Defending Public Education

AN ACTIVIST RESOURCE KIT

(Revised September 1999)
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Introduction

Since 1981, Political Research Associates has served as a resource for activists and organizers opposing right-wing initiatives or defending those under attack from the Right. Throughout the 1980s, the inquiries that came to us—many of them over the phone—could be summarized as: “Who are these people and why are they attacking us?” Our job during those years was to provide basic information about right-wing groups—their leaders, their ideology, their agenda, and their connections. This information would strengthen the hand of the beleaguered callers, and leave them better equipped to defend themselves or to challenge the misinformation and distortions of the opposition.

Early in the 1990s the nature of the question changed. With the New Right riding high for over a decade, people calling for information knew their adversaries, often having very specific information about their identity and their motives. Now callers asked: “How can we oppose these people most effectively?”

As part of our response to that question, PRA is producing a series of Activist Resource Kits. The first is this kit on public education. In it we seek to gather in one place a vast array of information, experience, guidance, and helpful tips learned over many years by a wide range of progressive activists and organizations involved with public education issues. It is our attempt to bring to activists on the front lines of struggles with the Right a knowledge of past mistakes, successful formulas, strategic lessons, and far-flung resources.

The Right has focused much of its attention on the public schools, understanding very well that what children learn in school is important in forming their view of the world and their patterns of interaction with others. For the Christian Right especially, the public schools are often perceived as a threat to the values and practices that conservative Christians consider God-ordained. This accounts, in part, for the ferocity of the Right’s attacks on contemporary public school curriculum and its campaign to turn back the clock in the classroom. In some cases, Christian Right activists advocate a complete suspension of the separation of church and state.

This Activist Resource Kit is a collaborative effort, designed with an eye to not reinventing the wheel. For that reason, it is only technically a publication of Political Research Associates. In fact, it represents the thinking and experience of many progressive organizations. We ask that you note the source of each entry in the kit, in order to know the origin of the material, and where you can go for further help.

As a research organization, PRA is aware that without the work of activists, all the research in the world will not make a difference in people’s lives. Information and analysis is only useful when it is placed in the hands of those best able to use it. We salute all of you who are organizing to defend and strengthen public education in these hard times. And we hope that this collection of resource material will help you in your difficult work.

Jean Hardisty
Executive Director
Political Research Associates
Acknowledgments

This Activist Resource Kit is a publication of Political Research Associates (PRA). Founded in 1981, PRA is an independent nonprofit research center that serves as a national information resource on the US political Right.

From the birth of the idea to final edit, the kit has been a collaborative venture. The project has drawn on the creativity and talents of the entire PRA staff team: Chip Berlet, Judith Glaubman, Jean Hardisty, Surina Khan, Mark Umi Perkins, and Peter Snoad. Consultant Pam Chamberlain provided skillful coordinating leadership, and former staff members Francine Almash, Anoosh Jorjorian, and Erin Miller helped move the project forward during its earlier stages. We’re grateful to our volunteer outside readers, Barbara Miner, Frieda Takamura and Loretta Williams for reviewing drafts of the kit and for their thoughtful feedback which significantly improved the final product.


We’re grateful to Debbie Hird for designing the kit, and Hazel Hankin and Impact Visuals for the cover photograph.

Of course, without the necessary financing, this kit would never have seen the light of day. We’re pleased to thank the following funders for their generous support of the project: The Boehm Foundation, the Deer Creek Foundation, the Stephen A. and Diane L. Goldberg Foundation, The Pequod Fund of the Tides Foundation, and an anonymous donor. We’re also deeply appreciative of the many donors—individuals and institutions—whose unrestricted support for PRA maintains our financial health and our capacity to undertake projects such as this.

Because foundation grants have covered most of the research and production costs, the Activist Resource Kit is modestly priced. You can help keep it that way. If you find the kit a valuable resource, please consider making a donation to PRA towards ongoing costs of updating, promoting and distributing the kit.
How to Use This Kit

This Activist Resource Kit provides information about current issues that feature prominently in the Right’s attack on public education.

The Right uses the phrase “school choice” to describe different types of initiatives. This Activist Resource Kit examines the ways in which the Right handles three school choice issues: vouchers, charter schools, and public school privatization, as well as two others: ending bilingual education and promoting parental rights.

There are other education topics besides school choice, bilingual education, and parental rights which are used by the Right to reach its goals. These include: limiting sexuality education, supporting creationism and prayer in the schools, and attacking gay and lesbian issues in the curriculum. We have chosen not to deal with these in this kit for two reasons. First, other progressive organizations have done a fine job developing materials about these issues and the Right, and we encourage you to seek them out. Second, we have chosen to focus on these five topics, because the Right’s language about them is often difficult to decode, and the Right has gained considerable success in manipulating moderate and mainstream groups to buy into conservative and regressive ideas.

The kit is broken down into seven sections:

- Overview
- Organizing Advice
- Actions & Victories
- Issues & Views
- Resources
- Primary Source Material
- Secondary Source Material

In the OVERVIEW, you’ll find articles that give an overview of the Right’s attacks on public education.

ORGANIZING ADVICE offers practical guidance for activists, including general do’s and don’ts and some specific suggestions for organizing on education issues.

ACTIONS AND VICTORIES contains some inspiring examples of how activists around the country are working to defend public schools—and, in many instances, winning.

The ISSUES & VIEWS section is the heart of the Activist Resource Kit. Here, we try to flesh out some of the arguments made by the Right. This section lays out factually-based arguments that activists can use and draw on to respond to right-wing positions that often distort the facts, are irrational, are based on religious conviction, or are based on pseudo-scientific reasoning that is at odds with the overwhelming majority of expert opinion. Each Issues & Views segment is followed by a resource list to connect activists with other organizations working on these issues.
RESOURCES contains a list of organizations working for and against public education as well as an extensive reading list. It includes descriptions and addresses of organizations working in your area of interest, and also those organizations that attack public education.

PRIMARY SOURCE MATERIALS are materials generated by the Right. These direct mail pieces indicate the Right’s focus, and how the Right develops its arguments. This section can be difficult for some people to read since the language is sometimes inflammatory and frightening. However, our hope is that these materials can be used by progressive activists to challenge the rhetoric, thinking, and strategies of right-wing organizations.

SECONDARY SOURCE MATERIALS are materials generated by progressive organizations or activists promoting modern public education. In this section, you’ll find articles about all of the segments described in Issues & Views as well as important analysis of the strategies of the Right.

Again, we invite your responses to the kit. You’ll find an evaluation form enclosed with this kit. Please fill it out and send it in, along with any information about your organization that you feel would be helpful to us.

We hope this kit provides some research back-up for those of you who are doing the important and difficult work of being activists. We thank you for your work and look forward to hearing your responses.
Attacking Schools
by Surina Khan

Phyllis Schlafly wants to abolish the Department of Education. Schlafly, who is widely credited with single-handedly defeating the Equal Rights Amendment, is founder and president of Eagle Forum, the oldest mass-based right-wing women’s organization. And she is just one of many individuals and organizations on the Right who routinely attack the public education system and by default, any organization that works to support public education including the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). These attacks are based in a fear that public schools are indoctrinating young children with liberal ideas. Schlafly and others on the Right believe educators are usurping the rights of parents by subjecting children to sex education, counseling, psychological surveys, and self-esteem programs.

While the US educational system has always met with challenge, in recent years these challenges have increased significantly. People for the American Way notes that in the 1995-96 school year, 475 challenges were made to remove or restrict public school instructional materials, literature, library materials, activities, or programs.

Schlafly is joined by others on the Right who blame the NEA and the Department of Education for problems in public education. Much of this opposition has been generated by organizations that are loosely affiliated with each other. These include Schlafly’s Eagle Forum; Citizens for Excellence in Education (CEE), an affiliate of the National Association of Christian Educators which maintains that its mission is to bring “moral sanity back to the public schools”; Educational Research Analysts which was founded by Mel and Norma Gabler who evaluate textbooks in detail and inform parents about materials they consider to be harmful; Focus on the Family, the Colorado Springs-based Christian Right media empire; Concerned Women for America, another mass-based right-wing women’s organization headed by Beverly LaHaye; and Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition and the American Center for Law and Justice.

These groups have objected to everything from history and science textbooks to self-esteem programs and sex education materials. They are also critical of general teaching methods including role playing, journals, and open-ended discussions designed to foster imagination and critical thinking.

“It is possible that for the next nine months, Janie and Johnny may be assaulted by obtrusive curricula, trampled underfoot by pagan philosophies, strangled by situational ethics, bombarded by revisionist history, demoralized by outcome-based education (OBE), and stripped of their innocence in sex education classes,” writes Rosaline Bush, editor of Concerned Women for America’s newsletter, Family Voice.

The criticisms leveled at public schools in various right-wing literature are dominated by a conspiracy theory which states that public schools are under the influence of a secular, liberal “religion” and are participating in a conspiracy to alter society by modifying children and their
thinking. In his book *The New Millennium*, Pat Robertson writes, “This plundering of traditional morality and Christian values was never accidental. It has been a deliberate and methodical assault on the tenets of society... and has proliferated from the classrooms to the courtrooms, and from the newsrooms to the living rooms of America.... The end has not just been to supplant Christian values with humanism, but to weaken American sovereignty and supplant it with a one world socialist government...The great irony of this situation is that the very men and women we have entrusted to educate and challenge our children have been the corrupters.”

The fear of organizations and individuals on the Right is that public schools are promoting an anti-Christian view of the world. Several strategies have been used to counter this “infiltration of secular humanism” in the schools. Some involve taking legal action against schools and/or teachers while others use the electoral process by getting themselves elected to the school board. Other strategies include curriculums designed to promote abstinence, creationism, and traditional values.

These curricula are filled with misinformation. One example, Project Reality, a state-funded abstinence program that started in Chicago and in 1997/98 served 36,864 students in 245 schools, refutes the concept of safer sex. In the Christian Coalition’s monthly magazine *Christian American*, program director Kathleen Sullivan notes, “We don’t give kids the false hope of ‘all you need is a condom.’ We teach abstinence is the only way to be ensured of a healthy lifestyle, both emotional and physical.”

The attacks on public education go beyond curricula and are aimed at teachers who are portrayed as money-hungry power maniacs. “People outside the education establishment want the schools to teach academic skills, while those inside the education establishment are looking for all sorts of ‘exciting’ new things to do, usually at the expense of academic skills,” writes Thomas Sowell in the *Conservative Chronicle*. “But academic performance does not matter. What matters to the education establishment is performance in getting more money, more jobs for teachers with smaller classes, and more iron-clad job security.”

Columnist Walter Williams agrees: “While there are some government schools doing a good job, by and large, our education establishment is corrupt beyond repair.” For Williams, the solution is privatization: “Make education subject to competitive pressure.”

These and other right-wing responses to problems within the education system are problematic. Veiled in misleading language like “parental rights” and “school choice,” the options posed by the Right increase its power in harassing public schools and limiting access to public education. The Parental Rights Amendment (PRA) is one such example. One version of the amendment states, “The right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children shall not be infringed.” Rob Boston, a writer for *Church & State*, notes that critics of the amendment assert that the language is so vague that judges could use it to undermine church-state separation. “For example,” writes Boston, “religious education could be declared a ‘parental right,’ with vouchers mandated by the courts. In addition, use of a particular book, play, or health curriculum in a public school could be declared an ‘infringement’ of parents’ rights leading to court-ordered removal of materials.”

Another solution touted by those on the Right are vouchers or “school choice.” Vouchers are public tax dollars that would be used for private school tuition. Tax dollars would go toward “scholarships” for elementary and high school students to attend the school of their “choice.”
These “scholarships” would be funded by cutting back existing federal aid for public schools. In fact, at the 1996 Christian Coalition annual “Road to Victory” conference, voucher advocates stated that the “scholarship” approach is the first step toward converting all public schools into private schools funded by taxpayers.

The NEA explains the threat voucher plans would pose to public education. “If vouchers were enacted, taxpayers would find themselves paying for the vouchers of all children already attending private schools, many of them from affluent homes, as well as for children newly enrolling in private schools.” The NEA makes an important point that the vast majority of private schools are not prepared to educate students with special needs. While public schools are struggling to meet the needs of students with disabilities, private schools enroll few. Even Jeffrey Hart, a columnist for the Conservative Chronicle agrees, albeit offensively. “Actually Catholic schools do pretty much admit all applicants, although they do not provide ‘special’ education—that is, they do not admit applicants who are mentally defective. Yes, the public schools are obliged to provide ‘special’ education for students who really are medical cases. Such ‘special’ education is costly and, often, useless.”

Most people, both on the right and the left, would agree that our public schools need help. But attacking the school system and its teachers does nothing to better the problem. While there are organizations working to support public schools and ensure access to education, their work is often met with attacks. And the agenda of the Right is not to support the existing institution of public education but to dismantle it and replace it with privatized schools that promote a Christian worldview where only the “deserving” have access to an education.

Dismantling the Department of Education is a bad idea. Blaming the NEA for problems within the school system is unproductive. There’s no doubt about it—public education in this country needs to be improved. But looking at the overall picture might help us understand the problems. Economic pressures have impacted millions of families. Kids today are feeling the pressures. And those pressures are also being felt in the schools. Attacking public education only demoralizes our teachers. And teachers need support in an environment that demands that they be sensitive to the different needs of our kids.

We must counter the right-wing threat to public education. To do this, we must first understand the organizations and individuals who are attacking public education. We cannot label them as radical extremists when very often they are our neighbors and are understandably concerned about our schools. But we can refute their misinformation while reaffirming the need for an accessible public education system that provides education for all of our kids.

Surina Khan is an Associate Analyst at Political Research Associates. A version of this article originally appeared in the November 1996 issue of Sojourner: The Women’s Forum.
Teaching the Bible: The Right’s Attack on Public Schools
By Barbara Miner

The religious right, helped by more moderate conservative forces, is taking aim at the very concept of a system of public schools that provides education to everyone. While the religious right has not abandoned its high profile campaigns against reproductive rights and lesbian and gay rights, the attack on public education stands out as its current primary focus.

It is vitally important that progressives pay particular attention to the attack on public schools, whether or not, as individuals, progressives relate directly to the schools. The existence of a high-quality public education system affects the entire society, not just teachers, administrators, maintenance personnel, parents, and children.

In a report released in September 1997 titled, “A Right Wing and a Prayer,” People for the American Way (PFAW), which has tracked the right and schools for nearly two decades, argues that the religious right’s education goals are twofold: “To redirect substantial public funds into an industry of private sectarian schools that serves a core constituency of the right; and to use whatever public education system that remains to impose a set of beliefs and ideas on America’s next generation.”

The main political emphasis of the religious right, particularly on a national level, is implementing voucher programs which would provide tax dollars to send children to religious schools. Under a voucher system of schools, fundamentalist parents would be able to send their children to religious schools controlled by Christian fundamentalists—and have the government pay for it.

Deanna Duby, former director of education policy for PFAW, notes that national religious right organizations such as the Christian Coalition and Focus on the Family have also put a high priority on affecting local policy for school boards. She points to the enormous amount of material generated by right-wing organizations—including radio programs, books, videos, and training manuals on how to become involved in education—as proof that the right has identified public education as a key sector for activism. Because it is in the schools that our values as a nation are formed, the goal of the right is to institutionalize their values by replacing what they see as the current curriculum of “secular humanist” values.

On its own, the religious right does not have the popular support or political clout to implement its agenda. In recent decades, however, it has forged a working relationship with more mainstream conservatives in the Republican Party—an unholy alliance in which each wing of the Party is trying to use the other for its advantage. The alliance also rests on an understanding by both religious and more mainstream conservatives that sustaining their coalition is crucial if the Republican Party is to dominate the country’s political structures. Thus, even when more moderate conservatives disagree with the religious right, they rarely speak up publicly for fear of jeopardizing the alliance and/or incurring the religious right’s wrath. This is particularly true in the case of the right’s agenda for schools.

If progressives are to defeat the religious right’s agenda, we must scrutinize both the points of unity and the points of difference within the right’s attack on the schools, and begin to drive a wedge between the religious right and its allies within more mainstream conservatism.
A Coalition of Sectors

Different terms are used to describe the various forces in the conservative movement: traditional vs. religious right, economic vs. social right, mainstream vs. far right, Old Right vs. New Right. This article generally will refer to the two major groupings as the religious right and the more secular economic right.

From the outside, it often appears that these two sectors are of one mind on education: abolish the US Department of Education, return all educational authority to states and localities, and support school prayer, privatization and vouchers. But this seeming unity masks important differences among conservatives on education issues. The most significant point of cleavage is between the religious right—which not only bases its views on a literal interpretation of the Bible but also seeks to place Biblical law at the center of public policy—and those who remain secular in their orientation despite rhetoric that often matches that of the religious right. “The key difference is in the word religion,” argues George Kaplan, an educational analyst in Washington, DC who has studied the religious right.

Kaplan sees a theocratic vision at the heart of the religious right’s agenda, in keeping with evangelical Christianity’s belief in a literal interpretation of the Bible. For this reason, Christian rightists are determined that their children receive religious instruction as the foundation of their school curriculum. A number of religious right organizations reflect this parental obsession and have placed education issues at the center of their political work. These include Louis Sheldon’s Traditional Values Coalition, Rev. Donald Wildmon’s American Family Association, Citizens for Excellence in Education/National Association of Christian Educators, Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum, Rev. James Dobson’s Focus on the Family, and Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition.

Within the economic wing of the conservative movement, there are greater internal contradictions than those within the religious right. The economic right encompasses three major groupings: traditional conservatives, neoconservatives, and libertarians. The diversity in these groupings covers venture capitalists, small and large entrepreneurs, free-market ideologues, so-called “moderate” Republicans, and cultural conservatives. These forces are united, however, in their belief in the wonders of the marketplace. While religious conservatives base their ideology on the Bible, economic conservatives pay homage to corporate capitalism.

Traditional conservatives, noted during the Cold War for their opposition to communism, have also always been opposed to the New Deal and to liberalism. Their views are best expressed in the National Review magazine, founded by William Buckley in 1955. The neoconservative movement sprung up in the 1960s and 1970s, founded by former liberals alarmed by what they considered the excesses of communism and by the anti-war, civil rights, and women’s movements. These origins explain in part the cultural/social emphasis of many neoconservatives. Originally viewed as to the left of traditional conservatism, the neoconservative movement has steadily moved rightward over the years. Many, including the “godfather” of neoconservatism, Irving Kristol, now argue that the movement is virtually indistinguishable from traditional conservatism.

Some of the most prominent conservative education reformers tend to be associated with the neoconservative movement and many served in the Reagan and/or Bush Administrations. These include Chester Finn, currently head of the Fordham Foundation; former presidential hopeful and former Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander; and William Bennett,
Secretary of Education, drug czar, and best-selling author of The Book of Virtues. Of the three, Bennett is closest on education issues to those in the religious right, and his focus on culture and morals allows him to act as a bridge to many religious conservatives.

Libertarians are distinct from both traditional conservatives and neoconservatives. More ideologically driven, libertarians oppose almost any government regulation of the marketplace and champion individual liberty and choice. They support vouchers and privatization based on ideological principle, while other conservatives often support such policies in the more pragmatic belief that private business and private schools will provide services more efficiently and will foster increased “competition.” While libertarians are the religious right’s most consistent allies in the fight for school vouchers, they are often at odds with the religious right over social concerns such as gay rights and the right to abortion. On these social issues, libertarians tend to favor protecting the individual’s freedom to make personal choices.

It is also important to mention the business community, a sector that, while generally aligned with the economic wing of the Republican Party, has several distinct identities and often a decidedly bi-partisan approach. Business interests, in particular representatives of larger multinational corporations, are often reluctant to give up on public schools, and advocate reforms such as school-business partnerships, school-to-work programs, and higher curriculum standards. Many in the business community have also resisted more grandiose voucher and privatization schemes, in part for economic reasons. As explained by Ann Bastian, an education policy analyst at the New World Foundation: “There is a real economy of scale to the structure of public education and business people are often quicker to recognize this than the ideologues. Many business people also don’t want to come up with the tax dollars to pay for children in private schools because the costs would be prohibitive in the short run.”

Differing Agendas

It is perhaps easiest to pick out the various areas where economic and religious conservatives agree on education issues. But if one is to try to drive a wedge into their working coalition, it is important to identify the issues on which they disagree—and to publicize those disagreements. The religious right, for instance, often emphasizes issues such as opposition to gay rights and national curriculum standards, pointing out the evils of secular humanism, and its support for such issues as home-schooling, creationism, school prayer, and censorship of what they see as objectionable books. Such books range from novels by authors such as Maya Angelou (whose autobiography, I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings, talks of a childhood rape), to sex and health curricula, to books on tolerance towards gays and lesbians. Progressive educators familiar with the religious right argue that their differences with the economic right sometimes appear to be based on rhetoric and emphasis—for example, how strongly they push for school prayer or how strongly they attack the rights of gay and lesbian students. Those differences ultimately stem from a fundamental split over the role of religion in education.

In particular, the leaders of the religious right are adamant in their desire to integrate their specific form of religion, fundamentalist evangelical Christianity, into the schools—either by taking over the public schools and remolding them as religious schools, or by pushing through vouchers for religious schools. Civilization, they believe, is driven by a correct understanding of God. The economic right, meanwhile, is primarily concerned with increasing the freedom of
the market, by cutting taxes, privatizing government services, and reducing government social programs, especially federal programs that redistribute resources and serve the needs of low-income people and people of color. The public schools, particularly in urban areas, increasingly serve low-income communities, and this is where controversy over education is the strongest. Even in suburban areas, however, a growing number of middle-class and affluent parents are withdrawing their children from public schools and turning to Christian private schools or home-schooling.

The Heritage Foundation, which is generally aligned with the economic wing of the right, has highlighted some of these differences. Reporting on a survey of its membership on a host of issues ranging from the budget deficit to tax policy, the Winter 1995 

Heritage Members News 

says: “When it comes to education reform, 70% support school choice programs, while 86% said we should dismantle the Department of Education in order to return power to local school boards. Forty-three percent support setting national standards for education, while 16% support abolishing compulsory education laws.” Nothing was mentioned about school prayer, sexuality education, creationism, discussion of sexual preference in the schools, secular humanism, or other education issues that are high priorities for the religious right.

One disagreement between the religious right and more mainstream conservatives involves standards, in particular federal standards. More mainstream conservatives have tactically backed away from the issue of federal standards, in part due to pressure from the far right and in part due to the fact that a Democrat now sits in the White House and controls the US Department of Education. But in general, mainstream conservatives have long stressed the need to return to “excellence” and “standards”—which they often use as code words for a curriculum focused on Western civilization and traditional interpretations of history. At this point, the
more mainstream right is focusing on voluntary federal standards and on instituting state standards in those states where Republicans hold power and where standards can be used to mandate a more conservative and traditional curriculum.

But there are those in the religious right who oppose even voluntary federal standards. The argument is that standards will turn children into objects of government mind control. As Linda Bowles, a nationally syndicated conservative columnist wrote in September 1997, “Federal testing will lead to federal control of the curriculum, which opens the door for political ideologues, social change agents and heathen predators to imprint our children with their messages and agendas.” Similar criticisms were launched against the standards-reform known as Outcomes-Based Education (OBE), which was popular earlier in the decade, and the federal initiative Goals 2000, an education reform package first proposed by former President Bush. The hard-right attack has been so successful that you never hear the term OBE anymore and rarely hear reference to Goals 2000, even though it technically remains a bi-partisan initiative to improve the nation’s schools.

Deanna Duby, currently with the National Education Association, notes another critical difference between the two sectors of the right: the religious right stresses education based on rote obedience and memorization and prefers to provide children ready-made answers instead of encouraging them to think for themselves. This approach is at odds with that of most economic conservatives, who want to see children improve their problem-solving skills and are not necessarily opposed to sexuality education, or drug prevention programs, as long as academic “excellence” is not compromised. “One of the beliefs that underlies a lot of the religious right’s work is that they really don’t want any discussion at all about certain issues,” Duby said. “They believe that if children are exposed to an idea, or even hear about it, they are vulnerable to being swept up into something different from their parents—that if you hear about sexuality, you are going to have sex, or that if you hear about homosexuality, you are going to become gay.”

The Religious Right’s Savvy

One reason that differences between the religious and economic right are sometimes unclear is that the religious right has become media-savvy and has learned to couch its views in high-sounding rhetoric. However, when reading the literature distributed to its members, a different picture emerges.

A typical tract is a book titled A Guide to the Public Schools for Christian Parents and Teachers and Especially for Pastors, by Robert Simonds, president of Citizens for Excellence in Education/National Association of Christian Educators. The book notes that there are three ways to educate one’s child: home-schooling (“the only truly biblical plan to educate our children”), Christian schooling (“the next best thing”) and public schooling. Simonds says he understands why parents might use the public school (“the most convenient school”) but says of public schools: “Morally, children are exposed to many unnecessary courses on human sexuality; occultic New Age indoctrination including necromancy (under hypnosis, talking to the dead); witchcraft; black magic; T.M.; eastern religions, etc. Social and psychological programs, diaries, visiting morgues, writing their own obituaries and grave-stone inscriptions, etc., as English assignments, have duly and rightfully upset parents.” No matter how much the William Bennetts of the world may choose to align with the religious right, it’s hard to imagine
that they believe such nonsense.

The religious right also often masks its true agenda when it is organizing parents at the local level. Thus it is able to build coalitions of parents and community people who may not agree with the religious right’s overall goals but who are concerned about educational issues raised by people they see as religious conservatives. For instance, well-meaning parents might become involved in a religious right campaign around curricular issues, such as sex education or the teaching of reading, with the religious right demanding an approach that emphasizes only phonics and, unlike the reading philosophy known as whole language, downplays the need to teach young children to understand the content of what they are reading. One important tactic for progressives is to expose the religious right’s coordination of seemingly isolated local school issues and to publicize its full agenda.

Lee Berg, a Baptist minister who has studied the religious right for over 20 years and now works with the human and civil rights division of the National Education Association (NEA), argues that too many people underestimate the extent to which the religious right is committed to a theocracy, a government based on literal interpretation of Biblical principles. Berg points Christian Reconstructionism which, in essence, seeks to replace democracy with a theocratic form of government. It argues that secular law is always secondary to biblical law, and that it is the duty of Christians to see that God’s law is paramount throughout society. Though the movement has received minimal attention in the mainstream media, some analysts consider it the driving ideology of the leadership of the religious right.

The religious right has been most successful at organizing at the grass-roots level. In the last decade, it has emphasized both electing fundamentalists to local school boards and training fundamentalist parents and pastors to organize in local schools. No one knows for sure how many religious conservatives serve on the country’s 15,000 local school boards, but the number is possibly in the thousands. Sometimes the candidates are openly affiliated with religious fundamentalist organizations; oftentimes run as "stealth" candidates who conceal their true beliefs until elected. As one Christian Coalition member said at a workshop during the coalition’s 1995 convention, “We are told not to identify ourselves as Christian Coalition members, just as John Q. Public.” Ralph Reed, then executive director of the Christian Coalition, told convention-goers: “I would exchange the Presidency for 2,000 school board seats in the United States.”

The religious right can feel comforted by success even when the religious right’s school board candidates are not elected: first, because it uses the electoral campaigns to organize parents who can be mobilized on various issues; second, the right-wing organizing puts the public schools on the defensive and drains energy away from implementing reforms; third, the organizing creates doubts in the public’s mind about the well-being of our nation’s schools; and fourth, the organizing gets media attention for the right’s issues.

The religious right has found it particularly useful to use issues of gay rights to attack schools and teachers unions, especially the NEA. In a typical attack on the NEA in the fall of 1995, the right-wing religious group Concerned Women of America (CWA) launched a campaign against the NEA because the union had passed a non-binding resolution at its convention—which included support for using Lesbian and Gay History Month as a means of acknowledging the contributions of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals throughout history. CWA, often called the most powerful women’s organization in the conservative movement, placed ads in several
major newspapers attacking the NEA resolution and sent out a 600,000 piece direct-mail appeal to ask for financial support in its campaign against the NEA. The mailing included pre-printed postcards to be sent to US Senators and then NEA President Keith Geiger arguing that “pro-homosexual programs” were being “forced on children.”

“The right-wing is looking for goblins,” notes Jesse Greenman of the PERSON Project, a national network focused on education issues affecting gays and lesbians. “It’s like the McCarthy era, except that instead of Communism, now the goblins are gay people.”

Points of Agreement

Economic and religious conservatives agree on a range of education issues. Most important, they both are pushing on the federal and state levels for vouchers that would provide tax dollars for private and religious schools. They also support other privatization efforts, such as contracting to for-profit businesses—everything from food service to, in some cases, the entire running of a school. They both have an antipathy toward federal education programs, in particular those designed to lessen inequalities due to race, gender, disabilities, or economic status; and they want to eliminate the US Department of Education and federal involvement in education. They also have found broad unity in a rejection of the liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. They both argue that the federal government tilted too far to the advantage of poor people and people of color, and that liberals tilted too far to the left on cultural issues.

They have also united around so-called “Parents Rights” legislation. Although varying slightly from state to state, the campaign uses legitimate concern over parent involvement to argue, in essence, that schools serve no broader purpose than meeting individual parental concerns. As People for the American Way notes, “[I]ts core purposes are to aid would-be censors in ‘cleansing’ public schools of all controversial material, challenge mandatory education laws, jeopardize the effective application of child abuse laws, and pave the way for the passage of legislation that would permit the use of public funds in private, religious schools.”

Although they publicly downplay anti-unionism as an explicit strategy, economic and religious conservatives both understand that breaking the power of the teachers unions is essential to cementing Republican control over state and federal education politics. The unions not only are important allies of the Democratic Party, but are one of the few forces in education able to match the financial and organizing resources of the right. Economic conservatives also know that unions want decent wages for their members, which drives up the cost of education. Religious conservatives, on the other hand, believe that teachers unions, in particular the NEA, have opened the school doors to secular humanism and practices such as cooperative learning, whole language, the teaching of evolution, and sexuality education that acknowledges the existence of homosexuals and sexually-active teenagers. (Secular humanism as a movement exists primarily in the religious right’s conspiracy theories. While the right uses it to condemn teaching philosophies not based on religion, secular humanism can be best understood as a philosophy, with roots in the Enlightenment, which stresses ethical behavior based on the innate goodness of human beings and the need to promote the larger social good. Because it offers a worldview that is not based on the Bible and the innate “evil” of human beings—an “evil” that can only be controlled by strict adherence to narrowly interpreted Biblical mandates—secular humanism is inherently threatening to religious fundamentalism).
The Importance of the Voucher Issue

Of the various education issues uniting religious and economic conservatives, vouchers is the most important. Using public dollars to provide vouchers to private schools remains the main political goal of both the religious right and its allies in more mainstream conservatism. Defeating the voucher movement is key to defeating the right-wing education agenda of both the religious right and its allies in more mainstream conservatism.

For religious conservatives, the voucher movement provides a way to funnel public dollars into private Christian schools. For economic conservatives, vouchers serve a number of purposes, including furthering an overall goal of privatizing government services and dismantling social entitlements, as well as undermining the role of government in providing for the good of all. “To privatize public education is the centerpiece, the grand prize of their overall agenda,” Ann Bastian writes in the booklet Selling Out Our Schools: Vouchers, Markets, and the Future of Public Education published by Rethinking Schools.

Bastian argues that vouchers also serve an important political function for the conservative movement, whether efforts to legislate their use are successful or not. “Vouchers unify the different strands of the right: business entrepreneurs looking for a new public carcass to feed on, having used up the Cold War; anti-government libertarians who worship the free market, having noticed that education is the society’s largest public institution; social and religious conservatives who want to break down the separation of church and state, while garnering public funds to run their own schools. Many issues divide the right; vouchers unite them and provide an organizing platform.” Politically, vouchers also provide a way to make inroads into the urban Democratic base. Most legislative voucher proposals have targeted low-income students in urban districts and support for vouchers has been stronger among urban African-Americans—who are the group most disserviced by the US educational system—than among white Republican suburbanites, who tend, by and large, to be satisfied with their schools.

What Are Vouchers?

The voucher movement often uses the rhetoric of “school choice,” masking its actual goal, which is to promote a system of vouchers to pay for private school attendance. In fact, most voucher proposals don’t even use the term “voucher.” Vouchers refer specifically to plans to use public tax dollars to help parents pay tuition at private schools, including religious schools. School choice, in contrast, is a much broader concept that also encompasses proposals to let students attend public schools in other districts, or that allows students to choose various public schools within a district.

In the 1998-99 school year there were two voucher programs involving private schools, including religious schools, in Cleveland and Milwaukee. Also in the spring of 1999 Florida passed a statewide voucher program. The constitutionality of public dollars for voucher programs that include religious schools is under intense legal debate. Ultimately, the issue will have to be resolved by the US Supreme Court.

Four efforts to institute statewide voucher programs—in Oregon, California, Colorado, and Washington state—have failed. In each case, the issue was put to the voters and defeated by a margin of roughly 2-1. (One of the unexpected sources of opposition to vouchers came from suburban parents who were not dissatisfied with their schools and who did not want vouchers
to be used as a way for urban children to attend suburban schools). On the federal level, conservatives have tried to institute some form of voucher program either through tuition tax credits or so-called “scholarship” programs for low-income students. Given the difficulties of getting a full-scale voucher program passed, some Republicans are emphasizing tuition tax credits, at both the state and federal levels. Such measures, which are politically appealing because they are packaged as a “tax cut,” provide a back-handed way for the government to help middle class parents pay for private schools; while no money is directly given to parents, families are able to reduce the amount of money they would otherwise have to pay in taxes.

Bastian writes that one of the difficulties in organizing against vouchers is that many people are unaware that vouchers are a key goal of the right wing. “It is remarkable how often a voucher battle erupts and people think it is just happening in their own backward city or state, as a sort of random product of nasty times.” She adds, “... While a variety of groups and individuals may support vouchers for their own reasons, vouchers are the agenda of the political right in this country and we ought to know it and say it.” One of the many tasks of progressives is to cut through the mystifying rhetoric of school choice and expose the reality of vouchers, while defending the right to student choice.

As Rita Tenorio, an editor of the newspaper Rethinking Schools, argues: “Public school students must have choices. Few would disagree with that. But choice is more than an individual concern. We must build a public school system where all students have as many choices as possible—not where we provide public money for private school options for a few. Further, it is not simply a matter of parents choosing a private school but of private schools choosing students. And if a private school doesn’t want your child, whether for academic, disciplinary, religious, or financial reasons, there is nothing you can do.”

Another challenge is that the right has exploited widespread discontent with public education, particularly in urban areas, to promote its agenda, forcing progressives to both defend and reform public schools at the same time. There is, however, a way to do both. Above all, progressives must point out that vouchers have little to do with reform and everything to do with subverting the very concept of a public education system. As Jonathan Kozol, author of Savage Inequalities and other books on public education, argued in an interview in Selling Out Our Schools: “We’ve got to be blunt about the problems in a public system and be harsh critics of those problems. We don’t want to be in the position of knee-jerk defenders of the public schools against the bad guys.”

“But we have to be careful not to succumb to this nonsense that a public system is inherently flawed and that therefore we have to turn to the marketplace for solutions. I’ve never in my entire life seen any evidence that the competitive free market, unrestricted, without a strong counterpoise within the public sector, will ever dispense decent medical care, sanitation, transportation, or education to the people. It’s as simple as that.”

What holds true for vouchers is applicable for much of the religious right’s agenda on education. While the religious right seeks to subvert the US Constitution—in particular the separation between church and state—and in many cases is attempting to mandate religiously-based curriculum in our public schools, the more mainstream conservative movement is locked in an unholy alliance with this theocratic agenda. Which leaves the job of unmasking the right’s agenda to the progressive movement.
Conclusion

Despite popular concern about the state of our public schools, there is no indication that the public at large subscribes to the religious right’s agenda. Indeed, there remains widespread and deep support for a public system of schools that provide an equal education to all—no matter how tarnished that ideal may be in reality. If the religious right were to win its agenda, that long-standing ideal would be abandoned.

Progressives have the right and responsibility to appeal to the positive American tradition of public schooling for all, equally available. We must defend our system of public schools while at the same time working to transform it so that public schools do indeed provide quality education for all.

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Do Your Homework

Recognize that the Right is a complex movement.

No one organization “controls” the Right. No single funder is “behind” the Right. Some large organizations are important, but many others appear to be more influential than they really are. Recognize that there are multiple networks of organizations and funders with differing and sometimes competing agendas. Find out as much as you can about the groups you see. Incorporate this information in your educational work. It is helpful in organizing to know a great deal about your opponents. Be alert to evidence of the Right’s “new racism.” The Right has replaced simple racist rhetoric with a more complex, “colorblind” political agenda which actually attacks the rights of people of color. See the Resources section of this kit for some assistance in your research.

Decode the Right’s agenda on your issue.

The Right often attempts to pass laws that take rights away from groups or individuals. Under the guise of addressing some compelling societal need, they often frame the issue by appealing to prejudice, myth, irrational belief, inaccurate information, pseudo-science, or sometimes even by using outright lies. Further, right-wing organizers often appropriate the rhetoric of the civil rights and civil liberties movement to portray themselves as victims of discrimination. Actually, they most often are seeking to undermine the existing protection of individual rights, increase their freedom to accumulate profit, and undermine the wall of separation between church and state.

Be careful to respect people’s right to hold opinions and religious beliefs that you may find offensive.

Everyone has an absolute right to seek redress of their grievances. This is equally true when those grievances are based on religious beliefs. In an open and democratic society, it is important to listen to the grievances of all members of society and take them seriously, even when we might be vehemently opposed to them. They do not, however, have a right to impose those beliefs on others.
Distinguish between leaders and followers in right-wing organizations.

Leaders are often “professional” right-wingers. They’ve made a career of promoting a rightist agenda and attacking progressives and progressive issues. Followers, on the other hand, may not be well-informed. They are often mobilized by fears about family and future based on information that, if true, would indeed be frightening. This so-called “education” is often skillful, deceitful, and convincing. These followers may take positions that are more extreme than those of the leaders, but on the other hand, they may not know exactly what they are supporting by attending a certain organization’s rally or conference. To critique and expose the leaders of right-wing organizations is the work of a good progressive organizer, writer or activist. In the case of the followers, however, it is important to reserve judgment and listen to their grievances. Do not assume that they are all sophisticated political agents or have access to a variety of information sources.

Rebut, Rebuke, Reaffirm.

It’s important to remember that while the tactics of the Right may be obvious to you, they are not necessarily obvious to others, even though they might be part of the political process. The ways in which the Right distorts and misleads the public must be carefully explained. Use a 3-step process. Rebut false and inaccurate claims. Rebuke those who use scapegoating or demagoguery. Reaffirm what a progressive goal or agenda would accomplish for the betterment of society.

Stay Cool In Public

Use the opportunity of public forums to present your position.

Approach any public event as a chance to state your case. Come fully prepared to explain why you are right. Although your audience may be unfriendly, remember that you are often an invited guest at such events. Audience members are expecting you to represent your group, even though they may not expect to agree with you. Your task is to convince these listeners, not the representatives of the Right who may be your debating opponents or fellow panelists. Do so using short, clear sentences, not long, abstract paragraphs. Many audience members are your potential supporters, available to join your ranks. Provide them with reasons and ways to do so.

Demand documentation.

Common tactics of the Right include distorting the truth and manipulating facts and figures in order to deceive the public. You can often expose false charges and baseless claims by demanding that their sources be cited. The leadership of an organization can and must be held fully responsible for every spoken or written word that comes from him or her or the organization they represent. If you are thoroughly prepared, you will know the weaknesses of these sources and be able to refute them publicly. At the same time be prepared to document your sources in order to maintain your credibility.
Address the issues, not just the actors.

Try to avoid personalizing the debate or focusing entirely on the presentation by the Right’s representative. Take time to clarify what the real issues are, what tactics are being used, why these issues are important to the Right and what the implications of the debate might be.

Criticize the outcomes, not the intent, of the Right’s agenda.

If you focus only on exposing the purpose of a particular campaign, you may find yourself locked in a circular argument about who knows better what the Right seeks to accomplish. It may be more productive to look at the implications of the issues at hand and to explain that the logical outcome of adopting your opponent’s position will be a serious threat to the goals of your group.

Avoid slogans, namecalling, and demonizing members of the Right.

Slogans and sound bites have their place, but they are not sufficient as an organizing strategy. Simple anti-Right slogans do not help people understand why the Right sounds convincing but is wrong. And responding in kind to being called names weakens your position with some of the listeners you are trying to convince. Phrases like “religious political extremists” are labels, not arguments, and often will backfire on the neighborhood and community level.

Expose those who benefit from right-wing campaigns.

One of the most common ways the Right advances its policies is to argue that they will benefit the “average” person, though that most often is not the case. It helps in exposing this deception to point out who actually stands to benefit and who stands to lose from the policy being proposed. Exploring whose self-interest is served can help organizers as they seek a clearer picture of the forces behind a particular campaign. Sometimes, the greatest beneficiaries of a right-wing campaign are the organizations conducting it. Campaigns are recruitment tools. So if potential new members can be reached by a certain position, that is sometimes in and of itself the reason the campaign is mounted.

Keep Organizing

Keep your supporters informed.

