

# Choice in American Education

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Historically, most school boards in the United States assigned students to schools by drawing boundaries that established specific attendance areas. Where one lived determined the school one attended, if one chose to attend a public school. Families did not *seem* to have any choice at all—though the reality, as we shall see, was not quite this simple.

The situation has changed substantially in recent years. Today, a wide variety of school choice mechanisms are available to parents and students—vouchers, magnet schools, charter schools, interdistrict choice programs, home-schooling, tax credits and tax deductions for private tuition, and, above all, school choice through residential selection. Responding to the increasing demand by parents for greater choice among schools, states today provide a greater range of choices to parents than ever before. Approximately 63 percent of American families with school-age children are making a choice when sending their child to school. According to a 1993 Department of Education survey, 39 percent of all parents said that where they have chosen to live was influenced by the school their child would attend.<sup>1</sup> Another 11 percent

1. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Findings from 'The Condition of Education 1997: Public and Private Schools:

of the population sends their children to private school.<sup>2</sup> And still another 13 percent of families have a choice of some kind of public school such as a magnet school, charter school, participation in an interdistrict choice program, or other choice program.<sup>3</sup> Currently, choice programs are rapidly expanding in size and number, and the topic has become a matter of significant public discussion and debate, with most public opinion studies finding increased demand for school choice, especially among citizens from low-income and minority backgrounds.<sup>4</sup>

In this essay I review the growth in the range of choices available in American education and examine in depth the way in which the most controversial of existing choice programs—school vouchers—has worked in practice in the few cities where vouchers have been tried.

#### ORIGINS OF THE CHOICE CONCEPT IN EDUCATION

The extended and explicit practice of school choice in the United States came of age only in the late 1980s and early 1990s. But choice in education is an ancient concept, dating back to the days when Socrates and his fellow philosophers walked the Athenian agora, teaching for a fee.<sup>5</sup> The earliest forms of choice left education strictly to the private market. It was John Stuart Mill who first made a fully developed argument on behalf of school choice within the context of publicly funded, universal education: “Is it

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How Do They Differ?’ ” (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1997) <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs97/97983.htm>>.

2. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data and “Fall Enrollment in Institutions of Higher Education” Surveys; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), “Fall Enrollment” Surveys, and Projections of Education Statistics to 2007 (Washington, D.C., 1997) <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/digest97/d97t002.html>>.

3. Lynn Schnaiberg, “More Students Taking Advantage of School Choice, Report Says,” *Education Week*, September 22, 1999, p. 6.

4. Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 1997 National Opinion Poll (Washington D.C., 1997), table 7.

5. Andrew J. Coulson, *Market Education: The Unknown History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1999), chap. 2.

not almost a self-evident axiom, that the State should require and compel the education . . . of every human being who is born its citizen?" he asks. He then goes on to point out that

were the duty of enforcing universal education once admitted, there would be an end to the difficulties about what the State should teach, and how it should teach, which now convert the subject into a mere battlefield for sects and parties, causing the time and labor which should have been spent in educating, to be wasted in quarrelling about education. . . . It might leave to parents to obtain the education where and how they pleased, and content itself with helping to pay the school fees.<sup>6</sup>

In the United States school choice within a system of publicly funded, universal education was first seriously proposed by economist Milton Friedman, who in 1955 argued that a voucherlike arrangement where the government finances the education but families choose the school would lead to a more efficient educational system.<sup>7</sup> The idea gained considerable public currency in the 1970s, when the Office of Economic Opportunity helped fund a school choice experiment in the Alum Rock school district in California. When this experiment encountered strong opposition from teacher organizations and failed to be implemented effectively,<sup>8</sup> enthusiasm for school choice waned for about a decade, except for sporadic use of the magnet school concept as a tool for school desegregation.

Then, in the 1980s and early 1990s, a number of events helped give the school choice movement new impetus. First, a major study by a research team headed by James Coleman (discussed more fully below) reported that students in Catholic schools outperformed their public school peers. These findings were subsequently

6. John Stuart Mill, "On Liberty" in *Educational Vouchers: Concepts and Controversies*, ed. George R. La Noue (New York: Teachers College Press, 1972), pp. 3–4.

7. Milton Friedman, "The Role of Government in Education," in Robert Solo, ed., *Economics and the Public Interest* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955), p. 127.

8. David K. Cohen and Eleanor Farrar, "Power to the Parents? The Story of Education Vouchers," *Public Interest*, Spring 1977, pp. 72–97.

supported by a second major study by the Brookings Institution that, in addition, explained the original results by showing that private schools had more autonomy and, as a result, were organized more effectively than public schools.<sup>9</sup> The authors, John Chubb and Terry Moe, proposed school vouchers as the solution. Although critics questioned both studies, their impact was reinforced by a Department of Education proposal to give compensatory education funds directly to low-income families to be used as vouchers.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, experiments that gave families greater choice of public school began to appear in Minnesota, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and East Harlem. When test score gains were reported for East Harlem, public interest in the idea grew rapidly, producing today a wide variety and ever-growing set of school choice initiatives.<sup>11</sup> What had been the gleam in the eye of a few intellectuals in 1970 had become, by the end of the century, a major political movement with a wide variety of actual policies operating in many parts of the United States.

### *Residential Location and School Choice*

Although explicit school choice programs are quite recent, in fact school choice by selection of one's place of residence is a deeply entrenched part of American education. Self-conscious school choice has long been exercised by many families when they rent or purchase a house in a place where they think the school is good. Because the quality of the school affects a family's residential decisions, housing prices vary with the quality of local schools. As a result, many families indirectly pay for their children's education

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

10. Paul E. Peterson, "The New Politics of Choice" in Diane Ravitch and Maris A. Vinovskis, eds., *Learning from the Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

11. Joseph P. Viteritti, *Choosing Equality: School Choice, the Constitution and Civil Society* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1999), pp. 60–62; Bruce Fuller et al., *School Choice* (Berkeley and Stanford: Policy Analysis for California Education, University of California, Berkeley, and Stanford University, 1999).

by purchasing homes that cost more simply because the home is located in a neighborhood which is perceived to have a higher-quality school.<sup>12</sup>

School choice by residential selection is highly inegalitarian, especially when one considers that the purchase of a home requires a capital investment. As school quality drives up housing prices, access to the neighborhood school is determined by one's capacity to obtain a mortgage. Those with higher earning power and more capital resources are able to command access to the best schools.

School choice by residential selection, the most inegalitarian form of school choice, is becoming more widespread, simply because more families have more choice in selecting a neighborhood in which to live than ever before. A half-century ago, the attractiveness—and thus the average cost (per square foot)—of a residential location was strongly influenced by its proximity to workplaces, which were concentrated in specific parts of a metropolitan area, primarily the central city. But when highways replaced railroads and rapid transit systems as the primary mode of transport in metropolitan areas, employment opportunities diffused throughout the metropolitan area. Once jobs became widely distributed, the dominant factors affecting community housing prices became local amenities, such as the neighborhood school.<sup>13</sup> As a result, many families today consider the local school when selecting a place to live.<sup>14</sup>

The amount of school choice by residential selection varies across metropolitan areas. In the Miami metropolitan area, for example, this form of choice is restricted by the fact that one

12. H. S. Rosen and D. J. Fullerton, "A Note on Local Tax Rates, Public Benefit Levels, and Property Values," *Journal of Political Economy* 85 (1977): 433–40; G. R. Meadows, "Taxes, Spending, and Property Values: A Comment and Further Results," *Journal of Political Economy* 84 (1976): 869–80; M. Edel and E. Sclar, "Taxes, Spending, and Property Values: Supply Adjustment in a Tiebout-Oates Model," *Journal of Political Economy* 82 (1974): 941–54.

