selected students to receive public monies to attend any nonsectarian private school of their choice. The program is specifically designed to allow low-income families access to private or alternative educational opportunities, and to "prevent the

payment of public monies to subsidize existing private school students, non-poor families, and students attending religious schools" (Witte, 1994, p.1). The cash value of the voucher is usually equivalent to the state per pupil expenditure on public schooling [in 1990, the figure was $2,500; in 1996-97 the figure was roughly $4,400 per student (Walsh, 1997, p.1)]. Students must come from families with incomes not exceeding 1.75 times the national poverty rate, and must not have been previously enrolled in a private school. The total number of students in any year was originally limited to 1 percent of the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) enrollment at that time. Schools initially had to limit their choice students to 49 percent of their total enrollment, and they cannot discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, or religion. Due to the success of the program, the total allowable MPCP participation was increased to 1.5 percent of MPS students in the 1994-95 school year, and each school was permitted to enroll up to 65 percent of its student body from the choice program.

In June 1995, the Wisconsin legislature passed a measure to expand MPCP to a maximum of 7,000 Milwaukee K-12 students, with full choice, including religious schools. Vouchers at that time were equivalent to $3,200. The expansion also called for a further increase in enrollment in the 1996-97 school year, to include up to 15,000 students. Opponents of this expansion, including teachers' unions and the American Civil Liberties Union, filed motions for a temporary injunction to halt the expansion. This was granted at the end of August 1995, and the program was stopped temporarily.

In response, members of the Wisconsin public donated more than $1.6 million to Partners Advancing Values in Education (PAVE) to give 50 percent tuition scholarships to about 2,000 students who had previously enrolled under the expanded program. PAVE was established in 1992 as a privately-funded voucher or scholarship program that enables low-income students to attend religious or nonreligious schools (PAVE, 1997).

In August 1996 Judge Paul Higgenbotham heard arguments regarding the injunction, and ruled to allow expansion of the MPCP program; however, schools with religious affiliation were not to be included in the plan. Finally, in January

1997, Judge Higgenbotham overturned the expansion of the MPCP, ruling the expansion as unconstitutional by the use of state funds to support religious institutions. He also reduced the size of the program, citing that the expansion would no longer make the program "experimental" (Walsh, 1997, p.17).

Outcomes

Student Achievement. The Fourth Year Report, conducted by Professor John Witte of the University of Wisconsin, assessed the outcomes of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program for the academic year 1994-95. The data showed that there were no significant differences in student achievement between choice students and MPS students (Witte, 1994). Outcomes in achievement throughout the four years were mixed, but remained statistically insignificant. Jay P. Greene, of the University of Houston, and Paul E. Peterson, of Harvard University, also studied the Milwaukee program. They found that after three or four years reading scores of low-income minority students were on the average 3 to 6 percentage points higher and math scores were 5 to 11 points higher than those of comparable public school students (Lee & Foster, 1997). Given these discrepancies, and the maturity of the plan, more evaluation efforts should be done to assess the effectiveness of MPCP on overall student achievement.

Parent Attitudes and Involvement. Parent attitudes and involvement have been very positive for choice parents over the four years. Attitudes regarding education quality and instruction, and school administration, were much more positive than the same parents' evaluations of their children's previous public schools. Parent involvement in school activities was greater in choice schools than was their involvement in most other Milwaukee public schools (Witte, 1994).

Student Attrition and Program Goals. In terms of achieving its overall goals, the MPCP has provided alternative education opportunities for many low-income students. In terms of its effects on the existing public education system, the choice program has not "creamed" the best students from the MPS system (Witte, 1994). The only threat that it does pose is the loss to the public

system of parents who were very involved in their children's schooling and who could be extremely influential in attempting to improve the current system. Attrition has declined in the four years of the program's existence, but it remains a problem for both choice schools and MPS schools. Students who leave the choice program are more likely to have lower test scores and to live farther away than the students who remain. The parents of leavers also expressed a lower degree of satisfaction (Witte, 1994).