Signing up supporters is a good start, but your job includes keeping your supporters well informed. Often the Right will switch tactics or redirect its energy. If you are in the middle of an attack, these changes may be puzzling. Keep in mind that the deep agenda of the Right remains unchanged despite these apparent shifts. Persist in explaining this to your colleagues.
Involve clergy and other respected community members in your organizing.

Since so much of the Right's rhetoric has been influenced by the Religious Right, progressive, faith-based organizations and their representatives have great potential for increasing your chances for successful organizing. Sympathetic religious leaders can present an alternative interpretation of scripture and often have access to large congregations who may be interested in your work.

Be patient.

Change takes time. Your organizing today is laying the groundwork for tomorrow's successes. Patience, optimism and a sense of humor are key ingredients in opposing the Right.

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**Lessons From the Voucher War**

by Ann Bastian

This is an editorial report from the front, four years into the Great Voucher War, the war to dismantle public education in America. I am writing as a partisan of public education who has seen a fair amount of the recent action, chiefly in my home state of New Jersey, and also in Pennsylvania, California, Colorado, Wisconsin, and Ohio.

As in any war, language is an early casualty. To soften their image, vouchers are sometimes called “choice” programs and confused with public school choice and charter programs that do not privatize education rights or funding. I am talking about tuition vouchers that allow public money to fund private and parochial school enrollment, a proposition raised in over 30 states since 1993.

This report is not really about how the Voucher War is going, which is mostly on and on. The good news is that statewide voucher initiatives have been overwhelmingly defeated in the three states where referenda have been held. The discouraging news is voucher legislation has established pilot programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland. The really discouraging news is: every Republican presidential candidate in 1996 endorsed a voucher platform and every Republican governor is looking at vouchers as a way to escape responsibility for the crisis in urban education. So despite electoral rejection—and a sketchy record showing that private school vouchers have no positive impacts on overall school improvement and highly inconsistent impacts on student achievement—the Voucher War will go on for the foreseeable future.

Today's report, however, is about what we, as progressive advocates for public education, might try to learn from this grueling experience so that we can live to fight for better causes. I've collected four lessons thus far:

Lesson 1: We are defending schools we want to change, not the status quo.

Lesson 2: Don't just mobilize, organize.

Lesson 3: If you're comfortable in a coalition, it isn't broad enough.
Lesson 4: There is an enemy. Name it.

Here’s what these lessons suggest in operational terms:

Lesson 1: We are defending schools we want to change, not the status quo.

Basically, a lot of us have mixed feelings about the public education system as it is, since it so often fails to meet its ideals and so often tolerates that failure. In New Jersey, you look at Newark and you want to weep. But if we can muster the stamina it takes to hold fast to a complex position, we can uphold the promise and the entitlement of public education, while being clear that we believe the institution needs deep restructuring. We need to convey that we are working to transform public schools at the same time we are defending them.

We can defend what works already, but not pretend that there is nothing wrong. There are real places in school crisis: twenty-five or so major urban systems, plus some hundreds of decaying industrial suburbs and dying rural districts. It is no accident that voucher warriors, having failed to win sweeping federal and statewide programs, are now targeting the most distressed urban districts for pilot programs (and back-door entry points for larger plans).

We can also defend schools that are changing, including some exemplary restructured public schools in those urban districts, schools that have traded in the factory model for child-centered learning. We can point to the growing number of successful Comer Schools, Key Schools, Accelerated Schools, Essential Schools, Carnegie Pilots, New Visions Schools, and scores more to prove that public schools can work even in adverse conditions. Then we can point out that these shining stars only make it more feasible and imperative to extend restructuring efforts to every school.

Most fundamentally, we can defend the universal right to public education and defend our future chances to transform the institution. What we cannot defend are schools that have failed or given up.

One key to supporting and challenging public schools simultaneously is to develop a focused agenda for local school improvement in our communities, as well as campaigns against vouchers, cutbacks and other attacks. But having a local agenda means we have to let some allies (usually inside the education system) know that we are not going to gloss over what is wrong or stop raising what needs to be done, just because schools are under hostile fire.

Building a pro-active agenda for troubled schools means it is necessary to raise difficult and divisive issues. The hardest are teaching practices, committed by fault or default, that reproduce racism, sexism, language and class bias. It is equally necessary to critique special ed placements, disciplinary double-standards, elite-centric and test-driven curriculum, segregation in the guise of tracking... The list could go on, but it includes all the gut issues of inadequate schooling. The trick is to raise these problems in a problem-solving context, where change is seen as possible. So while we seek to create broad coalitions to defend public education, we also have to create appropriate and ongoing spaces, places, and programs where we can struggle with educators who are obstacles to school reform, but allies in the larger war. I believe this is called fighting on two fronts. No small trick, but it’s part of what makes Lesson 2 important.
Lesson 2: Don’t just mobilize, organize.

Voucher battles are demanding and expensive because they are an all-out assault on the integrity of public education. We cannot afford to lose in any state, without losing equity mandates, economies of scale, and community investments that have taken decades to achieve. Whether wholesale or piecemeal, privatization would fracture the coherence of the public system and particularly its obligatory, if often grudging, commitments to the neediest students. So the stakes are very high. We must learn to fight negative and defensive battles in ways that increase rather than deplete our energy for education politics.

The problem is that we have been drawn into an endless series of defensive mobilizations and are in danger of becoming exhausted. Here’s a sobering example: the fight against Prop. 174, the 1993 voucher initiative in California, cost the California Teachers Association roughly $16 million in campaign expenses; millions more were spent by allies, which included the PTA, League of Women Voters, the AARP, civil rights organizations, labor unions, business leaders, social service providers, and more. The proposition was defeated by a 70%-30% margin, a resounding victory. The problem is that voucher proponents are vowing to come back with another voucher referendum in California, just as they are continuously submitting voucher legislation and amendments in other states.

Conservatives have deep pockets and the Right has rabid benefactors. If they can’t deliver a voucher A-bomb, they are willing to fight a war of attrition, to launch a state of siege. They are using voucher battles to build memberships, scare officeholders, identify new allies, reach deeper into local communities, connect organizations, capture media attention, control the public debate, and develop their own leaders and candidates. This is organizing.

Mobilizing is when you activate those who are already enlisted in the cause. It is represented by media campaigns, rallies on the Capitol steps and get-out-the-vote drives, and is the main way we have fought voucher battles so far. All of these actions are necessary, but they are not sufficient for protracted warfare. We need to use mobilizations and work beyond them to organize new bases of support. We need to increase the numbers, the diversity, the understanding, the leadership, the solidarity and the energy on our side; these should be the real measures of progress from every voucher battle.

Whatever organization we work out of—a school, a parents’ organization, a teachers’ union, a youth program, a community organization, a public interest group, a civic association—we need to start rounding up the unusual suspects and reach out to the unorganized. Don’t forget the grandmothers, the new immigrants, the trailer parks, or young people themselves. We need to get beyond the all-or-nothing style of activism that mobilizations encourage, so that more than overcommitted activists can join and so that the overcommitted activists can recover.

Then we need to provide a range of ways to get and stay involved after the voucher battle is suspended. People are reinventing some good approaches: a local speakers’ bureau, neighborhood house meetings, an ongoing roundtable breakfast of concerned teachers and community leaders, a program for school/community dialogue around education visions and goals. It seems that sustaining an active base of support for public education also requires that we organize around what we are for, not only what we are against. Which brings us back to Build an Agenda and Educate Your Allies, Lesson One.
Lesson 3: If you’re comfortable in a coalition, it isn’t broad enough.

This lesson is ascribed to Bernice Johnson Reagon, who learned it and taught it in the southern civil rights movement. It certainly applies if you adopt an organizing approach to education politics, which is about building new bases and broader alliances. The problem in the Voucher War is that most of our coalitions have been only at the leadership level, neither broad nor deep enough. My observation of traditional leadership coalitions is that everybody in the room already knows each other, they have probably met before on some legislative campaign, they are professional staff or officers of their organizations, they speak a distinct institutional language. They may not all look alike, but they somehow look similar. This is a fairly reliable observation if the leadership coalition has formed at the state level, but it also seems to happen in local coalitions.

Vouchers battles are opportunities to build new kinds of alliances. Rebuilding a strong base for public education means seeking new blood, both at the top and at the grassroots level. It means coalitions made up of groups that are large and small, mainstream and sidestream, staffed and voluntary, and genuinely representative when it comes to race, ethnicity, national origin, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, and whatever else the Right attacks.

We can use voucher battles to begin building coalitions and networks of allies at the community level. Usually, it requires one core organization to take the initiative. Often the teachers’ union is in that position, with staff and resources, but a great many union locals are trapped by isolation from the community and a fixation on their contract. One of the deepest frustrations of community advocates defending public schools is dealing with unions that are so entrenched in narrow agendas and business as usual that they can’t see how profoundly the politics of education has changed.

On the other hand, my experience in several states and cities—Pennsylvania, Washington State, California, Cleveland and even Jersey City—indicates that some unions are waking up to new alliances and that they are essential organizations in this fight. So are parents’ groups, school support personnel, school boards, other unions, and civic and religious groups concerned about educational opportunity and the separation of church and state.

However, creating new alliances that go beyond the top-down insider model means learning some new skills. We need to work at expanding cultural comfort zones (more accurately, expanding your acceptable discomfort zones) and burying old grievances (probably the last contract fight or bond issue). We need to better understand all the sectors and social forms that make up a community (asking others about themselves) and to identify educational injustice with other social causes (like funds for Midnight basketball). We need working groups and teams that mix constituencies and don’t keep us each in our safe and narrow havens. Above all, we need to forge long-term relationships rather than deals.

Lesson 4: There is an enemy. Name it.

It is remarkable how often a voucher battle erupts and people think it is just happening in their own backward city or state, as a sort of random product of nasty times. The fact is that voucher plans are not acts of God or tests of character. They are not a punishment for bad deeds in the past lives of school administrators. They are not what voters are demanding after the drop-out rates are announced. They are not even the outgrowth of an educational experi-
ement somewhere that shows promising results. While a variety of groups and individuals may support vouchers for their own reasons, vouchers are the agenda of the political Right in this country and we ought to know it and say it. Voucher battles are opportunities to expose the Right’s agenda.

The Right has been putting forward vouchers for decades, but with real vengeance since the Reagan years. To privatize public education is the centerpiece, the grand prize of their overall agenda to dismantle social entitlements and government responsibility for social needs. Vouchers also serve a political function for the Right, whether they win or lose. Vouchers unify the different strands of the Right: business entrepreneurs looking for a new public carcass to feed on, having used up the Cold War; anti-government libertarians who worship the free market, having noticed that education is the society’s largest public institution; social and religious conservatives who want to break down the separation of church and state, while garnering public funds to run their own schools. Many issues divide the Right; vouchers unite them and provide an organizing platform.

The importance of exposing this agenda is to combat both political fatalism and the myth that voucher campaigns are concerned with saving sinking school systems or rescuing drowning children. Look at the Milwaukee or Cleveland programs, or the proposals for Jersey City or Philadelphia, and you see the most cynical power politics: the Heritage Foundation’s game plan for state by state privatization, the Landmark Legal Foundation’s search for the new Supreme Court case on church and state, ambitious governors pandering to the Right and hoping to escape from court orders on desegregation or funding equity, and a flock of campaign strategists looking for new wedges into the Catholic vote or besieged communities of color, traditionally Democratic strongholds.

Understanding the role of the Right on vouchers should remind us that there is a very broad spectrum of people who do not share this agenda or this set of political purposes. Understanding the Right’s voucher agenda also reminds us that this really is a war, a modern civil war, with vast collateral impacts. This is a war over society’s resources and over our most basic social values: whether education should be obligated to serve all children equally and well, whether education should be governed by the democratic process or the economic marketplace, whether schools will represent common ground or contending private and sectarian interests, whether schools should belong to communities and serve as community institutions. I wish all the military metaphors were not so appropriate. We will surely have achieved a better world when we can use cooking, gardening, or building a house to describe the politics of education. But in launching its voucher offensive, the Right uses a perverse military logic: we must destroy the public schools in order to save them. In fighting vouchers, we need to speak the logic of democracy: we must save the public schools in order to advance them.

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How to be an Activist
For the Sake of Your Own Children
by Renee Hillman, Parent from Lehigh Valley, PA

Activism was not my plan in life. However, early in 1992 I witnessed a rapid erosion of my school district’s long-standing dedication to quality education. Suddenly, the members of my community seemed more interested in extremist attitudes and secret agendas. I knew that as a responsible person, it was time to get involved. Nobody has exclusive ownership of identities like “parent,” “taxpayer,” “concerned citizen,” or “pro-family” advocate. Much to the dismay of the people who abuse these titles in order to fulfill hidden political agendas, I was willing to claim publicly that I fit all of the above descriptions.

Looking back over the past year, I am most regretful that my involvement in fighting to keep sexuality education in my children’s school was initially a defensive reaction to an attack that had already started to occur right in my back school yard, so to speak. My advice to parents and other educators is to be alert, find out what is happening in your children’s school district, and be pro-active, offensive players. If you like what is happening in the classroom then tell the school board, the superintendent, and other community leaders. If you do not approve of the direction your child’s education is taking, you have every right to complain, to get involved, and see that changes are made. It is important that you be involved, before you end up like me, turning around to find that extremist leaders had started to take over with unacceptable plans for my children’s education.

The reality is that in many local school districts across the country, comprehensive educational programs of all sorts are being attacked. We are observing, however, that when the mainstream is informed about the extremist agenda, they come out in full force to defend their children’s right to a free education and a value system that encourages openness not narrow-mindedness. As a result, more people have become involved in positive participation in their children’s lives.

During my struggles, I discovered that my biggest supporters were other parents—all of whom were also taxpayers, concerned citizens, and pro-family advocates. It is most important to educate these supporters about the issues that are being used to take school districts down. It is important to obtain information about what is happening around the country, how the ultra-conservative movement operates, and who the leading extremist players are, and to share it with supportive parents in the community. It is often difficult to address the denial that many parents (including initially myself) share. “How could this be happening in our school district?” many of my supporters asked. But in time, I was able to gather the evidence and convince them that what we had most feared had already “hit home.” I asked my supportive community friends to pass along the information to their friends, neighbors, clergy, and family. Most importantly, I asked them to get involved in the classrooms that taught the kinds of curricula that were being opposed by extremists.

It is important to be up-to-date on the selection of books, teaching materials, and curricula being used in the classroom. Also know the policy that is in place for complaints and follow it to the letter. If you are able to garner support with a small group of community members, call yourselves a Review Panel, and try to include a broad representation of the community. Do not be afraid to include members of the community who have extreme opinions. Most often, the
extremists on either side of the issue are outvoted, especially if their arguments are unreason-able or unverifiable. Every piece of information you plan to use in public must be well researched and documented.

Often, it turns out that those who at first appear to be extremists, actually have very good intentions. Sometimes susceptible parents get used like pawns in a political struggle, especially when they are given false or distorted information. Do not waste your time trying to convince these community members who insist that their view is the only one. The best way to avert such a no-win situation is to organize public discussions concerning the issue that is up for debate, whether it be self-esteem programs, school-lunch programs, or comprehensive sexuality education. It is a good strategy to have parents with complaints against the current curricula come to the school and review the classroom teaching materials. Often you will find that these parents have been told what to say and once they see the actual material their children are using, they realize they have been given false information and will drop the complaint.

You can draw on numerous resources from the community to win this battle. Explain that you expect parents to visit the classroom on a regular basis and to get involved. Senior citizens are often tremendously supportive and great resources. Developing a partnership at all levels of education may be key to preventing the future devastation of good programming in your school district.

*This article was originally published in SIECUS Report, February/March 1994 and is reprinted with the permission of SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States).*
ACTIONS AND VICTORIES

With public education under siege, thousands of people and countless organizations are working to defend and strengthen public schools. We can take heart—and learn—from their experiences. Here are a few examples of successful and ongoing campaigns:

**PRIVATIZATION Stopping It Before It Starts**

After school administrators in Conroe, Texas held a “town hall meeting” to promote their plans to contract out food services, leaders of the 1,000-member Conroe Education Association (CEA) presented their own Saturday morning forum on the privatization debate.

But it was research that eventually carried the day. CEA’s compilation of contracting-out horror stories from districts across Texas and the nation, backed by privatization data from the National Education Association, helped sway public opinion—and, ultimately, the Conroe school board. Also influencing the board was a labor-management cost-cutting committee’s recommendation against privatization. The panel found that Conroe’s new food service manager had actually put operations in the black—largely through better billing practices and quality control.

Among the keys to CEA’s success:

*Involving support staff.* A task force gathered research on the track record of privatizers across the country and cranked out flyers, letters and position papers. Bus drivers—who feared they might be among the next privatizing targets—delivered these materials to parents and urged them to write letters to newspaper editors.

*Making the right arguments.* When support employees—many of them parents or grandparents of kids in Conroe schools—articulated concerns about wage cuts or child safety, taxpayers listened. “Most parents,” said bus driver Lottie Thacker, “prefer to have their friends and neighbors working with their kids rather than transient workers whose bosses are some distant corporation.”

*Staying on top of the school board.* CEA members, even food service workers in their aprons, appeared *en masse* at school board meetings, shared their research results and voiced opposition to privatization.

*Building unity:* Teachers were organized and educated to support the anti-privatization campaign. Professional staff were asked: “If we don’t prevent privatization of auxiliary services, what will keep the district from privatizing instruction down the road?”

*Staying vigilant:* Because CEA leaders monitor school board meetings, they learned about privatization plans right away—and acted quickly.

*Source:* article in October, 1998 issue of NEA Today, newsletter of the National Education Association (www.nea.org).
Two months before a so-called “Parental Rights Amendment” (PRA) was slated to appear as a ballot referendum in Colorado in 1996, polls indicated the measure would cruise to an easy landslide victory. Seventy-six percent of likely voters said they would vote for Amendment 17; only 11 percent opposed it, with 13 percent undecided. The measure guaranteed parents the right to “direct and control the upbringing, education, values and discipline of their children.”

But election day brought a surprise. Support for the measure, promoted by Religious Right organizations, had evaporated. The PRA went down to defeat 58 to 42 percent.

Even more surprising, the defeat came during a conservative tide that swept Colorado, which is home to Focus on the Family (annual budget $110 million) and several other prominent Christian Right and evangelical Christian groups. The state bucked national trends and favored Republican Bob Dole for president. Voters also elected Wayne Allard to the US Senate, a Republican so conservative that he was on record as favoring public hanging to deter crime.

So how did the turnaround happen? Opponents of the PRA in Colorado credit a well-organized campaign that used the news media effectively and educated the public about the dangers of the proposal. An advertising blitz warned that the PRA would protect child abusers, harm children, and have a negative impact on educational quality. Operating as the Protect Our Children Coalition, PRA opponents lined up an array of organizations and prominent

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**Keeping Advertising at Bay**

The growing intrusion of advertising in public schools is being successfully challenged in many school districts by concerned parents, teachers, school committee members and their allies. As one Seattle parent stated: “Schools should be about teaching students to make their own choices, not coercing them to buy things they don’t need. My child is not on sale for corporate advertising attacks, especially while on school grounds!”

Much of the opposition has centered around Channel One, the 12-minute infotainment show with two minutes of commercials that is viewed daily by 40% of students in the nation’s middle and high schools. A study by The Center for Commercial-Free Education, which has been leading a national campaign against Channel One, found that the program costs taxpayers $1.8 billion in lost instructional time, including $300 million in class time lost to commercials. In communities as diverse as Urbanna, VA, Gaylordsville, CT, and Guymon, OK, school boards have voted to ban Channel One from their schools. For three successive years, it has also been kept out of New York State—the program’s largest untapped market. In San Francisco, Levi Strauss was persuaded not to advertise on Channel One.

Some communities have restricted other forms of advertising and product promotion in their schools. In Johnson City, TN, the school board of Science Hill Educational Complex rejected a contract with Coca-Cola; in Viroqua, WI, a proposed Pepsi contract got the thumbs-down. Legislation was introduced in Madison, WI to prohibit all advertising in Madison’s schools.

Source: website of the Center for Commercial-Free Education (www.commercialfree.org). The Center provides training and resources on how to resist commercialization in public schools.
Coloradans to speak against the measure. Weekly press conferences featured county sheriffs, teachers, doctors and others. The bi-partisan coalition of 140 groups worked hard to find conservatives who would speak against the PRA. A turning point came when former Senator William Armstrong, well known for his conservative credentials, did just that.

PRA proponents spent an estimated $500,000 in their failed attempt to pass the Colorado measure. The effort was largely bankrolled by Of The People, a Virginia-based organization that claims to have helped introduce versions of the PRA in more than 31 state legislatures since 1995.

Source: Article in the December 1996 issue of Church and State, published by Americans United for Separation of Church and State (www.au.org) and Of The People website (www.ofthepeople.org).

Advocates of stronger public schools have been working hard to resist the introduction of school vouchers. Voucher schemes drain funds from public schools in order to allow a tiny minority of students to attend private and religious schools at taxpayer expense.

At the community level, thousands have attended rallies, forums, and workshops bringing together parents, clergy, religious groups, educators, community and youth organizations, and others. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has joined with People for the American Way in a national campaign, “Partners for Public Education,” to mobilize support for public schools and oppose voucher schemes.

The defeat of a well-financed voucher lobby in Texas—no less than six bills were introduced in the legislature over the last two years—offers an especially powerful example of successful grassroots mobilization against vouchers.

- A hundred parents from Edgewood in San Antonio went to the state capitol to explain how the pilot voucher program in their school district had hurt neighborhood schools and the community at large. Edgewood Schools had lost over 700 students and more than $4 million to vouchers, which had “skimmed” high performing students and left special needs students to fall through the cracks. Most damaging to children were the fly-by-night schools that had sprung up to capitalize on the voucher program.
- Anti-voucher forums held in Houston and Dallas and sponsored by the Texas Freedom Network (TFN) Education Fund, Parents for Public Schools and other organizations built opposition to vouchers and kept critical perspectives in the public eye.
- Hard-hitting reports helped shape public opinion. One report, by the TFN Education Fund, revealed that a few wealthy individuals—all closely connected to Texas millionaire James Leininger and his pro-voucher organizations Putting Children First and CEO America—contributed over $5.2 million to candidates and political action
committees to push their agenda that would siphon billions of dollars away from Texas public schools into vouchers. Another report, by the Coalition for Public Schools, showed that public schools in the six counties targeted by a proposed five-year voucher program would lose $2.8 billion in funding. Budgets would have to be cut “at every neighborhood (public) school to make up for the money spent to send a select few children to private and religious schools,” said the Coalition’s Carolyn Boyle.

■ Concerned religious leaders took a public stand against vouchers. They held a press conference at the state capitol, releasing the names of 100 other like-minded Texas clergy and debunking the myth that Texas’ religious community was unified in support of state-funded religious education. Weeks later more than 300 people flocked to the capitol for a rally, lobby day and prayer breakfast to voice their opposition to vouchers.

In addition to Texas, 26 states have this year considered at least one bill to create publicly funded voucher schemes. Only Florida and Ohio enacted voucher legislation, while in 18 states, voucher bills never made it out of committee. However, many activists say the legislative battle is only just beginning: seven states—Arizona, Arkansas, Louisiana, Michigan, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania and Virginia—are likely voucher hotspots in the next legislative session. In New York City, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s proposal to pilot vouchers in one of the city’s five boroughs stirred up widespread opposition and was turned down by the city council.


Concerned teachers, administrators, parents and religious leaders across the country are working together to assure that the spirit and practice of the nation’s pluralist vision—tolerance, open-mindedness, inclusivity—is maintained in public schools. They are responding to the divisive agenda being advanced by supporters of Christian Right groups. This has included initiating school prayer, mandating the teaching of “scientific” creationism, preventing access to the Internet, removing guidance and psychological counseling services from public schools, and implementing an anti-gay policy.

In some cases, those defending pluralism and diversity have regained control of public school boards that were taken over by Christian Right candidates. For example, the Christian Coalition’s dominance of the school board in Lee County, Florida ended in 1998 with a swing back to more mainstream candidates. The five-member board captured national attention in 1996 after instituting a “Bible as history” course, much of its later declared unconstitutional by a federal judge. The Christian Coalition majority on the board had also pressured science teachers to instruct in creationism and replace the sex education curriculum with an “abstinence-based” program.
Citizens for Excellence in Education, a Christian Right organization that claims to have helped place more than 25,000 conservative Christian activists on local school boards in the 1980s and ‘90s, has called for Christian families to pull their children out of public schools. Other Christian Right organizations, however, continue their efforts to make public schools and what is taught in them conform to their own Biblical worldview.

The intolerance and division promoted by such efforts have been countered creatively by many mainstream community-based groups. In Iowa, the Iowa Interfaith Alliance developed a “civility” pledge, a “Code of Fair Campaign Practices” and issues questionnaires for all school board candidates. It also sponsored public forums for discussion of pertinent education issues, and released a “Pride in Public Education” position paper.

Sources: The Interfaith Alliance, The Interfaith Alliance of Iowa, Church and State published by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, The Des Moines Register, and USA Today. For relevant organizing and training materials, including a Candidate Code of Civility, contact the Interfaith Alliance at (202) 639-6375 (www.tialliance.org).

DIVERSITY: It’s Elementary

Teachers and their allies trying to make classrooms safe and welcoming for all students have their work cut out for them: anti-gay bias in schools is pervasive and 76% of the nation’s largest school districts provide no training for staff on issues facing gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth, according to a new report by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN).

Now an important new training resource—the documentary film, It’s Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School—is being made available, despite a campaign against it by the American Family Association and other Religious Right groups. In November, 1998, in a bold and precedent-setting move, the Chicago public school system, the third largest in the country, agreed to make It’s Elementary part of its teacher-training program. The decision was the successful culmination of a two-year campaign by the local GLSEN chapter. It is hoped that other school districts will follow Chicago’s lead. Directed by Academy Award-winning director Debra Chasnoff, It’s Elementary is also being shown on more than 89 public television stations around the country. PBS declined to distribute the film to its affiliates, in part because of Religious Right pressure, and it was sold station by station through an independent program distributor.

Sources: GLSEN website (www.glsen.org) and article in The Boston Phoenix, July 1999.
Education “Reform” and School Choice

Definition

Education reform is a catch-phrase used by the Right. The term “reform” implies a positive change, but the Right uses the term as shorthand for promoting its own narrow agenda: dismantling public education and funding the private sector to operate schools on the model of free-market capitalism. Such a drastic change in US public education would create an enormous gap in educational opportunity between those who can access the privatized school and those who would be left behind in a defunded school system.

“School choice” is an umbrella term that includes such education reform programs as charter schools, vouchers, and public school privatization. School choice has supporters across the political spectrum, including advocates for urban school reform. Proponents of school choice initiatives argue that these various programs provide the means to improve student performance, create a more equitable learning environment, accelerate educational change and overhaul the public school system in general.

School choice is presented by its supporters on the Right as a way to address the individual needs of students as well as to increase parental involvement in the education system. A more deeply conservative agenda exists, however. The Right has appropriated the term “school choice” in order to further an agenda that is larger than educational policy.

Discussion

A coalition of right-wing groups has crafted a multi-plank platform for school “reform.” The right seeks public funding for private schools, specifically Christian-based religious schools. But this goal is only part of a more far-reaching agenda. The leadership of the Right hopes to dismantle the system of federal and state control over public education and replace it with one that is suffused with Christian rightist values and is oriented toward the children of the Christian Right.

This campaign is moving forward on several fronts simultaneously. The target areas selected by the Right for its focus on education include: support for school vouchers, charter schools, parental rights, the privatization of educational services and, in some states, the eradication of bilingual education.

There are several reasons why education reform and school choice have been selected as vehicles to promote the Right’s agenda. First, public education is vulnerable to criticism; many people are dissatisfied with the quality of schooling in this country. Second, it offers several entry points for local control of funds and policies. What students learn, who teaches them and how they are taught can be controlled with careful positioning of right-wing representatives in elected and appointed posts. This is designed to protect the children of those who support the Right from the influences of liberal thought. Further, the issue of education is
an effective vehicle for building the Right’s political base, which can then be mobilized in other issue areas.

The implications for such a “takeover” of American education are deeply troubling. Vouchers and charter schools contribute to an increased privatization of public services and an abandonment of government’s role in promoting, and commitment to, equal educational opportunity for all. The parental rights movement supports the notion that the pursuit of individual interests takes priority over the public good. At stake is the future of public education, an institution that plays a critical role in transmitting democratic values from generation to generation.

Response

Certainly our schools need improvement, especially underfunded and undervalued urban systems. But the school “choice” programs advanced by both the economic and religious Right will not support real reform. Such reform would require equitable distribution of funds across all schools and adequate financial support for each and every building. So-called “choice” programs actually increase the burden on public schools, not only by funneling much-needed funds away from existing public school systems and usurping the legitimate debate on school reform, but also by diverting attention away from the social and economic problems that carry over into public schools. Many feel that some school choice programs create inequalities and further segregate students by weeding out the best students and leaving the weakest schools for students with the greatest needs. Some school choice programs also violate the constitutional provision for separation of church and state.

Programs that allow public funds to support private ventures are central to the right’s strategy for controlling public education. School vouchers, which are created with public funds, can be used to support private schools, including religious or profit-making schools. Tax-free education savings accounts for parents of K-12 students, which would encourage saving for private school tuition, would indirectly do the same thing. If allowed to grow, these programs will weaken attempts at legitimate school reform.

Responses to the Right’s agenda can get complicated, however, particularly for communities of color and/or communities in which funding for public schools is inadequate. Often, parents in these communities want to send their children to the best possible school, and are happy to support charter schools or vouchers because then their children can attend whatever school the parents choose. Such schools are perceived as having a low student-teacher ratio, an innovative curriculum, and a safer and more supportive environment. The concept of school choice appears empowering for those parents, and in some cases, it is.

These are valid and important arguments. However, it is also important for parents to look at the long-term effects that charters, vouchers, and privatization will have on the community, local and national, and on public schools in the United States. The concept of school choice is one of the Right’s most commonly used tools to chip away at the democratic control of education by a more moderate spectrum of the community.

Finally, the Right’s school choice rhetoric reflects its “new racism.” Even though explicitly racist language may be missing and there seems to be a new climate of racial tolerance on the part of the Right, the real intent of its agenda is clear. Communities of color may be encouraged to
participate in school choice programs, but this is secondary to the central purpose of the Right in touting vouchers. The real agenda is to lure those who feel threatened by people of color to withdraw their children from public schools and demand that the government pay for their parallel, independent schooling. The resulting school resegregation is predictable.

School Vouchers

Definition

Vouchers are state-provided funds in the form of scholarships which would permit parents to use public money to send their children to any public or private school. Under this system parents who take their child out of a public school system would receive a voucher from the state which they could apply to tuition at a school of their choosing. Vouchers are attractive to parents who are dissatisfied with their child’s school. Where implemented, vouchers have been primarily used to send children to religious schools. Currently, vouchers are not available in most school districts, but pilot programs have been set up in a number of communities.

The voucher movement has a powerful influence on the Right’s ability to mobilize general support, even if actual implementation has been limited.

Discussion

Both the economic and religious Right are highly critical of public education and are demanding alternatives using the language of school choice. Appealing to a broad range of individuals and groups, from religious fundamentalists, inner city parents and middle income taxpayers, a coalition of right-wing groups has focused on the strategy of promoting school vouchers.

The Right is waging a campaign to implement voucher programs on several fronts. Arguments supporting vouchers have become part of the mainstream discussion on schools, and it is commonplace to hear debate about vouchers in the media as well as at school board meetings. Sometimes legislative language creating voucher programs can be well publicized, or it may be embedded in other education-related bills and receive little attention.

Proponents use the rhetoric of school choice to promote their position, focusing on the value of allowing individuals to choose their own solutions to their educational problems. They use the language of the market, employing free-market vocabulary such as “competition” and “efficiency” to discuss social issues and their solutions. Many voucher supporters argue the Right’s standard anti-government line: that the existing system of public education has been corrupted by unresponsive government structures run by uncaring bureaucrats who waste taxpayers’ money and that education should not be run by “big government.”

These arguments can distract us from recognizing the Right’s real agenda in supporting school vouchers. Although market-based solutions for government program reforms are current favorite tactics, the privatization of education is not the ultimate goal but a means to a broader end. The religious Right is not looking for better schools as defined in mainstream educational
terms; it seeks the conversion of a secular education system into a “Christian” one. However, such a massive shift cannot happen without state financial support, and a voucher program is an effective way to redirect state money for religious purposes, narrowly defined.

The economic Right, on the other hand, may be convinced that “free-market” competition among schools will improve them, but the appeal of securing a portion of state money for use by the private sector is also alluring. As Barbara Miner explains in *Teaching the Bible*, reprinted in the Overview section of this kit, when various sectors of the Right find unity on the issue of vouchers, that helps to maintain the coalition of economic and religious rightists.

Seen as a whole, these tactics are designed to dismantle public education and mobilize a growing conservative constituency. They mask the inherent contradictions that free choice in schooling cannot serve the public good if equal educational opportunity does not exist for all children. In fact, school vouchers ultimately damage urban systems the most, since they siphon off money from already beleaguered city schools to create the coffers that pay for vouchers. Suburban parents are more satisfied with their schools and less interested in vouchers, unless they want their children to have a religious education. If allowed to expand, voucher systems will undermine the legitimate role of state regulation of schools and will prevent authentic education reform.

**What the Right Says About Religion-Based Schools**

Most sectors of the Right advocate giving control to families to spend education funds as they see fit, arguing that parents should be given the right to send their children to schools of their choice, including religion-based schools. They maintain that the purposes of school choice are threefold: 1) to create incentives for public schools to institute reform; 2) to give options to parents; and 3) to ensure that children in religion-based schools not be discriminated against in educational opportunity because they attend non-public schools.

**Response**

The school choice movement as constructed by the Right is clearly designed to use public money to support religion-based schools. Vouchers, tax credits, scholarships and compensatory aid to poor students allow public funds to be spent in religion-based schools in violation of the church/state separation clause of the First Amendment. For instance, while the voucher system has only been instituted in a few districts, approximately 85% of the participating schools are religion-based.

Using federal funds for children to attend religiously-affiliated schools, most of which teach religion in school, sets a dangerous precedent for other church/state violations. The Christian Right’s long-term agenda is to break down the separation of church and state in many areas. Bringing religion into public schools and public funds into religion-based schools are key elements of this plan.

Evangelical and fundamentalist Christian schools have a blemished history in this country. During the struggle for civil rights of the 1960s, private Christian academies proliferated, especially in the South. Ostensibly they were a response to the increased secularization of the public schools due to the then-recent banning of school prayer and devotional Bible reading, but
Christian academies were private schools that provided their all-white student bodies an alternative to desegregated schools. Modern religion-based schools could also fail to reflect the race, class and religious diversity that exists in the US today. Extending public funds to such schools challenges federal equal educational opportunity regulations.

There is no question that freedom of religion is an important value in the United States. But public education funds should be reserved for providing equitable, high-quality schooling for our diverse student population. Diverting even some of these funds to schools that are sponsored by religious groups diminishes, not enhances, the overall quality of public education and should be challenged at every level.

What the Right Says About Opportunities for Low-Income Students

Supporters of school vouchers argue that voucher programs provide true freedom for parents who want better educational opportunities for their children. According to the right-wing Heritage Foundation, “public policy has made it difficult for all but the well-to-do to choose the school they prefer.” The Right argues that vouchers are the solution to poor-quality schools that often exist in low-income communities, since they would provide an escape for poor students stuck in those public schools.

Response

The claim that vouchers create equity for low-income students is a myth. The real purpose of vouchers and other choice initiatives by the Right is 1) to dismantle public education as we know it; 2) to support private religion-based schools with public funds; and 3) to serve the larger political agenda of the Right.

For several reasons voucher programs will make things worse for most low-income students. First, voucher plans can offer school choice options only to limited numbers of students in need, since they are typically small-scale and experimental. Because of their size, no voucher plan guarantees that all students who want them will receive vouchers. But if larger-scale plans were allowed to develop, they would create even more inequities. Comprehensive voucher systems would effectively dismantle urban school districts, because, based on current trends, most families would spend vouchers on private schools, removing funds from the public districts. Those left behind in public schools would experience compromised educational quality.

In addition, vouchers would leave behind students with the greatest needs to struggle in a public school system stripped of resources. The students who remained in urban schools would include, in addition to the losers in the voucher selection process, children of families unable to “work the system” of school choice and low-income students with physical or emotional disabilities. Because private special education tuition is much more expensive than the average cost-per-pupil voucher their parents might be able to obtain, low-income students would be effectively shut out of special education programs in the private sector. While they could continue to enroll in public school special education programs, the public system would be decimated financially across all program areas, compromising the quality of special education.

Vouchers create inequities in another way as well. While they could be used by low-income students currently enrolled in public schools, some voucher proponents argue for the equity of
allowing current private school students to receive vouchers and to use them to continue to stay at private schools. Wealthier parents would in effect receive a subsidy for sending their children to private schools. If such plans were put in place, even fewer slots would be made available to low-income public school students to participate in voucher programs, and the chances of getting to choose a school would be diminished even further.

Finally, the shift toward private institutions fails to recognize the value and importance of public schools as places where students can experience a diverse population in an equalizing environment that promotes democratic values.

What the Right Says About Better Private Schools

Central to the school voucher debate is the Right's claim that most private schools do a better job than most public schools. They claim that encouraging the development of private schools will raise the standard of educational quality in America today by supporting healthy competition among all schools. All students will benefit from the proliferation of private schools.

Response

America’s education problems are not rooted in poor public schools overall, but in the unequal distribution of resources across public school district lines. The best suburban public schools compete with elite, highly selective private schools, but these schools educate only a minority of America’s students. The purpose of a public education system is to offer all students free, quality education. When properly supported by fair public taxation plans, public schools can succeed. Given adequate financial resources, even beleaguered urban schools can thrive. (See Charles Radin’s article Bringing Back the Burke, in the Secondary Sources section of this kit).

Creating more private schools will not automatically create better schools. In some cases, vouchers have created new, poorly-managed, private schools. For example, in Milwaukee, which has been central in the debate over vouchers, two voucher schools closed suddenly in the midst of controversy over false enrollment statistics and questionable financial records. Others have been unable to pay their staff regularly. It is very difficult to maintain individual private schools, especially those that serve moderate- to low-income students, with income derived primarily from vouchers. If current trends continue, the business community’s attraction to running voucher-supported or charter schools will be short-lived.

Conclusion

The inadequacies and inequities of public education will not be solved by school voucher programs designed by the Right. School choice is not a panacea for the complex set of issues facing schools today. In fact, choice programs such as vouchers are potentially harmful to many students and a threat to the public education system.

It is important to recognize the appeal of voucher programs to those who have been especially affected by the shortcomings of public school systems. In low-income communities of color, especially inner-city communities, inadequate public school funding is one result of institutionalized racism. It is important to point out the political agenda of the well-funded right-wing...
think-tanks that promote the voucher system—the same groups which support welfare “reform” and an end to affirmative action, as well as other draconian cuts in public spending. The public needs to know that the same think-tanks that support vouchers also support programs that would and do have severely negative effects on low-income communities and communities of color.

Organizations Working to Oppose Vouchers  
(see the Resources section for complete information)  
American Civil Liberties Union  
Americans United For Separation of Church and State  
Center For Rebuilding America’s Schools  
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People  
National Coalition of Education Activists  
National Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty  
National Education Association  
Parents For Public Schools  
People For The American Way  
Rethinking Schools

Organizations Working to Promote Vouchers  
(see the Resources section for complete information)  
Children’s Educational Opportunity Foundation (CEO America)  
Concerned Women For America  
Eagle Forum  
Golden Rule Insurance Company  
Heritage Foundation  
Hudson Institute  
Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research
Charter Schools

Definition
Charter schools are deregulated, autonomous public schools created through a charter (or written contract) between a group or organization that wants to operate a school and a local governing and funding body, such as a local school board. Charter schools are primarily publicly-funded with tax monies, but they often raise private funds as well.

As of August 1999, 37 states, Washington, DC, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico had adopted some form of charter school legislation. There are currently more than 1,200 charter schools nationwide, serving over 300,000 students. Charter schools are performance-based, meaning that applicants are required to meet or exceed the educational outcomes they outline in their application to the city or state that grant them their charter. They must periodically reapply with evidence of success. Charter schools are too new at this time for us to judge their academic quality as a group.

Charter schools are popular in the climate of deregulation and decentralization, and their numbers are growing rapidly. While some charter schools are developed by grassroots groups, the real push behind the expansion of charters comes from an organized effort from the Right.

Discussion
The charter school movement has been orchestrated by elements of the conservative arm of the Republican Party and other groups from the economic Right as a vehicle for advancing the Right’s “education reform agenda.” Charter schools are one of the most successful aspects of this “reform,” partially because they sound like a legitimate education reform initiative. They have developed broad appeal among urban parents and moderate and even liberal critics of public education, because they represent a new chance to attend a better school. Tapping this support, conservative think tanks and foundations have developed influence within state departments of education and legislatures. They argue that the quality of all education will improve if charter schools compete with existing public schools for student enrollment.