13. Paul E. Peterson, "Introduction: Technology, Race, and Urban Policy," in Paul E. Peterson, ed., *The New Urban Reality* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1985), pp. 1–29.

14. National Center for Education Statistics, *Findings from the Condition of Education*, 1997.

school district is responsible for almost the entire metropolitan area, whereas the Boston metropolitan area is divided into more than one hundred school districts.

The quality of education is higher in metropolitan areas that give parents more choice by virtue of the fact that they have more school districts. Students take more academic courses, students spend more time on their homework, classes are more structured and disciplined, parents are more involved with schools, student test scores are higher, and sports programs are given less emphasis.<sup>15</sup>

It is difficult for low-income families to exercise choice through residential selection. Most do not have the earning power or access to financial markets to locate in neighborhoods with schools perceived to be of high quality. On the contrary, they often can afford a home or apartment only because it is located in a neighborhood where schools are perceived to be of low quality, a perception that depresses property values. In short, in a system of residentially determined school choice, such as exists in most metropolitan areas today, low-income families are very likely to be concentrated in areas where schools are thought to be of low quality. Conversely and ironically, once a neighborhood school serving a low-income community improves, local land values will rise, making it more difficult for additional poor families to gain access to the school.

It was precisely this link between school and residence that provoked one of the most turbulent periods in American educational history, the school busing controversy. Since school choice by residential selection gave better-off families access to better schools, many felt that racial segregation and inequality could be obtained only by forcefully breaking the link between school and residence

15. Caroline Minter Hoxby, "The Effects of School Choice on Curriculum and Atmosphere," in Susan B. Mayer and Paul E. Peterson, eds., *Earning and Learning: How Schools Matter* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1999), pp. 281–316; Caroline B. Hoxby, "Does Competition among Schools Benefit Students and Taxpayers?" *American Economic Review*, forthcoming; Caroline M. Hoxby, "Analyzing School Choice Reforms That Use America's Traditional Forms of Parental Choice," in Paul E. Peterson and Bryan C. Hassel, eds., *Learning from School Choice* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1998), pp. 133–51.

by compelling families to send their children by bus to schools distant from their place of residence.<sup>16</sup>

### *Magnet Schools*

So unpopular was compulsory busing with many Americans that the magnet school, exploiting the choice concept, was developed to replace it. Magnet schools sought to increase racial and ethnic integration of schools by enticing families to choose integrated schools by offering distinctive, improved education programs. The magnet idea was initially broached in the 1960s. But it was not until after 1984 that the magnet school concept, supported by federal funding under the Magnet Schools Assistance Program, began to have a national impact. "Between 1984 and 1994, 138 districts nationwide received a total of \$955 million" in federal funds to implement this form of school choice.<sup>17</sup> As a consequence, the number of schools with magnet programs doubled between 1982 and 1991, while the number of students tripled.<sup>18</sup> In some school districts, parents can choose a magnet school only if their choice increases the level of racial integration within the magnet school. In other school districts, magnet school places are offered on a first-come, first-served basis. In still other school districts, schools that are highly magnetic must choose students by means of a lottery. Nationwide, in the early 1990s, more than 1.2 million students attend 2,400 magnet schools in more than two hundred school districts.<sup>19</sup>

Cleveland provides an illustrative example of the way in which

16. Gary Orfield, *Must We Bus? Segregated Schools and National Policy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1978).

17. Fuller et al., *School Choice*, p. 26.

18. Lauri Steel and Roger Levine, *Educational Innovation in Multicultural Contexts: The Growth of Magnet Schools in American Education* (Palo Alto, Calif.: American Institutes for Research, 1996).

19. Dennis P. Doyle and Marsha Levine, "Magnet Schools: Choice and Quality in Public Education," *Phi Delta Kappan* 66, no. 4 (1984): 265–70; Rolf K. Blank, Roger E. Levine, and Lauri Steel, "After 15 Years: Magnet Schools in Urban Education," in Bruce Fuller, Richard Elmore, and Gary Orfield, eds., *Who Chooses? Who Loses? Culture, Institutions and the Unequal Effects of School Choice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996), pp. 154–72.

school desegregation controversies led to the introduction of magnet schools. In 1981, the federal district court issued an order that explicitly asked the Cleveland school district to establish magnet schools. Gradually, a number of magnet schools were created, and in 1994 the city of Cleveland and the state of Ohio agreed to a plan that would “enlarge the capacity of its magnet schools from 6,800 seats in 1992–93 to approximately 12,800 seats by the 1994–95 school year.”<sup>20</sup> In the 1999–2000 school year twenty-three magnet schools were expected to enroll well more than ten thousand students in kindergarten through eighth grade.

The magnet school concept, if taken to its logical conclusion, opens all the public schools in a district to all families, allowing them to select their preferred public school, subject to space constraints. Such programs, generally identified as open-enrollment programs, can be found at the high school and middle school levels in a few school districts.

Most studies of the effects of magnet schools and open-enrollment programs find positive effects on student learning.<sup>21</sup> Although some of these findings have been questioned on the grounds that the apparent effects were simply a function of the initial ability of the students selected to attend magnet schools,<sup>22</sup> two studies that carefully addressed this issue still found positive effects from attendance at a magnet school.<sup>23</sup>

20. *Reed v. Rhodes*, 934 F.Supp. 1533, 1575 (N.D. Ohio 1996).

21. R. Kenneth Godwin, Frank R. Kemerer, and Valerie J. Martinez, “Comparing Public Choice and Private Voucher Programs in San Antonio,” in Paul E. Peterson and Bryan C. Hassel, eds., *Learning from School Choice* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1998), pp. 275–306; Corrie M. Yu and William L. Talor, “Difficult Choices: Do Magnet Schools Serve Children in Need?” Citizens’ Commission on Civil Rights, 1997, Washington, D.C.

22. California Department of Education, as cited in Fuller et al., *School Choice*, 1999, pp. 30, 38–39; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *School Choice: A Special Report* (Princeton, N.J.: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1992).

23. Adam Gamoran, “Student Achievement in Public Magnet, Public Comprehensive, and Private City High Schools,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 18 (1996): 1–18; Robert L. Crain, Amy Heebner, and Yiu-Pong Si, *The Effectiveness of New York City’s Career Magnet Schools: An Evaluation of Ninth-Grade Performance Using an Experimental Design* (Berkeley, Calif.: National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1992).



In the East Harlem community school district within New York City, the magnet school was expanded so as to give most parents within the community a choice of schools. Test scores climbed both within the magnet schools and within traditional neighborhood schools competing with these magnet schools.<sup>24</sup>

### *Interdistrict School Choice*

If most magnet school programs limit parental choice to public schools within a particular school district, in a number of places school choice has been expanded to include access to public institutions outside the local school district. As early as 1985, Minnesota gave local school boards permission to allow students from outside their district to attend their school (but the program was restricted to students who would not adversely affect the racial integration of participating school districts).<sup>25</sup> By 1997, nearly twenty thousand students were participating.<sup>26</sup> In 1966, Massachusetts enacted a program that allowed minority students to exit the Boston schools and enter participating suburban schools, then in 1991 enacted a more general interdistrict choice program without regard to a student's ethnicity or a district's racial composition.<sup>27</sup> By 1995 nearly seven thousand students and more than three hundred school districts were participating in this program. By 1997 similar programs had been enacted in sixteen states.