Other Voucher Programs

The outcomes of the Milwaukee plan are not necessarily applicable to all voucher plans, as each initiative varies considerably in selection and implementation procedures. Plans in states such as California and Colorado do not have the same conditions for eligibility or school selection as Milwaukee. In ***California***, Proposition 174, an initiative that would have provided vouchers funded by tax dollars and been worth $2,600 to families to enroll their children in public, private, or religiously-affiliated schools, was rejected by voters in a November 1993 election. Last year, Governor Pete Wilson proposed a limited voucher plan, called "opportunity scholarships." It calls for the state to pay a large portion of the education costs of students from the worst California public schools to attend public, private, or religious schools of their choice. California currently has a mandatory intradistrict choice plan and a voluntary interdistrict plan.

In November 1992, voters in ***Colorado*** rejected a full school choice ballot initiative, "Choice School Reform," which would have provided vouchers worth 50 percent of the existing per pupil expenditure to send children to a public, private, or religious school of their parents' choice.

In 1995, ***Cleveland, Ohio***, became the only city in the country to maintain a voucher pilot program that includes all schools, public, private, and religious. Initially, the plan was limited to students from grades K-3; however, one grade level is to be added each succeeding year, up to and including eighth grade. Cleveland public schools keep 55 percent of state aid per pupil, while vouchers would be limited to 45 percent of state aid. Low-income students would receive up

to 90 percent of tuition costs, with a maximum of 45 percent of state aid; others would receive 45 percent of tuition costs. Teachers' unions vigorously objected to the legislation, and in January 1996 they filed suit on constitutional grounds and asked for an injunction against implementation (Shokraii & Hanks, 1996).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Limits of Choice

There is little doubt that the monolith of urban public education is being transformed from within and without. Since the 1960s there has been wide experimentation with magnet schools, alternative schools, and a host of other nontraditional approaches to schooling. Some of these experiments have proven to be exciting from an education reform point-of-view, but some have turned out to be less fruitful. Notwithstanding efforts to reform urban schools through choice, most children living in cities attend neighborhood schools, and it should not be overlooked that many of the most exciting efforts to transform education in urban areas occur in non-choice schools. In fact, there is very little evidence that choice is the only genuine engine of education reform. Reform can be motivated from a number of different sources, perhaps the most lasting of which is from those teachers and principals who, through experience and dedication, arrive at a vision that is grounded in the lived lives of urban children. It should be said, however, that without choice, children's education experience and, hence, economic and social futures are constrained by the vagaries of chance. Children's opportunities are influenced by the neighborhood that their parents choose to live in, or are forced to live in, and by the quality of the schools in that neighborhood. Choice does provide exit from these controlling circumstances, and, to that degree, provides opportunities that might not exist otherwise for some children.

But clearly choice is not a reform silver bullet. To begin with, in large urban systems it is highly unlikely that students will be able to travel long distances to go to schools of their choice without restructuring and refinancing public transportation. While competition among schools does have some laudable effects, clearly there is a downside as well. The most obvious negative effect is that in a pure choice system many children will not be able to attend their first or second or even third school of choice. Even this statement implies an availability of information that is unlikely in a complex social and cultural environment such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Upper-middle-class families benefit from traditional school choice for the obvious reason that they can pay for private

schools. They also benefit for the less obvious reason that they have the time and social resources to explore their options.

Another limitation is that in an open choice system accountability is very difficult. In the rush to restructure public education it is possible to overlook the fact that the bureaucratic structure was meant to institutionalize accountability. Perhaps the existing structure has failed to provide this accountability, but the issue has not disappeared. A chaotic system of small unaccountable schools is a poor blueprint for providing all children with educational excellence. If teachers and principals were angels there would be no need for supervision, observation, and evaluation. But teachers and principals are not angels; they are humans with all the strengths and weaknesses intrinsic to the species.