Although some charter schools are started by local community activists and parents who are taking advantage of the opportunity to try some authentic alternative approaches, rightist charter school proponents are not interested in supporting such experiments. Instead, they are using charter schools as a means to end what they call “the state’s monopoly on education,” funneling public funds into private corporations that run schools as a business. These companies often attempt to run their schools from out of town, using standardized curricula, administrative policies, technology and testing. (See “To Market, to Market...the School Business Sells Kids Short” in the Secondary Source Materials section of this kit).

Creating charters is a threat to public education in other ways as well. The movement diminishes state regulation of public schools. Most charter schools are public schools exempt from hiring certified, unionized teachers, thus allowing lower salaries and weakening support for teachers’ unions. In fact, chipping away at the strength of unions is a long-term strategy of
the Right. Curricular and extracurricular decisions are no longer made by the school district, creating the possibility that public funds would support curriculum content closely aligned with a deeply conservative agenda. Finally, some charter schools do not provide equal educational opportunity for special education or bilingual students.

There is a debate in the parent and education communities about the value of charter schools. Some feel that lending support to certain charter schools is acceptable if the school meets the criteria of progressive education reform, measured by such benchmarks as multicultural curricula, inclusive admissions, or the absence of religious teaching, to name a few. Others feel that any support for charter schools, despite good intentions of the alternative school’s designers, only supports the Right’s strategy of siphoning funds from existing public schools to support its agenda. The allocation of public money in the form of charter schools must not be allowed to violate the principles of equal education for all, free from any forms of exclusion.

Charter schools have gained support across the political spectrum, including some progressive educators who hope to rescue students from underperforming public schools. The Right has been successful in selling the concept that charter schools are legitimate educational experiments. Support from more moderate sectors masks their ultimate goals. If support for charters is allowed to continue to grow, it will be more difficult to keep a critical focus on the Right’s real agenda. That agenda includes the dismantling of state regulation of public education in order to gain control of funds that support public schools. These funds can then be freed up to be used by for-profit businesses that are in turn controlled by a small minority of right-wing business and political interests. Charter schools cannot be allowed to justify an undemocratic attempt to take control of the basic American institution of public education.

**What the Right Says About Better Schools**

*The theory underlying charter schools is that freeing public schools from many state and local mandates will hasten educational innovations, create greater parental involvement, and promote improvement of public education in general.*

**Response**

This is not necessarily the case (see Issues and Views/Privatization). While it may be the case that some schools or some students show improvement, other charter schools, like the private businesses many mimic, have faltered. In addition, the premise behind charter schools, that their students have access to a “better” education, is exclusionary. Because they are so few in number, charter schools do not serve the needs of the majority of low-income students and students of color, but instead serve only a selected few.

Also, some state laws allow charter schools to operate independent of any school district. This deregulated environment, combined with little oversight at the school site, raises serious issues of public accountability, both in monitoring the use of public funds and maintaining educational standards.
What the Right Says About Free-Market Competition

The Right claims that public education should be run on the model of competitive free-market enterprise. Right-wing critic Abigail Thernstrom, in School Choice in Massachusetts (published by the Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research) states: “Are schools competing for informed customers? Does product differentiation allow consumers to ‘buy’ something that seems right for them? Are the schools that can’t compete forced to change or close?...The demand must be for a quality product.” Thernstrom and others argue that charter schools are a way for free-market competitive principles to provide the best “product” to “consumers.”

Response

The Right uses the economic terms of free-market competition and product design as means to justify the move towards privatization of public education. However, the free-market system is never actually “free.” Free-market transactions constantly respond to social, economic, and political factors, such as race, income, sexuality and gender. One purpose of state regulation is to counteract the inequalities that emerge in a free market atmosphere. Charter schools are funded from the coffers of local school districts. If public education is left to the free-market system, people of color and low-income people will inevitably suffer as more funds are drained from the public school system and funneled into charter schools.

Conclusion

Charter schools are a short-term solution to a long-term problem. Some progressive activists want to use charter schools as a way to create an innovative and diverse curriculum and to provide a safe learning environment that supports low-income students and students of color. However, it is important to look at the Right’s agenda in this matter, and to see how it sets a precedent to use charter schools as a way to privatize all public schools. In addition, charter schools serve only some of the school-age population. What happens to the students and the system left behind?

Selected Organizations Working to Challenge Charter Schools
(See the Resources section for complete information)
National Coalition for Education Activists
National Education Association
Rethinking Schools

Right-Wing Organizations Working to Promote Charter Schools
(See the Resources section for complete information)
Center for Education Reform
Heritage Foundation
Hudson Institute
Landmark Legal Foundation
Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research
Privatization and Corporate Management

Definition
In a handful of public schools across the country, school districts are experimenting with corporate management. Private, for-profit companies are seeking contracts to operate schools, claiming they can upgrade a school’s physical plant, bring in computers and other technology, improve student learning, and still make a profit.

Discussion
The issue of privatizing public education helps to unite different sectors of the Right. The Christian Right is attracted to using tax dollars to support a particular type of Christian school. The far Right, always wary of any governmental role, supports the breakup of “big bureaucracies” like public education. But the actual work of the privatization of public education is carried out by the combined forces of the economic Right and education conservatives. The economic Right stands to benefit from the conversion of public schools into a growth industry (see Phyllis Vine’s To Market, To Market...the School Business Sells Kids Short in the Secondary Source Materials section of this kit), while education conservatives believe a back-to-basics movement can be instituted by loosening what they perceive as liberal control of public schools. The Republican Party provides organizational support for the privatization movement, using the language of free market enterprise to link its positions on education with other interest areas. As a result, the Party gains new voters who are dissatisfied with the current status of education.

A key strategy in the drive to privatize schools is the use of the language of “free markets” to justify a radical transformation of the US education system. Free markets are represented by the Right as pinnacles of efficiency and a better way to deliver services than wasteful bureaucracies. This rosy version of free enterprise will probably remain politically useful as long as the US economy remains strong, since the Right maintains that current prosperity and consumer optimism is the result of the deregulation of private enterprise. The pro-privatization Right argues that since competition has worked in the marketplace, competition can simply and effectively be applied to schools. But as Jeffrey Henig points out (see The Danger of Market Rhetoric in the Secondary Source Materials section), “free market” rhetoric has drawn attention away from several dangerous threats to democratic institutions and values. Entrepreneurial language touts personal choice over equal opportunity; it glorifies competition over community problem solving; and it misrepresents the function of education as a consumer product rather than its rightful role as a central pillar of maintaining and protecting democratic values in our society.

Inviting private management companies to work in schools takes several forms. One method is to allow commercial television into the schools. The most prominent example of this method is Channel One, the creation of media entrepreneur Chris Whittle. Channel One contracts with schools to provide televisions, VCRs and satellite dishes in exchange for the guarantee of broadcasting its commercial-laden newscast to a captive audience of students.

Another method is to hire a management firm to run a single school or a whole district. Often
these companies are for-profit corporations with representatives from the economic Right and education conservatives on their boards. In each case these private ventures are justified by the use of language that applies economic theories to educational functions.

Applying market methods and language to schools must be challenged. Privatizing education is not a simple panacea for the public schools. Obviously, inviting the corporate sector into schools is good for business, but is it good for the schools? Privatization serves the Right’s hidden agenda which is to remove public schools from government control and to transfer those functions to the for-profit sector. The free market rhetoric used to advance that hidden agenda is intended to lull voters with the promise of higher quality education. But no mention is made of the insidious shift to education as a personal investment for those able to “work the system” and away from education as a social investment for society as a whole. And we hear nothing of the reality that the public would lose control over how its tax monies are spent. It is the task of critics of privatization to explain these contradictions and manipulations.

What the Right Says About Channel One

One controversial aspect of corporate involvement in public schools is Channel One. Originally founded by Christopher Whittle who has since invested in the Edison Project with William Bennett to run entire schools for profit, this now highly profitable in-school commercial television program is owned by K-III Communications, a savvy marketer to children and youth. Channel One is beamed into 12,000 schools in the US, with an audience of over 8 million students. Proponents promote it as a way to involve students in current events in an innovative and interactive way. Young newscasters offer interesting role models and an approach to the news that helps young people get into the habit of being well informed about current events.

Response

For every one minute of news on Channel One there are 12 seconds of commercial advertising. These programs promote unchecked television advertising in public schools during school time. Channel One also provides a shallow, too-brief analysis of news stories, and it trains young people to accept the media as entertainment. (See News For A Captive Audience and Unplugging Channel One in the Secondary Source Materials section.)

In addition it creates a climate where advertising in a public educational setting is acceptable. In an era of decreased funding for public schools, such a climate invites corporate intrusion and influence over the substance of education.

Local districts have no say in the design or content of either the newscasts or the ads. Public schools and the students that populate them need to be free of such influence during school time. Schools are not arenas for business to advertise its products.

What the Right Says About For-Profit Management

Some school boards and administrators look to for-profit management as a cure-all that will solve the complex problems faced by today’s schools. Part of the attraction comes from the promise of computer equipment and improved resources that corporations can provide. In
addition, many blame the “crisis” of public education on government bureaucracies which the Right portrays as protecting burned-out, inadequate teachers through teachers’ unions.

Response

The Right’s scapegoating of teachers takes the focus away from the real issue in achieving high-quality public education: inadequate and unequal funding. There is not enough money to go around, and better funded schools are concentrated in more affluent communities. If adequate funding were provided for public school education, then the perception of teachers as inadequate would significantly decline. Teachers’ unions have come out against privatization because unionized jobs would be eliminated and the largest public union system would be dismantled.

What the Right Says About Opportunities for Low-Income Students

As with charter schools and vouchers, the Right states that privatizing public schools would enhance “healthy” free-market competition and benefit low-income students who currently receive a poor education in public school systems.

Response

Since the for-profit movement began as an urban alternative, many educators view it as a way of “selling” troubled inner-city schools to the lowest bidder. While some low-income students would benefit, the vast majority of students would be left behind in an even more financially drained public school system. There is also concern that parents and students will take a back seat to corporate shareholders, and that students with special needs and bilingual students will be particularly overlooked.

What the Right Says About the Benefits of Privatization

Proponents of privatization of public schools believe that the transition from non-profit to for-profit can happen quickly and easily. In addition, because the competition principle will be operating, all schools will be able to compete for students, and parents will prefer higher performing schools. This will require underperforming schools to improve if they want to “stay in business.”

Response

Experiments over the past several years have proven that it is more complicated than it appears to turn public schools into profit-makers. One of the most talked about examples of corporate management is Education Alternatives, Inc. (EAI), which has the longest track record of attempting to manage public schools. EAI signed five-year contracts to manage one public school system in Dade County, Florida, nine schools in Baltimore, Maryland and the entire public school system in Hartford, Connecticut.

EAI failed in all three cases. In the case of Dade County, the contract was not renewed when it expired; in Baltimore the contract was canceled halfway through the third year; and in
Hartford the company’s contract was reduced to six schools after less than a year, then canceled completely after a year and a half.

In May of 1996 the US General Accounting Office issued a report analyzing the performance of the three for-profit management attempts made by EAI as well as one in Minneapolis, Minnesota which was run by a company called Public Strategies Group, Inc. (PSG). The report concluded that in all the cases examined, corporate management of public schools did not improve students’ academic performance, nor did it turn a profit.

**Conclusion**

There is no sign that the move toward privatization will slow in the future. As with other alternatives to public education, much of what happens depends on the public’s perception of the state of education.

The push towards privatizing schools continues to occur on several fronts. If corporate management becomes less popular, charter schools, which can be managed themselves by businesses, may emerge as the more acceptable form of corporate presence in the schools. Meanwhile, vouchers and tax credits to support private schools may take off as the campaign of choice. All of these approaches are part of the Right’s attempt to break down the system of public education as we have known it. Efforts to privatize schools need to be challenged for 1) their long-term crippling of meaningful approaches to education reform; and 2) their replacement with unproven, misguided concepts that serve to perpetuate a system of inequity. This dovetails with the Right’s overall political agenda, to continue to build its constituency for use in future campaigns by monopolizing the debate on a topic of great concern to the public: education. (See also, Issues and Views/ School Vouchers; Issues and Views/Charter Schools.)

**Selected Organizations Opposing Privatization**

(see the Resources section for more information)
- American Federation of Teachers
- Center For Commercial Free Public Education
- Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting
- National Education Association
- Parents For Public Schools

**Selected Organizations Supporting Privatization**

(see the Resources section for more information)
- Center For Education Reform
- Heritage Foundation
- Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research
Bilingual Education

Definition

Bilingual education is an in-school program for students whose first language is not English and who have limited English proficiency upon entering school. Second language acquisition can occur in a variety of classroom formats. In some English as a Second Language programs, called Transitional Bilingual Education, students are taught a portion of the day in their native language. This method is designed to allow students to keep up academically by studying subject matter in their native language while learning English, thus enabling them to move into mainstream classes taught in English at a realistic pace, based on individual needs.

Currently, bilingual education is under severe attack in several states. In June 1998 California voters ratified Proposition 227, known as the Unz initiative, which threatens to end bilingual education in California (see English Only Hysteria Grows As Anti-Bilingual Initiative Heads For The Ballot, in the Secondary Source Materials section of this kit).

Discussion

The main force behind anti-bilingual education in the United States is the right-wing English Only movement. English Only advocates incorrectly argue there is conclusive proof that bilingual education has failed and that it no longer has the support of the American people. Their goal is to remove federally-mandated bilingual education programs from public schools. The principal organizations of the English Only movement are the Washington, DC-based US English and One Nation/One California, founded by millionaire Ron Unz. (See “Who is Behind the English Only Movement” in the Secondary Source Material section of this kit for more information.) Until recently, US English was considered a right-wing fringe group; now it is molding public policy.

In its attempts to end bilingual education, US English is supporting a much larger agenda than helping students to learn English more quickly or representing the best interest of immigrants. This movement has gained broad support from people who hold a spectrum of political views, some of whom have little interest in, or understanding of, the debate over second language acquisition. According to James Crawford, an independent researcher and analyst of bilingual education, those who stand to benefit from the eradication of bilingual education include: groups who seek a sense of national unity through a single official language; anti-immigrant activists; people who fear that multiculturalism will lead to ethnic divisiveness; some liberals opposed to identity politics that bilingual voting blocs represent; and bigots who want to reverse civil rights gains for language-minority groups. The Right has succeeded in rallying such a coalition of support by choosing an educational program targeted to a vulnerable group, exaggerating its problems and oversimplifying its solutions.

California is a classic case study of this approach. As a result of the Unz Initiative, bilingual programs are slated to be replaced with shorter, one-year immersion classes conducted entirely in English called “Sheltered English Immersion.” English Only supporters assert these new classes would be more effective than bilingual education in bringing non-native speaking students up to speed in English language skills. The jury is still out on the success of this
approach: implementation varies widely from district to district. Some districts have retained their bilingual programs through diligent soliciting of parental waivers. Others have eradicated them, leaving a statewide evaluation nightmare. During the campaign, English Only advocates consistently misrepresented second language acquisition research, infuriating bilingual educators and putting their supporters on the defensive. Opponents of Proposition 227 spent much of their energy refuting claims by One Nation/One California that current bilingual education programs were ineffective. Unz’ organization controlled the debate by focusing solely on the value of bilingual education and refusing to acknowledge a larger agenda.

Part of this agenda was to drive a wedge into the Latino community, the largest bilingual community in the state. Ron Unz, who crafted Proposition 227 in California, was successful in dividing the bilingual community by courting conservative Latino leaders to support his initiative. The English Only movement boasts that it counts racial minorities among its supporters as a way to show it is not racist in its intent. But behind this tactic is another plan. Organizations on the Right can then mobilize new conservative voters around other issues.

English Only supporters are also keenly aware that a demographic shift in this country will eventually place communities of color, which includes Latino and Asian immigrants, in the majority. Elements of the Right have excited anti-immigrant sentiment by exaggerating the rate of this shift, vilifying undocumented residents and implying that non-English speakers are unpatriotic and a threat to American society. Tactics such as these have successfully inflamed anti-immigrant fervor and racist fears among large blocs of voters who fear their way of life will be irrevocably compromised by such change. These tactics also fan white racism, since the Right has promoted a negative stereotype of low-income immigrants of color in its claim of the “threat” posed by non-English-speaking immigrants. Bilingual education is seen as a program that helps fuel this threat.

Another right-wing approach is to appeal to taxpayers’ pocketbooks. Ending bilingual education would eradicate a high-end education expense, which might result in lower taxes. This is designed to increase the Right’s popularity among its traditional anti-tax constituency.

Building support to end bilingual education may also contribute to other campaigns to limit the rights of newcomers and communities of color. Immigration and naturalization regulations may harden, and social services for non-English speaking residents may shrink as we have seen in California. What appears to be an effort at educational “reform” has the potential for deep setbacks for immigrants and other non-English speakers.

What the Right Says About English Only in the Classroom

Some organizations and individuals on the Right support the English Only movement as a way to criticize multilingual education, which they feel undermines American culture. In The Phyllis Schlafly Report, December 1995, Phyllis Schlafly, head of Eagle Forum, the anti-feminist women’s organization, writes: “You can’t be an American if you don’t speak English. Our public schools should be mandated to teach all children in English.”
Response

The English Only movement not only ignores the history of multilingualism that has always existed within the United States, but also serves to marginalize many populations. Instead of promoting the integration of bilingual students through specialized programs, proponents of English Only attempt to pass legislation which would end bilingual education in public schools. The effect would be to penalize bilingual students.

These legislative efforts would have other far-reaching effects. Restrictive legislation making English the “official” language would jeopardize equal access to essential government services for non-English speakers. The legislation of English Only rules in the workplace would also encourage discrimination against non-English speakers.

In addition, English Only legislation as it applies to public schools is unconstitutional. In its 1974 Lau v. Nicholas decision, the Supreme Court ruled that schools must offer equal opportunities to all students. This applies to students whose native language is not English. It is therefore unconstitutional to deny educational access to a non-English speaking student by teaching only in English—which would be the effect of an English Only classroom.

What the Right Says About the Effectiveness of Bilingual Education

The Right charges that bilingual education is an ineffective method of teaching English to immigrants. Opponents argue that bilingual education programs actually hurt children who are trying to learn English by slowing down the learning process. Rather than be taught part of the day in their native language, bilingual students should be completely immersed in English. Otherwise, opponents claim, the student will have poorer grades for a longer period of time, and in the long run will remain outside of the American culture, its political system and the job market. Immigrant parents sometimes make these arguments to the public, providing a stamp of legitimacy to the white-dominated English Only movement.

Response

Reputable research has shown that various methods of bilingual education are extremely effective in helping students to learn English. In addition, the portion of the class taught in the students’ native language allows them to maintain connections to their culture and history as well as keep up in other disciplines.

An article in Racefile (Jan.-Mar. 1998) states that a 1997 study at The University of California Language Minority Research Institute “found that students with a strong background in their native language tend to achieve higher levels of English proficiency than those taught without bilingual instruction.” In addition, students taught in bilingual programs develop fluency in both their native language(s) and English.

If students were denied bilingual education, they would have to learn English first, before studying other subjects like math and social studies. Students must not be forced to fall behind in school because of an issue of language proficiency.
What the Right Says About Immigrants Wanting English Instruction for Their Children

Sometimes, immigrants make public statements about their opposition to bilingual education. Often, these immigrants are parents who state that they want their child to have better opportunities and therefore they feel their children must learn only in English. Bilingual education, they say, will only set their children back and keep them from other opportunities enjoyed by native English speakers. This demonstrates that even the recipients of bilingual education don’t support it.

Response

The Right cleverly uses the voices of some immigrant parents as a way to enforce the notion that the immigrant population is uniformly opposed to bilingual education. This is not the case. There is a wide diversity of opinion in the immigrant community, with many immigrants actively supporting bilingual education for their children. In fact, 88% of Latino parents with children in bilingual programs in Los Angeles indicated they felt these programs were effective. While there are some immigrants who oppose bilingual education, they are not representative of the community as a whole, and they certainly do not reflect the views of parents with children in bilingual classrooms.

What the Right Says About Immigrants and English

One of the most common arguments against bilingual education is that immigrant populations at the turn of the century had more success in school because of immersion in English-only speaking classrooms. If those immigrants could learn English through immersion, this argument goes, why can’t today’s immigrants do the same?

Response

While some may reflect back on the “good old days” when immigrants learned English and were successful, statistics prove otherwise. According to the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE), in 1890, children of foreign-born parents were three times more likely to drop out of high school than white children of native-born parents.

Conclusion

While some opponents of bilingual education frame their discourse in terms of “helping” immigrants, this is rarely the case. Instead, many attacks on bilingual education come out of the English Only movement, which seeks to enact legislation that would severely impair the ability of immigrants to function in the US by limiting their access to government services, health care and court interpreters, for example. It is important to view these attacks on bilingual education as part of a larger movement that attempts to curtail democratic and constitutional rights for all immigrants, especially non-English speakers. It is no accident that many of those targeted are people of color.
The passage of California’s anti-immigrant Proposition 227 has been met with resistance in the form of litigation, waiver requests and a range of legal interpretations of its potential impact. While bilingual education’s effectiveness has been conclusively determined by research, its political strength continues to wane.

If confronted by an anti-bilingual education campaign, it is important to understand and be able to cite reputable research about the value of bilingual education programs. (See the Secondary Sources and Resources sections of this kit for more information). Refuting the inaccuracies, misleading statements and outright lies broadcast by bilingual education opponents remains for activists a necessary response to such ongoing campaigns that intend to deny educational opportunity to documented and undocumented immigrants. At the same time, exposing the intent of such campaigns and identifying how the Right stands to benefit from them is equally valuable.

Selected Organizations Working to Support Bilingual Education

(see the Resources section for complete information)
American Civil Liberties Union
Applied Research Center
J.W. Crawford’s website
Media Alliance
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)
National Association for Bilingual Education
National Coalition of Education Activists
National Education Association
Rethinking Schools
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)

Selected Organizations Working Against Bilingual Education

(see the Resources section for complete information)
Center For Equal Opportunity/Equal Opportunity Foundation
Concerned Women For America
Eagle Forum
English First
One Nation/One California
Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research
US English
Parental Rights

Definition

One of the most hotly debated topics in education is the right of parents to direct what their children are taught in school. Many right-wing groups, especially Christian Right groups, see the curriculum in their children's public schools as too liberal. Their criticisms address programs ranging from sexuality education to what some call the “secular humanist” and anti-patriotic slant of many textbooks.

The Parental Rights Amendment is the Right’s answer to this concern. It is a two-sentence statement designed to be used in state-by-state campaigns to amend state constitutions. The effect of the Amendment would be to increase the control that parents have over the curriculum used in their children’s school. As written by the right-wing group Of the People, the Amendment reads:

\[
\text{The rights of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children shall not be infringed. The legislature shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.}
\]

(For an example of a right-wing group’s discussion of the Amendment, see “The Parental Rights Amendment: Guiding Public Policy” in the Primary Source Materials section).

Discussion

The Parental Rights Amendment has been carefully constructed to appear to be a simple reassertion of the rights of parents to raise their children as they see fit. It is designed to appeal to parents and others who worry about changing family structures and losing control of their children. Its purpose is hidden behind the simple language, however, and it is important to understand why the campaign is being mounted.

Instead of agreeing to appropriate parental involvement and representative decision-making through school boards and other democratic means, parents could exercise their new constitutional authority to regulate more directly how and what their children would be taught. The amendment would weaken the separation of church and state by allowing parents to infuse particular Christian values and topics championed by the Religious Right into the schools. It could encourage the use of vouchers to support private schools as well.

The vague language of the amendment intentionally allows for sweeping interpretations of what parental rights in schools might be. Curriculum decisions across the board, from health education to science, social studies, language arts, and foreign languages, could be affected. Social services such as counseling, health care and even food service could be altered by parents who seek redress from the school's interference in their rights to determine the “upbringing” as well as the “education” of children.

The underlying goal of the Parental Rights Amendment is to disable public schools. Disgruntled parents who felt their rights had been violated by school systems would be encouraged to sue. Litigation could disrupt and perhaps even cripple public education at the local level. It could also interfere with the government's role in responding to child abuse or custody claims.
What the Right Says About the Parental Rights Amendment

The Of The People Foundation, a right-wing research and education organization, is spearheading the fight for state-level constitutional amendments to protect the “rights of parents.” This challenge to public education is based on the following question, proposed by Of The People: “Who should decide what’s in the best interests of children? Their parents or the government?” Proponents of the Parental Rights Amendment state that they don’t want to spend their time and money in lengthy court battles. Instead, it should be their explicit, constitutional right, to decide what their children learn in school.

Of The People encourages right-wing activists to place this amendment on statewide ballots. According to Americans United for Separation of Church and State, parental rights measures have been introduced in at least 28 states—in several more than once—but none have been passed or approved. In 1997, the amendment failed by the narrow margin of 21-19 in the Virginia Senate. It is likely that the amendment will continue to appear in state legislatures and on state ballots.

Response

The rights of parents must be balanced with the responsibility of the government to educate and oversee the welfare of all children equitably. It is crucial that public education provide an environment which promotes democracy and diversity, not one which promotes the ideas of a single group. Not all parents support the views held by parental rights advocates. For instance, many of the supporters of the Parental Rights Amendment oppose school-based sexuality education and support prayer in schools. But those parents who believe in comprehensive sexuality education and the separation of church and state also have “parental rights” that should be protected.

Religious Right groups are the organizing force behind the parental rights amendment campaign. The amendment appears to be a democratic initiative, but in reality it is an attempt to disrupt the functions of public education and to insert Christian views in public education. A parental rights amendment would destroy public education by creating endless battles around what is appropriate and what is morally objectionable by fundamentalist Christian standards. These battles could take place both at the local school board level as well as in the courts.

The language of the amendment is deceptively simple. Its vagueness invites sweeping interpretations of what rights parents have in schools. Schools could be required to teach creationism or abstinence-only sexuality education, and they might become sites for prayer in the schools or explicit fundamentalist Christian religious education. Finally, such an amendment could at the least keep the issues of vouchers and aid to private schools in the public eye. At worst it might allow for the siphoning off of major funds from public schools and the destruction of free and appropriate public education.

Since the public schools are part of and funded by a democratic system, it is important for parents with views separate from or opposite to the Christian right to voice their concerns. Ultimately, public schools are everyone’s schools. They should support a diversity of opinion rather than serve as a platform for any group or organization to control the education of everyone else’s children.
What the Right Says About School Prayer and Parental Rights

The Religious Right has been attempting to institute school prayer in public schools for decades. Many vocal fundamentalist Christian groups see school prayer as a constitutional right under religious liberty. Opponents of school prayer are often viewed by the Christian Right as denying constitutional rights to other Americans. Legal organizations such as the Rutherford Institute and Pat Robertson’s American Center for Law and Justice are among many Christian Right organizations that have been vocal on the issue of public school prayer as religious freedom.

A recent argument for the institution of school prayer is that it is the right of parents to direct their child’s education, including their religious education. Supporters of the parental rights amendment have not stated this explicitly, but the amendment would allow for litigation that could open the door for mandated school prayer. Barry Lynn of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State asserts that, “The proposal is a time bomb. If adopted by any state or appended to the U.S. Constitution, it will eventually go off and do great damage to public schools and the wall between church and state.”

Response

One of the unspoken goals of the parental rights amendment is to create a legal basis for school prayer. Mandatory prayer in public schools would be a clear violation of church/state separation. Public schools are funded by the federal government, and because there is a constitutional provision for the separation of church and state, school prayer is unconstitutional. State-level constitutional parental rights amendments would not overrule the First Amendment to the US Constitution. Rather, they would create legal battles that would tie up energy and money.

It is crucial to treat this issue in a way that points to the constitutional issues and is sensitive to the very personal issues relating to religion. It can be extremely helpful for activists to have the support and involvement of progressive clergy who support church/state separation and diversity around religious issues.

What the Right Says About Sex Education and Parental Rights

The Right claims that sexuality education is destroying the moral fabric of American education and promoting homosexuality, “irresponsible” behavior, and sexual promiscuity. Opponents of sexuality education view these programs as an infringement on the rights of parents to protect their children from “morally offensive” material. Often, anti-homophobia efforts are seen by the religious right as a way to “recruit” children to homosexuality. In addition, organizations like the Rutherford Institute, Of the People, and the American Center for Law and Justice equate these programs with Outcomes Based Education, and declare that sex education is taking the place of traditional education.

Response

There is no argument about the importance of these sensitive curriculum topics. Everyone has the right to express his or her own opinion about how these topics should be taught. In fact,
schools often develop their own tailor-made procedures for ratifying how hot-button health topics are taught. While parents may have the right to exclude their own children from some school-based programs such as sensitive health education topics they find inappropriate, they do not have the right to alter the public curriculum to inflict their personal values on all children.

However, age-appropriate sexuality education provides accurate information that can be life-saving. Sexuality education can reduce the rates of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), including HIV and AIDS, as well as teen pregnancies. More education on the use of contraceptives can reduce unwanted teenage pregnancy and abortion. Positive discussion of gay and lesbian issues in the context of sexuality education classes can reduce the number of teen suicides related to sexual orientation.

For more information about challenges to sexuality education, refer to the SIECUS (Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States) Community Action Kit and PURPOSE, an advocacy kit, both listed in the Resources section of this kit.

Groups Working on Parental Rights Issues From the Left

(See the Resources section for more extensive listings)
American Civil Liberties Union
American Library Association
Americans United For Separation of Church and State
Freedom To Learn Network
Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network
National Committee For Public Education and Religious Liberty (PEARL)
National Education Association
People For The American Way
Rethinking Schools
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States

Groups Working on Parental Rights Issues From the Right

(See Against Comprehensive Sexuality Education in the Resources section)
American Center For Law and Justice
Center for Excellence in Education/National Association of Christian Educators
Concerned Women For America
Eagle Forum
Education Research Analysts
Educational Guidance Institute
Focus On The Family
John Birch Society
Of The People
The Rutherford Institute
Organizations Supporting Modern Public Education

American Civil Liberties Union
125 Broad Street, New York, NY 10004, (212) 549-2500; www.aclu.org
Membership organization, many local chapters. Interested in the threat to civil liberties posed by aspects of the Religious Right, including school prayer, school vouchers and equal educational and employment opportunity (on the basis of sex, race and national origin).

American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20001, (202) 879-4400; www.AFT.org
This teachers’ union publishes various educational reform critiques. The AFT website contains extensive analytical information and data on vouchers and charter schools.

American Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee
50 E. Huron, Chicago, IL 60611, (312) 944-6780; www.ala.org
Monitors censorship, school curricula, library protests, legal decisions. Coverage frequently includes local campaigns by religious and political Right. Publishes bimonthly: Newsletter On Intellectual Freedom.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State
1816 Jefferson Place, NW, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 466-3234; www.au.org

Applied Research Center
3781 Broadway, Oakland, CA 94611, (510) 653-3415; www.arc.org
The co-publisher of Colorlines with the Center for Third World Organizing, ARC studies the effects of social change and issues of race. Its education initiative, ERASE (Eliminate Racism and Advance School Equity), is a multi-year research and community organizing project addressing the institutional effects of racism on this country’s public schools.

Center For Commercial Free Public Education
1714 Franklin Street, Suite 100-306, Oakland CA 94612, (510) 268-1100; www.commercialfree.org
The Center is best known for its UNPLUG campaign against Channel One, the highly profitable, in-school school commercial television program founded by media entrepreneur Christopher Whittle. Publishes the quarterly newsletter Not For Sale.
Center for Law and Education

The Center for Law and Education tracks and reports on federal legislation that affects all students’ rights to quality education. CLE helps communities address their own public education problems effectively, with an emphasis on assistance to low-income students and communities.

James Crawford’s website
www.ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/JWCRAWFORD/

James Crawford is an independent writer and lecturer—formerly the Washington editor of Education Week—who specializes in the politics of language. His website contains multiple resources on supporting bilingual education, exposing the English Only movement, and issues such as saving endangered languages, and language rights in the US.

The DataCenter
1904 Franklin Street, Suite 900, Oakland CA 94612, (510) 835-4692; www.igc.org/culturewatch

The group that publishes CultureWatch, a monthly bibliography that monitors the Right’s political and social agenda, has produced a 70-page packet of 17 reprints on education reform, Charter Schools: A CultureWatch DataPak. This $18 resource also examines business interests in public education.

Designs for Change
6 North Michigan Ave., Suite 1600, Chicago, IL 60602, (312) 857-9292; www.dfc1.org

Founded in 1978, Designs for Change (DFC) is a multi-racial, educational research and reform organization which serves as a catalyst for major improvements in the public schools in the 50 largest cities in the country, with a particular emphasis on Chicago.

Facing History and Ourselves
16 Hurd Road, Brookline, MA 02445, (617) 232-1595; www.facing.org

Nonprofit organization whose mission is to engage students of diverse backgrounds in an examination of racism, prejudice, and anti-Semitism in order to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry. By tracing the historical roots of the events that led to the Holocaust and other examples of genocide, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their own lives. High school curriculum on the Holocaust, slavery, Armenian genocide, and theory of prejudice and violence.

Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR)
130 W. 25th Street, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10001, (212) 633-6700; www.fair.org

A national media watch group that offers well-documented criticism of media bias and censorship. FAIR advocates for greater diversity in the press and scrutinizes media practices that marginalize public interest, minority, and dissenting viewpoints. Reports include: How To Be Stupid: The Teachings of Channel One and News for A Captive Audience: The Case Against Channel One. Both are critical looks at the TV news show now seen in the majority of US high schools. Publishes the bi-monthly newsletter EXTRA!
Freedom To Learn Network  
2020 Downyflake Lane, Suite 301A, Allentown, PA 18103  
Formed in 1992 in response to widespread attacks on books and programs in local public schools. Supports drug and alcohol education programs as well as health, sex and AIDS curricula. “FLN does not endorse all programs but seeks to expose the motives behind challenges... (and) to provide objective information and reveal the tactics of those whose goals are to destroy public education.”

Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)  
121 W. 27th Street, Suite 804, New York, NY 10001, (212) 727-0135; www.glsen.org  
Activist organization dedicated to the safety and well-being of each member of every school community, regardless of sexual orientation. GLSEN works to end homophobia in public schools through changes in policy and thinking. Currently runs a program linking gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender high school student activists nationwide. Publishes quarterly newsletter Blackboard.

Intercultural Development Research Association  
5835 Callaghan Road, Suite 350, San Antonio, TX 78228, (210) 444-1710; www.idra.org  
IDRA conducts research and development activities; creates, implements and administers innovative education programs; and provides teacher, administrator, and parent training and technical assistance.

The Interfaith Alliance  
1012 14th Street, NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 639-6370; www.tialliance.org  
An alliance of religious leaders and people of faith concerned about the narrow vision of the Religious Right. Promotes the positive role of faith as a healing and constructive force in public life. Alliance chapters have been active in opposing Christian Right campaigns to win control of local school boards.

Media Alliance  
814 Mission Street, #205, San Francisco, CA 94103, (415) 546-6334; www.media-alliance.org  
In addition to publishing an alternative newspaper MediaFile, this activist group provides training and resources for media workers, activists, and community organizations. Produces an on-line toolkit for media activists on bilingual education.

Media Education Foundation  
26 Center Street, Northampton, MA 01060, (800) 897-0089; www.mediaed.org  
Conducts media research and produces videos, study guides and other resources to support media literacy.

Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund  
634 South Spring Street, 11th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90014, (213) 629-2512; www.maldef.org  
A national nonprofit organization with a mission to protect and promote the civil rights of the
more than 29 million Latinos living in the United States. MALDEF is an active supporter of bilingual education.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
1025 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 1120 Washington, DC 20005, (202) 638-2269; www.naacp.org

The NAACP has joined forces with People for the American Way in a project called Partners for Public Education which seeks to expose the Right and its use of vouchers as a wedge issue to divide black and white parents.

National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE)
1220 L Street NW, Suite 605, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 898-1829; www.nabe.org

The national advocacy and professional organization for bilingual education and its teachers and administrators. Publishes NABE News. NABE’s goal is to support the needs of language-minority students in the US and to advocate for a commitment to multicultural education for all students.

National Center for Science Education
P.O. Box 9477, Berkeley, CA 94709-0477, (510) 526-1674; www.natcenscied.org

NCSE works to defend the teaching of evolution and serves as a clearinghouse for information and advice to keep evolution in the science classroom and “scientific creationism” out. Resources include bi-monthly journal and workshops for educators.

National Coalition of Advocates for Students
100 Boylston Street, Boston MA 02116, (617) 357-8507; www.ncas1.org

A coalition of 14 organizations promoting advocacy for authentic educational reform in public schools in pursuit of equity for America’s most vulnerable students.

National Coalition of Education Activists
PO Box 679, Rhinebeck, NY 12572, (914) 876-4580; ncea@aol.com


National Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty, Inc.
P.O. Box 586 FDR Station, New York, NY 10150, (212) 486-4590

A coalition of organizations and individuals dedicated to preserving strong public schools that are free from sectarian control. PEARL publishes educational materials, litigates to protect religious liberty in public education, and helps parents and teachers take action on violations of church/state separation related to public schools.

National Council of La Raza
1111 19th Street, NW Suite 1000, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 785-1670; www.nclr.org

La Raza’s educational activities focus on ensuring that public schools serve Hispanic children and helps them to succeed academically. NCLR’s work in education is carried out on both a
programmatic and a public policy level—helping its network of affiliates and other community-based organizations run effective education programs and advocating for a public education system that serves Hispanic children equitably.

**National Education Association**  
1201 16th Street, NW, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 822-7200; www.nea.org  
This teachers’ union has information about resources on combating censorship in schools, school prayer, and privatization of public schools. Published *The Real Story Behind ‘Paycheck Protection’* that includes a guide to analyzing the structure of the Right.

**Parents for Public Schools (PPS)**  
P.O. Box 12807, Jackson, MS 39236; www.pps.net  
A national grassroots organization dedicated to supporting and strengthening public schools. PPS is committed to restoring and sustaining constructive parent involvement and advocating community-wide support of public education.

**People for the American Way**  
2000 M Street, NW, Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036, (800) 326-7329; www.pfaw.org  
Engaged in a national “Partners for Public Education” campaign with the NAACP. Reports and press releases include: *Attacks on the Freedom to Learn; Values, Pluralism, and Public Education: A National Conference; Education and the First Amendment: The Appeal to History; and Hate in the Ivory Tower: A Survey of Intolerance on College Campuses and Academia’s Response*. Special education newsletter: *Education Activist*.

**The Public Education Network**  
601 13th Street, NW, Suite 900 North, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 628-7460; www.publiceducation.org  
PEN works to educate the nation about the relationship between school quality and the quality of community and public life. PEN members believe that equal opportunity, access to quality public schools, and an informed citizenry are all critical components of a democratic society. Among other projects, it supports local education funds (LEFs), tax-exempt, nonprofit, community-based organizations that work to improve student achievement for all children attending public schools.

**Rethinking Schools**  
1001 E. Keefe Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53212, (414) 964-9646; www.rethinkingschools.org  
A nonprofit, independent newspaper advocating the reform of elementary and secondary public schools. Emphasis on urban schools and issues of equity and social justice. Stresses a grassroots perspective combining theory and practice and linking classroom issues to broader policy concerns. Published quarterly. Excellent resource for all issues related to public education.

**Southern Institute for Education and Research**  
*Tulane University*, MR Box 1692, 31 McAlister Drive, New Orleans, LA 70118, (504) 865-6100; www.Tulane.edu/~so-inst/  
Curriculum development and training through the Teacher Education Program. Provides
resources for teaching about the Holocaust and the civil rights movement. Offers anti-bias training for teachers, consultations, site-visits, film and video program, speaker’s bureau, and study guides and teaching materials.

**Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.**  
700 South Washington Street Suite 200, Alexandria, Virginia, 22314, (703) 836-0774; www.tesol.org

International association of 16,000 individuals and institutions in the field of teaching English as a second or foreign language. TESOL’s Advocacy Network provides e-mail action alerts on federal and legislative issues related to bilingual education and other issues.

### Sexuality Education

**Parents (and others) United for Responsible Policies on Sexuality Education (PURPOSE)**  
Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, 1055 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215, (617) 616-1660; www.pplm.org

A statewide campaign to bring together community members interested in developing and maintaining high-quality sexuality education in public schools. Provides information and technical assistance needed to challenge opposition. Resources include the Massachusetts Advocacy Kit.

**Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS)**  
130 West 42nd Street, Suite 2500, New York, NY 10036, (212) 819-9770; www.SIECUS.org


### Organizations Opposed to Modern Public Education

**American Center for Law and Justice**  
1000 Regent University Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23467, (757) 226-2489; www.aclj.org

Legal action in support of Christian principles. Founded by Pat Robertson in 1990 as a “public interest law firm dedicated to the promotion of pro-liberty, pro-life and pro-family causes.” Provides legal support for students or parents challenging church/state separation in public schools.

**Association of American Educators**  
26012 Marguerite Parkway, P.O. Box 333, Mission Viejo, CA 92692, (800) 704-7799; www.aeteachers.org

A conservative teachers’ association that bills itself as an alternative to the NEA. Based on its own annual survey, the membership supports charter schools, merit pay and national testing. Publishes a monthly newsletter *Education Matters.*
Bradley Foundation
P.O. Box 510860, Milwaukee, WI 53202, (414) 291-9915; www.townhall.com/bradley/

With assets of $461 million, Bradley is the leading funder of conservative and ultra-conservative causes. Has poured millions of dollars into voucher initiatives. Since 1992 the foundation has awarded $5.8 million to Parents Advancing Values in Education, a Milwaukee group that provides partial vouchers to students at religious schools.