Although many of these programs are too new to enable researchers to draw conclusions about their long-term effect, preliminary evidence from the Massachusetts program indicates that the students participating in the programs enacted in that state are ethnically representative of the student composition of the public

24. Mark Schneider, Paul Teske, and Milissa Marschall, *Choosing Schools: Consumer Choice and the Quality of American Schools* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

25. Viteritti, *Choosing Equality*, 1999, pp. 62–63.

26. Fuller et al., *School Choice*, p. 33.

27. David J. Armor and Brett M. Peiser, "Inter-district Choice in Massachusetts," in Peterson and Hassel, *Learning from School Choice*, pp. 157–86; David J. Armor and Brett M. Peiser, *Competition in Education: A Case Study in Inter-district Choice* (Boston: Pioneer Institute, 1997).

schools more generally. Also, it appears that school districts losing students often make significant efforts to upgrade their curriculum in order to stanch the flow of students outside the district.<sup>28</sup>

### *Charter Schools*

Magnet schools and interdistrict enrollment programs limit parental choice to schools operated by school boards. Charter schools have enlarged choice opportunities so as to include government-financed schools operated by nongovernmental entities. By 1998 thirty-four states and the District of Columbia had enacted charter school legislation, and more than 1,199 charter schools were educating more than a quarter-million students.<sup>29</sup> At the beginning of the 1999 school year the number of charter schools had increased 40 percent, to 1,684—a notable increment by any criterion.<sup>30</sup> Although the percentage of students in charter schools nationwide is still a small fraction of all students, in some states charter schools are providing the school of choice for a significant fraction of the student population. For example, in 1997, 4.4 percent of the students in Arizona were attending charter schools.<sup>31</sup>

Charter school terminology varies by state, as does the legal framework under which these schools operate. The common characteristics of charter schools are twofold. First, the entity operating the school is ordinarily not a government agency, though it may receive most of its operating revenue from either the state or a local school board. Second, charter schools do not serve students within a specific attendance boundary; instead they recruit stu-

28. Armor and Peiser, "Inter-District Choice," 1998.

29. Bryan C. Hassel, *The Charter School Challenge* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1999), p. 1.

30. "Operating Charter Schools, Fall 1999–2000," memorandum prepared by the Fordham Foundation, Washington, D.C., October 1999.

31. Robert Maranto, Scott Milliman, Frederick Hess, and April Gresham, "Real World School Choice: Arizona Charter Schools," in Robert Maranto, Scott Milliman, Frederick Hess, and April Gresham, eds., *School Choice in the Real World: Lessons from Arizona Charter Schools* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1999), p. 7.

dents from a large catchment area that may be beyond the attendance boundaries of traditional public schools. As a result, they must persuade parents that their offerings are superior to those provided by traditional public schools in their vicinity.

Studies of charter schools find that, on average and taken as a whole, students attending charter schools are fairly representative of the school population more generally.<sup>32</sup> Most charter schools are popular with parents and substantially oversubscribed, though some charter schools have been closed because safety and education standards were subnormal. Charter schools are better able than traditional public schools to attract teachers who were educated at selective colleges and who have received higher education in mathematics and science.<sup>33</sup> Whether or not students learn more in charter schools than traditional public schools has yet to be ascertained by an independent research team.

### *Tax Deductions/Credits for Private Education*

Recently, two states—Minnesota and Arizona—have facilitated parental access to private schools by providing tax deductions or tax credits that can be used to help pay the cost of private education. In Minnesota, families earning less than \$33,500 a year can claim a tax credit of up to \$1,000 per child (\$2,000 per family) for school-related expenses, including costs incurred in attending a private school such as the purchase of books and other educational materials—although a credit cannot be claimed for private school tuition. Any family can claim a tax deduction for educational expenses of up to \$1,625 for students in kindergarten through sixth grade and \$2,500 for students in seventh grade

32. U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, *A Study of Charter Schools: First-Year Report* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1997); Gregg Vanourek, Bruno V. Mann, Chester E. Finn Jr., and Louann A. Bierlein, "Charter Schools as Seen by Students, Teachers, and Parents," in Peterson and Hassel, *Learning from School Choice*, pp. 187–212.

33. Caroline Minter Hoxby, "The Effects of Charter Schools on Teachers," Department of Economics, Harvard University, September 1999.

through high school. Private school tuition counts toward the deduction.<sup>34</sup> Demonstrating its popularity, 37,951 Minnesotans claimed the tax credit in 1998, averaging \$371 per credit. (Information on the deduction is not available at this writing.)<sup>35</sup> In Arizona, any person may receive a tax credit of up to \$500 if they contribute to a foundation that is providing scholarships to students attending private schools. Again, this program has proven popular, with 5,100 Arizonans claiming the credit.<sup>36</sup> If this practice should spread to other states, it is possible that the growth in the numbers of students attending private schools might increase in future years.

### *Private Schools*

Although research on the operations of these recently enacted tax credit programs is not yet available, other information about the place of private schools in the U.S. educational system is extensive because the presence of private schools constitutes the oldest form of school choice—dating back to before the Constitution was ratified.

*Historical development of private education.* In colonial times, education was privately provided, mainly by schools that had a religious affiliation. Those who wanted to enhance educational opportunity sought to do so by means of voucherlike arrangements. For example, when the radical populist Thomas Paine proposed a more egalitarian system of education, he recommended a system of vouchers: government should provide monies to parents, he said, so that they could send their children “to school, to learn reading, writing and common arithmetic; the ministers of

34. Minnesota Department of Children, Families, and Learning, “Take Credit for Learning,” 1997 <<http://www.children.state.mn.us/tax/credits.html>>.

35. John Haugen, Legal Services Division, Minnesota Department of Revenue, telephone interview, October 21, 1999.

36. Rob Robinson, senior tax analyst, Arizona Department of Revenue, telephone interview, October 21, 1999.

every parish, of every denomination to certify . . . that the duty is performed.”<sup>37</sup>

State-operated schools were constructed in the United States only many decades later—largely in response to the migration of poor Catholics from Ireland and Germany into the large cities of the Northeast in the 1840s. In 1852 the Boston School Committee urged that “in our schools they [the foreign-born children] must receive moral and religious teaching, powerful enough if possible to keep them in the right path amid the moral darkness which is their daily and domestic walk.” Horace Mann, the first secretary of education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, explained the need for public schools in the following terms: “How shall the rising generation be brought under purer moral influences” so that “when they become men, they will surpass their predecessors, both in the soundness of their speculations and in the rectitude of their practice?” When Mann established public schools in Massachusetts, the new institutions won praise from the Congregational journal *New Englander*, which excitedly exclaimed in language that anticipated the phrasing (if not quite the sentiments) of the Gettysburg Address: “these schools draw in the children of alien parentage . . . and assimilate them to the native born. . . . So they grow up with the state, of the state, and for the state.”<sup>38</sup>

Over the ensuing decades, public schools grew rapidly, and the share of the population attending private schools shrunk substantially. In some states—most notably, Nebraska and Oregon—the state legislature attempted to consolidate state power over the education of children by closing private schools, but key Supreme Court decisions declared such actions unconstitutional.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, the share of the population educated in private schools

37. Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man* (1792), 1:245, as quoted in David Kirkpatrick, *Choice in Schooling: A Case for Tuition Vouchers* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1990), p. 34.

38. As quoted in Charles L. Glenn Jr., *The Myth of the Common School* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987), pp. 83–84.

39. *Meyers v. Nebraska* 401 U. S. 399; *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U. S. 528.

dropped steadily throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, until by 1959 the percentage of students attending private school was but 12.8 percent and by 1969 as low as 9.3 percent.