Further, there is very little compelling evidence that school choice is directly related to higher student achievement or school improvement, although there are studies claiming that choice fosters higher test scores (Lee & Foster, 1997). Even if these studies are correct, the basis for a general assertion is so fragile, so limited, and so speculative that only a true believer would seize on this evidence as an argument for the abolition of an accountable school system.

Much of the evidence that school choice advocates marshal to support their achievement claims derives from their analyses of the effects of private education on student achievement. Cookson (1994) has written elsewhere that most of these studies are flawed and draw sweeping inferences from very little evidence. Common sense and experience dictate that the private school advantage does not come from choice, but from the nature of the parents and students who choose private schools. There is virtually no way to control statistically for the motivations and the cultural capital resources of those who opt out of the public system.

Many school choice advocates advance their cause in the name of egalitarianism and equity. But only a little sociological reasoning leads to the question of whether choice is the best mechanism to achieve an equitable school system. Studies from Scotland and elsewhere indicate that middle-class children almost never choose working-class schools, and that middle-class schools only

accept the most academically able working-class students. Moreover, one of America's nasty little secrets is that there is a huge under-class of the permanently poor. Many of the members of this permanently poor class are minorities and live in urban areas. Most of the permanently poor, however, are not minorities; they are whites who are as shut out of the economic system as are so many African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians. There is little likelihood that a large proportion of this permanently poor class could benefit by school choice. The middle-class consumer metaphor that rests behind so much of the school choice research and experimentation does not fit well with the limitations of choice and consumerism that poverty places upon individuals and families.

The American education system reproduces class differences with eerie predictability. This is because race and class segregation is not based on law, but on residence. Predominantly white middle-class and upper-middle-class neighborhoods are not likely to welcome to their schools large numbers of students from families who are poor, non-white, or otherwise socially disadvantaged. The property tax that supports public education outside of urban areas is a barrier to integration and equity. There is little likelihood that this situation will change within the foreseeable future. Thus, if urban school districts are going to provide educational excellence and opportunity for their students, there must be internal organizational mechanisms that will transform the schools without a romantic reliance on mythological markets or extended academic fantasies about the power of choice to break down race and class antagonism and even hatreds.

The Goal of Educational Justice

To our way of thinking, the fundamental principle underlying school reform in urban areas should be the provision of educational justice. In earlier work, Cookson proposed a new educational covenant based on three design principles: (1) the establishment of an educational trust fund for every child, (2) the development of managed choice and model schools, and (3) the establishment of parent information centers. Below some of the elements of this redesign strategy are delineated.

The proposed strategy rests on an argument concerning the nature of the social contract and the nature of social markets. Clearly, this monograph is not the place for an extended discussion of how John Locke's social contract, based on the assumption of unlimited acquisition, has undermined civil society. But it is important to note that in a time when wealth is becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer people, there is an urgent need to rethink the relationship between the marketplace and the provision of human services. We would argue that social marketplaces should operate differently from commodity marketplaces. The success of a social marketplace ought not to be measured by profitability, but by its successful provision of services to all citizens. This is not to say that the social marketplace should not include private enterprises. On the contrary, the social marketplace should be a creative redefinition of public and private sectors that takes the best from each and forms a new constellation of organizations that is responsive to the needs of every family and is also innovative and thus capable of embracing the future.

How does such thinking apply to education reform in urban areas? To begin with, it suggests that public bureaucracies are, in fact, a huge obstacle to creating a just and productive school system. These bureaucracies, like all bureaucracies, develop organizational agendas that very often have more to do with organizational preservation than with the provision of services. Bureaucratic self-interest leads to social blindness; there is little doubt that in U.S. cities these education bureaucracies have replaced educational achievement with organizational survival as their major goal. The alternative, however, is not to throw open the urban education marketplace to entrepreneurs, single-idea fanatics, amateurs, and educational impostors. School improvement is not an exact science, but an art that is based on experience, intelligence, integrity, and the capacity to look at the larger picture without the distortion of narrow ideology. Alternative schools and experimental schools may be necessary models for the future, but the system should guard its experimentation carefully so that it does not create thousands of "non-schools." For well over 25 years, there has been a de-schooling movement in the United States. One of its current iterations is the home school movement. For individual students home schooling, or attending a school with very little structure, may provide creative opportunities, but urban education is not likely to be improved through de-

schooling or the proliferation of single-idea schools that promote the ideological agenda of its founders.