Center For Education Reform
1001 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 920, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 822-9000


Center For Equal Opportunity
Equal Opportunity Foundation
815 15th St., NW, Ste. 928, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 639-0803; www.ceousa.org

President Linda Chavez has been a pivotal figure in the attacks on bilingual education, immigrant rights, and affirmative action. Publications include: The Failure of Bilingual Education and Strangers at the Gates: Immigration in the 1990s and The American Experiment, a quarterly periodical.

Center For Rebuilding America’s Schools
800 E. Northwest Highway, Suite 1080, Palatine, IL 60067, (847) 202-3060

Think-tank focused on “school choice.” Advocates vouchers for private/religious schools. Formerly a project of the Heartland Institute, a right-wing think-tank, but now incorporated separately.

Chalcedon
P.O. Box 158-WP, Vallecito, CA 95251, (770) 396-0965; www.chalcedon.edu

Leading think tank of the Christian Right run by R.J. Rushdoony, the father of Christian Reconstructionism and an early advocate of the Christian School movement.

Children’s Educational Opportunity Foundation (CEO America)
P.O. Box 330, Bentonville, AR 72712, (501) 273-6957; www.childrenfirstamerica.org

Funded by Dr. James Leininger, a San Antonio millionaire who bankrolls several conservative foundations and PACs, CEO America serves as a national clearinghouse for privately funded school voucher program information and provides matching grants to help develop such programs. Publishes a bi-monthly facsimile publication, A Voice for Choice.

Christian Coalition
P.O. Box 1990, Chesapeake, VA 23327, (800) 325-4746; www.cc.org

Most significant Christian Right group seeking to mobilize grassroots constituencies. Has devoted substantial resources to getting members elected to local school boards.
Citizens for Excellence in Education
See National Association of Christian Educators.

Concerned Women for America
1015 15th St., NW, Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 488-7000; www.cwfa.org
CWA is the nation’s largest conservative Christian women’s organization with chapters in 50 states. Led by Beverly LaHaye, it considers high levels of defense spending and aggressive anti-communism to be integral to defending traditional family values. Plays an active role in attacking the National Education Association and the Department of Education and opposes sex education in the schools. Publishes Family Voice. In addition, LaHaye has a half-hour daily radio show which reaches an estimated audience of 500,000.

Creation Science Ministries
P.O. Box 6330, Florence, KY 41022, (800) 350-3232
Publishes Creation magazine. Hosts seminars. The Institute for Creation Research joined with Australia’s Creation Science Foundation to start the group devoted to “the urgent task of spreading the creation message.”

Eagle Forum
P.O. Box 618, Alton, IL 62002, (618) 462-5415; www.eagleforum.com
Founded and led by Phyllis Schlafly, its best known campaign was against the ERA. Anti-feminist. Opposes comprehensive sexuality education. Publishes the newsletter, Eagle Forum. The Eagle Forum Education & Legal Defense Fund publishes Education Reporter.

Education Research Analysts
P.O. Box 7518, Longview, TX 75607, (903) 753-5993; www.members.aol.com/txtbkrevws/
Run by Mel and Norma Gabler who claim to have the “world’s largest textbook review library.” Reviews Texas school textbooks for signs of liberal permissiveness, anti-patriotic statements or other ideas that threaten the “American Way of Life.” Used as a resource by many religious conservative groups. The Gablers are the authors, with J. Hefley, of What Are They Teaching Our Children? (1985), a widely touted book that is highly critical of the “secular humanistic” influence on American public education.

Educational Guidance Institute
927 S. Walter Reed Drive, Suite 4, Arlington, VA 22204, (703) 558-3000; www.esi-intl.com
Opposes comprehensive sexuality education. On the steering committee is Onalee McGraw, who once edited Education Update for the Heritage Foundation. McGraw argued in one Heritage pamphlet, Secular Humanism and the Schools: The Issue Whose Time Has Come, that the religion of secular humanism was destroying public education and lowering SAT scores.

English First
8001 Forbes Place, Suite 102, Springfield, VA 22151, (703) 321-8818; wwwenglishfirst.org
Founded in 1986, English First seeks to pass English Only amendments at the state and federal levels. Considered politically to the right of US English. Home to Larry Pratt (Gun Owners of America, the Council for Inter-American Security, US Border Control and the [anti-choice] Committee to Protect the Family, Pat Buchanan’s 1996 presidential bid). English First’s strategy
is to move all 50 state legislatures to pass English Only laws in order to ratify an amendment to the US Constitution.

English Language Advocates
1601 N. Kent Street, Suite 110, Rosslyn, VA 22209, (703) 816-8821; www.elausa.org
A not-for-profit advocacy organization that supports making English the official language of the United States. Connected to US English and English First.

Family Life Seminars
P.O. Box 2700, Washington, DC 20013, (703) 830-4898

Focus on the Family
Colorado Springs, CO 80995, (719) 531-5181; www.fotf.org
One of the largest and most visible conservative Christian organizations. Founded and led by family counselor James Dobson, Ph.D. Seeks to defend family, faith and traditional values. Originally based in Pomona, California. With an operating budget of more than $100 million, Focus has 10 radio stations, several books, and twelve magazines, including *Teachers in Focus*. Dobson has a large audience for his syndicated radio programs.

Golden Rule Insurance Company
CEO J. Patrick Rooney is a major funder of conservative causes, including GOPAC, vouchers for private school tuition, and medical savings accounts.

Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002, (202) 546-4400; www.heritage.org
One of the most influential conservative think tanks in the country. Founded in 1973 to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense. Has published numerous papers in support of school choice, vouchers, and privatization; for example: *Real Education Reform for the 1990s*.

Hudson Institute
5395 Emerson Way, Indianapolis, IN 46226, (800) 483-7660; www.hudson.org
Headquartered in Indianapolis with offices in Washington, DC, Madison, WI, Lansing, MI and Canada and Belgium. This conservative think tank publishes reports on the negative effects of “governmentalism” on welfare, education, finance and other topics. Touts the thinking of Ron Unz, Chester Finn and other education conservatives. Coordinates the Education Excellence Network and co-sponsors the National Commission on Philanthropy and Civic Renewal, chaired by Lamar Alexander.
Institute for Creation Research
1946 Woodside Ave. North, Santee, CA 92071, (619) 448-0900; www.icr.org

A leading promoter of creation science, ICR is devoted to research, publication and teaching “in those fields of science particularly relevant to the study of origins.” ICR’s graduate school program prepares students to be “effective warriors for the faith,” according to president John Morris.

Institute for Justice
1001 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Suite 200 South, Washington, DC 20004, (202) 457-4240

Libertarian legal organization founded by Clint Bolick and William H. Mellor. Supported voucher programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland.

Institute for Research and Evaluation
6068 S. Jordan Canal Road, Salt Lake City, UT 84118, (801) 966-5644

Director Stan Weed, Ph.D. is frequently cited in materials promoting abstinence-only curricula.

John Birch Society
P.O. Box 8040, Appleton, WI 54913, (920) 749-3780; www.jbs.org

Ultra-conservative membership organization founded and led by Robert Welch until his death. JBS promotes a conspiratorial view of history. Publishes *The New American.* Considers public education part of the New World Order conspiracy. Opposes Outcome Based Education and promotes home schooling. Opposed integration and claimed the civil rights movement was a communist plot. Chief theoretician on education is Samuel L. Blumenfeld.

Josh McDowell Ministries
P.O. Box 1000, Dallas, TX 75313, (972) 907-1000; www.ccci.org/josh/

Opposes comprehensive sexuality education. Josh McDowell also speaks for Campus Crusade for Christ.

Madison Center for Educational Affairs
1155 15th Street, NW, Suite 712, Washington, DC 20005, (202) 835-3869

Raises funds and provides training for the Collegiate Network of ultra-conservative campus newspapers. Publishes two quarterlies: *Precis;* and *Diversity and Division: A critical journal of race and culture.* The latter trivializes concerns over racism, and suggests attempts to promote diversity and multiculturalism result in divisions that hurt American society.

National Association of Christian Educators/Citizens for Excellence in Education (NACE/CEE)
P.O. Box 3200, Costa Mesa, CA 92628, (949) 251-9333

Both groups are headed by Robert L. Simonds, who is on the Coalition for Revival (COR) Steering Committee. NACE works closely with COR. NACE’s purpose is “to reclaim our Christian heritage in our public schools.” CEE is a division of NACE. “CEE enables parents to replace faith-destroying curricula with programs that support moral values.” Argues that students in public schools are “being taught a socialist global world view, and being indoctrinated with new age, atheistic and value-free ideologies.” Together, both groups publish the *Educational Newsline* newsletter and the monthly *President’s Report.* Has also published
several books including Reinventing America's Schools, vols. 1-3; A Guide To the Public Schools; and How to Elect Christians To Public Office.

Of The People
1100 No. Glebe Road, Suite 1060, Arlington, VA 22201, (703) 351-1111; www.ofthepeople.org

A research and education organization dedicated to the parental rights movement. Jeffrey Bell is the chairman. Co-Chair is Betsy DeVo, wife of Richard DeVo, president of Amway. Richard DeVo is the son of Richard and Helen DeVo, whose foundation is a major funder of Religious Right organizations, such as the Family Research Council, Focus on the Family, and Coral Ridge Ministries. Publishes a newsletter, Voice of the People.

One Nation/One California
3415 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Suite #370, Los Angeles, CA 90034, (310) 737-1949; www.onenation.org

A creation of software magnate Ron Unz, One Nation/One California spearheaded the successful 1998 campaign to pass Proposition 227, designed to dismantle California’s bilingual education system.

Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research
85 Devonshire St., 8th Floor, Boston, MA 02109, (617) 723-2277; www.pioneerinstitute.org


Project Reality
P.O. Box 97, Golf, CA 60029, (874) 729-3298; www.project-reality.pair.com

Produces the abstinence-only curricula Choosing the Best and Facing Reality. Director is Kathleen M. Sullivan. Original name of Project Reality was Project Respect, which was a subsidiary of the Committee on the Status of Women run by Sullivan. Project Respect originally promoted Sex Respect, an abstinence-only curriculum now handled by Respect, Inc.

Project Respect
Renamed. See Project Reality.

READ (Research in English Acquisition and Development) Institute
P.O. Box 2428, Amherst, MA 01004, (413) 256-0034

A right-wing think tank opposing bilingual education. Executive Director is Rosalie Porter, a former bilingual education director for the Newton, MA public schools. READ receives funding from US English.
Respect, Inc.
P.O. Box 349, Bradley, IL 60915, (815) 932-8389

Produces *Sex Respect* abstinence-only curriculum designed to replace comprehensive sexuality education courses. Early workbook written by Coleen Kelly Mast.

The Rutherford Institute
P.O. Box 7482, Charlottesville, VA 22906, (804) 978-3888; www.rutherford.org

Founded in 1982 by John W. Whitehead, the Rutherford Institute is a Christian legal organization that promotes the Christian Right agenda through the courts. Publishes numerous books, papers, pamphlets and periodicals, including *Your Rights in the Public Schools* and *Parents’ Rights: How To Fight Back!*

Teen Aid, Inc.
723 E. Jackson, Spokane, WA 99207, (509) 466-8679

Develops, promotes, and provides family life education materials that focus on premarital abstinence and parent/teen communication. Opposes comprehensive sexuality education, publishes *Me, My World, My Future* among other abstinence-only curricula.

US English

Founded in 1983 by Senator S.I. Hayakawa and Dr. John Tanton. Tanton chaired US English until he departed after a xenophobic memo was leaked. The goal of the organization is to make English the only legitimate language of government at all levels. The organization has two arms: US English, Inc., which lobbies at the state and federal levels to abolish bilingual education, as well as to make English the only language for government business, and the US English Foundation, a non-profit organization which shares the same goals.

Publications:

*Education Report*
Dr. Tim LaHaye’s newsletter where he argues that “multiculturalism will destroy public education in America.” Opposes comprehensive sexuality education. See also Family Life Seminars and Concerned Women for America.

*Education Reporter*
See Eagle Forum.

*Diversity & Division*
See Madison Center for Educational Affairs.

*Family Voice*
See Concerned Women for America.

*The Phyllis Schlafly Report*
P.O. Box 618, Alton, IL 62002, (618) 462-5415
“Warning: Much of the college curriculum has been politicized by the liberals and the feminists...and shifted to what is called ‘Oppression Studies,’ that is, readings of third-rate feminist and minority writers who attack Western civilization as sexist, racist, and oppressive.” Published by Eagle Trust Fund. See also Eagle Forum.

Website Clearinghouse

www.townhall.com

National clearinghouse for conservative websites such as American Association of Christian Schools, the Christian Coalition and Of the People. Maintains current newslinks, a chat room and related pages.

Anti-Sexuality Education Curricula

Choosing the Best
See Project Reality.

Facing Reality
See Project Reality.

Free Teens
Abstinence-only sex education curriculum developed and promoted by persons with a history of affiliations with various groups started or promoted by Rev. Sun Myung Moon.

Me, My World My Future
See Teen Aid, Inc.

Sex Respect
See Respect, Inc.

Reading List and Other Resources

Defending Modern Education


Classroom Crusades: Responding to the Religious Right’s Agenda for Public Schools (Milwaukee, WI: Rethinking Schools, 1998).


**Opposing Modern Education**


Supporting Comprehensive Sexuality Education

Community Action Kit: An information pack to support comprehensive sexuality education. Available from SIECUS.

PURPOSE: Massachusetts Advocacy Kit. Parents and others United for Responsible Policies on Sexuality Education. A comprehensive kit providing information on all areas of sexuality, including HIV/AIDS education and condom availability in public schools. Also provides community advocacy resources and guidelines for evaluating curricula. Available from Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts, 1055 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215, (617) 616-1660.

SIECUS Fact Sheet #4: The Far-Right and Fear-Based Abstinence-Only Programs. 1992. 3pp. Available from SIECUS.


**Against Comprehensive Sexuality Education**


Primary Source Materials

(Materials generated by the Right)
Because of copyright restrictions we are unable to reproduce the following key education articles from the Right in their entirety. Below you will find brief descriptions of their content. If you need to obtain these source documents, please read the note at the end of this section.

School Vouchers

Stephen Chapman. “The Growing Case For School Vouchers.” Conservative Chronicle, April 9, 1997, page 27. Chapman argues that school vouchers should be used in parochial schools, since those schools have a high success rate in terms of academic achievement. Liberals, he says, are afraid of religious ideas, but he states that violating the separation of church and state is a small price to pay for learning. “Opponents of a full voucher program for poor children apparently fear that they may be contaminated by religious ideas. But that risk should be for them and their parents to evaluate. Attending classes with crucifixes on the walls doesn’t keep kids from learning. Too bad the same can’t be said for attending inner-city public schools.”

Abigail Thernstrom. School Choice in Massachusetts. Pioneer Paper No. 5: Education in Massachusetts Series. Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, 1991, pp. 97-112. In these pages, Thernstrom discusses the issues around vouchers, although the whole book is a useful resource for researching conservative school choice proposals. (Available from the Pioneer Institute: see address in Resources section). She proposes a pilot school voucher program for “disadvantaged” public school students, and then goes on to anticipate reaction from the left. “The bad news about this proposal is that it would undoubtedly be challenged in federal court on grounds of violating the US Constitution and would almost certainly require a change in the Massachusetts Constitution. Public funds for parochial education are the problem.”

Charter Schools

outlines the potential good of charter schools, but then uses the example of charter schools in Michigan to make the point that school reform is moving the nation towards a New World Order. “To privatize public schools by means of federal/state funds is to create neither a private or a public school. In reality, a state/government school is created which removes both private and local/public control. Although written in flowery language with the most clever use of the English language, once the thin veneer of deceit is peeled [sic] back, what is really seen is a raw grab for total control of the educational system by the state.” From the introduction: “The proposed restructured program of the US educational system closely resembles the international/global education program of the United Nations and is clearly socialistic in concept.” (emphasis in original)

Privatization

Cal Thomas. “School Choice Would Improve Public Schools.” Conservative Chronicle, October 9, 1996, p. 27. Thomas credits poor performance in public schools to the lack of a competitive structure. “Government schools...are not doing the job the taxpayers are paying for and are unlikely to improve unless education follows the example of business and engages in competition.”

Jack E. Phelps. “Private Scholarships: An Alternative to Government Aid.” Conservative Review, Jan./Feb. 1995. The author argues that school vouchers would be flawed if the system were controlled by the public schools. He takes the view that business must lead the way to privatization through vouchers. “American education needs the private sector to take it by the hand and lead it out of the morass.”

Bilingual Education

Phyllis Schlafly. The Phyllis Schlafly Report: English Should Be Our Official Language, December 1995. Schlafly advocates for the abolition of bilingual education, stating that not only does it cost the taxpayers vast sums of money, but it is part of the liberal machinery of Political Correctness and multiculturalism. In short, bilingual education is downright Un-American. “You can’t be an American if you don’t speak English. Our public schools should be mandated to teach all children in English. Of course, English should be our official language! The language of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution is fundamental to our national identity. Without it, we will cease to be one nation.”

Thomas Sowell. “Watch Your Language!” Conservative Chronicle, May 21, 1997, p.26. Sowell states that bilingual education leads to an anti-American and separatist culture. He supports English-only legislation and states that bilingual education must end because it will lead to language riots. “What many Americans are concerned about is...mandated promotion of numerous foreign languages in our schools, often with an anti-American ideological bias thrown in.”
Christine H. Rossell and Keith Baker. *Bilingual Education in Massachusetts: The Emperor Has No Clothes*. Pioneer Paper #10. Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, 1996. (Available from the Pioneer Institute: see address in Resources section). A book examining the effectiveness of bilingual education in Massachusetts. Rossell and Baker state that bilingual education is not a clear concept because it represents different programs in different schools. They cite their research finding that bilingual education is ineffective, that the cost is high, and that public opinion is confused on this issue because of the lack of clarification of programs. They advocate an end to the legal obligation to provide native language instruction and advocate for language immersion programs. “At the March 30, 1995 hearings on Governor William F. Weld’s reform bill...Hispanic students testified in Spanish (subsequently translated by others into English) in favor of transitional bilingual education and against the Governor’s bills, which offered school districts the right to state funding for programs that did not include native language instruction. Asian students also testified, but in English...against the bill. No one, including the students themselves, acknowledged or even seemed to realize that the programs in which these distinct groups were enrolled bore no resemblance to each other, a fact suggested by the language in which each group testified.”

Parental Rights

Phyllis Schlafly. *The Phyllis Schlafly Report: Let’s Abolish the Department of Education*. September 1995. In this newsletter, Schlafly advocates for the return of public schools to communities and parents. She cites what she considers inappropriate spending: “The Scandal of Drug Education Funds.” She also cites failing educational standards and performance, and the “infusion” of the gay-lesbian agenda in public schools. “Contrary to the gloom-and-doom fearmongering of the education lobby, US public schools will not collapse if the Department of Education is abolished. Public schools flourished before there was any Department of Education (and academic standards were much higher), and public schools will continue to exist if the Department is abolished. ...Public schools should have no difficulty downsizing... Their top-heavy and redundant administrative bureaucracy is a scandal, anyway.”

Copies of articles cited on this list are available for research purposes at $1 per article (prepaid) and a minimum order of $4 (first class postage included). When an address is provided in a citation, we encourage you to order the item directly from the publisher. A full set of primary source articles cited on this list is available for $7. Please send a check or money order to Political Research Associates, 120 Beacon St., Suite 202, Somerville, MA 02143. Orders can also be placed over the phone with a Visa or Mastercard: (617) 661-9313.
October 1995

Your signed Constituent
Declaration and gift are
vital to end America's
15-year educational nightmare.

Dear CWA Member,

In 1979, President Jimmy Carter pushed for the creation of the federal Department of Education (DOE). It was one of the biggest political payoffs in American history.

In exchange for their campaign support and votes, President Carter handed National Education Association activists and unionists what they wanted most—their own federal department.

Today, 15 years later, the Education Department and the NEA have practically destroyed education in America. Performance standards and academic quality have plummeted drastically across the country. And our schools are in a moral shambles.

A whole generation of students has had to endure a barrage of experimental programs like Outcome Based Education. And the results of radical sex education programs and pro-homosexuality sensitivity training have been catastrophic.

Teenage pregnancies and suicides are at all-time highs. Abortions for young girls are a daily occurrence. Venereal diseases, including AIDS, are rampant among our youth. Dropout rates have skyrocketed. Innocent children are told to indulge in promiscuity, even "try" homosexuality.

That's why I need you and every CWA member across America to stand with me in the fight to abolish the Department of Education. Now is the time for us to restore the rights of parents and local communities to control the education of their children.

Already, CWA lobbyists and analysts have been meeting with leaders in the U.S. House, working on legislation to end this federal stranglehold over our public schools and children.

CWA has been instrumental in helping to draft legislation calling for the abolition of the DOE. And I'm pleased to report a growing

(over, please)
number of congressmen are signing on as sponsors. We must seize this momentum now.

For you see, national education activists and unionists are mobilizing throughout the country to stop any attempt to defund the Education Department. They know that if CWA's efforts succeed, the liberal establishment will lose a major political power base.

DOE spends nearly $32 BILLION of our taxes annually. More than $249 million is squandered on AIDS information and education programs that promote homosexual behavior. Over $172 million is thrown away on family planning services, including abortion counseling for young girls. What a waste!

Parents, local communities, and states are better able to repair the education mess the federal bureaucrats have created. And CWA is leading the charge to restore local control over education.

So I am asking you for two things today.

Please, sign and return the enclosed Constituent Declaration to CWA as soon as possible. We'll use it to urge your congressman and senators to defund the Department of Education.

And with your signed declaration, please include a generous gift to help CWA at this time. Your support makes all our work possible. I'm relying on your help in this battle.

With Congress back in full force and presidential politics heating up, the issues are flying fast and furious on the Hill. CWA is mounting powerful public information campaigns on several vital issues. In the next few weeks, I know I'll be asking for you to take action on some of these matters.

But right now, I need you to focus on the opportunity we have before us in this Congress to free our children's schools from the clutches of the federal government. And I need you to respond generously with your financial help.

Your faithfulness in giving to CWA's pro-family work touches every success we're able to achieve. God bless you for your friendship and commitment to the family.

Sincerely,

Beverly LaHaye
President

P.S. If we make our voices heard now, I believe the leaders of Congress will act on our call to abolish the Department of Education. I've enclosed a flyer of eight good reasons why DOE must be eliminated. I prayerfully await your signed declaration and gift to help CWA wage this important battle.
President's Report
National Association of Christian Educators/Citizens for Excellence in Education
Box 3200 • Costa Mesa, CA 92628 • Dr. Robert Simonds (714) 251-9333

February, 1998

Please read this entire letter -- it is very important and presents
a significant change in our approach.

Dear Christian Parents, Grandparents, and All Who Follow Jesus,

With King David, my prayer is: "Lord, lead me as you promised you would;
otherwise my enemies will conquer me. Tell me clearly what to do, which way to turn"
(Psalms 5:8, L.B.). This is my prayer for 1998.

I believe this year will be a major turning point for American education and
especially for the beautiful Christian children we must save from any teaching that
would destroy their faith in the living God we serve and worship.

Our Lord has told us clearly, "Be strong and courageous, fearless and

We are facing a new reality! God has given CEE incredible victories in our
efforts to save our Christian children in public schools -- and thereby guiding CEE to
save America’s public school children from atheism, homosexuality, the occult, drugs,
children having children, abortion, brainwashing and crippling psychology.

Yet, with all the positive changes we've seen because of each of you, that
together we have accomplished for God, the system of public education has refused
to bend. The frightened and woeful cries of godly parents have been, and still are,
ignored.

Deception in our schools is the rule, not sincerity; arrogance, not cooperation.
Therefore, after 15 years of sincere efforts to gain parental rights, a "safe-passage"
curriculum for our dear innocent children, the Lord has counseled me, and an
impressive array of those associated in ministry have confirmed God’s leading, that
CHRISTIANS MUST EXIT THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS as soon as it is feasible and
possible. The price in human loss, social depravity and the spiritual slaughter of our
young Christian children is no longer acceptable (and certainly never was!). We have
tried hard to find common ground and will continue. School leaders have used this for
a stalling tactic, rather than an open dialogue for solutions. That’s understandable, but
just more of the same deceit tactics.

Our schools have never truly taken Christians seriously. They have nationally
decried Christians as a "small minority," not worthy of a voice. That was and is a very
big mistake. The census and numerous polling research show that out of about
250,000,000 Americans, 193,000,000 (48,250,000 families) claim to be Christians.
Based upon this statistical data base, that means that about 24,125,000 Christian
children are in school; of which 20,000,000 are attending public schools (about 4-5 million are in private, Christian or home schools). Since total public school enrollment is now officially at 52.2 million (K-12 students) according to the U.S. Department of Education, Christian children comprise almost 40% of our public school attendance. No sane person would read that as a "small minority."

Since 90% of all Christian church children still attend public schools, it is a massive job to get Christians to transfer their darling children to Christian or home schools, but it can be done. It must be done, thoughtfully and gradually, but as soon as possible. That does not mean that Christians should work less hard to reform our public schools and protect all America's children from the current harm being done. On the contrary, we must work even harder than ever before! Our children are still there!

As the Christian influence exits our public schools (both students and teachers), the liberal establishment will get to see first hand the massive problems that will run completely out of control without Christian influence.

Some brief reasons for "RESCUE 2010" are:

1. First and probably foremost is that many otherwise good teachers and certainly almost all our curriculum bases the instruction unit on a humanist world view, with all its anti-Christian worldly values, which is the current ideology in education. This is done very subtly and constantly undermines and contradicts a child's Biblical, godly belief and value (right vs. wrong) base for thinking. It wears on a child's mind until faith in God and Biblical principles simply breaks down and becomes extinct. Satan has then won! That's happening every day. The Christian plea goes unheard. The children are being lost.

2. Evolution and the origins of man and the universe are taught as scientific fact, i.e.; "Humanists (evolutionists) regard the universe as self-existing and not created" (Humanist Manifesto I, Principle #1). The world exists by chance. The atheist's (humanist's) manifesto goes on to say "We can discover no purpose or providence for the human species . . . no deity will save us; we must save ourselves." Man's fulfillment, to the atheist, is when he no longer needs the idea of God. Life has no known purpose. Sin is a delusion. Faith in God is openly derided in most science classes.

The Christian child believes, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1, K.J.V.). The Bible goes on to say, "I have made the earth and created man upon it . . . " (Isaiah 45:12, K.J.V.).

To a child, God exists. God is the designer and creator of all things (all unbiased scientific facts support the Bible). How strong must a child be to disbelieve his teachers? His faith in
God is permanently crippled or it dies with atheistic evolution. The very foundation of a Christian’s faith is destroyed, and results in a devaluation of life, which makes abortion, suicide and euthanasia appear more acceptable.

3. Parents lose control of their child’s instruction in the public schools, yet they are clearly held accountable to God for that duty. Most parents have not been instructed in that responsibility by the church. This responsibility is true, no matter where we may choose to send our children.

4. The academic quality of most all public schools is highly inferior to most private and home schools as evidenced by the standard test scores. It is well known that public school teaching is less complete, more shallow and worst of all, focuses on behavior and feelings instead of academics. Forty percent of all public school teachers send their own children to private schools.

5. Drug and alcohol use are much more prevalent on most public school campuses. Both are said to be permissible in anti-substance abuse programs, if done in moderation. Young, inexperienced youth with raging hormones do not have that discipline, hence rampant abuse. Their solution: “don’t be judgmental, be tolerant.” Not good! That thinking could cost your child his/her soul!

6. Public school teens and even pre-teens face tremendous peer pressure to become sexually active. The schools teach, “just be sure to use condoms and be on the pill.” Result: Christian children face a double standard, with heavy peer pressure, many succumb, with tragic pregnancies, babies, lives and careers ruined. Enormous family pain results, often causing divorce.

7. Parents find they have far less control over their child’s friends and peers and the resulting influence on their child’s attitude toward sin, homosexuality, the occult, sex and drugs in the public schools.

8. Public school teachers are taught to be coaches, not teachers. They say children learn best from each other. Children are not taught to struggle, memorize, and learn the difficult disciplines; “just work on what you like best.” The number of students in each class is much higher in public schools -- 24-30 to 1 -- instead of 15 to 1 in most Christian schools. Obviously, the quality and efficiency of learning will be higher in private Christian schools and home schools.

9. Through state and federal assessment testing, students’ privacy is openly invaded, exposing them to become targeted
for curriculum or psychological "services" that, tragically, are
designed and intended to destroy their faith in God and their
Christian belief system.

10. The physical safety of Christian (and all) students is "at
great risk" in public schools, as gangs and on campus weapons
have become common on public school campuses, even in the
smallest of towns.

My 35 years as a teacher/administrator have proven to me just how incredibly
important it is to save our Christian children from the philosophy of atheistic humanism
and its destructive elimination from heaven, of our church children. The schools may
still change and work with us to clean up the deteriorating, crumbling system. It is
much like communism -- it is a failing system with leaders shouting its success from
the roof tops, even while it self-destructs. It is definitely self-destructing -- and
Christians can no longer afford to wait before rescuing their own children. Our
children's souls are at stake.

America must not just get vouchers and tax breaks for parents in private schools
-- those are good and necessary steps. We must go back to what worked best for
America. The only way to do this is to privatize all public education. Secularists,
atheists and homosexuals could have their own schools, but they could not force tax-
payers to subsidize their schools. Our system would be thoroughly reformed and
improved. Double taxation of Christians would cease! The present injustice must stop.

And what about Christian teachers in public schools? They are still very
essential. As adults that are strongly rooted in faith, they have a great influence upon
all kids, unlike Christian children who most often are too influenced by peer pressure to
serve as "missionaries in the snake pit." And, of course, as Christian schools grow,
more jobs will open up for Christian teachers who prefer the private sector.

Who is to blame for the public school mess we now have? To our school
personnel I would say, "We know you present to our children the best education you
possibly can. However, because our schools are state schools you can never teach our
children that there is a creator God; or that Jesus Christ is the Savior of all mankind;
or that sin destroys lives -- not fulfills lives; or that the Bible is God's Word and guide
to all mankind -- not just another famous book; or that all mankind will be judged by
the written Word of God, not by how good we may feel about ourselves."

We do not blame teachers or administrators -- though God knows they could stop
the spiritual rape of innocent children, if they saw clearly what is happening. We have
demonstrated exceptional compassion and tolerance toward our school friends, as a
Christian community. We will still not judge their intentions; neither will we ignore the
obvious. We all have a duty. Ours is to protect our children.

I must add that my comments are generally true of the vast majority of public
schools. We do realize there are small refuges of abnormal public schools - like
"fundamental" alternative schools, and a few led almost entirely by Christians. Parents
who have these opportunities are very fortunate, but part of a tiny minority.

What will CEE parents and chapters do? We will continue what we are
doing: seeking "common ground" on controversial issues; seeking "safe-passage"
of all K-12 children throughout the system unharmed spiritually and morally or academically stunted; organize Christians in every school district to become involved in their local schools, to oversee and insure the above objectives.

All this will be done with a spirit of reconciliation (II Cor. 5:18, N.K.J.). Christians are peacemakers always, whenever possible (Mt. 5:9, K.J.V.). Christians are urged to practice the Golden Rule (Luke 6:31, L.B.): "Treat others as you want them to treat you." Love always overcomes ill will.

We urge all Christian organizations and all churches to join in saving our Christian children. For those families who cannot or otherwise do not remove their children in favor of Christian schools or home-schooling, please begin a systematic teaching of your own children, in matters of faith and academics.

We pray you will mark your card with your vote YES or NO -- whether you agree with adding this national movement to CEE's current ministry. We must know from each of you who have prayed for us and supported CEE for so long. Your opinion will guide us. PLEASE send your card in with your enclosed, addressed return envelope. You vote COUNTS. Your support will make it possible.

It will cost plenty. It is an added ministry of enormous consequences, requiring denominational involvement, as well as all churches. There are 235,000 churches, including 155,000 evangelical churches. Just communications will cost a fortune!

Our current efforts will be greatly expanded. Getting the Bible curriculum in all 30,000 high schools (now in 300); and also our "CHRISTIAN/AMERICAN CULTURE" course in all high schools are priorities. Please PRAY for us, beloved. God seems to be expanding our borders of operation. He will also supply our needs. They have never been greater! Much PRAYER is needed.

I feel like I am driving a huge wheat combine that is reaping a huge field for harvest, but the gas gauge shows almost on empty. The field is ready! We must get the gas to do all of this. God is able; success depends upon whether you agree with me on this outreach to save our 20 million church kids and all our public school children.

RESCUE 2010 is ready to begin! That gives us 12 years to fill our current Christian schools and start a school in every church facility by 2010. If you agree, I will be answering all your questions very soon. Please ask the Lord to guide you in your part in making possible the greatest Christian movement in this century and the next.

I can hardly wait to hear from you! God can do all things for "with God all things are possible." God is giving us all an expanded VISION.

Just as we separate the church from our government; and business from government, we must now separate schools from government!

Your Christian brother, who believes,

Bob Simonds, Th.D.

P.S. Over for a major solution for your own young children!
Dear American Family Association Friend and Supporter,

Your steadfast support of American Family Association gives me confidence in writing you today. You have proven time and time again that you want to be INVOLVED in the work of reforming a culture in which our children can live and thrive.

God will bless you for the sacrifices you make to carry out this critically important work.

I write you today because a pro-homosexuality bombshell has been fired into our children’s elementary schools. It’s designed to accomplish three goals:

1. Subvert our children’s innocence.
2. Turn them from the beliefs and values you hold dear.
3. Indoctrinate them with false moral teachings.

Before I tell you about this bombshell and your AFA’s response to it, let me assure you that your American Family Association will NOT respond by getting into a shouting match with these people or resorting to name calling.

However, for the sake of our children, WE MUST RESPOND!

God has ordained PARENTS as the primary teachers of His children — not the so-called secular experts in the morally bankrupt education unions! (Thank God for those brave Christian teachers who work in the public schools every day. Without them things would be even worse.)

With that in mind, your AFA has crafted a REASONED, COMPASSIONATE and CHARITABLE response to the gay movement.
But I need your help to implement that response!

Will you help me protect our children?

Will you continue to support AFA's staunch opposition to the normalization of homosexuality in our society?

In truth, I am proud to work with you in this struggle. I have agonized over my decision to put YOU and your AFA in the front lines of this battle. In so doing I subject you to being called part of the "radical, extremist, Christian right" and ask you to accept being labeled an "intolerant bigot."

All this you bear without complaining.

You understand that our fight is not against individuals (after all, who among us has never sinned?), but against something far more sinister. You understood that this issue is a main front in the war for the soul of America!

Sadly, this is a battle that will not go away.

Today I am desperately hoping you will help again as we work to protect our children!

Here's what's happening.

First, two women - Helen Cohen and Debra Chasnoff - have teamed up to produce a pro-homosexual video called "It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School." Aimed at our children, their message is:

Don't listen to your ignorant, bigoted parents when they talk about homosexuality. Let us teach you.

As evidence, let me quote from the video itself:

- Chasnoff has this to say about her video, 'What's clear in the film is that the younger the kids, the more open they were. ... If we could start doing this kind of education in kindergarten, first grade, second grade, we'd have a better generation.'

- The principal of an elementary school says on the video: "I don't think that it's appropriate that values only be taught at home. There are social values as well, there are community values."

Right now Chasnoff is working to get PBS stations nationwide to air "It's Elementary." In a letter she sent out asking people to help her, Chasnoff wrote:
"We can assume that the right wing will continue its vitriolic efforts to censor IT'S ELEMENTARY and will do everything in its power to try and stop it from airing."

Well I have a surprise for Chasnoff.

AFA is NOT going to waste time and money and energy to stop PBS stations from airing her show. Here's how.

Instead, we're going to use our homes and our churches to give our children the TRUTH about homosexuality.

Experts here at American Family Association have made a video entitled "Suffer the Children." Our video exposes how this powerful pro-homosexual propaganda film is targeting our children.

"Suffer the Children" is thorough, factual and biblically sound, yet it is CHARITABLE and never mean-spirited.

In my opinion, the best way to counteract the damage radical members of the gay movement inflict on our children is, not to shout back at them,

... but to go to our children ourselves and give them the objective truth about homosexuality. And to do so with LOVE and COMPASSION in our hearts!

Using our "Suffer the Children" video, your AFA intends to:

1. Distribute it FREE to the youth ministers of over 165,000 churches across the country.
2. Make it available to AFA's MILLION+ supporters.
3. Offer it to the principals of 64,735 elementary schools.
4. Offer it to libraries all across America.
5. Offer bulk orders for churches.
6. Put a transcript of "Suffer the Children" on the Internet.

This is a PRO-ACTIVE way to counteract the confusion spread by radical elements within the homosexual community.

I firmly believe this is the best way to protect our children and help form them according to God's divine laws.

Now that you know what we're going to do,
... will you help your AFA do it?

It will cost American Family Association well over $250,000 to accomplish the six tasks I noted above (mostly in video production and shipping costs).

Right now, your AFA doesn’t have that money in our budget.

The truth is, it wasn’t until I learned about the plans for ‘It’s Elementary’ that I decided to take this PRO-ACTIVE step. Since no funds were earmarked for it in our 1999 budget, I had to use money set aside for other AFA projects to fund this one.

Now I need to make up the difference. Trouble is, the past months have not been good ones financially for your AFA.

That’s why I’m counting on you to make a contribution today. I know I’m not ordinarily this blunt about our need for financial help; but these aren’t ordinary times for us.

Please be as generous as you can. Do so for the sake of our children and the future of our nation. Thank you and God bless you.

Sincerely,

Donald E. Wildmon, President
American Family Association

PS: In appreciation for your help today I want to send you a copy of our “Suffer the Children“ video. Unfortunately I can’t afford to do so unless you’re able to help with this project. So if you give $25 or more to AFA today, I’ll send you “Suffer the Children.” Just check the box on your reply. God bless.

PPS: You’ll notice I’m not asking you to send anyone a postcard this month. Instead, please send your AFA a contribution!
THE PARENTAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT: GUIDING PUBLIC POLICY

1. The right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children shall not be infringed.
2. The legislature shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article. (actual wording)

THE PARENTAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT DEFINES THE DEBATE:

- The parental rights debate boils down to this question: *Who should decide what's in the best interests of children? Their parents or the government?* The common-sense answer is found in the Parental Rights Amendment: "*The right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children shall not be infringed.*" This fundamental principle ought to guide any discussion of parental rights issues.

- The Amendment keeps the debate focused on the central issue.

- "If someone came into your yard and ripped up your geraniums, replacing them with daffodils, you wouldn't debate the relative merits of geraniums and daffodils. You would tell them to get out of your yard. Once you start debating the relative merits of geraniums and daffodils, you have already given up the central issue: Whose yard is this? Similarly, the issue is not whether schools should teach sexual abstinence or hand out condoms. The issue is: Whose children are these?" (Dr. Thomas Sowell)

- The chief concern of parents is whether public policy will help or hinder their efforts to raise their children. Parents work hard to ensure that their children receive a "safe passage" through childhood and adolescence. We need the Parental Rights Amendment to keep public policy on the side of parents.

- We don't need to lecture parents on the right answer to the problems they face. American parents by-and-large already know those answers. We should promote the right of parents to answer these questions.

- The only real argument is between those who think parenting is an optional feature of society, replaceable by state institutions, and those who believe active parenting is the single biggest contributor to family health and therefore needs to be strongly encouraged by society.
A "SELF-EVIDENT" TRUTH:

- Our Founding Fathers spoke of certain "self-evident" truths upon which our nation was founded. Surely, the notion that parents ought to have the primary responsibility for raising children was just such a "self-evident" truth.

- Because this common sense notion was taken for granted, the Founders saw no need to make explicit the rights of parents.

- Now, perhaps, some of these truths are no longer so "self-evident." Perhaps some common sense notions are no longer so common. It is time to codify the rights of parents by enacting the Parental Rights Amendment.

WHERE LIMITED GOVERNMENT MEETS FAMILY VALUES:

- The Parental Rights Amendment is a simple way to transfer authority and responsibility from government back to families — *where it belongs*.

- Government has gradually assumed responsibility for duties traditionally carried out by the family. The family has been weakened, and parental rights have been eroded. By making explicit the irreplaceable role of parents, the Parental Rights Amendment limits government and strengthens families.

- The Amendment is a populist initiative rooted in faith in the ability of people to make the right decisions about their lives and the lives of those dearest to them.

THE PEOPLE’S MESSAGE:

- Enacting the Parental Rights Amendment to the constitution via a statewide vote of the people will send a message to public officials — *loud and clear* — that parental rights must be respected.

- Legislators should continue to enact statutory protections for parental rights. But putting the Parental Rights Amendment on a statewide ballot will carry the debate *directly to the people*. The people ought to be heard on an issue this critical.

- A statewide vote of the people for the Parental Rights Amendment will help public officials come to understand the importance of appointing judges and other officials who respect family values.