After reaching this nadir, the place of the private school began to stabilize and edge back upward. By 1980, 11.5 percent of students in kindergarten through twelfth grade were attending private schools, a number that has stayed relatively constant since then.<sup>40</sup> Families who could afford the cost of private education were increasingly reaching the conclusion that they needed an alternative to what was being provided by the public sector.

*Private schools today.* The image of private education held by some is of an expensive day school catering to well-to-do families or an exclusive boarding school attended by college-bound “preppies.” The reality is quite different. Most private schools have a religious affiliation, modest tuition, and limited facilities. Nationwide, the average private school expenditures per pupil in 1993–94 were estimated at \$3,116, considerably less than public school expenditure per pupil, which was \$6,653.<sup>41</sup>

It has been pointed out that private schools do not have the same costs as public schools, so expenditure comparisons may be comparing apples and oranges. In New York City, I was able to conduct a more exact, apple-to-apple comparison of schooling costs in the eighty-eight public and seventy-seven Catholic elementary and middle schools located in three New York boroughs, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan.

To make sure the comparison subtracted out from public school expenditures amounts that covered activities not provided by Catholic schools, we deducted from public school expenditures the amounts for all items that did not clearly have a private school

40. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data and “Fall Enrollment in Institutions of Higher Education” surveys; Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), Fall Enrollment: Surveys, and Projections of Education Statistics to 2007 (Washington, D.C., 1997) <<http://nces.ed.gov/pubs/digest97/d97t002.html>>.

41. Coulson, *Market Education*, p. 277.

counterpart. Among other things we deducted all monies spent on transportation, special education, school lunches, other ancillary services, and the cost of financing the far-flung public school bureaucracy that runs the citywide, boroughwide, and districtwide operations.

Taking all these deductions from public school expenditures subtracted out of the analysis nearly 40 percent of the cost of running the New York City public schools. But even after taking all these deductions, public schools were still spending more than \$5,000 per pupil each year, more than twice the \$2,400 spent on similar services in the Catholic schools in the three boroughs. In other words, private schools, on average, do in fact have fewer fiscal expenditures.

For many years it was generally believed that the education typically provided by private schools was, as a result of these more limited resources, inferior to the education provided by public schools. As a result, researchers and policymakers were surprised when a national study, funded by the U.S. Office of Education, undertaken by a research team headed by the well-known, reputable sociologist James Coleman (later elected president of the American Sociological Association), found that students attending Catholic schools outperformed public school students.<sup>42</sup> This result was obtained even after Coleman and his colleagues took into account family background characteristics, which also affect school performance.

Coleman's surprising and upsetting findings were subjected to careful scrutiny. Many methodological issues were raised, and numerous similar studies have subsequently been undertaken. Some scholars continue to find that students learn more in Catholic and other private schools; other scholars do not detect any differences.<sup>43</sup> Two conclusions may be drawn from the literature, taken

42. James S. Coleman, Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore, *High School Achievement* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

43. Major studies finding positive educational benefits from attending private schools include Chubb and Moe, *Politics, Markets*, 1990; Derek Neal, "The Effects of Catholic Secondary Schooling on Educational Achievement," University of Chicago, Harris School of Public Policy and National Bureau for Economic

as a whole: (1) Students, on average, learn at least as much (or more) in Catholic schools. (2) Although it is not altogether clear whether middle-class students learn more in Catholic schools, low-income, minority students clearly do. For this segment of the population, there is a definite advantage that comes from attending a private school.<sup>44</sup>

Where access to private schools is more readily available, their presence seems to provide desirable competition that spurs a positive response from public schools: The test scores of public-school students are higher, the likelihood that public-school students will attend college increases, and the wages they earn later in life are higher.<sup>45</sup>

### *Home-Schooling*

Home-schooling constitutes one of the more rapidly growing segments of the American educational systems. Although home-schooling has an enviable historic reputation—Abraham Lincoln was home-schooled, and so were Theodore and Franklin Delano Roosevelt—as late as 1980 only three states explicitly sanctioned this practice. But between 1982 and 1992, thirty-two states changed their compulsory school attendance rules so as to specifically allow families, under certain conditions, to educate their chil-

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Research, 1996. Critiques of Coleman's findings and other studies have been prepared by Arthur S. Goldberger and Glen G. Cain, "The Causal Analysis of Cognitive Outcomes in the Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore Report," *Sociology of Education*, 55 (April–July 1982): 103–22; Douglas J. Wilms, "Catholic School Effects on Academic Achievement: New Evidence from the High School and Beyond Follow-up Study," *Sociology of Education* 58 (1985): 98–114.

44. John F. Witte, "School Choice and Student Performance," in Helen F. Ladd, ed.,  *Holding Schools Accountable: Performance-Based Reform in Education* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1996), p. 167.

45. Caroline Minter Hoxby, "The Effects of Private School Vouchers on Schools and Students," in Helen F. Ladd, ed.,  *Holding Schools Accountable: Performance-Based Reform in Education* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1996), pp. 177–208; Caroline Minter Hoxby, "Do Private Schools Provide Competition for Public Schools?" working paper 4978, Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1994.



dren at home.<sup>46</sup> But in recent years it has grown rapidly. The full size and extent of home-schooling is unknown; estimates of the number of students who are home-schooled vary between 0.5 million and 1.2 million.<sup>47</sup> Despite the fact that at least one study suggests that home-schoolers are learning more than schooled students,<sup>48</sup> the recent growth in home-schooling has generated a good deal of controversy. When a charter school in California offered its services to home-schooled students by means of the Internet, the state legislature passed a law limiting the practice to students within the county and adjacent counties.<sup>49</sup> Nonetheless, as the Internet's educational potential is more fully exploited, it is likely to give further impetus to the home-schooling movement.

### *Voucher Programs*

Residential selection, magnet school, interdistrict enrollment, private schools, and charter schools are mechanisms that provide options to a wide range of groups, but, on balance, these options, when taken together, tend to give more choice to middle- than low-income families. Public and privately funded vouchers, as currently designed and operated, serve almost exclusively a low-income population. In this respect, they provide in a few places an

46. Christopher J. Klicka and Gregg Harris, *The Right Choice* (Gresham, Oreg.: Noble Publishing Associates, 1992), pp. 356–57, as cited in Coulson, *Market Education*, pp. 120–21.

47. Patricia Lines, "Home Schools: Estimating Numbers and Growth." U.S. Department of Education technical paper, 1998; Current Population Reports. Population Characteristics: School Enrollment—Social and Economic Characteristics of Students: October 1995. Paul Hill, University of Washington, has provided me with this information.

48. The study is based on a group of families who agreed to participate, making it difficult to generalize to all home-schooled students. Lawrence M. Rudner, "Scholastic Achievement and Demographic Characteristics of Home School Students in 1998," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 7, no. 13 (April 1999). For a commentary on this article, see Kariane Mari Welner and Kevin G. Welner, "Contextualizing Home-schooling Data: A Response to Rudner," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 7, no. 13 (April 1999).

49. Jessica L. Sandham, "Calif. Rules Hitting Home for Charter Schools," *Education Week*, September 8, 1999.

egalitarian complement to other choice programs by offering choice opportunities to those that otherwise have none.