We propose another alternative. As mentioned earlier, this alternative is based on justice. A fundamental principle of it is that every child has the same right to educational opportunity as every other child. This does not mean that all children have equal talent, or that we should expect all children to reach the same level of academic proficiency. The right of access refers to the social obligation of the community not to discriminate against a child because of family characteristics or personal limitations. Every child is entitled to what we call an equal educational monetary share that can be used at a public school of choice. In a society that is highly stratified and where the financing of education is also highly stratified, it is necessary for the monetary worth of an educational share to be in inverse relation to the family's income: the poorer the child, the greater his or her educational share. In effect, every child receives at birth an education trust fund that guarantees equal access to the public schools of his or her choice. The financing of these trust funds is discussed by Cookson in a previous publication (1994). The fundamental concept of the educational trust fund is that the United States, as a community, makes a commitment to children that their life opportunities will not be foreshortened for reasons of their birth.

Experience with controlled choice has shown that it can create racial integration, involve parents in the education of their children, and lay the groundwork for the rejuvenation of public schools. Interdistrict public school choice makes every public school a "magnet" school. Thus, the concept of controlled choice is a valid one, and can be enhanced by an equal educational monetary share system. Public schools in our proposed managed choice system would continue to receive revenues raised through taxation and state-operated gambling. However, these revenues would cover only 70 percent of a school's operating budget. The remaining 30 percent would have to be raised by attracting poor students who have educational shares to spend. A public school that receives such educational shares from students must ensure that 20 percent of its student body is composed of children whose family's income is at or below the poverty line. It is important to remember that these students receive larger shares than others

and are thus economically attractive. The key incentive for public schools to recruit share students, especially share students from disadvantaged homes, is that schools retain any surplus accrued during the school year in order to improve their programs, increase salaries, or maintain the school itself. This method of financing public education balances the need for a strong, publicly-supported school system with the need to stimulate competition among public schools. Managed school choice is a method of encouraging schools to innovate by rewarding those schools with educational ..ion and social commitment.

Equity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for a true transformation in education. Just as a community has the obligation to protect its children and to guarantee equal educational opportunity, so it also has the obligation to promote individual and family liberty. Thus, if teachers and parents are able to create schools that do not violate the conditions of the educational covenant discussed above, these may be designated "model schools" and made eligible to receive shares from children's educational trust funds. Model schools must have 50 or more students and must enroll at least 20 percent of their students from families whose incomes are at or below the poverty line. If the founders of model schools adhere to the rule of equal access, then the state should play only a small role in monitoring and regulating schools.

Conclusion

Clearly, this monograph has raised more questions about school choice and its possible effects on urban public schools than it has answered. In some ways, we are at the very edge of the choice phenomenon; in the next ten years the organizational picture of schooling in the United States will be very different from what it is today. There will be more privatization, more choice, more opportunity, more danger. Choice has proven to be a useful tactic in promoting experimentation, and surely the involvement of families in all phases of schooling is important, not only for educational improvement, but for democracy. Yet there is a danger that choice will be promoted as a panacea and that once again bad public policy will deprive the poor of the opportunities for growth and mobility that are at the heart of the democratic process. Good schools for all children will only be achieved through

finance equity, prepared professionals, and high standards and purpose. The marketplace does not provide purpose. What we have suggested above are some methods for using choice to strengthen public education. There are other ways. We end with the hope that those interested in improving the education of children living in urban areas will continue to struggle for a new education design based on an educational covenant that includes all children regardless of race, class, gender, or disability. A high standard, perhaps, but one worth meeting and exceeding.

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