CLARIFYING THE DEBATE:

- Submitting a constitutional amendment to a statewide vote is a powerful way to stimulate a public debate. This discussion will generate a contemporary legislative history of the Amendment, which will clarify its intent. Traditional limits to parental rights as established by the courts and common-sense will be highlighted.
THE AMENDMENT WILL GUIDE PUBLIC POLICY:

- Constitutional amendments serve to establish a consensus on the importance of a basic right. To move forward on questions of the rights and responsibilities of parents, it helps to make explicit our first principles. By passing the Parental Rights Amendment, society will be better equipped to deal with specific issues.

- Like most constitutional amendments, the Parental Rights Amendment is a simple statement of a basic right. Constitutional amendments stipulate destinations; they do not draw detailed maps.

- The First Amendment does not say how to protect free speech or the free exercise of religion. Nor does the Parental Rights Amendment say how to protect parental rights. Constitutional amendments don’t provide the answer to every specific policy question. That is a function properly carried out by the people through the democratic process.

- The First Amendment serves as the guiding principle for free speech and religious freedom questions. The Parental Rights Amendment will help to ensure that all public policies and future proposals will be measured against an appropriate yardstick.

- A debate on a free speech issue without reference to the First Amendment is hard to imagine. The parental rights debate lacks such a reference.

PARENTS WILL BE INSPIRED TO BECOME MORE INVOLVED:

- Greater parental involvement will improve children’s welfare. A child’s most important need is to have an active, loving parent who will serve as the protector of that child’s rights.

- The Parental Rights Amendment will spark a serious discussion of the responsibilities as well as the rights of parents. This is a welcome step to encouraging parents to become more involved.

- Policy makers across the political spectrum are calling for more parental involvement — but our laws continue to ignore parental rights.

- When their rights are respected, parents will naturally become more involved and more confident in claiming and exercising their responsibility for their children.

- Parents instinctively feel that they should have the right and the responsibility to raise their children. The Amendment will provide legal reinforcement for this natural instinct and encourage them to work for policies that support their parental role.

- To say that parents have the primary role in raising children is to say that parents are irreplaceable. The Parental Rights Amendment sends a message to public officials that parental rights must be honored, and a message to parents that parental responsibilities must be fulfilled.
THE AMENDMENT WILL HELP ENACT MORE PROTECTIONS:

- The Amendment provides that "The legislature shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article." This provides an open invitation to the legislature to enact remedies in accord with the parental rights principle.

- A high-profile statewide debate over the Amendment will significantly strengthen these legislative efforts.

THE AMENDMENT CODIFIES U.S. SUPREME COURT CASES:

- The Parental Rights Amendment is a codification of two U.S. Supreme Court cases from the 1920s (Meyer v. Nebraska and Pierce v. Society of Sisters) in which the Court first established the right of parents "to direct the upbringing and education" of their children.

- The Meyer-Pierce parental rights doctrine was recently used in court to prohibit condom distribution without parental consent. In December, 1993, a New York state appellate court in Alfonso v. Fernandez overturned New York City's condom distribution program. The court ruled that distributing condoms in public schools without parental consent was a violation of the constitutional rights of parents. The New York court based its decision on the U.S. Supreme Court's Meyer-Pierce parental rights doctrine.

BUT SOME JUDGES DON'T UPHOLD PARENTAL RIGHTS:

- While the Meyer-Pierce cases have never been overturned, some judges do not respect the parental rights doctrine.

- For example, the decision in Alfonso was a narrow 3-2 victory for parents.

PARENTS NEED A CONSTITUTIONAL REMEDY:

- Parents shouldn't have to engage in expensive and time-consuming litigation in court to protect their rights.

- The Parental Rights Amendment will ensure that parents have an explicit right in their state constitution — not just a court-interpreted right.

- A constitutional amendment will revitalize and clarify the parental rights doctrine.

- The alternative to a constitutional remedy is piecemeal enactment of statutory remedies. These are by nature only reactions to infringements.

- The Parental Rights Amendment is a proactive remedy that recognizes that usurpation of parental rights is a systemic problem found throughout government bureaucracies best addressed by making explicit the core principle.

- The Amendment is also a forward-looking proposal that will help defend against future proposals which may threaten parental rights.
RESOLVED:
Should laws be passed to make English the official language of our federal, state and local governments in America?

Please mark your Language Ballot by placing either the YES or NO sticker here.

Ballot #
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Registered to:
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U.S. Senator Edward M. Kennedy
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☐ YES! I agree -- it's time to make English our official language.
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I will help fight the Arizona lawsuit and support the drive to make English our official language by supporting U.S.ENGLISH, Inc. I am enclosing my contribution of:

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Margaret Quigley
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Please make your check payable to U.S.ENGLISH, Inc. today. Thank you.
Here's what's happening to us as Americans because Congress refuses to make English the official language of the U.S.A.

- 375 Voting Districts are now required by the federal government to print voting ballots in foreign languages. You pay for this unnecessary duplication -- with your tax dollars.

- In California, public schools can teach in 42 different languages ... yet students are not compelled to learn or speak English. 32 other states have no English requirement either.

- Many jurisdictions now issue driver tests and licenses in multiple languages, with extra costs all paid for by taxpayers.

What kind of nation will we be when we, as taxpayers, are forced to build our own Tower of Babel?

U.S. ENGLISH, Inc. was founded in 1983 by former California Senator S.I. Hayakawa, an American of Japanese heritage and a specialist in semantics who had grown alarmed by legislation that discouraged new Americans from learning the common language of the United States -- English. To this day, Congress has not yet passed our "Language of Government Act" to give our common language, English, legal status. Worse, government employees in Arizona are now filing suit to throw out our Constitutional Amendment which requires English to be spoken by state employees.

Your support of U.S. ENGLISH will help carry on the fight launched by the late Senator and force Congress to adopt English as the official language of our government. We urge you to protect the unity and common sense of a common language for America by joining with us and supporting U.S. ENGLISH today.
Secondary Source Materials

(Materials about the Right and public education)
AN OPEN LETTER TO MY FELLOW AFRICAN AMERICAN CLERGY

by Rev. Tim McDonald, PFAW Board Member, First Iconium Baptist Church, Atlanta, Georgia

Earlier this year, in a hotel conference room in Washington, the executive director of the Christian Coalition announced what he immodestly called a "bold" new plan to promote racial harmony and provide for America's poor. A key part of that agenda, a so-called "Congress on Racial Reconciliation," was called for Baltimore in May, 1997. As a clergyman who has had experience with the Christian Coalition in my home town of Atlanta, I would say that their new plan is bold in only one sense: political.

I can think of no better word to describe such a breathtakingly deceptive media strategy. But when it comes to substance--to policy, to real outreach, and even to motives--I must confess to a skepticism borne of experience.

My reasons for doubting the Christian Coalition's sincerity are three. First, history. For years, the Christian Coalition has been at the forefront of the Religious Right political movement. They've promoted a hard-line, right wing agenda that has been frankly at odds with the interests of African Americans, and hostile to the interests of the poor. In the last several years, the Christian Coalition has: opposed every civil rights bill introduced since 1991; supported efforts to slash welfare; supported cuts in Medicaid; worked to undercut Head Start; called for the abolition of the Department of Education; campaigned to end federal family planning assistance; backed efforts to get rid of real sex education programs; and worked to drain funds from already strapped public schools. All told, this group brings a track record that makes me doubt their leaders' sincerity.

My second reason to doubt the Christian Coalition's intentions is their current political agenda. Take a look at the fine print. The group's leaders want to abolish federal support for legal services for the poor, denying millions of poor and minority Americans their access to the courthouse, and they're renewing their call for a diversion of public school funds to private schools. Also, after working last year to gut welfare, the Christian Coalition now wants to use a tax credit scheme to funnel money to select nonprofit organizations and churches, so that we can distribute funds to poor people, and try to convert them along the way.

The third reason I doubt the Christian Coalition is because I've seen these folks in action here in Atlanta. A few years ago, the group's political organizers began circulating in the city's housing projects recruiting African American welfare mothers to testify before the Georgia legislature in support of their school vouchers proposal. They promised these women that vouchers would mean a quality education for their children, in the north end of Atlanta, home to the white upper middle class. But what they never told them was that the voucher they were proposing was too small to ever pay for a private school education. And they didn't mention that the only "choice" to be made in this so-called program of school choice, was the one that the schools would make in deciding which students to take.

So here's the point: the Christian Coalition is using the language of racial reconciliation for a much more partisan political purpose. The group's white leaders have their eyes cynically set on last November's exit polls, which showed that 85 percent of African Americans gave their vote to Bill Clinton. That's as powerful a force as any in the American electorate, and the Christian Coalition wants to peel some of those votes away for their candidates and their extremist policies.
So they talk about racial reconciliation. And they describe their voucher plan as an effort to "reform," not gut, the public schools. And they say they want to get rid of legal services for the poor because it "promotes divorce." And they defend slashing welfare by saying they're doing it to help the poor. And so on.

Well I say to them, "shame on you, Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed," and "shame on the Christian Coalition." Race relations are too strained, and tensions are too high to be playing politics. Instead of seeking to exploit these issues, Pat Robertson and his organization ought to try to help us strengthen our public schools, not abandon them.

So my fellow clergy, I urge, I plead with you, when the Christian Coalition comes to sell their program, don't buy it.

"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."
-Martin Luther King, Jr.
Teacher of the year gives vouchers a failing grade

BY BOB PETERSON

One recent winter morning, during the worst cold spell of the year, I found some caulk in my basement and took it to school. I teach at La Escuela Fratney in Milwaukee, which was built in 1903. My classroom’s third-floor windows are drafty, and on windy days, the kids who sit near the window often wear jackets to keep warm.

On this particular day, the wind chill was minus forty degrees. The big news—apart from the weather and the Superbowl—was that a Madison judge had declared the expansion of Milwaukee’s school-voucher program unconstitutional. I was relieved by the news. Republicans around the country have been pushing the idea of using publicly funded vouchers to send kids to private school. And Wisconsin has been in the forefront of this effort.

Vouchers are a top item on the conservative agenda. The religious right wants to use them to tear down the wall of separation between church and state. By using public funds for private, parochial schools, religious conservatives strike a blow against secular, public education. Vouchers serve that purpose, just as they serve the broader conservative movement’s goal of cutting government entitlements and denying government responsibility for social services.

For sixteen years, I’ve taught public school in Milwaukee’s central city, and I’ve been active in school reform. I know that vouchers won’t seal the windows at La Escuela Fratney.

Vouchers have been synonymous with Milwaukee ever since 1990, when Wisconsin began an experiment allowing low-income children in the city to use publicly funded vouchers to attend nonreligious private schools inside city boundaries. The courts upheld that original program. In the 1996-1997 school year, some 1,600 Milwaukee students received roughly $4,400 each to attend nonreligious private schools.

In 1995, the Wisconsin legislature expanded the Milwaukee voucher program to include religious schools and to allow as many as 15,000 students to take part, but the state suspended the expansion because of a lawsuit charging that it violates the state constitution. Until this fall, when Cleveland began a low-income voucher program that also included religious schools. Milwaukee had the only voucher experiment in the country. (Cleveland’s program is also being challenged in the courts, but was allowed to proceed until a final ruling.)

One of the big myths of the school-choice movement is that private schools are always better than public schools.

But in Milwaukee, vouchers gave rise to some fly-by-night private institutions.

The schools that initially took part in the voucher program were longstanding private institutions that, over the years, had built an infrastructure and a reputation attractive to tuition-paying students. Then the project started some new private schools—and they began to fail.

Two voucher schools closed unexpectedly this year amid charges of inflated enrollment figures and missing or fraudulent financial records. Two others were unable to pay their staff regularly, leading to an exodus of teachers and students. A fifth school closed during the winter.

One of the schools that closed, the Milwaukee Preparatory School, may have been obliged to return up to $300,000 due to exaggerated enrollment figures. But the state could not complete an audit because of missing financial records. The school’s founder skipped town. He was eventually arrested in Texas and charged with criminal fraud. Charges are still pending. The school had claimed in September 1995 that 175 out of its 200 students carried vouchers. By the time the school closed in February, only eighty students remained. Nine out of the twelve teachers had quit because the school hadn’t paid them.

The director of another school, Exit Education Center, was charged with felony fraud for falsifying attendance records. During a John Doe proceeding, the school’s former office manager told authorities that the director ordered her to fix the books, and threatened her wages if she did not comply. The director has twice failed to appear at court on the charges and a bench warrant has been issued.

In Milwaukee, the conservatives who clamor for higher standards and public-school accountability promoted a private voucher program with virtually no accountability measures. The private schools are not required to have a board of directors, adhere to open meetings or records laws, have grievance procedures for staff or students, or even administer state assessment tests.

It is harder to get a liquor license or set up a corner gas station in Milwaukee than it is to start a private school.

“Teacher of the year gives vouchers a failing grade” by Bob Peterson, a fifth-grade teacher at La Escuela Fratney, a Milwaukee pubic school, is an editor of the education newspaper Rethinking Schools and the 1995-1996 Wisconsin Elementary Teacher of the Year. He would like to thank Barbara Minzer for assistance in research and writing this article.
It is harder to get a liquor license or set up a corner gas station in Milwaukee than it is to start a private school.

Ohio Governor George Voinovich. Conservative foundations have provided all-important funding.

Anyone looking into the voucher movement soon comes across two names: Michael Joyce of the Bradley Foundation and Clint Bolick of the Institute for Justice.

The Milwaukee-based Bradley Foundation, whose assets of $461 million make it the country's most powerful right-wing foundation, has poured millions of dollars into voucher initiatives. Bolick is a libertarian who is perhaps best known as the man who dubbed Lani Guinier "the quota queen."
Vouchers are a diversion from the real problems in our urban schools: class size, inadequate facilities, and staff training.

Wisconsin citizens of varying religious faiths to support schools with their tax dollars that proselytize students and attempt to inculcate them with beliefs contrary to their own. We do not object to the existence of parochial schools or that they attempt to spread their beliefs through their schools. They just cannot do it with state tax dollars.”

Voucher supporters had argued that the expanded Milwaukee voucher program would not provide government support to religion but would merely help parents choose the best schools for their children. Higginbotham used promotional materials from those schools to dismiss that view. “The continuing purpose of St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church and Schools is to go and tell the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ for the conversion of unbelievers and the strengthening of believers in faith and Christian living,” reads one pamphlet.

As important as the church-state issues are, they are not the only concern. Vouchers are yet another diversion from the real problems in our failing urban schools. It’s easy to chant the mantra of vouchers, as if they could magically transform education. It’s much harder to do something about the real needs of urban public-school students.

As a classroom teacher, I am less concerned with competition from private schools than I am with my immediate problems: class size, inadequate facilities, and staff training.

Vouchers only aggravate the already troubling reality that our schools do not serve all children equally well. We have good schools, but they are clustered in affluent communities. There are huge differences between the schools in privileged suburbs and those in urban districts populated by low-income students and children of color.

Vouchers would take precious tax dollars from public schools and divert them to private schools. Milwaukee Superintendent Robert Jansky estimated that if the Milwaukee voucher program had been allowed to expand as planned by the legislature, the Milwaukee public schools could have lost as much as $100 million in funding over four years. They also make it possible for the Wisconsin legislature to pretend it is doing something about reforming the Milwaukee public schools while it ignores them.

Jonathan Kozol, author of Savage Inequalities and other books on education, said it best: “My own faith leads me to defend the genuinely ethical purposes of public education as a terrific American tradition, and to point to what it’s done at its best—not simply for the very rich, but for the average American citizen. We need to place the voucher advocates, the enemies of public schools, where they belong: in the position of those who are subverting something decent in America.”
Barbara Jeffries' never liked the idea of school vouchers. As president of the Ohio Association of Public School Employees (OAPSE) Local 181 and an executive board member of OAPSE/AFSCME Local 4, she worried that vouchers—which use public money to send children to private schools—would benefit few at the expense of many.

Then, in 1996, the issue hit home, Jeffries' home. The Cleveland Public Schools became the second school district in the country to implement a voucher program. And the drain on the public school budget from the vouchers killed full-day kindergarten in the public schools and cut other programs.

That left Jeffries and her family with a tough decision: Jeffries' granddaughter Essence hadn't had the benefit of preschool. Her family felt strongly she needed full-day kindergarten. The only way to get it was through the voucher program. Her family would have to enroll her.

It's been a year and a half since Essence began her private education, and her grandmother is not pleased. Jeffries, a 28-year employee of the East Cleveland public schools, now wonders whether the tuition grants aren't a wolf in sheep's clothing, preying on the fears of parents. "What parent doesn't want the best education for their child?" she asks. "What parent wants a child left behind?"

None, of course. But across the country, politicians and activists are promoting school vouchers as a way to give middle- and low-income families the same choice in schools as wealthy families. They also contend that by promoting competition for students, public school systems will be forced to improve.

When the time came to make a decision about first grade, Jeffries and her daughter decided to give the program another chance. Then came the next setback. Essence lost her school placement and had to switch to a Catholic school, the only voucher school with openings.

There are also expenses that Jeffries never imagined. "Vouchers are supposed to benefit poor children," she says, "but there are expensive uniforms and shoes, and fees for after-school care." (After-school care is often free or heavily subsidized in public schools.) Then there are the logistical problems of going to a school far from home, requiring extra driving or transportation expenses.

Without her financial support, Jeffries says, Essence wouldn't be able to participate in the voucher program.

Vouchers are costly not just to the families of voucher students, but also to the public. According to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the Cleveland program cost $6.45 million—all of which was taken from state funds set aside for disadvantaged students. Was that money used to reimburse private schools for new students who left the public schools? Only partially. A majority of the voucher students, 67 per-

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PRIVATE SCHOOL DAZE

Privatization comes to the classroom as school vouchers drain students—and jobs—from public schools.

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In Cleveland, however, Jeffries has found that the promises of vouchers are far from reality and have meant one disappointment after another. She now believes proponents of vouchers aren't concerned with better education for all students, but with an end to public education and, with it, an end to public jobs.

No Choice. Jeffries' first disappointment came when the very idea of school choice disappeared: Essence could not attend the school her family selected and was forced to go to another school in which the teachers were less experienced.
cent, were already in private schools or were forced out of public schools by the closure of full-day kindergarten. In other words, the vouchers drove full-day kindergartners out of public schools and were a bonanza for parents who had already chosen private schools.

Had the money set aside for the voucher program gone to public schools, more than 4,000 children, 70 percent of public school kindergartners could have attended full-day programs, according to the AFT. As it was, 834 Cleveland private-school kindergartners had the advantage of full-day instruction — at 2½ times the cost of the full-day program previously run by the public schools.

OUT IN THE COLD. To committed parents and grandparents like Jeffries, the most important issue concerning voucher programs is improved education and student performance. Unfortunately, Jeffries doesn’t believe Essence is any better off than her older granddaughter who is in public school.

While Cleveland has yet to compare public school performance to that of voucher schools, independent researchers in Milwaukee have turned up no learning improvement for voucher students over public school students after six years of experience with vouchers. One explanation might be that private schools in both Cleveland and Milwaukee do not have to meet the same criteria as public schools. They don’t have to have the same academic standards or evidence of achievement in their programs. Private schools are also free to exclude special needs children. In fact, four of Cleveland’s participating private schools were brand new, with no track record at all.

As independently run schools, there is...
no accountability for services, either. In Milwaukee, two of the city’s private voucher schools shut down in the middle of the school year, leaving students literally standing outside their doors.

**ATTACK ON JOBS.** OAPSE State Vice Pres. Lynda Mobley, a bus driver with the Bellevue Public Schools, thinks Jeffries has hit the nail on the head when she says vouchers are an outright attack on public schools and public jobs.

“Vouchers are an immense danger, and people don’t realize it,” warns Mobley. “People believe that additional funding will cover private school vouchers, that it’s not coming from public schools. Not true.” Mobley is particularly worried about the future of public education since Ohio Gov. George Voinovich (R) has promised to extend the voucher program throughout the state.

“The idea of vouchers is that if public schools can’t do the job, take their money away and let private schools do it,” Mobley observes. “That creates a self-fulfilling prophecy: If you continue to take money away from public schools, they’ll continue to deteriorate. The obvious outcome is fewer public schools and fewer public jobs.”

For the past two years, Mobley has put her energy into Total Quality Education (TQE), a program that she believes can improve public education. Through TQE, all employees make a commitment to provide the best possible service to their clients in the education process, whether those clients are students or fellow staff members. By improving every step of the education process — from maintenance, to transportation, to education — the entire school system will improve.

Mobley serves on the statewide TQE committee, which was started by the Ohio Department of Education. Her role on the committee, she says, is to keep reminding people of the important role of classified (non-teaching) employees in the school environment. Her primary job in training fellow school employees, she says, is empowering them to make the schools better.

“Safety is a big issue for many parents,” she notes. “Order in a school must be present not just in the classroom where teachers hold responsibility, but in the hallways, cafeteria and on school buses, where classified employees are responsible. All school employees need the support and resources to do their jobs.”

There are other programs, in addition to TQE, that are making improvements in the public schools. One, the Success for All program, which was developed at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md., seeks to improve reading levels of disadvantaged children. In its 10 years of existence, Success for All programs at public schools nationwide have helped fifth graders read a full grade level higher than their non-program counterparts. For the same amount of money that Cleveland spent on its voucher program in 1996, Success for All could have been implemented in all 80 of Cleveland’s public elementary schools, serving approximately 40,000 students.

Whatever the program, Mobley believes that improving public schools means fewer parents will be interested in private schools. As for Jeffries, she’s not sure where Essence will attend school next year, but she and her daughter are considering transferring her to the neighborhood public school.

There’s no question, however, where Jeffries stands on the subject of allocating money for education. “The answer to better education for disadvantaged students,” she says, “is to put money into the poor public schools, not the private. Use the money to educate the masses of children, rather than a few.”

*By Catherine Barnett Alexander*
Cleveland’s Voucher Plan
Unequal and Unconstitutional

On June 28, 1995, the Ohio General Assembly established a “Tuition Scholarship Program” specifically tailored for the Cleveland School District. The program would, over the next two fiscal years alone, use over five million dollars in public money intended for disadvantaged students to fund sectarian education. By early 1986, implementation of the plan had begun, and almost immediately thereafter, a group of parents, clergy and teachers filed suit (Gatton et al. v. Goff et al.), challenging the program under the Establishment Clause of the United States Constitution and various articles of the Ohio State Constitution. (A second suit challenging the scholarship program, Simmons-Harris v. Goff, was consolidated with Gatton.)

Arguments in the case were heard in the Court of Common Pleas for Franklin County, Ohio, on June 24. With sectarian schools and parents intervening on behalf of the defendants, and a diverse group of organizations filing amicus briefs in support of the plaintiffs’ challenge, the stage is now set in a case that is being watched nationally as a bellwether for church-state separation in education (see box). Simply stated, if Cleveland’s voucher plan survives a constitutional challenge, the lights will turn green for religious school voucher initiatives around the country.

The scholarship program allows 1500 low-income children in grades K-3, who reside within the Cleveland School District and who are chosen by state lottery from the pool of applicants, to attend participating sectarian and nonsectarian private schools located within the Cleveland School District, or public schools in districts adjoining Cleveland’s. Once enrolled, a student may continue to receive scholarships through the eighth grade. Up to half of the scholarships, moreover, may be awarded to students already attending a private school in Cleveland. The state grants amount to 90% of the school tuition or $2500, whichever is less, for lowest income children, and 75% for higher income children. (Participating private schools agree not to charge scholarship students tuitions in excess of 10% of the scholarship amount.)

The Ohio General Assembly also authorized tutorial assistance grants to be used by an equal number of students who remain in Cleveland District public schools; the percentages remain the same, but the upper limit is $500. (These grants are not challenged in Gatton.)

In January 1996, 1500 students, 375 of whom were already in private schools, were awarded scholarships at 90% of tuition. By February, 54 private schools were approved to enroll these students in September. At least 44 of these schools are sectarian (mostly Catholic), four are tiny pre-school programs, and six will open for the first time in September, never having taught a child (of those six, four appear to have sectarian ties). That most of the schools are sectarian could hardly have come as a surprise, since most of the private schools within the Cleveland district are sectarian. No public schools in adjacent
Cleveland’s Voucher Plan...
Continued from Front Page

school districts have opted to participate in the program. This could hardly have come as a surprise either, but more about that later.

Cleveland’s program is dubbed a “pilot project.” Since it is not limited in duration, no provision exists for extending it to other school districts, and nothing as yet indicates how and by whom the program will be evaluated, it is not clear what this program is a pilot project for. Indeed, if the program is a “demonstration” of anything, it is of the legal strategy on religious school vouchers mapped out by the Institute for Justice and other likeminded groups, and now being played out in Cleveland, in other poor urban school districts across the country, and on other legislative and legal fronts.

Mindful that the courts are not patient with ingenious plans for channeling state aid to sectarian schools, the Institute for Justice has this to say about crafting school choice plans that include sectarian schools (School Choice: Answers to the Most Frequently Asked Legal Questions, by Clint Bolick and Richard D. Komer):

---Language is important. In particular, wording emphasizing that school choice is about opportunities for children—not subsidies for private schools—will help the legal defense. Programs that expand opportunities for the educationally disadvantaged often enjoy special judicial deference.

---Programs that have survived First Amendment challenges share three essential features:

"The decision of which school to choose is made by parents or students, not the state...."

"The program does not create a financial incentive to attend private schools...."

"The program does not create an ongoing state presence in religiously affiliated schools."
Cleveland’s Voucher Plan...

The briefs filed by the state and various private schools intervening in support of the voucher plan follow this strategy to its fault. They are replete with references to the disaster that is the Cleveland public school system, to the higher student achievement rates of the district’s sectarian schools, and to the heroic response of Cleveland’s private schools to the city’s educational disaster—private schools are allegedly turning away full-paying candidates on their own waiting lists to enroll scholarship students. The scholarship program, we are told, is not intended to rescue sectarian schools. According to the state, it is intended to provide Cleveland’s school children—the majority of whom are poor, minority children—with an educational alternative to the city’s failing, segregated, public schools.

Legal principles aside, several awkward questions of fact immediately arise. First, is the matter of the waiting lists. The Cleveland Plain Dealer had this to say on April 28 about the schools participating in the voucher program (reported in the May Letter to Friends of the Center for Education Reform, a voucher proponent): “Most schools are reporting vacancies based on next year’s enrollment projections and current staffing levels. But a few schools plan to expand by September—they account for 354 openings....”

The Luther Memorial School asks for “everyone’s help in the recruiting of students for next school year”—especially in grades K-3—and offers a $100 tuition reduction to parents for each student they recruit. Which is it, then? Are the teeming waiting lists being held at bay, or are low enrollments, not to mention as yet unopened schools—being bolstered by state-subsidized students?

Second, is the matter of the state financing privatization in the name of providing an educational alternative for Cleveland’s poor and minority students, with all that will eventually mean for public education (not to speak of lost jobs and other resources) in the city. If the state education department solicited or considered other proposals to deal with Cleveland’s failing public schools—especially proposals that did not involve putting itself and the public out of the education business—it has not touted them. Also untold are the frankly dismal performance results some of the sectarian schools that will receive vouchers report on the required Assurance Compliance and Scholarship Program Parent Information Forms. Of course, a few of the schools cannot report any performance results at all, since they have never yet educated a child; and from what we can tell many of the other schools haven’t even bothered to complete that part of the form. (Since the public will not be able to storm a private school board meeting and demand some answers, we can...
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only hope the government regulators are there in its place.)

Most awkward fact of all, however: If the state education officials have an answer to how creaming off students and funds from public schools is going to improve education for the majority of Cleveland’s poor and minority children, we would like to hear it. Not answering this question in the absence of hard data is one thing. But now the data are coming in, and they do not look good for voucher proponents’ claims of carrying the torch for equal opportunity. As one example, Bruce Fuller and Richard F. Elmore of Harvard’s Graduate School of Education have just assembled the most up-to-date empirical results yet collected of school choice plans (Who Chooses? Who Loses?, New York: Teachers College Press, 1996). Here are two of the four propositions that emerge from the specific findings in the book: (1) "Increasing educational choice is likely to increase separation of students by race, social class, and cultural background." (2) "Greater choice in public education is unlikely, by itself, to increase either the variety of programs available to students or the overall performance of schools.”

"Metropolitan choice plans,” the editors conclude after sifting through the independent studies in the book, "are likely to provide enhanced opportunities for inner-city parents and students who have a strong achievement orientation but would further isolate parents and students whose expectations are less well formed and whose knowledge of how to take advantage of complex choice schemes is limited.” (The Educational Policy amicus brief, coordinated by PEARL and filed in Gatto, elaborates the implications of these and other findings; please ask us for a copy.)

It’s easy to see how Cleveland’s voucher plan will help sectarian schools and those parents who want to place their children in religious schools. But what about the majority of Cleveland’s poor children left behind?

At the legal heart of the matter is the question voucher proponents wish we wouldn’t ask: How can the state of Cleveland’s public school system ever be a justification for giving up our First Amendment Rights?

Ohio’s Tuition Scholarship Program directly advances religion by funneling state aid to pay for classroom instruction at educational institutions whose mission is pervasively religious. And that violates the Establishment Clause. Some voucher proponents—most notably the intervenors from the Hanna Perkins School and others—would have us believe that the sectarian schools in the program are not really all that sectarian.

Well, this will come as big news to the writers of the schools’ own mission statements: For one example, the majority of participating sectarian schools belong to the Diocese of Cleveland. Here is what the Diocese’s Graded Course of Study for Science Education has to say about educational philosophy: "The formation and development of Christian values is an underlying principle of Catholic Education and these values should be evident in all curricular areas.” Here, also, are a few more examples from the mission statements of individual schools: "The entire curriculum and the life of the school are grounded in the Word of God and dedicated to the purpose of showing the love of the Savior...." "Excellence of soul, however, can only be obtained by the teaching of the Bible and Christian/Catholic values." The "Outcome Goals" of the Islamic School of the Oasis include Religious Excellence in Quran, Islamic History and Culture and Hadiths.
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(Traditions of Proper Character and Code of Conduct). The goal of West Park Lutheran School, according to its mission statement, is that “knowledge, when taught in harmony with the Holy Scriptures, may help boys and girls to live successfully, and in accord with the Word and will of God.” At Westside Baptist Christian School parents must sign a statement of parent obligations and responsibilities that acknowledges their “cooperation” in faithful prayer (and also, by the way, gives the teacher and administration full discretion in the discipline of children, including corporal punishment). Many, if not most, of the schools, moreover, require students to participate in regular school-sponsored religious services during school hours. At least one school requires Catholic parents to be enrolled and active in the Catholic church, and to register the student as a member of any church. Another school requires parents to “spread the word of the Gospel.” Sounds like pervasively sectarian educational institutions to us.

Nor does the rather byzantine structure created to channel the aid successfully hide the state’s efforts to avoid legal prohibitions on direct aid to religious institutions. Superintendent of Education Goff has arranged for the tuition checks to be written as payable to the parents but sent to the schools, where the parents then must go and exercise choice: they must sign over the check to the school and to the school alone. This sham is unlikely to impress anyone very much. After all, as the Court said in one of the cases near and dear to the defendants’ hearts: “Aid may have [the effect of a direct subsidy] even though it takes the form of aid to students or parents” (Witters v. Washington Dept. of Services to the Blind, 1986).

In the face of the rather inescapable facts of the matter, the defendants only hope is to convince the courts that paying for instruction in a pervasively sectarian school is an incidental and indirect benefit of a neutral and broad-based program, the kind of benefit that has already survived constitutional scrutiny. Of course the Supreme Court has reiterated time and again that a brightline test for determining “direct” versus “indirect” aid is whether the aid is used for instructional purposes. But let’s pretend it hasn’t and indulge the defendant’s argument. Here too their hopes will be dashed. (See box)

The scholarship program, we are told, provides benefits that are generally available without regard to whether they accrue to public or private schools. It allows parents to make the choice about whether, when and how to use the scholarships, and it does not create incentives for parents to exercise religious over non-religious options. As a result, benefits may flow to religious schools, but they do so as a result of the numerous private choices of
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numerous private individuals.

Really?

The program, in fact, is structured in such a way that only private sectarian schools can rationally participate. Neither adjacent public school districts nor nonsectarian private schools charging high tuitions can afford the program. By the program proponents’ own admission, the cost of educating a child in Cleveland’s Catholic schools is $1,789. (We doubt this figure includes state and federal aid in the form of transportation, speech pathologists, psychologists, social workers, textbooks, standardized testing and scoring, disability services, breakfast and lunch programs, Chapter I remedial education, etc.; but no matter.) The average tuition at these same schools is $1,168, leaving $621 to be made up in diocesan support (or state aid, if that figure is not included in the per-child cost above). The scholarship program would pay $1,050 or about $118 less tuition than a non-scholarship child pays. Some of that differential may be made up by the fact that participating sectarian schools are charging scholarship children their higher non-parishioners tuition, which is usually 10 percent higher than tuition charged to parishioners. But even if it isn’t, the sectarian schools are not being hit all that hard by the program.

Especially if you compare their costs to public schools in adjoining districts. Even though sectarian school administrators were involved in various stages of
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planning for the scholarship program, their counterparts at public schools adjoining the Cleveland school district do not appear to have been as in on things. That may be why the resulting plan makes it impossible for a public school to participate without raising taxes or cutting services. The cost of educating a public school child in these districts is undoubtedly higher than the $6,654.69 per child Cleveland's public schools can allocate. Beyond that, unlike private schools, public schools must serve all the children in their area, which means that additional students must be paid for with additional funds or cuts in services. With the scholarship payment of $2500, that leaves over $4,000 per child for the public school to make up by increased tax levies or service cuts—not popular options these days.

In truth, therefore, benefits flow overwhelmingly to religious schools, and they do so as a result of the substantive structure of the scholarship program.

As for entanglement, a condition for participating in the program is that the schools agree not to discriminate according to religion, race or ethnic background (though they may remain segregated by sex). One assumes that they must also cease from proselytizing. Given the mission statements, however, as well as the general problems of accountability illustrated so vividly by the recent Pell Grant scandals, it is hard to see how the government will assure its laws, guidelines and other stipulations and regulations are being adhered to without entangling itself in the affairs—and in some cases, the religious freedom—of these institutions.

According to the defendants, Ohio is attempting to enhance equal educational opportunity for Cleveland's poor, minority students by offering their parents educational choice. In fact, Ohio is exacerbating educational inequality, and establishing a hierarchy of choices and rights: Those children whose parents can work the system and were then lucky enough to have been chosen by state lottery, will profit; the rest, who happen to be the majority, will be left behind. Those parents who want to send their children to sectarian schools will have enhanced "choice." Those citizens whose constitutional right it is not to fund or have government endorse the religious message will find that this right has been undermined.

Something is wrong here.

Resources

The two amicus briefs filed in Gatto summarize neatly the major Establishment Clause and Education Policy arguments against Cleveland's scholarship program, and are an excellent source of user-friendly publications on vouchers. Both are available from PEARL's offices.

Cleveland's Citizens Against Vouchers is coordinating the political struggle against Cleveland's voucher plan. Contact them at (614) 781-6344.

The Ohio Federation of Teachers, a plaintiff in Gatto v. Goff and local affiliate of PEARL member the American Federation of Teachers, is a key source for information on how vouchers will affect Cleveland. Contact: Ron Marek (216) 741-8538.

PEARL members, many of which have local affiliates in Ohio, have issued anti-voucher statements that reflect the particular concerns of their communities. Some of them notably the AFT and NYSUT, the NEA, the National PTA, and Americans for Religious Liberty—offer an array of fact sheets, comparisons of public and private school performance, and publications. Space limitations do not permit a complete listing, but specific information is available from PEARL's offices. Please call or write.
BEHIND THE MILWAUKEE SCHOOL VOUCHER MOVEMENT

The Color of “Choice”

Bob Peterson and Barbara Miner investigate the way the Right has played the race card in pushing its vaunted voucher program.

Conservatives use the rhetoric of “choice” to portray vouchers as a vehicle for levelling the educational playing field for communities of color.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Just ask Wisconsin State Representative Polly Williams (D-Milwaukee).

Williams, who is African American, became a national spokesperson for vouchers in 1990 when she spearheaded a much-publicized, but very limited, voucher initiative for low-income students in Milwaukee. But recently Williams told the Boston Globe that “I knew that once they [white Republicans and rightwing foundations] figured they didn’t need me as a black cover, they would try to take control of vouchers and use them for their own selfish interest.”

Bob Peterson, a fifth grade teacher in Milwaukee, was Wisconsin State Teacher of the Year and is an editor of the quarterly magazine, Rethinking Schools. Barbara Miner is managing editor of Rethinking Schools. Selling Out Our Schools: Vouchers, Markets and the Future of Public Education, is available for $8.50 from Rethinking Schools at 800-669-4492 or www.rethinkingschools.org.

In the last eight years, Williams has seen how Republicans and other conservative power-brokers use the rhetoric of equal opportunity to mask their real goal of privatizing Milwaukee’s public schools and removing schools from public oversight, predominantly to the benefit of white families with money and privilege.

Why the Right Loves Vouchers

Just about every group on the right loves vouchers, a system in which the government gives students a “voucher” that can be used to pay for their education at any private or public school that will accept them. The religious right sees vouchers as a way to batter down the separation between church and state and to make the public pay for fundamentalist religious schools. Free-marketeers see vouchers as a way to privatize public education—opening up a $600 billion market and removing education from the messy realm of democratic control. For the libertarians, vouchers are a way to dismantle the biggest and most important public institution in this country.
"The protections afforded by the Bill of Rights do not apply to private actors such as University School. Restrictions on constitutional rights that would be protected at a public high school ... need not be honored at a private high school."

—U. S. Federal Court, Milwaukee

All love the fact that vouchers transfer money away from public schools into private schools. Private schools are not subject to hard-won anti-discrimination or accessibility laws, educational quality standards, separation of church and state mandates, or public safety and environmental safeguards. They are accountable only to their owners.

Take the case of Tenasha Taylor. Tenasha, an African American student at University School, a private high school in Milwaukee, criticized the school as racist in a speech assigned by her English teacher. The school suspended her and asked her not to return the following fall. Tenasha sued on the grounds of free speech. The court ruled against her, saying: “It is an elementary principle of constitutional law that the protections afforded by the Bill of Rights do not apply to private actors such as University School. Generally, restrictions on constitutional rights that would be protected at a public high school... need not be honored at a private high school.”

Contrary to the claims of its supporters, privatization of schools through vouchers would greatly aggravate the existing problems of racial inequality and poor standards in the schools.

**Milton Friedman and Vouchers**

Conservative economist Milton Friedman, infamous for his free-market economic blueprints for the Chilean dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, initiated the concept of vouchers in the 1950s. At the time, only white segregationists rallied to his support. They established the first publicly funded school vouchers in the United States in Virginia in 1956 for the explicit purpose of circumventing

**National Coalition of Education Activists**

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NCEA offers its members:
- an information bank to help you find materials, model schools, speakers, and training
- a quarterly newsletter full of organizing ideas
- access to seasoned parent and teacher activists willing to share their experiences
- institutes where small groups of parents and teachers work on particular issues or skills
- national conferences where parents and educators share ideas, get support, and work to resolve differences.

If you would like to be part of a multiracial national membership organization that is committed to quality and equity in public education, contact NCEA, PO Box 679, Rhinebeck, NY 12572; call (914) 876-4580; or email: rfsb@aol.com.

**Want to know more about race and education?**

Check out the web page of ERASE (Eliminate Racism and Advance School Equity)

- Take a Pop Quiz on Racism in Education
- Learn the History of Race in Education

and much more!

Point your server to http://www.arc.org/pages/ArcEd.html
the historic Brown desegregation decision of that same year by helping white people attend private academies.

Eventually, the Virginia program and similar plans passed by segregationist Southern legislatures in the 1950s were ruled unconstitutional. But following the rightward drift of national politics in recent decades, vouchers were resurrected. This time, voucher supporters have tried to appeal not only to their traditional white conservative base, but to people of color who are, not surprisingly, also dissatisfied with public education. As voucher advocate Daniel McGroarty put it in a strategy paper for the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, limited voucher programs targeting poor families should be used as a "beachhead"—a way "to win and hold new ground in the long march to universal school choice."

The Milwaukee Proving Ground

The Milwaukee-based, rightwing Bradley Foundation and other well-heeled voucher advocates chose the Milwaukee public schools as the proving ground for this strategy.

In 1990, the Wisconsin state legislature passed a limited voucher program for Milwaukee that was tailored to gain support from minorities. The program allowed a few hundred low-income children in Milwaukee to use publicly funded vouchers to attend a specified handful of non-religious private schools. The principal argument for this program was that it would allow low-income African American students to attend good private schools. And, indeed, the program has been quite popular in black Milwaukee.

Having established this "beachhead," voucher proponents are now moving to implement their full agenda. Recently, the program was opened to religious schools and was expanded to include up to 15,000 students. In June 1998, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that the expansion does not violate the separation of church and state and the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the appeal, thereby leaving it intact. The ink was barely dry on the Wisconsin Supreme Court decision when Milwaukee Mayor John Norquist called for an end to the income cap for those receiving vouchers, currently set at about $23,000 a year for a family of four.