School voucher programs have, with public and private funds, established themselves in many cities and states. In just ten years, the number of students involved has climbed from zero to more than sixty thousand. During the 1999–2000 school year, nearly fifty thousand students were participating in sixty-eight privately funded voucher programs, and another twelve thousand or more in three publicly funded ones.<sup>50</sup>

*Publicly funded voucher programs.* The three publicly funded voucher programs are to be found in Cleveland, Milwaukee, and the state of Florida. In Cleveland, students began matriculation in private schools in the fall of 1996; in the fall of 1999 the number of participating students was nearly four thousand. In 1999 students received a scholarship of up to \$2,250, substantially less than the amount spent per student by Cleveland public schools or the amount provided to students at community schools.

The Milwaukee program, initially established in 1990, originally allowed students to attend schools without a religious affiliation. Only a few hundred students participated in the program in its first year. In the 1998–99 school year, the program, after overcoming constitutional objections, was expanded to include religious schools, and the number of participating students in 2000 increased to approximately twelve thousand. In that year participating students received a scholarship or voucher of up to nearly \$5,000.<sup>51</sup> A fairly small number of students became eligible for participation in the Florida program for the first time in the fall of 1999 when the legislature said that students attending “failing” schools could apply for vouchers. In 1999 participating students could receive a scholarship or voucher of up to \$3,389.<sup>52</sup> Initially,

50. Children First America, “68 Private Programs and Counting,” *School Reform News*, October 1999, insert, p. B.

51. Paul E. Peterson and Jay P. Greene, “Vouchers and Central-City Schools,” in Christopher H. Foreman Jr., ed., *The African American Predicament* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1999), p. 85.

52. “Florida Begins Voucher Plan for Education,” *New York Times*, August 17, 1999, p. A15.

only two schools met the legislative definition of failing, but many more were expected to fall within this category in subsequent years. But no additional students became eligible in 2000 because the concept of failing was redefined and the performances on state-wide tests of students attending potentially failing schools improved. All three of the publicly funded programs are designed in such a way that students are to be selected by means of a lottery, if the number of applicants exceeds the number of school spaces available.

*Privately funded voucher programs.* Privately funded voucher programs are operating in many cities. In 1999, the Children's Scholarship Fund greatly expanded the size and range of these programs by providing forty thousand vouchers to students from low-income families nationwide.

In the United States, the private sector often plays a major role in social experimentation. Ideas that are initially too untried and controversial for governments to attempt will often be explored by private or nonprofit entities, with the sponsorship of tax-exempt private foundations. The Ford Foundation sponsored the "gray areas" program that became the model for the community action program of the war on poverty established in 1965.<sup>53</sup> Results from evaluations of privately funded preschool programs provided the impetus for Head Start. Privately funded services for disabled students antedated and facilitated the design of the federally funded special education program enacted in 1975.<sup>54</sup> In all cases, privately funded programs provided important information to policymakers about the potential value of a social innovation.

Learning about school vouchers is taking place in much the same way. Several privately funded voucher programs are currently providing valuable information about the way in which voucher programs operate in practice. These privately funded voucher programs differ from traditional scholarship programs in

53. J. David Greenstone and Paul E. Peterson, *Race and Authority in Urban Politics: Community Participation and the War on Poverty* (New York: Russell Sage, 1973).

54. Paul E. Peterson, *Making the Grade* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1983), chaps. 4–5.

two important ways. First, the offer of the voucher to students is not conditioned on student performance. If more applications are received than can be funded by resources available to the private foundation sponsoring the program, the vouchers are distributed either by means of a lottery or on a first-come, first-served basis. Second, the scholarship is not tied to a particular school or religious denomination. Instead, the family may choose from among a wide variety of participating secular or parochial schools with any one of a multiplicity of religious affiliations. In these ways, the private programs are approximations of what is developing in the public sector.

The privately funded voucher programs that have been studied by independent research teams are located in Dayton, the Edgewood school district in San Antonio, Indianapolis, New York City, and Washington, D.C. For the major characteristics of these programs as well as other voucher programs, see table 1.<sup>55</sup>

#### RELATIONSHIPS AMONG SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS

One cannot understand the full range of school choices available to families apart from an appreciation of the relationships among the wide variety of programs and policies that have been outlined. In every state, families have some choice of school, even if it is limited to paying for a private education or choosing to live in a neighborhood served by a school the family thinks desirable. In many metropolitan areas, including Cleveland, families have a choice among magnet schools, charter schools (designated as community schools in Ohio), and a voucher program—as well as selecting a neighborhood of choice or paying for a private school.

When several programs are located in the same place, they can affect one another in important ways. Schools that once participated in a voucher program may establish themselves as charter schools, perhaps because charter school funding generally exceeds state funding under voucher programs.<sup>56</sup> Parents with students in

55. This table is taken from Peterson and Greene, "Vouchers and Central City-Schools," p. 85.

56. Jeff Archer, "Two Cleveland Schools Plan Rebirth With Charter Status," *Education Week*, July 14, 1999.

TABLE 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES

<i>City or State</i>	<i>Sponsor</i>	<i>Religious Schools Included</i>	<i>Grades</i>	<i>First School Year</i>	<i>Initial Enrollment</i>	<i>1999–2000 Enrollment</i>	<i>Number of Schools 1999–2000</i>	<i>Maximum Payment 1999–2000 (in dollars)</i>	<i>Selection Method</i>
Milwaukee	State of Wisconsin	No	preK–12	1990–91	341	7,913	93	\$5,106	Lottery
Indianapolis	ECCT <sup>a</sup>	Yes	K–8	1991–92	746	2,600	85	800	First come
Milwaukee	PAVE <sup>c</sup>	Yes	K–12	1992–93	2,089	781	114	1,000/elem. 1,500/high	First come
San Antonio	GEO <sup>d</sup>	Yes	1–8	1992–93	930	1,137 <sup>e</sup>	55 <sup>e</sup>	4,000 <sup>e</sup>	First come
Washington, D.C.	WSF <sup>f</sup>	Yes	K–12 <sup>g</sup>	1993–94	30	1,300	120	1,700/elem. 2,200/high	Lottery
Cleveland	State of Ohio	Yes	K–8	1996–97	1,996	3,500	59 <sup>h</sup>	2,250 <sup>h</sup>	Lottery
New York City	SCSF <sup>i</sup>	Yes	1–5	1997–98	1,200	1,790	240	1,400	Lottery
Dayton	PACE <sup>j</sup>	Yes	K–12	1998–99	542	680	46	1,785/elem. 2,300/high	Lottery
Florida	State of Florida	Yes	K–12	1999–2000	146	146	5	3,500	Lottery

a. Educational Choice Charitable Trust

b. Program enrollment in Indianapolis is supplemented with periodic lotteries.

c. Partners Advancing Values in Education

d. Children's Educational Opportunity

e. San Antonio data is for the 2000–2001 school year.

f. Washington Scholarship Fund, Inc.

g. Students must be in grades K–8 to begin the Washington program.

h. Cleveland data is for the 1999–99 school year.

i. School Choice Scholarships Foundation

j. Parents Advancing Choice in Education

private schools may decide to save money by enrolling their children in charter schools instead.

All these choice programs provide traditional public schools an incentive to modify their practices in such a way as to maintain their enrollments—and the per-pupil state aid that they have previously received. Already there is some evidence that the availability of school vouchers is affecting public school policies and practices. In the Edgewood school district in San Antonio, Texas, for example, the local school board accepted the resignation of its superintendent and, in a reversal of an earlier decision, established a school-uniform policy.<sup>57</sup> In Florida, the first two schools judged to be failing by the state—and therefore placed immediately in the voucher program—made significant policy changes after receiving their ignominious designation. One school introduced uniforms, a new phonics reading program, and class-size reduction in kindergarten; the other introduced Saturday and after-school tutoring sessions and had school staff visit parents at home to discourage truancy. Both schools have begun to focus on the basics of reading, writing, and math, in part by hiring more full-time reading and writing specialists.<sup>58</sup>

Within a year of the enlargement of the voucher program in Milwaukee, a new school board, elected in a hotly contested race, accepted the resignation of the school superintendent and announced its determination to respond to the challenges provided by the new choice arrangements. In Albany, New York, all the students at a particular elementary school (deemed to have the lowest scores in the city) were offered a voucher by a private individual; the school board responded by changing the principal, the teaching staff, and the curriculum.

More systematic evidence is available from ongoing research on other choice experiments. According to a study of the impact of

57. Anastasia Cisneros-Lunsford, "Munoz Leaving District, Edgewood Chief Gains New Position," *San Antonio Express-News*, September 10, 1999; Anastasia Cisneros-Lunsford, "Edgewood Oks Uniforms for Youngsters," *San Antonio Express-News*, April 28, 1999.

58. Jessica L. Sandham, "Schools Hit by Vouchers Fight Back," *Education Week*, September 15, 1999.

charter schools on traditional public schools in Arizona, “districts that have lost large numbers of children to charter schools make efforts to win those children back. Sometimes those efforts pay off.”<sup>59</sup> Similarly, in Massachusetts, districts losing students to interdistrict programs are making efforts to retain their student body, with some apparent success.<sup>60</sup>

These are only preliminary pieces of information. It is not yet possible to know how this ferment in American education, which is undoubtedly giving families greater choice than previously available, will affect education policy and governance in the long run. Nor do we know for certain how school choice will affect students and families in the long run. It is important to continue to try out the full range of school options in a variety of contexts in order to determine which, if any, may benefit students and their families in the long term.

#### WHEN VOUCHER PROGRAMS ARE INTRODUCED

Fortunately, a substantial amount of information has recently become available on the way in which the most controversial of all choice programs, school vouchers, works in practice. A series of studies provides us with valuable information about the kinds of students and families who participate in voucher programs; the reasons families select a particular school, when offered a voucher; the effects of vouchers on student learning; the school climate at voucher schools; and the impact of vouchers on homework, school-home communications, and parental satisfaction. Also, there is limited information available on the effects of school vouchers on civil society. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall identify some of the issues that have arisen around these topics and report results from recent evaluations.

59. Robert Maranto, Scott Milliman, Frederick Hess, and April Gresham, “Lessons from a Contested Frontier,” in Robert Maranto, Scott Milliman, Frederick Hess, and April Gresham, eds., *School Choice in the Real World: Lessons from Arizona Charter Schools* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1999), p. 237.

60. Susan L. Aud, *Competition in Education: 1999 Update of School Choice in Massachusetts* (Boston: Pioneer Institute for Public Policy Research, September 1999), p. 36.

*Voucher Recipients*

Critics say that voucher programs will “skim” or “cherry-pick” the public schools, attracting the participation of the most talented students and the higher-income, better-educated families. As a consequence, public schools will be left with an increasingly difficult population to educate and without the support of informed, engaged parents. Defenders of vouchers have replied that families have little incentive to move their child from one school to another if the child is already doing well in school.

Considerable information is now available on the types of students and families who participate in means-tested voucher programs. In general, there is little evidence that voucher programs either skim the best and brightest students from public schools or attract only the lowest-performing students. On the contrary, voucher recipients resemble a cross-section of public school students, though in some cases they may come from somewhat more educated families.

In the Edgewood school district in San Antonio, Texas, vouchers were offered to all low-income residents. Those who accepted the vouchers had math scores that, on beginning their new private school, were similar to those of students in public schools and reading scores that were only modestly higher. Voucher students were no more likely to have been in programs for gifted students, though they were less likely to have been in special education. Household income was similar, as was the percentage of families with two parents in the household. Mothers of voucher recipients had, on average, an additional year of education.<sup>61</sup>

In Cleveland, the parents of students with vouchers were found to be of lower income and the mothers more likely to be African American than a random sample of public school parents. Mothers had less than a year’s worth of additional education beyond

61. Paul E. Peterson, David Myers, and William Howell, “An Evaluation of the Horizon Scholarship Program in the Edgewood Independent School District, San Antonio, Texas: The First Year.” Paper prepared under the auspices of the Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University, 1999, tables 2, 3, pp. 41–42.



that of the public school mothers, and they were not significantly more likely to be employed full time.<sup>62</sup> Nor were the students themselves the “best and the brightest.” On the contrary, students with vouchers were less likely to have been in a program for gifted or talented students than were children remaining in public schools. However, students with vouchers were less likely to have a learning disability.<sup>63</sup>

### *Reasons for Accepting a Voucher and Attending Private School*

Questions have been raised about the bases for the choices made by voucher participants. In the words of one group of critics, “when parents do select another school, academic concerns are not central to the decision.”<sup>64</sup> To determine what was paramount in the minds of voucher participants, parents in the Edgewood school district in San Antonio were asked to give the *single* most important reason for their choice of private school. Nearly 60 percent of parents accepting vouchers said “academic quality,” “teacher quality,” or “what was taught in class” was the single most important reason. Only 15 percent listed the religious affiliation of the school as the single most important reason.<sup>65</sup> In New York City, parents who received vouchers were asked which considerations were very important for their choice of school. The six reasons most frequently mentioned were teacher quality, what is taught in class, safety, school discipline, school quality, and class size. Religious instruction was seventh on the list, convenient location was ninth, and the sports program and a school where a child’s friend was attending were tied at the bottom of the list.<sup>66</sup>

62. Peterson, Howell, and Jay Greene, 1999, “An Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship Program,” table 1, pp. 16–17.

63. *Ibid.*, table 2, p. 18.

64. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, p. 13.

65. Peterson, Myers, and Howell, “Horizon Scholarship,” table 1.5, p. 44.

66. Paul Peterson, David Myers, and William Howell, “An Evaluation of the New York City School Choice Scholarships Program: The First Year.” Paper prepared under the auspices of the Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University, 1999, table 2, p. 35.

### *Reasons for Not Using a Voucher*

When parents are asked about their reasons for not making use of a voucher, they provide a wide range of explanations for their decision. Most parents said that they had found a school they wanted their child to attend. Only a tiny percentage of those who do not find the school of their choice said that it was because they were not a member of the religious group with which the school is affiliated.

In New York City, for example, 72 percent of the families who were offered a voucher said they were able to attend a school the family preferred. Families could give multiple reasons for not finding the school of their choice. The reason parents most frequently offered (by 15 percent of the parents) was the cost of the school—the privately funded voucher in New York was only \$1,400, which was significantly less than the tuition charged by most private schools.<sup>67</sup>

### *School Quality and Student Learning*

Proponents of school vouchers expect that schools will perform better—and students will learn more—if families can choose their children's schools. There will be a better match between the students' needs and the schools' characteristics. A stronger identification between family and school will be realized. Preliminary information on some of these questions is now available.