Rep. Williams was characteristically blunt in responding to the mayor's proposal. "He just said what they were already doing in the back rooms," Williams told The Tampa Tribune. "He wants to attract white people back to the city [by saying] "You don't have to go to Milwaukee public schools [with black children] because we have opened a way for you."" Williams contends that the conservative movers and shakers behind the voucher movement have been using African Americans all along.

Indeed, in the first five years of the Milwaukee program, the majority of voucher students were African American. But now that religious schools are included, the figures are expected to change dramatically. According to the Milwaukee NAACP, a voucher opponent, in 1996 only 10 percent of the students in Catholic elementary schools in Milwaukee were African American, compared to 61 percent in the public schools.

The proposed elimination of income requirements will aggravate the racial and class inequities still further, allowing predominantly white middle and upper
class families to use public money to pay for private schooling.

Further, the money for the Milwaukee voucher program is being taken out of the budget of the Milwaukee public schools, which are expected to lose $22 million in funding in 1998-99 because of the voucher program. Thus, this state-mandated voucher program takes significant money out of a district whose population is about 80 percent students of color and already spends thousands of dollars less per student than surrounding white suburban districts. In the Milwaukee public schools, 61 percent of students are African American, 12 percent are Latino, 5 percent Asian, 1 percent Native American, and 20 percent are white.

As NAACP president Kweisi Mfume has said, many of the "best [public school] students will be skimmed off—those whom private schools find desirable for their own reasons. Since families will have to make up additional costs [of the private schools], those in the upper and middle-income brackets will be helped the most." And, conversely, students who are the most challenging to educate due to race, class, or disability will be left in defunded public schools. In short, the voucher system profoundly aggravates existing class and racial biases in education.

Robert Lowe, co-editor of Selling Out Our Schools: Vouchers, Markets, and the Future of Public Education, argues, "The link between The Bell Curve and the Bradley Foundation strongly suggests that the interest of the foundation...is the diversion of resources spent on urban schools, whose students are largely deemed uneducable, to the allegedly worthy children of more affluent families."

**Defend Public Education**

Forty years ago white-dominated Southern state legislatures gave vouchers to white people so they could opt out of a desegregated school system. Today, the white-dominated state legislatures of Wisconsin and Ohio are essentially doing the same thing: using vouchers to let white families take their children out of integrated schools and abandon the notion that the government has a responsibility to provide all children with equal, quality education. A voucher program similar to Milwaukee's exists in Cleveland, and voucher plans have been proposed in at least 28 other states. In addition, corporate magnates such as Wal-Mart's John Walton have funded private voucher programs in a number of urban areas—programs unabashedly designed to build political pressure for publicly supported vouchers.

Voucher supporters have enacted laws which promote a lessening of our communities' responsibility to our children, aggravate racial and class inequalities, remove education from democratic control, and instead promote an individual "solution" to a social problem—the education of our children.

But vouchers are not a solution. Instead, advocates of equity and social justice must work to reform public schools and demand that they fulfill their responsibility to provide equal education to all children. There is no doubt that public schools must do a better job of giving students the skills they need to understand, maneuver in, and improve society. However, progressives must not be tricked into thinking that the only alternative is a system of private schools and for-profit endeavors. At issue is our very system of a providing a free, public education to all children.
Jingletown:
One Charter School’s Story

By Tamara Prévost and Margarita Jiménez-Silva

In terms of evaluating the progressive nature of any school, perhaps the most important questions to ask are: who does the school serve and what type of education is taking place?

We teach at Jingletown, a charter junior high school in Oakland, Calif. When the school was created, there were several priorities expressed in its charter, including: smaller classroom size; two-hour blocks for core subject periods; bilingual and multicultural instruction; cooperative learning; and a diverse and representative teaching staff. The majority of teachers have been Latino and bilingual, and many have come from progressive educational or activist backgrounds. Although we have been short on resources, we have stood firm in our commitment to classes no larger than 24. We have been able to do this by sacrificing a janitor, alarm system, and other such “luxuries.” Students, teachers, and parents are responsible for keeping the school clean. Although we receive the same per pupil funding as do Oakland public schools, we have expenditures which regular schools don’t have, such as paying rent for our school site.

Jingletown grew out of the organizational efforts of Latino parents and a committed principal to create a safe and positive learning environment for their children. We went to teach at the school because we were excited about doing bilingual education in a school which valued Chicano culture and academic instruction in Spanish. In spite of state-mandated bilingual education programs for limited English proficient students in California, most Californian schools have few bilingual teachers and are not ideologically committed to promoting academic excellence and proficiency in students’ native language as well as in English. Far too often, bilingual educational programs actually have fewer resources, less qualified teachers, segregated classrooms and a watered-down curriculum. In spite of Lau v Nichols, only one-third of language minority students in California are in an educational program which attempts to address their language needs. We saw teaching at Jingletown as an opportunity to teach in a public school and respond to the needs of working-class Latino students traditionally underserved by the public school system.

Parents Organize

Clementina Durón, the principal of Jingletown, said the impetus behind organizing for Jingletown came from parents at Lazear Elementary School who were satisfied with the bilingual education at Lazear and with the school’s environment that respected their culture. However, the parents became alarmed when looking at the neighborhood junior highs, which were seen as large impersonal schools with violence, gangs, and the prospect of academic failure of their children. The parents, with the support of Lazear teachers, took advantage of California’s charter legislation and formed Jingletown. (Jingletown gets its name from the East Oakland neighborhood where most of the families are from. There are various theories about the name’s origin, such as the story which recalls the time when the neighborhood was home to mostly Portuguese immigrants, who would stand on street corners and jingle their silver coins in their pockets, after being paid for their work in the neighborhood factories.)

Jingletown is a public school and has been organized as a non-profit organization with its own board of directors. The majority of Jingletown board members are parents with children at the school but there also are students, teachers, and members from the broader Oakland community. The Oakland School Board granted the charter; it holds the power to continue or revoke the charter. We are now in our third year of operation, and have 172 students in the seventh through ninth grade. The majority are Latino while the other 10% are a mixture of Native American and African American students.
Parent involvement, another fundamental component of the charter, is seen in their majority representation on the school board, where all meetings are conducted in Spanish or bilingually. Parents also agree to do four volunteer hours a month. Some parents are extremely dedicated to the school and log over many hours of service a month. In reality, many parents have not complied with this part of the school contract and there has been no real consequence yet, but parents on the board have formed a committee to deal with this issue. And in spite of the serious hardships that parents and students have undergone in the creation of the school, such as the fact that we had no electricity for the first two months of this school year because of our move to a new location, families vigorously defend the charter school and express that it fulfills an educational need not being met by other public schools.

Most often, students and parents differentiate Jingletown from the other public schools because they say it is safer, there is less conflict and that it is more demanding, both academically and in terms of discipline. As one student wrote in a journal last week, “Yo creo es cierto que estoy aprendiendo mucho en esta escuela aunque sea pobre pero es honrada y no hay tantos problemas.” (Ana Martinez, 8th grader)

Much of the politics of the school ended up being negotiated issue by issue rather than following some predetermined position. For example, the Oakland teachers strike presented us with a real dilemma. On the one hand, there were many longtime teacher union members on our staff, and we wanted to support the legitimate issues concerning striking teachers. (The strike centered on demands for lower class size and salary increases.) On the other hand, we reasoned that we were teaching under conditions that were quite different than those of other Oakland School District teachers: we have in fact achieved smaller classroom size and there is real teacher participation in school decision-making. Some teachers expressed mixed feelings about the teachers union itself, especially when bread and butter issues of teachers take priority over interests of the broader community and the students themselves.

We also weighed the fact that we had already disadvantaged our families by starting the school year two weeks late. Finally, we feared that striking would seriously injure our very limited resource base: a strike might mean closing the school for our move this year to a new location had cost the school three times what we had predicted. Ultimately, we decided not to strike ourselves but to write a letter of support to striking teachers, explaining the reasoning behind our decision. However, it is clear that our position on the teachers union is an unsettled issue, both in terms of our theory and our practice. If we support the teachers union in theory but never do anything about it in real practice, what will that mean for the relationship between the union and charter schools in the long run?

**When to take money?**

The discussion over our relationship with the teachers’ union mirrors discussions over who to take money from and under what conditions. There are no easy answers. In general, we feel extremely deprived of resources. We have no computers, no sinks for biology projects, little physical education equipment, small portable classrooms — and the list goes on. However, despite talk of business interest in reforming education, there has been no rush by business to take us over or to shower us with resources. On a theoretical level, many of us agree that the best thing that businesses and corporations could do for public schools would be to pay more taxes to public education so that educators and the school community could then decide what to do with the money.

However, there have been real concerns over whether accepting donations from certain institutions and private enterprises will jeopardize our school’s autonomy. For example, we received a small grant from a research institute which we later discovered was against bilingual education and supported a back-to-basics emphasis for educational reform. This issue was discussed among educators and board members, and we accepted the money. Refusing “tainted” monies is much easier when you don’t have 172 kids whose education is suffering because they don’t have access to basic resources. We did decide, however, not to accept further contributions from this foundation if they did not support our bilingual/multicultural educational priorities.

Although we are excited about creating a school which provides an outstanding education for our students, we are concerned about the role charter schools will play in the strengthening or weakening of public education. Although we are excited about creating a school which provides an outstanding education for our students, we are concerned about the role charter schools will play in the strengthening or weakening of public education in general. There is a real need for those with the information and the resources to help communities with the least resources to demand terrific public schools which respond to their needs and interests. Creating public charter schools can be one way of doing this. However, although many charter schools may aspire to “progressive” pedagogies, most in California are not in urban areas serving economically poor students. In fact, it appears that many of the neighborhoods that already have decent schools also have the most resources to put into the creation of a charter school. If this trend continues, then charter school reform will not end up better serving those most in need but will simply provide alternative schools for “rich” kids. It is yet to be seen whether serving those most in need of good schools is the charter school rule, or rather, the exception.

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*The authors work at the Jingletown charter school.*
BRINGING BACK THE BURKE
Can Boston’s Most Troubled High School Be Turned Around?

By Charles A. Radin, Globe Staff
Sunday, March 8, 1998

7:30 a.m. Students trudge through a bleak winter morning along streets littered with fast-food wrappers and shards of broken glass, headed toward Boston’s most beleaguered high school. Mostly, they come in groups, wearing cautious expressions the way athletes wear their game faces. Conversations are muted.

To get to school, some pass through the turf of the Intervale Posse, long one of Boston’s most notorious gangs. Others must walk along streets dominated by the Columbia Road Boys, the Morse Street, the Brunswick gangs. Most avoid Castlegate Road, which runs toward Blue Hill Avenue from the front door of the school. The Castlegate gang is one of the city’s most enduring and aggressive groups of thugs.

It is no coincidence that the turf of at least five gangs bumps up against the Jeremiah E. Burke High School, where Roxbury meets Dorchester, and that there are more gangs in the immediate vicinity. Inside the school, some of the teenagers who grow up deprived, emotionally even more than economically, on Intervale and Castlegate and Brunswick, launch themselves toward jobs or college. But outside, in the ruins of derelict buildings and vacant lots, others succumb to the camaraderie, protection, and fast money of the streets.

7:35 As the kids file through the metal detector, handing over their backpacks for a weapons check, the transformation is dramatic. Hoods and hooded looks come off. Smiles break across young faces. Laughter and chatter surge along corridors and up stairwells.

Michael Kennedy, who used to work in a program that takes black children out of the ghetto to suburban schools, is working security at the Burke, hoping for an opening as a history teacher. He pats down the packs quickly, greets the owners by name. He searches faces, too, for signs of trouble, but, these days, he’s not worried the way he used to be. The kids who would bring a weapon to school “are pretty much out of here now,” Kennedy says.

Pouring into the classic Art Deco building, the students move quickly to class through well-lighted, high-ceiledinged halls. Graffiti boards are mounted here and there; otherwise, the yellow tile walls are gleaming and spotless. There is no trash on the floors, no trash talk in the air. No hats. No gang colors. No headphones. No nonsense.

Posters solicit participants for plays, sports teams, chorus; others encourage good hygiene and promote ambition. It’s not just violence for which the Burke has zero tolerance, the wall banners say. Mediocrity is not accepted, either.

The friendly, orderly, upbeat atmosphere would be a pleasant surprise in any school where fatherless children, teenage mothers, substance abuse, and clashes with the law abound. Here, it is amazing. Less than three years ago, the Burke became the first Massachusetts high school in memory to be stripped of its accreditation. Tiles were falling from the ceilings; much of the furniture was broken. Students came and went as they pleased, playing cards in class and boomboxes in the corridors. There was one guidance counselor for 1,000 students. No librarian. No drinking water.

Examiners for the New England Association of Schools and Colleges cited these and dozens of other shortcomings, ranging from lack of institutional purpose to inadequate supervision of students to poor sanitation, as reasons for withdrawing accreditation. The Burke became a symbol of all that was wrong with the city’s school system, an embarrassment to City Hall, proof that the long-hoped-for renaissance of the Boston schools had not yet begun.
“Two years ago,” Steven Leonard, the school’s headmaster, tells a visitor to his office, “if we had sat here this long, something would have crawled across your feet. Centipede, roach, mouse. There was cigarette smoke in the bathrooms, the smell of marijuana in the halls, and half the kids coming in late reeked of alcohol or marijuana. Each gang had its own territory in the building.”

Since then, the crumbling physical facility, the absence of guidance counselors and librarians, the scarcity of purposeful, effective teaching, and numerous other problems have been addressed. Profound concerns remain. Suspension and dropout rates are high. Too many children have children of their own. And while everyone, from the superintendent of schools to the teachers at the Burke, believes that the students will show improvement in citywide tests this spring, no one thinks that enough time, energy, or money has been spent to turn around academic performance decisively. “I’ve understood all along that getting the accreditation back would be a minor problem,” Leonard says. “The real problem is what to do so that the students who walk through these doors walk out with competitive skills.”

Nevertheless, as city officials, school staff, and association officials gather today for the start of a four-day inspection that could lead to re-accreditation, the Burke looks like it has what it takes to turn a neglected, demoralized urban school around: A principal whose compassion and enforcement of discipline are equally absolute. Teachers who hold themselves responsible if their students do not learn. A budget nearly double what the standard School Department formula would dictate. Growing numbers of students who come to school because they want to.

But if the presence of all these elements foreshadows a bright future, the school’s history sounds a cautionary note. Burke High School rose from the ruins once before, in the mid-1980s. Then, with stunning speed, the leadership at City Hall and in the Boston School Department let the Burke down. Things just fell apart.

7:40 Steve Leonard is standing just inside a broken-down fence, at the entrance to what passes for a school-yard, welcoming students. He shakes hands with the boys, throws compliments to the girls, coaxes smiles to the surface even as he hurries them along.

“Brother William!” “Good to see you today—on time!” “Lot of compliments from that interview yesterday, Tashiani!”

Tashiani Santos, big woman on campus, basketball star, aspiring student journalist, is startled. After a moment of shock, her street cool melts into a huge grin, and she gives Leonard an energetic thumbs up.

“These are good, good kids, as long as you create the environment where they can be,” Leonard says as he swings into his morning routine. “Unfortunately, we have created a world out there in which they have to be a certain way to make it through. We have to help them make the adjustment from what they have to be out there to what they can be in here. I want to cheer when they walk through the door,” he says. “I know what they had to go through and overcome to get here.”

This is not just talk. Leonard grew up fatherless on Waumbeck Street, in Roxbury, just a few blocks from the Burke. He had a daughter and was married before graduating from high school. A son was born the year after graduation. He worked at General Electric, the post office, TWA, but nothing seemed quite right for him. Less than two years out of school, he joined the Marines; while on duty in Vietnam, he received a Dear John letter from his wife, who disappeared with the children. He did not see them again until they were in high school. He is now remarried, with two more children.

Leonard was 32 when he received his bachelor’s degree in education from Boston State College, 43 when he was awarded his doctorate at Boston University.

Even as he cheers Burke students’ daily exertions, “I tell them every pain they have, I’ve had already, and they’re tougher than me,” Leonard says. “I tell them, ‘You can use your energy to whine about how tough it is,
or you can use your energy to solve the problem.’”

7:45 The kids are in trouble if they’re not through the door by now. Late is anything after precisely 7:42. If you are tardy, your parent or guardian has to come sign you in.

Walkie-talkie in hand, Leonard swings his 300-plus pounds past the check-in desk for tardy students, looks up back stairwells to make sure no one’s loitering, and lumbers down the halls. He gets a little out of breath; there is no time for the exercise he needs to keep his weight under control.

Many days, he is stopped and scolded by an angry parent frustrated over discipline, grades, or life. After one such encounter, which he endures stoically, Leonard explains: “That young woman at the door, she has one son who’s graduated, one daughter in school, one son who’s been thrown out. She’s got to get mad at someone. I let her get mad at me.”

Inside the school, young women offer him hugs and confidences that would make many fathers envious. Outside, he is treated with respect even by the scores of gang members he has expelled. Jacqueline Burnett, an aide to Leonard first at the Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School and now at the Burke, gestures out her office window at the gray Toyota in the parking space marked “Dr. Leonard, Headmaster.”

“Nobody has ever bothered that car,” Burnett says. “He touches them. He’s one of them. He makes them feel ‘I am you; you could be me.’”

Leonard first made a name for himself as assistant headmaster of English High School, then as principal of the King School, which, when he took over, was the most troubled middle school in the city. That is where he was in 1995, when city leaders, who had ignored years of warnings from the New England Association of School and Colleges about problems at the Burke, realized that loss of accreditation was imminent. Mayor Thomas M. Menino put forward a $31 million proposal to repair a handful of the most run-down schools, and the School Department asked Leonard to take on the Burke.

The moves were “supposed to impress [association leaders] enough so they would not take the accreditation away,” Leonard says. “As often happens in this system, the bureaucracy moved a little too slow. [The association] said to them, ‘This is not about giving you another chance. It’s about cheating children by not giving them the basic services they are supposed to have.’”

After the association acted, Menino visited the school, and a fortuitous accident occurred. As the mayor and the principal walked through the auditorium, a hunk of plaster fell from the ceiling, striking Menino on the shoulder. The mayor brushed himself off and asked for a drink of water. Leonard laughed. There were no working water fountains at the Burke.

“He said, ‘That’s it,’ and the place became a beehive of activity,” Leonard says. “Between June and September of 1995, it came to look like a school.”

But looking like a school and actually being a school are not the same.

Soon after accreditation was lost, in 1995, a group of Burke parents drew up a federal civil rights complaint; they asserted that conditions would never have been allowed to deteriorate so profoundly if 97 percent of the enrollment had not been children of color. Now, not just the city’s reputation was at stake. The impending suit meant the federal government could withhold tens of millions of dollars a year in aid—on which the school system depends heavily—while the complaint was being investigated.

Suddenly, the city wanted action. Fast.

From his City Hall perch, Menino could make sure that the plaster and plumbing were repaired. To fix the long list of academic deficiencies cited by the examiners, a different kind of housecleaning was required.
School Department administrators agreed to allow teachers to transfer out freely. Then Leonard told the staff what he expected.

“The hardest thing of all—but it’s something people have to understand if they want to be urban educators—is we have to take responsibility,” Leonard told them.

“The day when a teacher’s responsibility was just to come in and teach at grade level is over.” The Burke’s teachers had to see to it that their students made progress, whatever that took. To help them do that, they were offered a 36-hour professional development course on an unpaid, volunteer basis.

“If all this is too much for you,” Leonard told the teachers in the summer of 1995, “if it is too late in your career, don’t be here in September.”

Half of them weren’t.

The 65 teachers now on staff are there because they want to be. All are volunteering for professional development training. They represent a wide range of ethnicities and experiences—from Abner Logan, 47, who has spent his adult life in the Boston schools, to Chad Leith, 27, who came here from Harvard College via the Peace Corps less than two years ago.

One winter day, Logan is working with a group of 10th-graders on George Orwell’s classic Animal Farm. His main problem is that the book is an allegory for the Russian Revolution, and the students don’t know anything about the Russian Revolution.

“When someone starts an organization—a gang, a team—how do they go about selecting a leader?” he asks, sparking a discussion that gradually gets away from the book, until a girl asks the teacher if he thinks the president is stupid. “If he is,” says Logan, smoothly guiding the class back toward Animal Farm, “then he’s leading a population of stupid people. . . . Now, is Orwell saying the working population isn’t smart enough to move forward?”

Down the corridor and around the corner, Leith helps a class of students from Cape Verde practice how to call authorities in an emergency. Then he adopts a different persona.

“Now we are going to leave the Jeremiah Burke once again,” Leith says, making his voice deeper and more dramatic. “Where are we going? California. Where in California? The university, where Professor Leith will deliver a lecture on Death Valley.” He encourages class members to think of themselves as college students, and takes them through a half-hour in which they work on converting Celsius to Fahrenheit, change kilometers to miles, and figure out that almost all of Cape Verde would fit inside Death Valley.

Both teachers are enthusiastic about the Burke, though neither is under any illusions that things are ideal there or ever will be.

Logan, the veteran, remembers years when kids rode bikes and pulled knives in the halls, when strangers roamed the school. He taught without textbooks for so long that he says he eventually “learned to Xerox articles and do without books.” Just looking at the rows of new books makes him grin.

Leith, the newcomer, knows little of the old days, though some gang members were still active in the school when he arrived, two years ago. To him, the Burke is simply the “most supportive place I have ever worked, including the Peace Corps and [Cambridge] Rindge & Latin. A lot of us spend time together out of school. It’s very warm and comfortable.”

News that the Burke was being stripped of its accreditation set off a domestic dispute in John and Ann Young’s house, in Dorchester. Their son Shawn was happy in the school; he had friends there: It was where his older brothers and sister had studied.
Ann wanted to pull him out. John wanted him to stay.

“John said if we were going to keep running from problems, they’d never get worked out, that this was our community’s school, and we should do everything we could,” Ann says, over a quick dinner in a Dorchester Avenue restaurant, before a recent parents’ group meeting. They doubted that either Dorchester or South Boston High School would be better; they feared that if they had to pay for Shawn to attend Boston College High School, they’d never be able to cope with college costs.

John, a carpentry contractor who has been disabled since the mid-1980s, promised his wife, a social-service center employee, that he would take an active role at the school. They agreed to try to stick it out.

They and a handful of other parents began meeting and talking. “Why was this happening to the Burke,” John Young wondered, “when Latin Academy [an elite exam school, formerly Girls’ Latin], in the same neighborhood, had a nice library and gardeners outside? We had no library. We didn’t even have drinking water.”

The parents sought legal advice from the Center on Law and Education, a national private, nonprofit organization that offers assistance to parents seeking school reform. They wound up creating the strongest single force for bringing the Burke back—the civil rights complaint that alleged that the rats, the lack of guidance counselors and drinking water, the general neglect, would not have been permitted in schools with more white students. To avert litigation of the complaint, city officials agreed to fix 34 specific physical and academic problems, nearly doubling the Burke’s budget in the process.

Michele Brooks, one of the parents who worked with John Young on the complaint, says she has experienced the effects of racism since she was a Burke student herself. A lifelong resident of the neighborhood, she entered the school during the last of its glory days; she took Latin through 12th grade, three years of French, a year of Spanish, and graduated in 1970.

The Burke was still a girls’ school then, as it had been since it opened in 1934. The student body was diverse. Half of the whites were Irish Catholic, half were Jewish; the numbers of blacks and Asians were increasing. Students could choose a college-track curriculum or a course of study designed to prepare them for office jobs after high school.

“The Burke’s status was almost the same as Girls’ Latin,” Brooks says, “but all the guidance counselors were white, and there was a lot of subtle racism. A lot of girls who wanted to go to college were being discouraged. Black girls who wanted to be doctors were told, ‘Go into nursing. It’s easier.’”

Brooks became so involved in the school after it lost accreditation that she gave up her job with a computer company to take a part-time position as the Burke’s parent coordinator. Now she is studying for her teaching certificate. She is happy about the progress at the school over the last several years but, like other parents, is worried about the future. Whenever accreditation is regained, the obligations of the city and School Department under the civil rights complaint end, too, and “we could be right back where we were in 1991,” Brooks says. “This could be a very short-lived victory.”

Most people concerned with the Burke now see the loss of accreditation, so traumatic when it occurred, as a blessing. It forced city officials to focus; it put power in the hands of the parents; it put resources in the hands of the staff. And, despite fears to the contrary, it did not have an adverse effect on students’ futures. “We sent kids to college from the unaccredited Burke High School last year,” Leonard says, stressing that “if you’ve got A’s and B’s here, you’re going to college, and you’re probably going free.”

Leilah Rose is one of those A and B students. She is senior class secretary, works afternoons and weekends when she can find jobs, participates in an academic enrichment program for urban students through UMass-Boston, and still finds time to volunteer at an early-learning center for children on Columbia Road and at homes for the elderly in Dorchester and Roxbury.
She likely would be homeless now, or bouncing from one friend’s apartment to another, if not for the staff at the Burke. She probably would not be on track for college, still wrestling with whether she’s more interested in engineering or psychology.

Leilah’s mother, who, her daughter says, “has a substance-abuse history and a lot of medical problems,” left her to be raised by her paternal grandmother, in Greensboro, North Carolina. When her grandmother died, four years ago, Leilah, then 13, tried to live with her older sister, in Quincy, then with her mother, in Dorchester. Neither situation worked out for her.

An aunt who is a Burke alumna helped her get into the Burke and find a place to stay. The living arrangements still didn’t work, but the Burke connection did. When life started to become unmanageable, the staff found her a safe, low-cost apartment in the home of a friend of the school.

“This is a Lean on Me school,” Leilah says, likening it—as many teachers and parents do—to a popular movie about a similar school in Philadelphia. “The teachers and staff will go wherever they need to go, do whatever they need to do, so you can do what you’ve got to do. They’ve done this kind of thing for a lot of other kids, at least seven seniors that I know of. I think they don’t feel like they’re fully doing their job if they don’t take it so far.”

Of 671 students enrolled at the Burke in February, 591 are black, 42 Hispanic, 20 Asian, 16 white, and two Native American. Bilingual students are 24 percent of the school population. Those with special needs, ranging from mild learning disabilities to serious behavioral disorders, make up 19 percent.

Most students in the neighborhood with Leilah’s ability and desire are gone, enrolled in one of Boston’s three exam schools or in the Metco program, which offers black students access to high-quality suburban schools. The brain drain holds down the number of positive role models students see among their peers.

“Peer expectations are like a balancing scale,” says teacher Chad Leith. “If there are enough children with expectations and ambitions in a class, even if you have a few who don’t care and could be disruptive, the large group in the middle, the followers,” will incline toward the positive. “If you skim off [the achievers], the most charismatic kids left sometimes are the disruptive ones.”

This weakens the efforts of teachers and staff to save kids like Ray Williams (not his real name), a typical member of that large group in the middle. After being drawn into a fight with a local hoodlum early this winter, Ray walked out of the Burke the following day to find the Castlegate gang waiting for him.

School officials and police officers intervened quickly, forcing the gang to back off and urging Ray to transfer to another school.

“He knows what we’re saying,” says Roscoe Baker, the Burke’s dean of discipline. “But he can’t hear it.”

Ray leans over and wipes a smudge from his sneakers. His brow furrows deeply; he struggles visibly with his confusion. “I can’t say I’m not worried about my life,” he finally says. “I’ve heard of Castlegate, the shootings and all that. But I can’t worry about it all the time. I try to push it to the back of my mind.”

Baker turns his attention to pressing Ray’s parents to move him to another school. He fails, in part because the principal thinks it is better for Ray to stay at the Burke. “If [the gangsters] want to, they’ll find him at home or at another school anyway,” Leonard says. “He’s been here all through high school. He’s a senior. I think we’ll care more about him here.”

Ray does not transfer. The Castlegate gang forgets about him after a few days. But Ray will not make it to graduation day. Several weeks later, in completely unrelated circumstances, he behaves so unacceptably toward a female student that Leonard expels him.
Many parents, alumni, and longtime staff share Leilah Rose’s assessment that the Burke is a Lean on Me school, but Steve Leonard is not the man most would cast in the role of hero/principal. They think of Albert Holland and are reminded that the Burke’s previous renaissance, which Holland helped engineer, ended unhappily.

Holland came to the Burke in 1982, after long duty as assistant headmaster of South Boston High. He literally had to roll around on the floors, fighting with the toughest students, to get the school under control. Abner Logan, who came as basketball coach and dean of discipline at Holland’s request, recalls that the bathrooms were locked then, out of fear of what students might do there, and that human waste fouled the halls. Teachers were so terrified of the students that they locked themselves in their classrooms.

“Nobody cared about the Burke High School,” says Holland, who became its fourth headmaster in three years. “It was a dumping ground for all the have-nots.”

With the support of then-Superintendent of Schools Robert R. Spillane, Holland was able to have the Burke’s enrollment lowered, its staffing increased, its halls and classrooms cleaned and painted—all precisely the same steps Leonard took in 1995. No accreditation or civil rights issue was involved in 1982; Holland says Spillane just wanted to do the right thing. It worked, just as it is showing signs of working now.

By 1990, the Burke was being written up in national magazines as one of the country’s outstanding public high schools. A remarkable 70 percent of Burke graduates were going on to college. Twenty social-service agencies were offering everything from peer leadership to pregnancy counseling to dress-for-success programs for the students.

“The Burke has a tremendous history. It was the alternative to the exam schools, and our goal was to return it to that,” Holland says. He laughs bitterly. “We even had a dream of restoring Latin. We had kids going to Cornell, Bates, Michigan, Boston College. The Burke High School was working well.”

Then the bottom fell out. Beginning in 1991, the Burke was hit with major budget cuts and layoffs. Simultaneously, the number of students assigned to the school was sharply increased.

Albie Holland was gone by 1993, before the collapse became total, promoted to assistant superintendent. Teachers, students, and neighborhood families, who loved him, believe he was moved because he had become a hero, the man who saved the high school in the heart of the black community. They believe that the bureaucrats downtown, at School Department headquarters and in City Hall, needed a politically weaker man to be the fall guy for what was going to happen to the Burke.

Holland tells a different story. He says that the pressures of nearly two decades of fighting violence in Boston schools came to a head one afternoon in 1991, when a student was stabbed on the back steps of the Burke during lunch period and nearly died in his arms. Holland remembers the student’s blood gushing onto his own clothes, remembers praying, “My God, don’t let this child die.” For reasons he does not fully understand, the experience shook Holland, stayed with him, haunted him, in a way that earlier traumas had not. It was time to go.

Besides, he adds, “after I told the mayor [Ray Flynn] in public that if this was a white school in a white neighborhood, this [deterioration] would not be tolerated, I didn’t know how much more I could do.”

Mayor Menino is sitting in an armchair, his back to the upscale bustle of Faneuil Hall Marketplace, talking about the Burke. He confesses the sins of the collective municipal past, condemning the “stupidity and arrogance of adults who didn’t care.” He is enthusiastic about the headmaster: “Steve Leonard is great.”

But he does not promise that the higher budget and smaller staff-to-student ratio at the Burke will continue after accreditation is regained. The school’s budget is nearly $5 million a year now, almost double what it was. The maximum staff-to-student ratio in a regular education class is 1 to 24, compared with 1 to 33 in other high schools.
“There was a real crisis at the Jeremiah Burke,” says Menino, who succeeded Flynn. “We had to put extra resources there, and we did. We’ll wean them eventually. Now we’re putting extra resources at Dorchester High.”

On the same gray winter day, a block away at school headquarters, Superintendent Thomas Payzant is more blunt. “The Burke is enriched now beyond other high schools in the city,” he says. “Not that that’s not great, but we can’t afford it.”

To Payzant, equity means equal allotment of teachers and staff to students throughout the city, regardless of the relative poverty or other problems of the neighborhoods from which they draw their students.

“Sometimes, there are very legitimate reasons for exceptions,” he says, “like the loss of accreditation and the agreement with the parents’ group and the Office of Civil Rights” at the Burke. But when the accreditation is regained, and the civil rights agreement has expired, staffing according to his formula for equality will return, he promises.

Steve Leonard is hoping that’s not the last word. “Basically, the system has made the same mistake twice,” Leonard says, referring to the school’s declines in the late 1970s and the early 1990s. “The superintendent’s office, the School Committee, didn’t want to believe that this school requires a whole lot more resources than the formula says. It’s real clear to me that every time this school gets above a certain number of staff and a certain number of kids, it falls apart. Right now, it’s at just about what it takes.”

Superintendent Payzant “thinks we can do it all with a whole lot less,” Leonard says evenly. “Well, show me. I can’t do it with a whole lot less, and I’m better than most.”

TO MARKET, TO MARKET...

The School Business Sells Kids Short

PHYLLIS VINE

If Wall Street has anything to say about it, the same forces gnawing away at the public stewardship of hospitals, prisons and the Social Security system will take on the $600-billion-a-year education market. Mary Tanner, managing director at Lehman Brothers, which sponsored the first educational investment conference last year, compares it to health care—"a local industry that over time will become a global business." Montgomery Securities' Michael Moe claims that "the timing and entry into the education and training market has never been better."

Moe knows. In twenty-eight states, legislation supports privatization through charter schools and vouchers, or contracting of for-profit management companies. (Charter schools themselves are politically neutral—some founded by activists on the right or left who want greater involvement in their children's education, others merely openings for entrepreneurs.) Despite the preliminary findings of two federal studies that neither privatized education nor charter schools have improved test performance—an ostensible goal of their proponents—and the well-known failures of Educational Alternatives Inc.'s schools in Baltimore and Hartford [see Bruce Shapiro, "Privateers Flunk School," February 19, 1996], the campaign for charter schools continues to snowball. President Clinton has given it a boost by calling for an increase from the current 450-500 charter schools to 3,000 by the turn of the century.
The road to for-profit educational enterprises has been paved by the political and financial support of conservative opponents of public education. From the Hudson Institute and the Heritage Foundation, two of the right-wing think tanks driving privatization, come reports about reinventing education to stem the deterioration of schools and replace the "status quo unions." They speak of giving parents choice, back-to-basics and performance-driven curriculums, management "design teams" and accountability.

There’s lots of doom-mongering that harks back to the Reagan era’s scare on education, A Nation at Risk. The Indiana-based Hudson Institute has grown to national importance through the support of the Olin Foundation and the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation [see Vince Stehle, "Righting Philanthropy," June 30].

Along with Heritage, the Hudson Institute has nurtured a battalion of veterans from the Education Department in the Reagan and Bush administrations. In addition to Lamar Alexander, Education Secretary from 1991 to 1993, Hudson funded Chester Finn Jr., who was Assistant Education Secretary from 1985 to 1988 and a founding partner of the Edison Project, the four-year-old for-profit school chain started by Whittle Communications.

Finn and Diane Ravitch (Assistant Education Secretary from 1991 to 1993) founded the Educational Excellence Network, a smaller think tank housed at the Hudson Institute. The network serves as a clearinghouse and resource center for their projects, one of which was The Modern Red Schoolhouse, designed by the New American Schools Development Corporation (N.A.S.D.C.), which was formed during the Bush Administration in 1992 to funnel business dollars to education reform. Alexander placed David Kearns, a former Deputy Education Secretary and Xerox chief, in charge of the N.A.S.D.C.

Kearns well illustrates the intersection of business and ideology. He serves on the board of EduVentures, Michael Sandler’s investment banking service for the education industry.

Sandler worked for Kearns at the N.A.S.D.C., developing projects that would fulfill Alexander’s break-the-mold vision for schools. The N.A.S.D.C. offers design teams to help schools restructure. The Modern Red Schoolhouse is one of the nine prototypes that schools can purchase for curriculum, assessment, professional development and technology “as a learning and instructional management tool.” The costs range from $90,000 to $150,000; technology is extra.

Sandler moved on in 1993 to co-found “Education Industry Report,” a monthly newsletter that announces mergers and acquisitions, new education markets, changes in charter school legislation and major players in government or business. “E.I.R.” also analyzes about thirty publicly traded companies that constitute the “education index.” David Kearns and Michael Moe both sit on the board of the newsletter, as does Denis Doyle, who alternates between the Hudson Institute and the Heritage Foundation, writing about vouchers and charter schools. Other prominent players who began in the federal government are the Hudson Institute’s Bruce Manno, now doing a study on the Massachusetts charter school experience, and Scott Hamilton, associate commissioner of the Massachusetts Education Department, who oversees the state’s charter schools.

The right-wing approach to school reform can be seen in the battle over the management of public education in Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania, where a divided school board hired the Nashville, Tennessee-based Alternative Public Schools Inc. (A.P.S.), to manage the Turner Elementary School. Turner is one of three elementary schools in a racially mixed, economically distressed suburb of Pittsburgh. Wilkinsburg’s once-stable economy sputtered with the decline of the local steel industry. The town has one of Allegheny County’s largest percentages of people living in subsidized public housing, and 78 percent of the students at Turner qualify for means-tested lunch programs. Although only half the community is African-American, almost all of Turner’s students are.

A.P.S. was new to education when it won the contract for Turner Elementary. Bill DeLoache and John Eason, its founders, were investment counselors, “citizens with a hobby,” DeLoache said, when they bid on the Turner initiative. “We came at it from a businessman’s perspective. Charter laws started passing. The market was opening up.” In just three years A.P.S. has moved from being “a couple of guys looking for a school” to a major force in the for-profit education industry. Their first bid, on a school in Tennessee in 1992, was unsuccessful. But it put them in touch with the growing network of educational privatizers who gathered regularly at meetings such as the Edventures Conference in Madison, Wisconsin (not related to Sandler’s service), where a request for proposals for Turner was advertised in July 1994.

Since March 1995, when the school board announced the contract, the Pennsylvania State Education Association and the Wilkinsburg Education Association have been in court. The union challenged the board for discharging its responsibility and funneling more than $2.4 million of taxpayer money to a private, out-of-state company. It also sued Pennsylvania’s Education Secretary, Eugene Hickok, whose furlough of teachers made way for A.P.S. to bring in nonunion employees. (The court later upheld an arbitrator’s recommendation to reinstate them with back pay.) Connected to the Heritage Foundation and a member of the Commonwealth Foundation for Public Policy Alternatives board, Hickok is another link between the political right and the drive to transform public education.

Facing huge legal bills, the school board accepted an offer of free representation from the Landmark Legal Foundation shortly after signing the contract with A.P.S. With strong connections to the Heritage Foundation and a mission to challenge “arbitrary, government-imposed barriers to entrepreneurial opportunity,” Landmark has battled for vouchers for religious schools in Wisconsin. Landmark then hired the law firm of Strassburger McKenna Gutnick & Potter, which also represents Richard Mellon Scaife, a major financier of right-wing organizations, including the Heritage Foundation and Landmark itself.

The most recent ruling in this case was handed down in Au-

In three years A.P.S. has moved from ‘a couple of guys looking for a school’ to a major force among the education profiteers.

Phyllis Vine is a historian and journalist who lives in New York.
August, when a court ordered A.P.S. to vacate the Turner school at the end of this year. But the case is far from settled and appeals are likely to go on for several years, at least through the remainder of the five-year contract.

A.P.S.'s promise to improve student performance backfired. Some blame the new teachers, others cite the lack of school supplies, still others denounce a principal commuting from Chicago. At the end of the first year test scores tumbled, and disappointed parents pulled their children out of Turner. Among them was Ernest Neal Ramsey, the school-board president who struck the original deal. In last spring's school-board elections, neither Ramsey nor the sitting president, an A.P.S. enthusiast, was returned to office. "The company used us to get what they wanted," says Ramsey's wife, Arnella Ramsey. "It's like buying something in the mail and not knowing what you get until you've got it."

Nowhere does the play between politics, profits and policy appear more powerful than in Massachusetts. And no single group has been more active promoting charter schools in Massachusetts than the Boston-based Pioneer Institute. Pioneer's role in the charter school movement has been evident from the beginning. Former director Steven Wilson is largely regarded as the architect of the 1993 Education Reform Act, which he drafted while serving as a special adviser to then-governor William Weld. Current executive director James Peyser was named acting Under Secretary of Education by Weld when the first charter schools opened in 1995. And board member William Edgerly influences state legislation by mobilizing C.E.O.s for the organization Fundamental Change in Education and by taking credit for "a more flexible approach to special education compliance in charter schools [that] was adopted by the Department of Education."

In 1995 Pioneer raised more than $500,000 for charter schools, and it assists the growth of others by "identifying, recruiting, and assisting potential charter school founders." Pioneer also distributes a how-to manual, The Massachusetts Charter School Handbook, and sponsors seminars bringing together entrepreneurs selling curriculum packages, management systems and assessment and evaluation programs. Conservatives want to "outsource" these functions as part of an effort to neutralize "the government monopoly on education." In addition to companies, such as A.P.S., that supply these services, they can be obtained from Advantage Schools, the for-profit education company Wilson started after leaving state service. Edgerly is chairman of the board of Advantage.

The impetus behind many Massachusetts charter schools has been to restructure education by removing accountability from local jurisdiction. Critics of the 1993 Massachusetts law point out that it transfers oversight to the politically appointed state Education Department, which decides who gets charters. And even if for-profit companies do not hold the charter, the holders may then hire a market-driven company, with its "learning system" and accompanying services. Although community-based trustees theoretically manage the school that manages the company, Robert Gaudet, who resigned last spring from the Edison Project's Boston Renaissance Charter School, says that's a charade. Of the twenty-five charter schools that have opened in Massachusetts, seven are managed by out-of-state companies. Two (Boston and Worcester) are run by the New York-based Edison Project. Sabis International, a company headquartered in Choueifat, Lebanon, opened two (Springfield and Somerville). And Nashville's A.P.S. started out with one (Chelmsford), but last July picked up consulting with two more (Franklin and Lawrence) when it acquired The Modern Red Schoolhouse from the Hudson Institute and the N.A.S.D.C. It is ironic that the same people who complain about the government's imposition of standards and regulations invite corporations with anonymous shareholders and highly paid executives to devise and deliver educational values.

When the Edison Project began to manage the Boston Renaissance Charter School two years ago, initial publicity promised maximum class sizes of twenty-one, parental involvement, longer days and more of them. Instead, classes grew to twenty-eight, books and materials arrived late, faculty were replaced in mid-year and the principal clashed with parents and staff. Edison also botched the job of providing services for kids with special needs. By the middle of the first year, Boston Renaissance had been reprimanded by the state's Bureau of Special Education Appeals for its neglect of two children with learning disabilities. Although both cases were sealed with nondisclosure clauses, the school agreed to provide the special education services these students need.

Two other complaints have been filed with the civil rights office of the U.S. Education Department, describing patterns of racial discrimination and neglect of special education. Both are under investigation. Parents of one boy with a learning disability described how their kindergartner had been suspended for forty-nine days, sent home at noon instead of 3:30 for five months and physically restrained by holding his hands behind his back until he stopped crying. He was subsequently placed in a public school, where he had perfect attendance and won an award for the student who made the most progress.

Children's advocates claim that charter schools have gone out of their way to develop an inhospitable environment for kids with serious special needs. At Edison's Seven Hills Charter School in Worcester, something called "counseling out" resulted in the return of fifteen students to public schools in their first two weeks. The process was subtle, says Robin Foley, chairwoman of the district's parent advisory council for special education. Parents complained that during counseling Edison's staff asked, "Do you think your child can fit in?" Kate Garnett, Edison's consultant for special education, explains that "we wanted to make clear that parents knew what kind of a situation the families were choosing." Of the ninety-two students who returned to the district schools by year's end, nearly one-quarter needed special education services.

Edison's John Chubb attributes the problems to the start-up phase in which students arrived without sufficient records. Edison underestimated the number of special-education students. Their planning was based on the national average of 9 percent, instead of the state average of 17 percent. But Tim Sindelar, an
attorney with the Disability Law Center in Boston, says many cases cannot be attributed to start-up problems, since the schools opened two years ago. In testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce, Sindelar painted a bleak picture for special education in the Massachusetts charter schools: exclusion of students; extension by several months of the required forty-five-day deadline for developing a student's individualized education plan; failure to inform parents of their rights and the schools' obligations.

The Boston Renaissance Charter School has beefed up its special-education staff for the coming year. But critics still fear that the charter schools are simply selecting the students most likely to succeed in any environment and leaving the others to a system that will be further impoverished. "It's a scary thing," said Fred Birkett, former assistant headmaster of Boston Renaissance. "Those who are hurt the most in public schools have the most to lose in a reform movement."

The Massachusetts law undermines unions and allows companies to set low salaries and determine qualifications for employment. Districts—i.e., taxpayers—pick up transportation costs for charter school pupils, while companies get bargain rent. Sabis International Schools pays $2,800 a month to rent an entire school.

Sabis's Springfield school was not created from the efforts of dissatisfied parents. It was a pure business deal struck after passage of the 1993 law. Sabis, with fifteen schools in the Middle East, England and Europe, has ambitions to start a chain of charter schools in America. With its cookie-cutter curriculum and packaged testing system, Sabis can profitably surf the back-to-basics reform movement and bask in public subsidies.

Sabis approached Advantage Schools/Pioneer Institute's William Edgerly to help it find a school; Edgerly arranged for a meeting between Sabis's owners and Springfield's mayor, Robert Markel, and superintendent of schools Peter Negroni, both of whom eventually ended up on the board of a newly formed partnership. One week before the deadline for submitting an application for a charter school, Sabis put together a board of trustees during a meeting in Negroni's office. The group then agreed to apply for nonprofit status, assuming it would be granted about the time school opened.

Without so much as a site or school building, or youngsters it intended to serve, Sabis submitted its application for a charter school. And in the absence of an actual facility, the application could only refer to the school as "XX" when it claimed, "The XX school is currently running and can be easily adapted to the SABIS program."

Sabis budgeted hefty profits. The company's standard 6 percent management fee comes off the top. For the first year, this amounted to $150,000. Then it charges an additional fee for using its proprietary computerized program for weekly tests. For this it charged $50,000. And there was a combined fee for marketing and for corporate support from its Minnesota site. This amounted to $30,000. But the profits could rise well beyond $230,000, depending on the number of students enrolled.

Linda Wilson, past president of the Springfield Educational Association, points out that "Springfield tax money will be given to an out-of-state private company to be enjoyed as business
profits while more than 23,000 Springfield students do without new materials and supplies.” In challenging the Springfield School Committee’s decision to give Sabis a building rent-free, she said: “The School Committee will go forward to negotiate the contract with the International School Board of Trustees. But who will they negotiate with? The Mayor, two members of the School Committee, the Superintendent, the President of the company who owns the International School, and the Director General are all members of the Board of Trustees of the Charter School. I can’t be the only one to see a conflict of interest here!”

Creaming students most likely to succeed, poor management, unionbusting, conflicts of interest and discrimination against kids who need special education (and sometimes discrimination against kids of color)—all are on display in the for-profit school system. And so is the effort to eviscerate a core American institution that has been a laboratory for citizenship. While right-wing education guru Chester Finn insists that “the market... can rise to the challenge of educating America’s young,” the record suggests otherwise. “The schools belong to us as communities,” says Barbara Miner, editor of Selling Out Our Schools. “So why should we allow some private company to come in and make money off of our kids?”
The Market Is Not the Answer

An interview with
Jonathan Kozol

The very word “public” has a negative connotation these days. How does one counter that negative image in a way that one can defend public schools but not defend the status quo?

We’ve got to be blunt about the problems in a public system and be harsh critics of those problems. We don’t want to be in the position of knee-jerk defenders of the public schools against the bad guys.

But we have to be careful not to succumb to this nonsense that a public system is inherently flawed and that therefore we have to turn to the marketplace for solutions. I’ve never in my entire life seen any evidence that the competitive free market, unrestricted, without a strong counterpoise within the public sector, will ever dispense decent medical care, sanitation, transportation, or education to the people. It’s as simple as that.

I think it’s time for us to begin to look back at some of our roots as Americans. It’s absolutely crucial to claim the high moral ground on this issue and make it clear that the right-wing voucher advocates are subverting a strong American tradition. In this respect, we are the defenders of American history.

Let me state it differently. The complaints about the apparent malfunction of the public system are linked, in my belief, to the peculiar problems of impoverished, often virtually colonized, urban school systems. I mean “colonized” in the sense that very little power actually exists within the system, least of all the most important power which is finance, for which they’re dependent on outside forces. And those outside forces are the people who set tax rates, the state government, the federal government, and the people who shape economic policy in America. I don’t think the problems in urban public schools are inherently those of public education. I see hundreds of fine suburban school systems all around the country where nobody ever raises any question about the dangers of monopoly, because these are well-funded, reasonably attractive school systems.

Monopoly Not the Problem

I think it’s important to recognize that this issue of monopoly never came up until people realized the incredible problems of our segregated, impoverished, colonized inner city systems, and needed to find a scapegoat other than segregation and colonization. The issue to me is not that these are public institutions. The issue is that these city schools are basically powerless. The superintendent is usually the viceroy representing other interests to which the superintendent has to be deferential, usually at great emotional cost.

My own faith leads me to defend the genuinely ethical purposes of public education as a terrific American tradition, and to point to what it’s done at its best — not simply for the very rich, but for the average American citizen. We need to place the voucher advocates, the enemies of public schools, where they belong: in the position of those who are subverting something decent in America.

Jonathan Kozol is the author of Savage Inequalities, Amazing Grace and other books on children.
NEWS FOR A CAPTIVE AUDIENCE
An Analysis of Channel One

By William Hoynes

Since Channel One was introduced into high school and middle school classrooms in 1990, the commercial television program has been the focus of ongoing controversy. Purchased in 1994 for $250 million by K-III Communications, Channel One beams 12 minutes of programming (including two minutes of ads) into more than 12,000 schools in the United States, with an audience of more than 8 million students.

Participating schools receive the daily program along with 19-inch television sets for each classroom, two VCRs and a satellite link. Channel One sends the news via satellite early in the morning, where it is taped by each school's VCR, then distributed to individual classrooms at a designated time. In exchange for the programming and the equipment, schools are obligated to show Channel One to students as a required part of each school day. In essence, schools deliver a highly sought teen audience to Channel One, which sells the attention of captive teens to youth-oriented marketers for approximately $200,000 per 30 seconds of advertising time.

The Channel One controversy has focused largely on the introduction of advertisements into public schools. Critics and parents have argued that students are not commodities to be sold to advertisers under the guise of educational television (Educational Leadership, 1/90; Extra!, 9-10/91). To advocates, the ads are but a small price that schools will have to pay in order to bring new technologies and discussions of current events into the classroom (Phi Delta Kappan, 2/95).

Indeed, Channel One's mission statement touts its educational and civic value, indicating that its purpose is to "use news and current events information as a tool to educate and engage young adults in world happenings, make the daily news accessible, relevant and exciting to younger viewers, promote daily awareness of the relationship between national and world events and every teen's individual life, encourage young people to become productive and active adult citizens by proving to them that they are participants in history not just witnesses to it." After a rocky start, by 1996 Channel One was touting its acceptance by the mainstream journalistic community, citing its partnership with ABC News and favorable reviews in prominent publications, including Time magazine (12/18/95), whose television critic noted enthusiastically that "after five years on the air, Channel One News has filled an important niche."

Researchers have participated in the debate primarily by exploring the "effects" of watching Channel One, paying attention to the learning that Channel One produces. But there has been little work on the actual content of the news that 8 million teenagers watch. What messages about our nation and our
world does Channel One beam to millions of teens? The news-for-ads trade off that is an implicit, and often explicit, component of the argument in support of Channel One takes for granted that Channel One delivers to students a program that we would all accept as "news." Instead of taking the news quality of Channel One for granted, however, we need to systematically study Channel One programming to determine the nature of this news.

The data for this study are videotapes of 36 Channel One programs, collected from late November 1995 to early March 1996. These 36 programs contained a total of 91 news stories and 177 on-camera sources. Stories and sources were coded on a range of dimensions, including story topic, story length, source occupation, source race and gender, and length of source appearance. The programs were also subject to more in-depth, qualitative analysis, focusing on the "frames" or interpretive patterns employed in both the news coverage and the non-news components of the Channel One program.

**Style vs. Substance**

The most striking aspects of Channel One are its look and feel; the program is so self-consciously stylish that the news often seems like an appendage to this MTV-like display of youth culture. The program generally begins, ends and cuts in and out of commercials with current youth music; the opening generally includes attractive and sometimes bizarre visual images or computer animation. Most of the programs are hosted in "The Hacienda," the extremely hip Channel One studio in Los Angeles, where a young, racially diverse set of reporters sit next to their laptop computers, lean against railings or sit on platforms high above the studio. The atmosphere in the studio is informal; there are rarely suits and ties for these stylishly groomed anchors, who rhetorically ask the audience "what's up" as they introduce themselves. Before we've seen any news, except perhaps a tease for an upcoming story, the general tone—attractive and cool young people reporting news in a way that is entertaining to teenagers—has been well established.

Slightly more than half (58 percent) of Channel One's air time is devoted to news content. The remaining 42 percent is made up of ads, the "Pop Quiz," Channel One contests and activities, and the music and banter that serve as filler. Features and profiles not pegged to breaking events constitute 57 percent of news time, meaning that only 25 percent of Channel One's air time is devoted to coverage of breaking news stories. After sports, weather and plane or train crashes, the figure is just 20 percent.

News coverage focused on a range of topics. The frequency and air time of each topic area is reported in Table 1.

Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Topic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Air Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Politics</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel One</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 1996 presidential election was the most frequently covered subject, with 15 percent of Channel One stories focusing on various primaries and caucuses during the sample period. Next in order of frequency were coverage of sports and stories about Channel One activities, both of which were the focus of 10 percent of the stories in the sample. Stories on Bosnia accounted for 7 percent of the stories, and coverage of plane and train crashes made up nearly 6 percent of the news reports on Channel One.

**Going to the Source**

Despite the diverse set of anchors, in terms of both gender and ethnicity, the on-camera sources that appear on Channel One are primarily white and male. While the percentage of black sources, at 15 percent, is slightly higher than the percentage of blacks in the U.S. population, the black sources are not a very diverse lot. More than half are either athletes (42 percent) or prisoners (15 percent). Other people of color are almost invisible, and women are substantially under-represented among Channel One sources.

In coverage of breaking news, inequality of access is accentuated. The gender gap widens substantially, the percentage of black sources decreases significantly, particularly in terms of time, and other people of color virtually disappear.

Beyond simple demographics, who are the sources on Channel One news? The most frequent type of source to appear on these programs is government officials and politicians, who account for more than one-quarter of all sources and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Air Time</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Air Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino/a</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
more than one-third of source time. The other major source type is students and teachers from schools that receive Channel One news—where student views are sought or where reporters cover activities at these schools—who account for more than 24 percent of sources and 15 percent of source time. This is one example of how Channel One covers itself, making the views and activities of those involved with the Channel One project central to the program.

Official appearances are, on average, more than twice as long (33 seconds) as appearances by Channel One students and teachers (15 seconds); only one Channel One student (a potential Olympic swimmer) appeared for longer than 25 seconds. This suggests the top-down communication pattern that Channel One promotes. Officials define the important issues and the parameters of discussion, and brief on-screen student comments present a semblance of student participation.

Coverage of domestic politics in particular includes a very narrow range of perspectives. Government officials and politicians made up 69 percent of the sources, and accounted for 86 percent of the source time. Men accounted for 91 percent of sources and occupied 93 percent of the source time. And 94 percent of the sources on domestic political stories were white, accounting for 97 percent of source time.

Coverage of international issues is rather different. Half of the sources in these stories were from outside the United States. The inclusion of voices from outside the United States resulted in substantial racial diversity here, with whites accounting for 55 percent of sources and occupying 59 percent of source time.

Channel One's coverage of social issues makes use of sources that are far more representative. The male/female ratio is 58–42 percent, a substantially higher proportion of women than in other topic areas. Eighty percent of the sources are white and 17 percent are black in stories about social issues. These stories are also the least reliant upon officials, government officials and politicians only account for 8 percent of sources. Instead, the primary sources are teenagers and their parents (31 percent), professionals (20 percent, mostly doctors and lawyers), Channel One students and teachers (14 percent) and students and teachers from schools that do not receive Channel One (13 percent).

Seventy-five percent of the culture stories were about sports; the sources were largely Channel One-affiliated athletes and coaches (40 percent) and professional athletes (20 percent). While nine out of 10 sources in cultural stories were men, 60 percent were white and 40 percent were black. The black sources were all either high school or professional basketball players.

**Absent from Class**
This relative homogeneity of Channel One's sources stands in stark contrast to the diversity of its on-camera staff. This is indicative of the substantial differences between the multiculural appearance and the substance of the reporting at Channel One news. In fact, race and ethnicity are almost never an issue in the newscasts; it is as if the existence of a multicultural staff erases the social and economic history of racial differences in U.S. society. Even when Channel One made an effort to foreground race, as in its Black History Month interview with Rosa Parks, the focus was solely on history—the civil rights movement of the '60s—with little effort to explore either the contemporary implications of the civil rights movement. The bottom line is that Channel One packages multiculturalism as a style, but does little to give students resources for making sense of the complexities of racial inequality in our society today.

Similarly, as noted earlier, Channel One pays very little attention to economic news. Only three of the 91 stories focused on the economy: one story on changing interest rates and two stories (both in the same day) about the flat tax proposal. Why would economic news be of so little interest to Channel One news? One could make a persuasive argument that economic questions are of central concern to today's teenagers. What kinds of jobs are available today, how is the labor market changing, and what kinds of skills are required? What are the economic prospects for the next generation? Channel One does not provide students with resources to be able to understand, in even the most rudimentary way, the workings of the economy or the significance of economic developments.

Given that Channel One is much more likely to air in less affluent schools (Morgan, *Channel One in the Public Schools*), the absence of reporting about economic inequality is particularly significant. Indeed, for working class and poor students who are required to watch Channel One, the news does little to include stories about their lives, communities or concerns. In short, Channel One reflects the deeply structured inequalities in American society; in failing to talk about inequality, however, Channel One helps to reproduce and legitimize these inequalities.

The absence of economic news, however, does not mean that there are no economic messages on Channel One. These appear each day in the two minutes of advertising imbedded in the news. Economic messages are reduced to the general promotion of consumption—as ads promote candy, cereal, new

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### Table 3: Occupation of U.S. Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>All Stories Frequency</th>
<th>All Stories Air Time</th>
<th>Breaking Stories Frequency</th>
<th>Breaking Stories Air Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Govt Officials/Politicians</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel One Students/Teachers</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenagers/Parents</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizens/Soldiers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Group Representatives</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Ch 1 Students/Teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate Representatives</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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movies and video games.

Channel One (whose parent company also owns RJR Nabisco) does not promote a corporate perspective in a heavy-handed or direct way, as some critics had initially feared. Indeed, given the absence of economic news stories, corporate spokespeople are virtually nonexistent on Channel One. However, without any substantive economic news to give students the ability to make sense of the economy, the corporate advertising becomes the principal lens through which economic questions are addressed on Channel One news. The implicit message is that students’ relationship to the economy is solely as consumers, well-prepared to purchase the products and lifestyles that Channel One promotes.

**Simplifying Political News**

In contrast, Channel One regularly covers the political world, with a particular focus on the presidency and Congress. As with most major news outlets, the coverage focuses substantial attention (69 percent of domestic political sources) on government officials and politicians. The one major difference is that while network television news increasingly relies upon “expert” commentators for news analysis, Channel One rarely uses this journalistic approach (6 percent).

Although Channel One does not follow the standard news script that employs experts in prominent roles, it does follow its own set of conventions in coverage of controversial issues, both inside and outside the world of politics. Channels One’s approach, with rare exceptions, is to frame these stories as debates between two clearly demarcated sides. These sides coincide with the perspectives advanced by the leadership of the Democratic and Republican parties.

For example, a story on the welfare system is set up as a debate between Republicans and Democrats in Congress. A story on sending U.S. troops to Bosnia is framed as a debate between President Clinton and his Republican critics. Coverage of the federal budget is also a “battle” between the president and Republicans. The same general approach frames reporting on the flat tax, punishment for violent teenagers and the proposed amendment to ban flag-burning. And when a representative of the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing think tank, appeared as a rare expert in a January 30 story about teenage pregnancy, the two sides were drawn clearly—without any competing definition—as the “pro-family community” versus “the left.”

The “two sides” approach is a convenient journalistic framework: It provides drama, protects reporters from claims of “bias,” and brings a semblance of order to a complex world. However, such an approach often obscures more than it illuminates. By almost any definition, the positions of the leadership of the two major political parties cast the issues narrowly. On Channel One news, critics of the president outside of the Republican party do not contribute to the debate, and ideas from outside of the “President vs Republican Congress” framework are not available for students.

From an educational standpoint, the “two sides” approach may even promote a kind of cynicism among students. By reporting on the regular debates and “battles” between the same two sides, with little context and only a rare voice from outside this enduring conflict, students may well conclude that these fights are only about “politics” in its most derogatory sense. If promoting citizenship is a relevant goal for Channel One, as its mission statement indicates, more context, substance and diversity in political news will be required.

The election coverage adopted a general tone that highlighted the value of voting as a form of political participation and identified the presidential election as an event with important consequences for youth. However, the substance of the coverage emphasized the horse race nature of the primary process instead of either the issues in the election or the workings of the political process.

The profound shortcomings of this kind of electoral coverage were highlighted by the anchor banter on the February 28, 1996 program, the day after Steve Forbes’ victory in the Arizona primary. The report noted that Forbes led the delegate count, and that the Republican primaries were shaping up as an “unbelievably tight race.” Such reporting may have been intended to pique student interest in the primary election, but the dramatization of the close race was fundamentally misleading and seriously lacking in educational value. The “tight race” frame on the election gave students no way to make sense of Bob Dole’s overwhelming victory in subsequent weeks, which was widely anticipated at the time of Channel One’s “tight race” coverage.

Moreover, the “tight race” framework effectively obscured the role of the party leadership, the significance of political infrastructure and organization, the role of money in politics and the status of campaign media coverage. Such issues, which are central to under-
standing American politics and election campaigns, were neglected in Channel One’s politics-as-drama approach to the election.

Highlighting Teen-Related Social Issues

The most in-depth reporting on Channel One focused on teen-related social issues. Stories on teenage mothers, pregnancy, teenage drinking, violence, school prayer, abusive relationships and teen health were, on average, longer than international or domestic political news stories and, in general, made use of a wider range of sources. Sometimes these reports were pegged to a recent event—a press conference, for example, about teen drinking or the policy debate about welfare reform. In other cases, like a two-part story on teens with cancer or a report on violent teens, the stories stood on their own as the “feature” story of the day.

A three-part story on school prayer from December 1995 is emblematic of the strengths of Channel One’s reports on youth-oriented social issues. The report provided an in-depth and multi-perspective view of the religious, legal and community issues that the debate over prayer in public schools raises. Voices from various sides of these debates—including school officials, parents, students and expert commentators—were all featured, exploring a complex question without reducing it to a simple or dramatic conflict.

While reporting on teen-oriented social issues had the most depth and was often the most nuanced, these reports generally employed an underlying theme that recast these social issues as morality tales. While reports on teen pregnancy, parenting, drinking and crime imply that there are broader social questions at stake, the stories suggest, often quite directly, that the fundamental issues are about individual moral choices. For example, a report on teenage mothers closed with an explicit call for teen abstinence from sexual activity. And reports on pregnant teens and teenagers in prison suggested that teens are responsible for their own poor choices and the resulting consequences.

This format for covering social issues may be a kind of compromise to ward off Channel One’s critics. In-depth reporting on complex social issues guards against charges that the news is simply light entertainment, while the implicit morality tales provide defense against charges that the program glamorizes a fast-paced teen lifestyle. This kind of compromise may allow Channel One to navigate difficult waters—while at the same time making its news appealing to its audience of teenagers—but it avoids the larger questions of Channel One’s implicit and often explicit role as moral educator.

Most critics will agree that schools provide more than subject-specific education; they act, often rather subtly, as moral educators, imparting lessons about appropriate (and inappropriate) attitudes and behavior. This is one of the reasons why local school boards are so often the site of controversy, as communities struggle over what such moral lessons should include and how they should be incorporated into the curriculum. Since Channel One is neither accountable to educators and parents, nor connected to the communities where it beams its news program, there is good reason to scrutinize the moral lessons that Channel One teaches.

Channel One Covers Itself

Lacking any deeply rooted relationship to its audience of students, Channel One crafts a news program that tries to be both an attractive product and a legitimate news outlet. Given the various constituencies that Channel One tries to satisfy, the blending of entertainment with news, education with commerce, hipness with seriousness, is a difficult but essential task. The result is that Channel One news spends a significant amount of its daily program essentially talking about itself.

As we have seen, the anchor/reporters are young, attractive and cool. They talk to students in the informal language of the schoolyard or the street, instead of the formal language generally associated with the anchor desk. Indeed, Channel One—taking a page from the music and film industries—promotes its anchor/reporters as celebrity personalities, albeit celebrities within a closed community of teenagers. The program seems to revolve around the personalities of the reporters, who make themselves unusually visible within their own news stories.

One distinctive practice in Channel One coverage is the inclusion of its reporter asking a question at press conferences or at appearances by public figures—going well beyond the standard reaction shot that television news routinely includes. For example, a report on a train crash in Silver Spring, Maryland, included reporter Rawley Valverde asking interviewers a question at a sparsely attended press conference. Coverage of Magic Johnson’s return to the NBA included reporter Krystal Greene asking a question at Johnson’s news conference. In both cases, the visual image of the reporter asking a question did not enhance the substance of the story—but did promote the legitimacy of Channel One by showing its reporters talking with prestigious people.

On the campaign trail, Channel One reporters made their attempts to interview a candidate part of the story. For example, reporter Craig Jackson tried (in this case unsuccessfully) to stand his ground, in the face of a moving crowd of campaign officials and cameras, to ask questions of presidential candidate Steve Forbes. Reporter Tracy Smith commented anxiously about the high speed of the car as she followed candidate Phil Gramm on a campaign trip. In each case, the Channel One reporters were part of the story, often in an exciting or humorous manner, but always in ways that focused attention on the personalities that drive this program.

Additionally, Channel One routinely invokes its previous coverage by showing previously aired images of the reporters on location. Whether it be the former Channel One reporter Anderson Cooper in Bosnia or Haiti or the current anchor Tracy Smith recalling her travels with Cuban-American pilots, history is filtered through the personalities and images of Channel One anchors. So “history” in Bosnia is Channel One’s coverage of the war, without a broader historical context. And “history” in Haiti is the U.S.-sponsored return of President Aristide, with little context or prior history. The self-referential nature of the reporting adds little substance to the news, but again legitimizes Channel One reporters and reaffirms Channel One’s status as a news outlet.
The often subtle focus on the glamorous and sometimes heroic reporters becomes explicit when the news includes gifts and letters to them from students. This goes well beyond the TV networks' promotion of their on-air personnel, displaying Channel One anchors as objects of teen desire who receive fan letters, paintings, and chocolate roses from their loyal fans. In short, the anchors are ads for Channel One itself, selling the fun, excitement, coolness and drama of Channel One to students in the classroom.

We have already discussed the great frequency with which Channel One news quotes students and teachers at schools that receive Channel One. Only representatives of government appear on camera more frequently than Channel One students and teachers. This is another example of Channel One's inward focus; one major component of Channel One is the creation of a self-contained circle of discourse that is far about Channel One schools. Indeed, one of the most enduring contributions of Channel One news is the addition of the term "Channel One school" to the vocabulary of American teens. The term is widely and casually used in the program, regularly marking the schools that are in the circle, suggesting that Channel One is becoming a fundamental component of a school's identity.

Students learn of the top ranked boys basketball team, community-minded students in the flooded Northwest, and potential Olympic swimmers—all of whom are at schools that receive Channel One. And discussions about current events and policy debates from teen drinking to the flat tax include comments from students at schools who receive Channel One. This kind of coverage certainly has the potential to be of substantial educational value, linking students to one another to learn about each other's perspectives and lives. But in this case the coverage is brief and superficial.

Given the broader context in which Channel One covers and promotes itself, the high frequency of Channel One-affiliated sources can better be understood as part of broader self-promotional efforts. Such coverage shows that important things are happening at "Channel One schools" and that students may expect to see themselves or their friends on the program.

With the need to focus the attention of even a captive audience in a classroom, the visibility of Channel One students, the on-camera recognition of student artwork and school shirts, the regular Channel One contests and the daily pop quiz all serve an important strategic function. There is, however, little reason to believe that this approach to the news—one that is both self-promotional and self-legitimizing—provides the kind of educational experience that is appropriate for students.

Channel One's self-covereage can be seen as part of a broader marketing approach to develop a "brand name" consciousness of the network, including the promotion of the "Channel One school" identity. Most discussions of Channel One have focused on the advertising in the classroom. This study suggests that Channel One contains more than two minutes of product ads embedded in the news—ads for Channel One itself.

**Marketing to a Captive Audience**

The marketing significance of "place-based media" like Channel One is their ability to bring media products and their ads to captive audiences. The content of Channel One news suggests the difficulties of holding the attention of even captive audiences, like students in classrooms who are required to watch.

Although students are a captive audience, there is little evidence that the program is less driven by audience pressures than media in a more competitive environment. Indeed, it is clear that Channel One has tailored a product that is, first and foremost, about inducing students to pay attention, with a relentlessly hip style and participatory gimmicks like contests and quizzes. Perhaps all commercial media have the same underlying goal, but Channel One makes use of classroom time and needs to be evaluated for its educational value, not simply its popularity or its profitability.

The program's goal of attracting and holding a teen audience results in a version of the news that is dramatic and exciting. The anchors are cast as adventurers who travel the world for a good story: We see Joel Brand walking in the rain over a closed bridge in Israel in search of "suicide bombers," and Lisa Ling posing as an educator to cover the situation in Tibet, where she reports that she has to hide the video footage in her clothing. This helps to account for the unusual visibility of the anchor/reporters in their stories, since a central component of Channel One's discourse centers on the emotions and activities of these anchors and their exciting jobs—not on the issues and events they are covering.

The regular practices of anchors wearing school T-shirts and acknowledging gifts from students, sending Channel One anchors out to the schools (sometimes as the prize for contests), and making the lives and activities of

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Channel One anchors very visible on their World Wide Web site only reinforce this approach to journalism. The drama framework was also employed in coverage of the presidential primaries, in the two-sided conflict approach to political issues, and in the routine coverage of accidents and disasters. And the regular doses of sports news—anchors on location at the Super Bowl and the NBA All-Star Game—along with the hip music that is peppered throughout the news—help to keep the news fun.

This dramatic framework is supplemented by the focus on teen social issues. These reports are Channel One's strongest suit; they are the most substantive and educational component of this news program. Even here, though, the reporting personalizes the issues, depicting them largely as individual choices, providing little historical or social context. This strategy of personalizing the news is a good fit with the broader news-as-drama frame. In this case, the drama is about the lives of teens and the dilemmas they face. Economic questions—particularly about poverty, jobs and education—conflict with the dramatic and personalized news and are, in this sample, almost entirely absent from the coverage. Since such stories do not fit with the Channel One approach of making news fun and exciting, they are not a regular part of this ostensibly educational news.

In short, the repackaging of news to attract and hold the teen audience turns Channel One news into a multi-faceted promotional vehicle. Channel One serves as a promotional vehicle for itself and for youth culture and style, and provides a friendly environment for the explicit advertisements that have been the principal source of controversy. This may be the kind of news that sells advertising time, yields a high return in school T-shirts, and helps to promote a consciousness of Channel One as a youth-oriented brand name. However, it is dubious whether such news provides educational or civic benefits to either students or educators at schools that receive Channel One.

William Horner, the author of Public Television for Sale: Media, the Market and the Public Sphere, teaches sociology at Vassar College. Research assistance was provided by Joan Nussbaum.
The Danger of Market Rhetoric

By Jeffrey Henig

The word "choice" is a potent political symbol. Its connotations of personal freedom and abundant opportunities make it a slogan that is easy to rally around. It is no coincidence that choice is a central issue outside the education arena, most notably in the abortion debate. And, given the combination of potent appeal and fundamental ambiguity, it is not surprising that choice is a label simultaneously pursued by the political right and the political left.

Overhearing one woman say to another, "I'm pro-choice," tells you little about her political agenda without further clues. She may be a liberal feminist thinking about a woman's right to choose whether to carry an unwanted pregnancy to term, or a conservative mother hoping for legislation that would make it easier for her to transfer her children to parochial school.

In the thin, pure air of abstraction, educational choice can be presented as a universal goal, opposed only by those so mean-spirited and daring as to claim allegiance to repression, suppression, and force. But this illusion fades when theory is translated into specific programs.

There are many visions of school choice, and the distinctions among them are significant. They are linked, however, in this regard: each and every proposal to expand school choice has the potential to impinge on the free exercise of choice by some groups as the price exacted for increasing the options for others. Embracing educational choice, then, does not lift us out of the messy political world in which interest is pitied against interest, and within which one group's victory usually rests on another's defeat.

The greatest risks associated with the movement for educational choice come not from choice itself, but from its overly close association with the market metaphor.

The greatest risks associated with the movement for choice come not from choice itself, but from its overly close association with the market metaphor.

and services, like a used car or a good haircut. A market-place perspective reasons that if parents are freed to act as rational education consumers — able to take their business elsewhere if unsatisfied with the product that their local school provides — schools will be forced to increase the quality of education and efficiency with which they deliver it, or else risk going out of business. The problem with schools, from this perspective, is traceable to government's intrusion and its mandates, regulations and rules.

There are at least two important sticking points, however, that keep translation of the market metaphor to schools from being wholeheartedly accepted. The first has to do with many people's experiences with market forces in their everyday lives. For most of us, a trip to a shopping center is as likely to confirm fears about shoddy merchandise and inflated prices as it is to be a reassuring demonstration of the self-regulation of market forces. Where market forces and consumer choice have been introduced in education, moreover, they frequently have been associated in Americans' experience with inequalities rooted in economic advantage and racial discrimination.

The second sticking point is a bit more abstract. For there are important ways in which education is not like haircuts or cars.

Conventional economic theory allows for the existence of some goods and some conditions to which market forces do not readily apply. Education is one such condition. The emergence of a vast public-school network in the United States is based on the presumption that schooling is a "public good" that requires a direct government role, just as government is necessary to provide for the national defense.

When parents make certain that their children are well educated, the benefits of their efforts are shared by the broader community (in the form of a better-trained workforce, a source of civic leadership and entrepreneurial innovation, reduced demand for social welfare, lower crime, and so forth). These positive "spillovers" presumably do not play a role in a family's calculation of how much of an investment to make in its children's education. This suggests that, left to their own devices, some families acting rationally will tend to underinvest in education, relative to what is good for the society as a whole. Purely market processes, in such cases, will produce a sub-optimal level of support for schools.

Even when they recognize the collective social benefit that comes from a well-educated population, moreover, all citizens have a self-interest in reducing their own contribution to funding the schools, while shifting the burden to others. Citizens who act like rational, self-interested consumers will figure that they can enjoy the benefits of living in a highly educated society even if they do not pay their own fair share. In cases like this, economists generally agree that government must become involved. Through its taxing authority, government can demand contributions from citizens, essentially forcing them to do what is in their collective best interest.

Differences in the Choice Movement

Much of the rationale for school choice rests on a market metaphor. Yet it is essential to understand that many people attracted to expanded school choice have been drawn by non-market forces such as individuality and personal growth, cul-
tural diversity, community empowerment, and the opportunity to shake up lethargic public bureaucracies. Such differences among the diverse interests in the choice movement are often obscured during the period of debate and policy formulation. But failure to come to grips with the latent cleavages in values within the choice movement invites four distinct risks.

The first risk is that public desires will be misinterpreted. A careful consideration of public-opinion polls, for example, confirms that Americans support for the abstract concept of "choice" does not translate directly into a mandate for markets over government. Americans' view about the limits and potential for government intervention are fluid and uncertain. Nearly two out of three Americans, in 1991, indicated they favored public school choice. Asked whether they supported a voucher system that would include public, private, and parochial schools, 50% indicated they were in favor, versus 39% who were opposed. At the same time, however, respondents indicated support for a range of other policy responses that would call for a more activist government. And expressions of support for vouchers proved to be highly dependent on the wording of the question.

A second problem is that the different rationales for choice — while they may seem minor at the pre-implementation stage — may be likely to clash once implementation begins. Maximizing personal freedom and development, for example, can erode the ties that bind traditional communities. Ethnic and religious groups that favor choice because they see it as a way to sustain schools promoting their way of life may want to limit students' own freedom to explore; the only choice programs they will support may be the ones that vest the right to choose in the parents. Building community power may conflict with free-market principles; parents in poor inner-city communities who see choice as a way to build more locally oriented institutions may demand public protection and subsidization of such institutions if they prove economically fragile. Those whose attraction to choice is contingent on its presumed link to organizational forms promoting more orderly environments and high academic demands may show little patience for choice if it supports alternative schools based on experiential learning, open classrooms, and countercultural ideals.

Blurring distinctions among the rationales for choice may simply delay conflict. Moreover, groups that play an influential role in pushing a policy onto the public agenda may find that they lose the ability to monitor and shape the policy once it is put into effect. Those who join the school-choice coalition as fellow travelers, rather than as converts to market theories, cannot necessarily count on being able to assert their own visions later on.

A third problem is this paradox: that in the name of greater choice, people may actually restrict choice. The rhetoric of educational choice emphasizes individual liberty, breaking down the walls that constrain us. One person's liberty, however, can be another person's corral. When we move from abstraction to policy, it becomes apparent that almost every work-

continued on page 10
able plan entails, first of all, a redistribution of choice.

The redistribution may be from one family to another. Such is the case, for example, when my neighbor’s choice to throw noisy parties conflicts with my choice to read quietly in my own backyard. Or the redistribution may be from one group to another. Regulations in my community, for example, limit on-the-street parking for cars without resident stickers; this opens up choice to me and my neighbors by restricting those of commuters, who would like to park here and walk to the train station nearby. Choice, also, can be redistributed from one broad level of society to another, as when individuals acquire increased discretion (for example, to avoid exposure to others whose values and traditions seem different) only as the broader collectivities to which they belong acquire less (for example, to sustain public institutions where people from different backgrounds learn to interact on relatively equal terms.)

Winners and Losers

Our experience with educational choice to date confirms that the label “choice” does not ensure that an initiative will not impose substantial constraints. Converting a school to a magnet school, for example, increases the choices for students outside the immediate neighborhood; to ensure that there is room for these transfer students, however, school districts often must bar children who live in the immediate neighborhood.

The winners and losers are not preordained. Lower-income groups currently locked in ghetto public schools would benefit under some conceivable choice schemes. Under others, the principal beneficiaries would be middle- and upper-income families given the freedom to re-direct personal funds now dedicated to private school tuition. Given economic and educational disparities, both among families and across school districts, there is a serious risk that choice-in-practice will expand the opportunities of those already advantaged, at the ultimate cost of limiting opportunities for those in greatest need. Market theory systematically distracts attention from such trade-offs. It accepts the notion — as an article of faith or as a consequence of definition — that giving individual consumers the freedom to shop around determines the aggregate level of societal choice. And it is fundamentally indifferent to existing inequalities in market power and the ways they shape people’s actual ability to choose.

Markets and Schools

By Peter Cookson, Jr.

The public school system as we have known it is being transformed because the structure of American society and economy has been transformed and requires a system of public education system that is more flexible, more innovative, and more just. As I see it, two competing metaphors will shape the public education system of the future. The first is that of democracy. At the heart of the democratic relationship is the implicit or explicit covenant: important human interactions are essentially communal. Democratic metaphors lead to a belief in the primacy and efficacy of citizenship as a way of life. The second metaphor is that of the market. At the heart of the market relationship is the implicit or explicit contract: human interactions are essentially exchanges. Market metaphors lead to a belief in the primacy and efficacy of consumerism as a way of life.

Peter Cookson, Jr., is associate provost at Adelphi University. The above is excerpted from his book School Choice. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.)

Undermining Collective Values

Least recognized, but ultimately most important, is the fourth risk: that the market rationale associated with educational-choice proposals will undermine the social and political institutions that are prerequisites to achieving genuine reform. Granting individuals greater choice to pursue their interests does not automatically establish a course toward social betterment, through the benign
mechanism of an invisible hand. Unconstrained by moderating values, school choice can erode collective ideals. Witness the historical reliance on freedom of choice as a means of evading racial integration. Following the 1954 Supreme Court decision prohibiting racially separate schools, some southern states used voucher, tuition tax credit, and "freedom-of-choice" schemes to maintain segregated schools. Where school choice has appeared most successful — as in some of the many experiments with magnets, magnetized districts, and statewide open enrollment — it has been at the instigation and under the direction of strong and affirmative government action.

At least as conventionally articulated, market theory questions the basic meaning of collective values and challenges the legitimacy and utility of government action beyond a minimalist menu of necessary functions. To put into place a system of educational choice that does not exacerbate fragmentation and inequality is possible, but not easy. Advocates of market models for education rely on several forms of intellectual sleight of hand to hide this difficulty. They imply that racial bigotry is largely a thing of the past. They presume the willingness of suburban residents to accept and even help to fund lower-income, minority students who might exercise their choice to leave the inner city to attend their schools. They rely on government, as a deus ex machina, to monitor the implementation of educational choice and to intervene authoritatively when circumstances demand. Yet they deny the corrosive effect that market premises might have on the social goodwill and governmental power that they assume at the start.

The problem is not choice per se. Properly conceived and properly implemented, the introduction of elements of parental choice can refresh and revitalize public-school districts that too often seem stodgy and tired. The danger comes, rather, from the ideological rationale on which market-based conceptions of educational choice are based.

Many of the individuals and groups that favor educational choice are attracted by values that have little to do with market theory; indeed, under many foreseeable conditions, free-market forces are as likely as not to clash with personal development, communal values, community empowerment, and the maintenance of an ad hoc coalition for effective schools. But the logical coherence, academic legitimacy, and conservative appeal of conventional economic theory results in the market rationale dominating the choice movement in public, even if nonmarket rationales account for most of the enthusiasm. The real danger in the market-based proposals for choice is not that they might allow some students to attend privately run schools at public expense, but that they will erode the public forums in which decisions with societal consequences can democratically be resolved.