*Test scores.* The debate over student achievement is likely to continue for some years to come, not only because it is very difficult to measure how much children are learning in school but also because different groups and individuals have different views as to what in fact *should* be learned in school. According to test score results, African American students from low-income families who switch from public to a private school do considerably better after two years than students who do not receive a voucher opportunity. However, students from other ethnic backgrounds seem to learn

67. *Ibid.*, table 5, p. 38.

after two years as much but no more in private schools than their public school counterparts.<sup>68</sup>

### *High School Completion and College Attendance*

It is too early to know what impact vouchers will have on high school completion rates and college attendance. However, information on the effects of attendance at a Catholic high school are contained in a recent University of Chicago analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, conducted by the Department of Education, a survey of more than twelve thousand young people. Students from all racial and ethnic groups are more likely to go to college if they attended a Catholic school, but the effects are the greatest for urban minorities. The probability of graduating from college rises from 11 to 27 percent if such a student attends a Catholic high school.<sup>69</sup>

The University of Chicago study confirms results from two other analyses that show positive effects for low-income and minority students of attendance at Catholic schools on high school completion and college enrollment.<sup>70</sup> University of Wisconsin Professor John Witte points out that studies of private schools “indicate a substantial private school advantage in terms of completing high school and enrolling in college, both very important events in predicting future income and well-being. Moreover, . . . the effects

68. William G. Howell, Patrick J. Wolf, Paul E. Peterson, and David E. Campbell, “Test-Score Effects of School Vouchers in Dayton, Ohio, New York City, and Washington, D.C.: Evidence from Randomized Field Trials,” paper presented before the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, 2000. Available from Program on Education Policy and Governance, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2000, and at <http://data.fas.harvard.edu/pepg/>.

69. Derek Neal, “The Effects of Catholic Secondary Schooling on Educational Achievement,” Harris School of Public Policy, University of Chicago, and National Bureau for Economic Research, 1996, p. 26.

70. William N. Evans and Robert M. Shwab, “Who Benefits from Private Education? Evidence from Quantile Regressions,” Department of Economics, University of Maryland, 1993; David Siglio and Joe Stone, “School Choice and Student Performance: Are Private Schools Really Better?” University of Wisconsin Institute for Research on Poverty, 1977.

were most pronounced for students with achievement test scores in the bottom half of the distribution.”<sup>71</sup>

*School discipline.* School discipline seems to be more effective in the private schools voucher students attend than in the inner-city public schools their peers are attending. Parents and students who have received vouchers report less fighting, cheating, property destruction, and other forms of disruption than do the parents and students who are in public schools.

In Washington, D.C., students in grades five through eight were asked whether or not they felt safe at school. Twenty percent of the public school students said they did not feel safe, as compared to 5 percent of the private school students.<sup>72</sup>

Nationwide information on public and private schools yields similar information. A survey undertaken by Educational Testing Service found that eighth-grade students encounter more such problems in public than in private schools. Fourteen percent of public school students, but only 2 to 3 percent of private school students, say physical conflicts are a serious or moderate problem. Four percent of public school students report racial or cultural conflicts are a serious or moderate problem and 5 percent say drug use is, while less than 1 percent of private school students indicate they are. Nine percent of public school students say they feel unsafe in school, but only 4 percent of private school students give the same response.<sup>73</sup>

71. John F. Witte, “School Choice and Student Performance,” in Helen F. Ladd, ed., *Holding Schools Accountable: Performance-Based Reform in Education* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1996), p. 167.

72. Paul E. Peterson, Jay Greene, William Howell, and William McCready, “Initial Findings from an Evaluation of School Choice Programs in Dayton, Ohio and Washington, D.C.,” Paper prepared under the auspices of the Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University, table 9A, p. 53. This finding remains statistically significant after adjustments are made for family background characteristics.

73. Information in the preceding two paragraphs contained in Paul E. Barton, Richard J. Coley, and Harold Wenglinsky, *Order in the Classroom: Violence, Discipline and Student Achievement* (Princeton, N.J.: Policy Information Center, Research Division, Educational Testing Service, 1998), pp. 21, 23, 25, 27, and 29.

*Homework.* Parents of students in voucher programs report that their children have more homework than do the parents of students in public schools. This finding was consistent across a range of studies. In Cleveland, parents of students in the voucher program were significantly less likely than a cross-section of Cleveland public school parents to report that “teachers do not assign enough homework.”<sup>74</sup> In New York City, 55 per cent of the parents with students in private schools reported that their child had more than one hour of homework a day, while only 34 per cent of a comparable group of students remaining in public schools reported this much homework.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, in the Edgewood school district in San Antonio, 50 per cent of the parents of students receiving vouchers reported more than one hour of homework, while only 16 per cent of parents of students in public schools reported this much homework.<sup>76</sup>

*Parental-school communications.* Parents of students in voucher programs report more extensive communications with their school than do parents with children in public schools. In Cleveland, “parents of scholarship students reported participating in significantly more activities than did parents of public school students.” Results from a teacher survey further “support this finding.”<sup>77</sup> Similarly, in New York City, parents of students in private schools reported that they were more likely to receive grade information from the school, participate in instruction, attend parent nights, and attend regular parent-teacher conferences.<sup>78</sup> In the Edgewood school district in San Antonio, parents of students with vouchers were more likely to report that they had attended a

74. Peterson, Howell, and Greene, “Cleveland Evaluation,” table 5, p. 23.

75. Paul E. Peterson, David Myers, William Howell, and Daniel Mayer, “An Evaluation of School Vouchers in New York City,” in Mayer and Peterson, 1999, table 12-2, p. 328.

76. “An Evaluation of School Choice Scholarships,” table 1.13, p. 52. Similar results were obtained when school effects were estimated controlling for family background characteristics. See table 2.4, p. 63.

77. Kim K. Metcalf et al., 1998, pp. 18–19.

78. Peterson, Myers, Howell, and Mayer, “School Vouchers,” table 12–3, p. 329.

school activity at least once in the past month than were parents of students in public schools. They were also more likely to report that they had attended a parent-teacher conference.<sup>79</sup>

### *Suspensions, Expulsions, Absenteeism, and School Changes*

Most educators think that, all things being equal, it is better that students stay in the same school, especially during a given school year; students usually learn more when not subjected to the disruption that comes from changing schools. Of course, parents should be allowed to move their child from one school to another if family circumstances require or if a school is not suitable. But forced changes in the middle of an elementary education—either by government fiat or by an individual school—should not be undertaken, unless the reasons for doing so are compelling.

Most studies indicate that students in voucher programs do not move from one school to another any more frequently than do students in public schools. Also, suspension rates were essentially the same for students with vouchers and for students in public schools. However, in Washington, D.C., suspension rates were higher for voucher students in grades six through eight the first year they entered private school.

These findings are not peculiar to Cleveland. In the Edgewood school district in San Antonio, voucher parents were no more likely to report their child had been suspended than were public school parents. And the parents of students in the voucher program were more likely than public school parents to say their child had remained in the same school all year long. Plans for attending the school during the coming year were similar for the two groups of families. Less than 1 percent of parents of students with vouchers reported that their child had been asked not to return.<sup>80</sup>

## PARENTAL SATISFACTION

Many economists think that consumer satisfaction is the best measure of school quality, just as it is the best measure of any product.

79. Peterson, Myers, and Howell, “An Evaluation of School Choice Scholarships,” table 1.14, p. 53.

80. *Ibid.*, tables 1.18, 1.19, pp. 58–59.

According to this criterion, vouchers are a clear success. All evaluations of vouchers have found higher levels of parental satisfaction among parents receiving vouchers than among comparison groups of parents with students in public schools. In Cleveland, voucher parents were much more satisfied with their school than parents who had applied for but did not use the voucher offered to them. For example, 63 percent of the parents with vouchers said they were very satisfied with the academic quality of the school, as compared to 29 percent of those who had not used them. Similar differences in satisfaction levels were observed for school safety, school discipline, class size, and parental involvement.<sup>81</sup>

Some interpreted these findings as showing only that those who had applied for but not received a voucher were particularly unhappy with their public school, not that private school families were particularly satisfied. Those not receiving the voucher or scholarship might simply be called a bunch of “sour grapes” uncharacteristic of public school parents in general. To ascertain whether the “sour grape” hypothesis was correct, the satisfaction levels of voucher parents were compared with the satisfaction levels of a random sample of all of Cleveland’s low-income, public school parents. Very little support for the “sour grape” hypothesis could be detected. Voucher parents were considerably more satisfied with the academic program, school safety, school discipline, and other characteristics of the school their child was attending if the child had a voucher.<sup>82</sup>

The findings from other cities parallel those in Cleveland. In Milwaukee, the evaluation team found that “in all three years, choice parents were more satisfied with choice schools than they had been with their prior public schools and more satisfied than [Milwaukee public school] parents with their schools. . . . Attitudes were more positive on every item, with ‘discipline in the school’ showing the greatest increase in satisfaction.”<sup>83</sup> Studies of the Indianapolis program and an early voucher program in San

81. Greene, Howell, and Peterson, table 1.8, p. 56.

82. Peterson, Howell, and Greene, table 3c, p. 21.

83. Witte, “Who Benefits from the Milwaukee Choice Program?” p. 132.

Antonio (predating the one in the Edgewood school district) also found higher levels of parental satisfaction, when families with vouchers were compared to families with students in public schools.<sup>84</sup> A comparison of similar groups of students from low-income families attending public and private schools in Washington, D.C., and Dayton, Ohio, also found much higher levels of parental satisfaction with the private schools.<sup>85</sup>

#### IMPACT OF VOUCHER PROGRAMS ON CIVIL SOCIETY

A major concern of critics of school vouchers involves their potential impact on civil society. Even if students learn to read, write, and calculate more by means of a voucher program, these gains will be more than offset, it is argued, by the polarization and balkanization of our society that necessarily accompany greater parental choice in education. In the words of commentator Michael Kelley, “public money is shared money, and it is to be used for the furtherance of shared values, in the interests of *e pluribus unum*. Charter schools and their like . . . take from the *pluribus* to destroy the *unum*.”<sup>86</sup> Amy Gutmann, the Princeton political theorist, makes much the same argument, if in less colorful prose: “Public, not private, schooling is . . . the primary means by which citizens can morally educate future citizens.”<sup>87</sup>

Some information about the impact of vouchers on civil society is now available. Despite the concerns many have expressed, vouchers typically have positive effects on racial and ethnic integration, racial and ethnic conflict, political participation, civic participation, and political tolerance.

84. David J. Weinschrott and Sally B. Kilgore, “Evidence from the Indianapolis Voucher Program,” in Peterson and Hassel, *Learning from School Choice*, pp. 307–34; R. Kenneth Godwin, Frank R. Kemerer, and Valerie J. Martinez, “Comparing Public Choice and Private Voucher Programs in San Antonio,” in Peterson and Hassel, *Learning from School Choice*, pp. 275–306.

85. Peterson, Greene, Howell, and McCready, tables 7A, 7B, pp. 49–50.

86. Michael Kelly, “Dangerous Minds,” *New Republic*, December 20, 1996.

87. Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 70.



### *Racial and Ethnic Integration*

Private schools are more likely than public schools—or at least no less likely—to be racially and ethnically integrated, perhaps because private schools can draw students from a more extensive catchment area, and religious schools may provide a common tie that cuts across racial lines.

Nationally, private school classrooms are estimated to be 7 percentage points more integrated than public schools.<sup>88</sup> Consistent with the national picture, voucher recipients in New York City moved from a less racially integrated to a more racially integrated setting when they left public schools for private ones.<sup>89</sup> However, no differences between public and private schools were observed in the Edgewood school district.<sup>90</sup>

In Edgewood, students were asked with whom they ate lunch, because interracial conversations at lunch time suggests that students enjoy eating together, a particularly meaningful finding. Students with vouchers were just as likely as public school students to say that they ate lunch with people of other ethnic backgrounds. Another study of public and private schools in San Antonio that directly observed students at lunch found that students in private schools were in fact more likely to sit with someone of another racial group at lunch time than students attending public schools.<sup>91</sup>

### *Racial Conflict in School*

Students in private schools are often less likely to be engaged in or witness racial conflicts. Nationally, more interracial friendships are reported by students in private schools than in public schools. Students also report less interracial fighting in private schools than

88. Jay P. Greene, “Civic Values in Public and Private Schools,” in Peterson and Hassel, *Learning from School Choice*, p. 97.

89. Peterson, Myers, and Howell, table 6, p. 39.

90. Peterson, Myers, and Howell, table 8, p. 47.

91. Jay P. Greene and Nicole Mellow, “Integration Where It Counts: A Study of Racial Integration in Public and Private School Lunchrooms,” report number 98–13, Program on Education Policy and Governance, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1998.

public ones, as also do administrators and teachers.<sup>92</sup> Consistent with these national findings, parents of students with vouchers in Cleveland reported less racial conflict than students in public schools.<sup>93</sup> Similar differences between public and private schools were reported by parents in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Dayton, Ohio.<sup>94</sup> However, in the Edgewood school district students in public and private schools were equally likely to report racial conflict at their school.<sup>95</sup>

### *Civic Participation and Political Tolerance*

Private school students are also more community-spirited than those enrolled in public schools. Nationwide, students at private schools are more likely to think that it is important to help others and volunteer for community causes. They also are more likely than public school students to report that they in fact did volunteer in the past two years. Finally, private school students were more likely to say their school expected them to volunteer.<sup>96</sup>

Public school administrators themselves (in a confidential survey) are less likely to say their school does an outstanding job of promoting citizenship than private school administrators do. Similar differences appear when administrators are asked to rate their school's performance in teaching values and morals or promoting awareness of contemporary and social issues.<sup>97</sup> Students educated in private schools are also more likely to be tolerant of unpopular groups.<sup>98</sup>

92. Greene, "Civic Values," p. 99.

93. Paul E. Peterson, William Howell, and Jay Greene, "An Evaluation of the Cleveland Voucher Program After Two Years," Paper prepared under the auspices of the Program on Education Policy and Governance, Harvard University, table 6, p. 24.

94. Peterson, Myers, and Howell, "An Evaluation of School Choice Scholarships," table 8, p. 41; Peterson, Greene, Howell, and McCreedy, "Washington, D.C., and Dayton Evaluation," tables 9A, 9B, pp. 53–54.

95. Peterson, Myers, and Howell, table 1.8, p. 47.

96. Greene, "Civic Values," p. 101.

97. *Ibid.*, pp. 102–3.

98. Jay Greene, Joseph Giammo, and Nicole Mellow, "The Effect of Private Education on Political Participation, Social Capital, and Tolerance: An Examina-

## CONCLUSIONS

Choice in American education is now widespread and has taken many forms—charters, magnet schools, tax-deduction programs, interdistrict enrollment programs, private schools, choice by residential selection, and school vouchers. Many of these programs give greater choice to middle- and upper-income families than to poor families. In this context, school vouchers, as currently designed, provide an egalitarian supplement to existing choice arrangements. They do so without restricting choices to parents with specific religious affiliation or any religious affiliation at all. Given the widespread public interest in finding better ways of educating disadvantaged children, it is particularly important that pilot voucher programs be continued so as to permit an assessment of the effectiveness of school vouchers as tools for achieving greater equity in American education, especially since early evaluations of their effectiveness have yielded promising results. If vouchers don't work, they will be discarded. If vouchers do work, their adoption will gradually spread. But if their exploration is prematurely ended, the country will be denied a valuable tool that could help it consider the best ways of improving its educational system.

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tion of the Latino National Political Survey,” working paper, Program on Education Policy Governance, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1998.