Reckoning with the way this has important consequences for educational policy. First, it opens the door for advocates of school choice to endorse school-choice arrangements that include private

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**The market rationale associated with educational choice proposals will undermine the social and political institutions that are prerequisites to achieving genuine reform.**

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**The Meaning of 'Public'

The distinction between public and private institutions is ostensibly at the center of the contemporary debate over school choice. While disagreeing on vouchers, former President Bush and President Clinton alike both accepted a common frame for the debate. "Private" school choice meant including private schools; "public" school choice meant not doing so.

While the debate over choice is properly framed in terms of public versus private choice, it is mistaken when it treats that distinction as if it relates simply to the question of whether privately operated schools ought to be included. Rather than focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of private versus public institutions and processes as service delivery mechanisms, we need to focus on the differences between private and public institutions and processes as vehicles for deliberation, debate, and decision making.

Jeffrey Henig is a professor of political science and director of the Center for Washington Area Studies at George Washington University. This article was adapted from Rethinking School Choice, The Limits of the Market Metaphor (Princeton University Press, 1994).
WHO IS BEHIND THE ENGLISH ONLY MOVEMENT?

The English Only movement is the organized effort to make English the official language of the United States. It’s led principally by a well-funded multi-million dollar right-wing organization called U.S. English, which boasts a membership of over 570,000. U.S. English has successfully lobbied for the passage of English Only laws in 18 states (out of 22 total English Only states) since its founding in 1983.

Although U.S. English’s propaganda often suggests otherwise, the racism and anti-immigrant philosophies are readily evident when we examine some of U.S. English’s roots. Dr. John Tanton, principal founder and architect of U.S. English, is also the founder and former chairman of the anti-immigration and population-control organization, FAIR (Federation for American Immigration Reform). FAIR and U.S. English are on a list of anti-immigration and population-control organizations supported by Dr. Tanton’s personal non-profit umbrella, U.S. Inc. Other organizations on that list include: the Center for Immigration Studies, Californians for Population Stabilization, and Americans for Border Control.

Dr. Tanton’s racist views on immigrants, particularly regarding Latinos, were reflected in a 1986 memo that was leaked out—warning about the specter of an Hispanic take-over of the United States: “...in a society where the majority peaceably hand over its political power to a group that is simply more fertile, ...As Whites see their power and control over their lives declining, will they simply go quietly into the night?” As a result of the negative publicity related to the memo. Dr. Tanton was forced to resign as Chairman of U.S. English. However, U.S. English’s propaganda machine has successfully deflected the Tanton Controversy by reinventing some of its history. The late Senator S.I. Hayakawa of California, the former honorary chairman, is now described as the lone founder of U.S. English in all its literature.

Another questionable source of U.S. English’s earlier funding was the Pioneer Fund, which supports eugenics research for racial betterment. The Pioneer Fund was created in 1934 to support what it called “applied genetics in present day Germany”, referring to Hitler’s program of forced sterilization. In the 1970’s, the Pioneer Fund also financed the research of William Shockley and Arthur Jenson on Blacks and lower I.Q.s.

The third principal funding source for U.S. English was Mellon heiress Cordelia Scaife May, who poured at least $5.8 through her Laurel Foundation. May’s Laurel Foundation sponsored the publication of The Camp of the Saints, a futuristic novel about the destruction of European civilization by third world immigrants.

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126 High Street, Boston, MA 02110
English-Only Proposals Gain Strength

BY TONY BAEZ

The Wisconsin Assembly is considering legislation that would make English the state’s official language, as part of a national effort by anti-immigrant forces for an English-only amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The State Affairs Committee of the Wisconsin Assembly has approved the English-only measure this February, and the full Assembly is expected to vote on the proposal in later March. A third of the Assembly already has endorsed the proposal, mostly along Republican Party lines. If the bill passes, Wisconsin would become the 33rd state to adopt English-only legislation.

**English-only legislation is not new but its resurgence is clearly connected to the growth of the conservative movement.**

The state initiatives are part of a plan by conservatives to build support for a U.S. Constitutional amendment that would prohibit the use of any language other than English for the purposes of government communication. Such an amendment would not only escalate anti-immigrant sentiment, it would violate the internationally recognized right of ethnic language groups to speak and sustain their language and cultural practices. Federal legislation also specifically calls for repeal of federal mandates on bilingual education. Such proposals have been endorsed by House Speaker Newt Gingrich and presidential candidates Robert Dole and Pat Buchanan.

English-only legislation is not new but its resurgence is clearly connected to the growth of the conservative movement. In their most extreme form, such language proposals are part of an ill-spirited strategy by conservative politicians, several national organizations (such as US English) and their state affiliates to wrap a veil of legitimacy around their anti-immigrant, anti-Latino, and anti-Asian sentiment. In their more benign form, such proposals are an expression of ignorance and fear by many Americans concerned with the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversification of their workplace, neighborhoods, schools, and media.

Moderate and liberal politicians have proposed an amendment to the Wisconsin bill that recognizes the contributions of ethnic minorities and the state’s multicultural and diverse heritage. But this amendment does nothing to change the intent of the legislation. It merely highlights the weak ideological and political grounding of Democrats and moderate Republicans — and the ease with which they contribute to the destructive push of conservative extremists in an election year.

What makes the Wisconsin bill particularly annoying is that many critics of the English-only movement thought that such a bill would face more difficulty in a state with an impressive history of linguistic tolerance. In 1848, for example, the territory of Wisconsin published its state constitution in three languages: English, German, and Norwegian. Bilingual school programming in German, Polish, and even Italian were common in places like Milwaukee in the early part of this century.

In contrast to the extreme xenophobia of most of its neighboring Midwestern states, over the years Wisconsin has pride itself on curbing the forces of nativism, and has minimized language discrimination. When a growing Latino population made its presence felt in urban areas in the early 1970s, the Wisconsin legislature enacted one of the most progressive bilingual education bills in the nation.

Language minority groups, progressive educators, and their supporters are now worried because the proponents of English-only have been more successful in Wisconsin than ever before. They fear that the combination of a Republican-controlled legislature and a Republican governor with national aspirations may lead to a restrictive law which could be used to suppress the use of languages other than English. In particular, the legislation would have a chilling effect on bilingual education programs and bilingual social services delivery in the Milwaukee area, which has the state’s largest language minority populations.

*Tony Baez is an assistant professor at the Center for Urban Community Development at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.*

SECONDARY SOURCE MATERIALS: Bilingual Education
ENGLISH-ONLY HYSTERIA GROWS AS ANTI-BILINGUAL INITIATIVE HEADS FOR THE BALLOT

By David Bacon

LOS ANGELES In June, California voters will vote on the Unz Initiative, a ballot proposition which threatens to wipe out bilingual education and punish students and teachers whose first language is not English.

Primary sponsor Ron Unz's organization, "One Nation, One California," has launched an attack on all who do not conform to his old-fashioned notion of who and what constitutes a "real American." It is a hateful reaction to the growing multi-racial and multi-cultural realities of California and the nation.

The title of the "English Language Education for Immigrant Children Initiative" would have voters believe it will make learning English easier for immigrant children. Publicity by its supporters claim it will give parents of non-English speaking children more choices in how their children learn English.
BILINGUAL EDUCATION

It's really an appeal to anti-immigrant hysteria, which shows no respect for the diversity of our languages and cultures.

But in mid-January, immigrant parents from Mexico, Central America and Southeast Asia picketed the Palo Alto home of the initiative’s sponsor, computer magnate Ron Unz, and rejected these claims.

“This initiative will actually hurt the ability of immigrant children to learn English,” explained Renee Saucedo, Executive Director of the Northern California Coalition for Immigrant Rights. “It’s really an appeal to anti-immigrant hysteria, which shows no respect for the diversity of our languages and cultures.”

Saucedo’s point of view is echoed by school districts in Los Angeles, Fresno, Santa Clara and San Diego where immigrant children make up a large percentage of students. Opposition to the initiative also comes from the state Parent Teachers Association, the California Federation of Teachers, the Association of California School Administrators, and Delaine Eastin, State Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Most immigrant children come from the poorest of the state’s families, and attend the state’s poorest schools. The education they receive is not equal, and learning English is a hard road in even the best circumstances. Furthermore, immigrant parents overwhelmingly want their children to learn English.

But examining the actual text of the initiative, it is clear that it has only one purpose—to abolish bilingual education. It will not make learning English easier, but harder. It will not increase the choices open to poor and immigrant parents. It will decrease them. It will isolate non-English speaking students of color and punish teachers who reach out to them.

A BITTER LEGACY

Students who went to California schools in the days before federal courts mandated bilingual education remember a bitter legacy of language-based discrimination. Octavio Sifuentes, now a librarian at Ventura College in southern California, came to the U.S. in his early teens. At St. Mary’s School in Los Angeles’ Boyle Heights, school authorities put him in the 7th grade.

“For the first year, I just looked around,” Sifuentes remembers. “In class I felt really bad, because I just couldn’t understand what they were saying. All I could do was math, which I learned in school in Mexico. So they just gave me math problems to do all day. It was the 1950s, and Chicanos were told not to speak Spanish.”

In that era, throughout the Southwest, students were frequently punished for using Spanish at school.

Sifuentes’ mother had been a teacher in Mexico, and she pushed him to learn English. They would read the newspaper together, struggling with the unfamiliar language. “I held the paper in one hand, and the dictionary in another,” he says. “But at school, no one would or could talk to me. I was a lost and lonely kid.”

This year Sifuentes is an angry man. “When I think about this anti-bilingual initiative, that’s what I remember. That’s where it will take us,” he predicts.

David Bacon is an editor at Pacific News Service and a member of Impact Visuals photographer’s cooperative. He is a former factory worker and a long-time union organizer.
BILINGUAL EDUCATION

THE POLITICS OF GRANDSTANDING

Ron Unz, the initiative’s sponsor, was a conservative-backed candidate against Governor Pete Wilson in the last California Republican gubernatorial primary. Owner of a Silicon Valley software company, Unz has largely financed the initiative and its expensive public relations campaign personally, through a sponsoring organization called “One Nation, One California.”

Despite Unz’ past run against the governor, however, Wilson has become a campaign co-chair. For Republican strategists, the anti-bilingual education measure is the third effort in as many election cycles to define an issue to draw conservative voters to the polls. In 1994, Republican candidates campaigned on Proposition 187, denying education and medical care to undocumented immigrant families. In 1996, their wedge issue was Proposition 209, banning affirmative action in state programs and institutions. In 1998, the anti-bilingual initiative will appear on the June ballot.

Its goal sounds simple: “All children in California public schools shall be taught English by being taught in English.”

Contradicting the experience of Sifuentes and thousands of immigrant children, the initiative states that “young immigrant children can easily acquire full fluency in a new language, such as English, if they are heavily exposed to that language in the classroom at an early age.”

Children who don’t speak English are therefore herded into a one-year “sheltered English immersion” class whose main, if not sole purpose is teaching English. “All classroom instruction is in English,” it says, “with the curriculum and presentation designed for children who are learning the language.” All other subjects have a secondary priority.

MANDATING MONOLINGUALISM

No research supports the premise of the one-year, English-only approach. In fact, the definitive study of various methods of bilingual instruction, by Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier of George Mason University (September 1995), contradicts it completely.

The George Mason study states that academic achievement, both in English and in core subjects, among non-English-speaking students depends on three factors.

- Academic instruction in the student’s first language for as long as possible, with English-language instruction during the second part of the day.
- A full academic curriculum.
- English-speaking students integrated into the classroom in a supportive environment, treating bilingual education as a gifted program for all students.

Students learn each others’ language in these programs, the study found, creating high expectations for students, both in language and in other academic subjects. The lack of discrimination against Spanish or other minority languages creates self-confidence among students who speak them. The programs encourage parental involvement, and treat learning English as part of the overall learning process.

Learning English takes more than a year, the study shows. It can take three years or more.

“Bilingual programs, properly taught, have been very successful,” says Lillian Utsumi,
A teacher who occasionally answers a child’s question in Spanish, Vietnamese or Cantonese could be sued for damages and lawyers’ fees

A bilingual advocate in the Los Angeles school system.

The initiative’s “sheltered English immersion” process, however, is not given as a choice. It is mandatory. Any parent wanting their child taught in a bilingual class must go in person to the school to ask for a waiver. A school district can deny waivers for any reason.

PENALIZING DIVERSITY

A school is not required to provide a bilingual class if the parents of fewer than 20 students demand waivers. This means that the poorest parents have to find other, more distant, schools and somehow get their children there. Undocumented parents are unlikely to ask for waivers at all. These hurdles effectively deny low-income immigrant families the right to choose the English-learning method for their children.

“The initiative eliminates school and parental advisory committees which now exist,” explains Dolores Sanchez, legislative representative for the California Federation of Teachers. “Right now, parents have a choice about the programs used to teach their children, which the initiative takes away.”

The initiative also threatens teachers. “Any school board member or other elected official or public school teacher or administrator,” it says, “who willfully and repeatedly refuses to implement the terms of this statute by providing such an English language educational option at an available public school to a California school child may be held personally liable for fees and actual damages by the child’s parents or legal guardian.”

A teacher who occasionally answers a child’s question in Spanish, Vietnamese or Cantonese could be sued for damages and lawyers’ fees. “What would this mean for maintaining a relationship of trust between teachers and students?” Sanchez asks.

POLITICAL SHIFTS

Fearing the initiative would be interpreted as another attack on California’s Latino community, Unz convinced widely-known Los Angeles teacher Jaime Escalante, whose story was told in the film “Stand and Deliver,” to chair its statewide campaign. Escalante’s move infuriated Sifuentes. “The East Los Angeles community helped him a lot,” Sifuentes fumes. “But instead of giving something back, he’s becoming a darling of the right. He should be ashamed to lend his name to this.”

Meanwhile, the initiative has sent a clear political message. In September, Federal District Judge William B. Shubb allowed the city of Orange to end bilingual classes entirely in favor of the initiative’s English-immersion approach. Shubb lifted a state court injunction blocking the city’s move, effectively ending bilingual education for 29,000 students.
1. Immigrant groups succeeded without bilingual education in the past. TRUTH OR LIE?

LIE. Between 1839 and 1917, states including Ohio, Minnesota, Maryland, Louisiana, and New Mexico provided instruction in German, French, and Spanish. Most students were placed in all-English classrooms where they often had difficulty learning English fluently and excelling in school. The economy of yesterday, with its strong industrial and agricultural base, still offered job opportunities to immigrants with little education and limited English skills. The same person today would have a much harder time finding a good job at a major corporation.

2. Bilingual education hinders English proficiency. TRUTH OR LIE?

LIE. In 1997, The University of California Language Minority Research Institute (LMRI) conducted a comprehensive review of existing research on bilingual education concluding that “primary language instruction does not impede acquisition of English.” They found that students with a strong background in their native language tend to achieve higher levels of English proficiency than those taught without bilingual instruction.

3. Bilingual education develops fluency in both English and one’s native language. TRUTH OR LIE?

TRUTH. A quality bilingual program uses native language instruction in different ways to develop fluency in English. Its goal is to teach children English and other subjects in a language they understand. At the same time bilingual education helps children develop and maintain literacy in their native language. It is a common assumption that children hold onto language after they learn English. The reality in this country is that as children become fluent in English, they tend to lose their native language.

4. Bilingual education contributes to lower test scores among “Limited English Proficient” students. TRUTH OR LIE?

LIE. A recent study by Berkeley sociologists found that scores on achievement tests are the product of inequality based on class, race, and gender discrimination. The issue is not that students are failing but rather that schools are failing their students. Since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978 that reduced revenue from property taxes, public school funding has been cut drastically. The result? Overcrowding, textbook shortages, and less spending per student than ever before.

5. Bilingual education doesn’t work. TRUTH OR LIE?

LIE. Bilingual education suffers when classrooms are overcrowded, teachers are underqualified, and programs are stigmatized and underfunded. This does not mean that bilingual education methods are ineffective. In fact, there are many examples of bilingual programs that work when they are run properly. These include the “two-way” schools in which 50% of the curriculum is taught in a foreign language and the other 50% in English. Schools like Eastmond Avenue Elementary in Los Angeles, Inter-American in Chicago, and Public School 1 in New York’s Chinatown are nationally recognized for their students’ outstanding achievement.
6. Bilingual programs serve only Latino immigrants. TRUTH OR LIE?

LIE. In 1996, 42% of all Asian students enrolled in California public schools were classified as “Limited English Proficient” compared with 49% of all Latino students. According to Board of Education statistics, Asian languages include Burmese, Cantonese, Chaozhou, Gujarati, Hindi, Hmong, Indonesian, Japanese, Kmer, Kru, Korean, Lahu, Lao, Mandarin, Mien, Pasheo, Taiwanese, Thai, Toishanese, Urdu, Vietnamese, and many others.

7. English-Only education restricts learning and is unconstitutional. TRUTH OR LIE?

TRUTH. English Immersion limits the benefits of a full curriculum because it requires that non-English speakers wait until they learn English before learning other subjects like science and social studies. How can a child learn successfully in a language they do not understand? In the Lau v. Nichols decision, the Supreme Court ruled that schools have the responsibility to teach English but must offer opportunities to learn all subjects. It is unconstitutional to deny “language minority students” access to education by focusing only on learning English and neglecting other subjects in an English-only classroom.

8. English-Only campaigns have historically suppressed different languages and cultures. TRUTH OR LIE?

TRUTH. Language transmits culture down through the generations. Historically, forced language assimilation had devastating effects on people’s cultures. In the 1880s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs established compulsory boarding schools for Native American children with the goal of wiping out their languages and cultural traditions. After the Spanish-American War in 1898, English-only instruction was also imposed on the people of Hawai‘i, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines in order to “Anglicize” and dominate these territories.

9. Even though multilingualism ensures success in a global economy, the Unz Initiative would penalize students that speak other languages. TRUTH OR LIE?

TRUTH. This paradox says a lot about the politics of language. Recognizing America lags behind all other major nations in multilingualism, monolingual English-speaking children are encouraged to participate in “foreign language” programs in order to help America compete in a globalized economy. However, children whose first language is not English will be denied the opportunity to develop that language until they are fluent in English. For these students, the preservation of a second language is stigmatized and discouraged.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON HOW TO FIGHT THE UNZ INITIATIVE, CONTACT:

Californians For Justice 510.452.2728 or 213.747.4495
Chinese For Affirmative Action 415.274.6763
Latino Civil Rights Network 213.252.0886 or 415.487.7820
Media Alliance 415.546.6334
ALABAMA'S GOVERNOR APPEARS TO BE USING RELIGION THE WAY GEORGE WALLACE ONCE USED RACE—TO WHIP UP BIGOTRY. UNFORTUNATELY, IT'S GONE ALL THE WAY TO CONGRESS.

A Wing and a Prayer: Religion Goes Back to School

WENDY KAMINER

Governor Fob James Jr. of Alabama has promised to resist a recent federal court order prohibiting organized, officially sponsored religious activities in DeKalb County public schools. The court order, issued in Chandler v. James on October 29, includes an injunction against an Alabama law permitting organized, student-led “voluntary” prayers at school events.

It's unclear what form the Governor's resistance might take, but James was last heard threatening to call out the National Guard to protect the prerogative of state court Judge Roy Moore to hang a copy of the Ten Commandments in the courtroom, in defiance of the First Amendment and the federal courts. Meanwhile, Judge Moore has declared the recent federal court order on prayer in school an “unconstitutional abuse of power,” refusing to recognize it as the law in his county. High school students, no doubt emboldened by these pronouncements, are protesting the court order, marching on city hall, walking out of class and leaving the stands at football games to pray. “Having Jesus in our school is something that we need. It gives us strength,” one student explained.

Advocates of organized school prayer will laud this uprising as a demand for religious freedom, defending the “right” of students to pray. But what is at stake in Alabama is the right not to pray to Jesus or be subjected to religious indoctrination. The facts of the case that led to the most recent federal injunction on organized prayer in school tell a very different story from that of the posturing of Alabama officials.

Chandler v. James involved a challenge to the virtual establishment of Christianity in DeKalb County schools. The case was brought by parents of public school students (including the assistant principal at one school) who protested sectarian prayer and Bible readings organized by school administrators and clergy, conducted in classrooms, at athletic events and during commencement exercises. Prayer was not voluntary. One teacher required students to pray out loud in class. Students who chose not to pray were encouraged to appoint surrogate worshipers, whose prayers they were required to attend. Christian devotionals were routinely delivered at school, assemblies and other activities during which students were a captive audience. Gideon Bibles were distributed in school, even in the classroom.

All these practices were clearly unconstitutional and violated numerous federal court decisions, but Alabama has a history of defying federal law protecting civil rights and liberties. Pamela Sumners, attorney for the plaintiffs in Chandler v. James, has observed that Governor James is “whipping up” religious bigotry the way George Wallace once whipped people into a frenzy over race.

So the Chandler decision is unlikely to end religious persecution in Alabama public schools. It clarified no constitutional principles that were not already clear and had not already been rejected by public officials. In fact, after an earlier decision in the Chandler case struck down the state's student-led prayer statute, a similar lawsuit, Herring v. Key, was brought against Pike County, Alabama, public schools.

The Herring case, now pending before the same federal district court that issued the injunction in Chandler v. James, involves four Jewish children who have the misfortune to attend public school in Pike County. They report being tormented by school officials and classmates because they are Jews, denied the right to practice their faith and forced to participate in Christian religious observances. Three of the children, Sarah, David and Paul Herring, are in the sixth, seventh and ninth grades.
respectively; they are also represented by Pamela Sumners.

The complaint in the Herring case makes you wonder if Pike County is part of America or Iran. It alleges that: Christian prayers and devotions are aired over the school's public address system; the elementary school principal has led prayers at assemblies and introduced preachers to captive student audiences; children are required to bow their heads in prayer during assemblies; sixth-grader Sarah was expressly ordered by a teacher to bow her head for a "student-initiated" prayer; and seventh-grader David was physically forced by a student teacher to bow his head in devotion to Jesus. The children have been required to attend Christian sermons; Sarah was once led crying and shaking from an assembly after being told by the preacher that all students who did not embrace Jesus as their savior would burn in Hell. Ninth-grader Paul was required by the vice principal of his school to write an essay on "Why Jesus Loves Me" as punishment for disrupting class. The principal forbade Paul from wearing the Star of David to class, claiming it was a "gang symbol." (other children wear crosses). School officials have tolerated vicious anti-Semitic remarks directed at the children as well as physical assault. Their possessions have been defaced with swastikas and they have been given cartoons about the Holocaust.

Their mother and stepfather, Sue and Wayne Willis, have regularly protested the persecution of their kids, with very limited success. Sue Willis reports that the high school principal and an elementary school teacher both responded to her complaints "with words to the effect of 'If parents will not save souls, we have to.'"

It is tempting to dismiss these cases as anomalies, but violations of First Amendment prohibitions on establishing religion in the schools are not uncommon, especially but not exclusively in the South. The New York Times reports that in parts of Alabama "prayer has remained as common as pop quizzes in many schools." In Mississippi in 1996 a federal court intervened to protect Lutheran children from organized prayer and Bible readings in a predominantly Baptist public school system. In West Virginia, prayers are broadcast over the public address system before every home football game at Nitro High School, and everyone in the audience is expected to stand with head bowed, according to a recent report by The Charleston Gazette. "They say it's illegal, but we've always done it," Nitro athletic director Patrick Vance reportedly said. The Gazette also reports that during graduation ceremonies at Herbert Hoover High School in Clendenin, West Virginia, students recite the Lord's Prayer.

Organized, officially endorsed sectarian religious activities in public school are indisputably illegal; but they persist, partly because relatively few people have the strength and courage to challenge them. Members of minority faiths who are most likely to object are also most at risk when they do so. But anyone who publically complains about illegal, school-sanctioned prayer or goes to court to stop it should expect to be ostracized, harassed and threatened with physical injury or death by God-fearing neighbors.

This is the climate of religious intolerance in which Congress will consider a constitutional amendment intended to legitimate organized group prayer in the nation's classrooms. The amendment, introduced by Oklahoma Representative Ernest Istook Jr.,
establishes a constitutional right to engage in sectarian religious practices on public property, including schools, and gives religious groups an entitlement to government funds. The Istook Amendment does state that "neither the United States nor any state shall require any person to join in prayer or other religious activity [or] prescribe school prayers." But the amendment would authorize student-led prayers, which often involve the de facto endorsement of school officials and can be quite coercive. Anyone doubting the threat to the free exercise of religion posed by student prayers need only attend public school in Alabama.

"I don't want the government involved in the religious upbringing of my son," Michael Chandler, plaintiff in Chandler v. James, has explained. "The state has no business telling my child when, where and how to pray." You'd expect conservatives mistrustful of government to sympathize with Chandler's concern. Instead, supporters of the Istook Amendment promulgate the dangerous fiction that religion has been exiled from the public schools and students have lost their rights to pray.

In fact, students have the undisputed right to pray individually or in groups during their free time; they can say grace before lunch, drop to their knees on the football field or pray silently in every class, as many do. Religious associations of students have the same rights as other student groups to meet on school property. In Chandler v. James, while the court enjoined organized, official prayer, it expressly affirmed the rights of students to express personal religious beliefs in their schoolwork or during graduation services, engage in religious activities during non-instructional time, announce meetings of extracurricular religious activities over the school's public address system and wear religious symbols. The federal courts have generally made clear that students have the right to exercise their religion in school; what they lack is the power to impose their religion on others.

Religious power, not religious rights, is what supporters of a school prayer amendment seek. In the name of rights, they seek the kind of power that subjects the children of minority faiths to religious persecution in the nation's schools. At least today that persecution is illegal and can be remedied in federal court, when the families at risk persevere. A constitutional amendment permitting organized school prayer would leave every public school student at the mercy of the religious majority. Introduce organized religion in the schools and you introduce sectarianism; and that is a prescription for tribalism, not virtue.
Betsy DeVos isn’t pleased by what she sees going on in public schools today. Educators, she insists, are subjecting children to unwanted counseling, sex education and psychological surveys, usurping parental rights.

“All too often our laws in this country are making it difficult for parents to exercise their responsibility,” says DeVos, a longtime Republican Party activist and wealthy funder of right-wing causes from Michigan. “The family has been weakened.”

To reverse the tide, DeVos, whose husband Dick heads the Amway Corporation, earlier this year accepted a position as national co-chair for Of The People, a three-year-old organization that has become the nerve center for the so-called “parental rights” movement. The Arlington, Va.-based group’s goal is to add a “Parental Rights Amendment” (PRA) to all 50 state constitutions — and eventually the U.S. Constitution as well.

Critics say the drive is simply the latest wrinkle in the Religious Right’s ongoing assault against public education and church-state separation. Decrying the “government-versus-the-family” rhetoric employed by Of The People, opponents argue that the PRA would cripple public schools by subjecting them to a flood of lawsuits based on newly created “rights.”

Virtually unheard of just two years ago, the Parental Rights Amendment is suddenly all the rage among the Religious Right. The 17-word amendment has been introduced in at least 28 state legislatures. Although it has yet to pass anywhere, parental rights legislation came within one vote of clearing the Virginia Senate last year, and this November voters in Colorado will consider a Parental Rights Amendment as a ballot initiative.

In addition, a legislative version of the amendment is advancing in the U.S. Congress. Sponsored by Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa) and Rep. Steve Largent (R-Okla.), the “Parental Rights and Responsibilities Act” (S. 984 and H.R. 1946) forbids government agencies, including public school officials, to “interfere with or usurp the right of a parent to direct the upbringing of the child of the parent.”

The bill passed the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Administrative Oversight and the Courts by a 4-3 vote last April but faces an uncertain future before the full Congress.

Church-state separationists and advocates of public education say that beneath the benign-sounding facade of “parental rights” lurks a dangerous proposal designed to give the Religious Right a powerful new weapon to harass public schools. The Parental Rights Amendment and the legislation under consideration in Congress, opponents say, could give fundamentalist activists a legal right to demand the removal of parts of the public school curriculum they don’t like or insist on government support for private religious education.

The version of the amendment favored by Of The People states simply, “The right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children shall not be infringed.” Critics assert that the language is so vague that misguided judges could use it to undermine church-state separation and hamstring public education. For example, religious education could be declared a “parental right,” with vouchers mandated by the courts. In addition, use of a particular book, play or health curriculum in a public school could be declared an “infringement” of parents’ rights leading to court-ordered removal of the materials.

Officials with OTP deny that is their intent. Yet, they remain strangely reluctant to explain exactly what the amendment is intended to do. At a Washington press conference Feb. 9, Of The People leaders spoke only in generalities about the proposed amendment’s effects.

Instead, OTP activists spent most of the time insisting that the rights of parents are routinely being trampled by government agencies. For example, during the press conference, Robert George, a Princeton University political science professor and OTP adviser, asserted that parental rights are “under unprecedented attack.” These abuses, the group claims, can be ended only by adding the PRA to state constitutions.

Asked to provide a specific example of abuse by government, DeVos pointed to an unnamed public school that allegedly subjected a child to counseling without his parents’ knowledge. “They were changing the personality of this child through the counseling,” she said.

OTP Executive Director Greg D. Erken and Chairman Jeffrey Bell would identify only one issue that they said would definitely be affected by the Parental Rights Amendment — condom availability in public schools. At the press conference, condom distribution programs were labeled “an outrage” by Bell, a longtime activist in right-wing causes who sits on the board of directors of the Catholic Alliance, a Roman Catholic subsidiary of Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition. (Erken declined to be inter-
viewed for this story.)

Opponents of the PRA point out that, despite the Religious Right’s frequent bluster about the subject, very few public schools make condoms available to students. According to Advocates for Youth, a Washington-based advocacy organization, less than 1 percent of high schools have such programs. (Furthermore, 81 percent of those programs require some form of parental consent.)

OTP critics suspect that the emotionally-charged condom issue is a stalking horse for a larger agenda that includes everything from blocking outcome-based education to stopping the U.N. Convention on the Rights of Children and restricting or removing materials from public libraries.

Foes of the “parental rights” movement also contend that the amendment would mire schools in costly and unnecessary lawsuits. Arnold Fege, director of governmental relations of the National PTA, says the Parental Rights Amendment and its companion bill in Congress would create an explosion of litigation aimed at public schools. Ultimately, he charges, it would result in federal courts dictating policy to local institutions.

“The real problem is, no one knows what rights we’re talking about,” Fege says. “Literally every state and local policy related to public education, health and child abuse is prone to legal challenge. [The PRA] would pit parent against parent.”

Fege considers it ironic that Religious Right groups and ultra-conservatives, who frequently trumpet the doctrine of “state’s rights” and local control of public institutions, would champion a measure that, as he puts it, will “federalize local policy.”

Says Fege, “Public schools in San Francisco are going to have different policies than schools in Orem, Utah, or Helena, Montana. Federal courts may subject them all to the same policies. That just isn’t going to wash. Court rulings effectively remove the issue of debate from the local community.”

The PTA official also considers the Parental Rights Amendment a “backdoor voucher bill.” “Why is it not possible,” he asks, “for parents to argue that all of public education is an interference, and say they want home schooling or a private school education paid for by public expense?”

At least one prominent voucher advocate is already thinking along those lines. Clint Bolick, litigation director of the Institute for Justice, made the case recently at the right-wing Heritage Foundation in Washington.

During a May 2 panel discussion about the state of the voucher movement, Bolick was asked if the Parental Rights Amendment would give his group additional firepower in the courts.

“It surely does,” he replied. “One of the broad goals of the Institute for Justice is to expand parental liberty, which is already recognized under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, but that [the PRA drive] is a movement, primarily state-based, that would recognize parental sovereignty. It is a very harmonious parallel movement because if you put it in terms of who should be sovereign over children — parents or some state government bureaucracy — you win that battle pretty niftily, and then you just ease on in to choosing where a kid goes to school, so I do see it as very helpful.”

Of The People’s Bell told a Christian Coalition gathering in Washington last September that the PRA “would not mandate federal funding of a private school voucher program.” He then added, “It would give the principle wider play and we think help such a school-choice movement at the political level.” He also said “First beginning to establish the principle of parental rights I think is the best thing we can do for the school choice movement.”

National PTA has joined a coalition of more than 40 organizations to oppose the parental rights legislation pending in Congress. The coalition includes Americans United, the National Education Association, the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Social Workers, the Child Welfare League of America and the American Civil Liberties Union. Several religious groups are also members, including the National Council of Churches; the Episcopal Church; the Presbyterian Church, USA; the Union of American Hebrew Congregations; the United Church of Christ’s Office of Church and Society; the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee; the United Methodist Church, Women’s Division and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
Proponents of the parental rights agenda include a familiar array of Religious Right stalwarts, among them the Christian Coalition, the Family Research Council (the political arm of radio broadcaster James Dobson’s Focus on the Family), the Traditional Values Coalition and Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum. The congressional “parental rights” effort, critics note, was originally part of the Christian Coalition’s “Contract with the American Family,” a legislative wish list unveiled in May of 1995.

In a May 1 interview with The New York Times, Christian Coalition Executive Director Ralph Reed asserted that the purpose of “parental rights” legislation is to make certain “that schools reinforce rather than undermine the values parents teach to our children in our homes, churches and synagogues.” Reed added, “The American people agree with us, and if Bill Clinton is faced with a situation where he gives in to extremist organizations on the left and vetoes this, he’s going to have a serious election-year problem on his hands.”

In addition to the support from fundamentalist Christian groups, “parental rights” lingo has long been a staple of the U.S. Catholic Conference. While the Catholic bishops have not formally endorsed the PRA movement, they employ similar rhetoric to buttress their argument in favor of voucher subsidies for parochial schools.

A recently issued USCC pamphlet, “Principles for Educational Reform in the United States,” asserts that “parental rights are natural and inalienable.” It goes on to say, “Parents have the right to choose the kind of education best suited to the needs of their children, and they should not be burdened economically for choosing a private or religious school in the exercise of this fundamental right.” The statement then calls on government to provide “assistance” to help parents take advantage of this “right.”

Christian fundamentalists and Roman Catholics have made common cause over “parental rights” before. Two years ago, Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston formed a group called The Interfaith Coalition, composed of traditionalist Catholics and Protestant fundamentalists, which in 1995 endorsed sweeping “parental rights” legislation. The measure would have required Massachusetts public school officials to give parents written notice at least 10 days before presenting “any information involving a morally or religiously sensitive topic.” Students would not have been permitted to hear such discussions without written parental consent.

The bill listed a number of “morally or religiously sensitive” topics, including human sexuality, sexual orientation, contraception, abortion, sexual or physical abuse, alcohol or drug abuse, marriage, divorce or family life, moral decision-making, suicide, coping with personal loss or religious practices and beliefs.

Critics said the bill was so broad it would have made it nearly impossible for public schools to teach many subjects. Sponsors later rewrote the bill to demand parental consent only when material dealing with human sexuality was presented, but Massachusetts lawmakers rejected this version as well.

Even with powerful backing, it remains to be seen whether the Parental Rights Amendment will catch on in the states. Both sides are eagerly watching Colorado, the first battleground. Voters there will decide whether to add the PRA to the state constitution this November.

California has also emerged as a PRA battleground. The Golden State’s version of the amendment is more detailed than OTP’s model language. It guarantees parents the “fundamental right to control the care and custody of their minor children including control over education, discipline, religious and moral instruction, health and psychological and emotional well-being of the child.” The measure was introduced in the Assembly by Religious Right Republicans, led by Assemblyman Steve Baldwin, a leader of the theocratic right in the state. It was drafted by attorneys with the Rutherford Institute, a Religious Right legal group.

According to the Mainstream Voters Project (MVP) Bulletin, a watchdog publication based in San Diego, the PRA’s backers in the California legislature have resorted to misinformation and distortion — along with a dollop of paranoia — to persuade voters that the amendment is needed.

In November of 1995, the MVP Bulletin said, Baldwin participated in a panel discussion sponsored by the California Conservative School Board Caucus. During his remarks Baldwin charged that an unnamed state agency was “rating” parents and “the information will be computerized and can be accessed by Child Protective Services in various counties and probably, I assume, used as a reason to confiscate your children.”

Continued Baldwin, “They’re going to categorize every parent they can as evil because you have imparted a Christian-based value system or something like that on your children that the establishment views as an obstacle to true learning....That’s the Orwellian trail we’re heading down right now.”

The MVP Bulletin also notes that supporters of “parental rights” in the U.S. Congress have relied on wildly embellished anecdotes to make their case. Testifying in favor of the Parental Rights and Responsibility Act last October, Oklahoma Rep. Largent cited a 1980 case from Washington state in which a court allegedly removed a 14-year-old girl from her home after her
parents grounded her for smoking marijuana and engaging in sex with her boyfriend.

To hear Largent tell it, the court was guilty of an outrageous case of judicial overreaction. In reality, the facts of the case simply do not match Largent's "horror story." As it turns out, the girl in question was a runaway whose mother had signed a consent form specifically permitting state officials to place her daughter in a juvenile care facility. The girl then filed a motion with the court seeking to be placed in a different facility. In court the girl's parents opposed the move and petitioned to have her returned to her own home rather than placed in a different center.

Charges the MVP Bulletin, "Largent's misrepresentation...illustrates the Religious Right's willingness to twist the truth in order to effect the desired public outrage they clearly thrive on. Often there is a grain of truth in the stories they tell. Too often that truth is consumed by the storyteller's desire to be recognized for uncovering the biggest 'shock tale' yet."

Are these Religious Right "horror stories" having an effect? In the case of the PRA, it may be too early to tell. Of The People touts data showing the amendment receiving the support of 74 percent of respondents in an opinion poll. But opponents say attitudes may change once voters learn what the proposal would do.

The PTA's Fege notes that the constitutional amendment has yet to pass any state legislature, indicating a lack of true grassroots support. (To date, the measure has been endorsed by only one governor — George Allen of Virginia, a Republican elected in 1993 with heavy support from the Religious Right.) Fege believes that most people will not support the measure if they are educated about its possible far-reaching effects, especially how it might affect the government's ability to crack down on child abuse.

Child welfare advocates argue that the PRA would make it more difficult for government agencies to intervene in cases where children are abused or neglected. Some assert that it could even aid parents who have lost custody of children because of abuse to insist on their "right" to regain custody.

In a May 11 letter to The New York Times, Theresa Reid, executive director of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, noted that under Largent's bill, government agencies could not intervene in family matters unless they could first demonstrate "clear and convincing evidence" of a compelling government interest. Reid charged that such a high standard would "have a chilling effect" on government's ability to investigate cases of alleged child abuse.

Wrote Reid, "'Clear and convincing evidence' is not available until after an investigation has been conducted — or until it is too late to help the child."

Complicating the issue for the right wing is the fact that not all conservatives support the "parental rights" movement. Some believe the measure would encourage the federal courts to meddle in issues that ought to be decided by local government.

Conservative columnist George F. Will raised this objection in a Feb. 11 column. Will expressed sympathy with parents who believe their rights have been violated but asserted that the "17 words" of the Parental Rights Amendment are "rich in potential for breeding litigation about matters that should be settled by legislation, or by processes of political persuasion....Do we want to turn every parent's grievance into grounds for suing?"

Despite these concerns, Of The People is confident that the PRA will catch on in the states in the months and years to come. If the group is right, it may have more to do with big money backing than true grassroots support.

DeVos, whose appointment as national co-chair of the group was announced with much fanfare last February, brings a sizeable war chest with her. Her husband, Dick DeVos, is president of the Amway Corporation, a lucrative multi-level marketing sales company based in Grand Rapids, Mich., and the son of Richard and Helen DeVos, who run the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation in Grand Rapids. (Richard DeVos, co-founder of Amway, was president of the company before turning it over to his son.)

The foundation, which has assets in excess of $105 million, frequently funds Religious Right groups, including Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council and the Heritage Foundation. (In 1992, the foundation gave $1.1 million to the Rev. D. James Kennedy's militantly anti-separationist Coral Ridge Ministries in Ft. Lauderdale.)

Betsy and Dick DeVos run their own foundation, the Dick & Betsy DeVos Foundation, which operates out of the same building as the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation. Dick and Betsy DeVos' group also gives large sums to Religious Right groups, including the Family Research Council, Focus on the Family and the Michigan Family Forum.

In addition, Betsy DeVos' parents, Edgar and Elsa Prince, established the Prince Foundation in Holland, Mich., in 1977. Like the DeVos foundations, the Prince Foundation gives generously to the Religious Right, including $500,500 to Focus on the Family and $495,000 to the Family Research Council in 1989. In 1993, the Prince Foundation gave FOF an additional quarter of a million.

Betsy DeVos' easy access to her family's multi-million-dollar right-wing foundations gives Of The People all the money it needs to push "parental rights" all over the country. According to Bell, the group expects to spend more than half a million dollars this year alone.

PRA proponents have no doubt they represent the cutting edge of a movement destined to take center stage in national debate. "The Parental Rights Amendment," says Bell, "will become the next term limits."

Supporters of church-state separation and public education warn that the "parental rights" movement should not be lightly dismissed. "The 'parental rights' drive is well funded and well organized," says Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "Because Of The People and its allies are pursuing a state-based strategy as well as a federal campaign, we may have to fight 50 separate battles in addition to one in Washington, D.C."

Continued Lynn, "This proposal is a time bomb. If adopted by any state or appended to the U.S. Constitution, it will eventually go off and do great damage to public schools and the wall of separation between church and state. Ironically, it would also hurt children and families — the very institutions its supporters say it is supposed to protect."