

AN OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL CHOICE

by

Hazel H. Jessee

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Wayne Worner, Co-Chairman



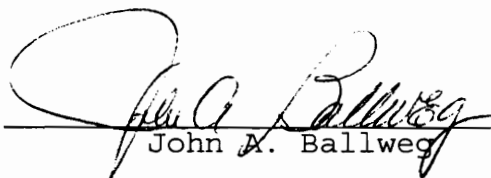
David J. Parks, Co-Chairman



Claire G. Cole



Robert R. Richards



John A. Ballweg

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Committee Co-Chairmen: Wayne M. Worner
David Parks

(ABSTRACT)

School choice is an intriguing issue, getting to the very heart of the American ideals of freedom, self-direction, equity, and diversity. While school choice is touted by some as a solution to the problems of American education, it is questioned more critically or even cynically by others. What cannot be denied is the fact that school choice exists on an increasingly widespread basis in America. The purposes of this study were to provide an up-to-date review of the status of the school choice movement on the national level, to identify key issues of the movement, and to describe choice options and programs. Having a description of its nature will offer assistance to those decision makers such as school boards, superintendents, administrators, and teachers, who will need to sort the rhetoric from the truth in analyzing the role of school choice in shaping schools in their communities.

School choice is replete with contradictory and often unanswered questions. A review of the literature on school choice has revealed a range of issues: school choice as a reform movement, as a diversionary tactic to use public funds for private education, as a solution to integration, as a guise for increased segregation and elitism, as a basic parental right, or as a detriment to the greater needs of a society, among others. One of the strongest observations to be made as a result of this review of school choice is that it is an issue for which the evidence is inconclusive. Another important observation is that school choice has survived head-on attacks on the political battlefields from the White House to state capitols to school board meeting rooms. It has woven itself into the school restructuring movement, and new options such as charter schools continue to emerge in the school choice movement. It is a significant educational issue for the future.

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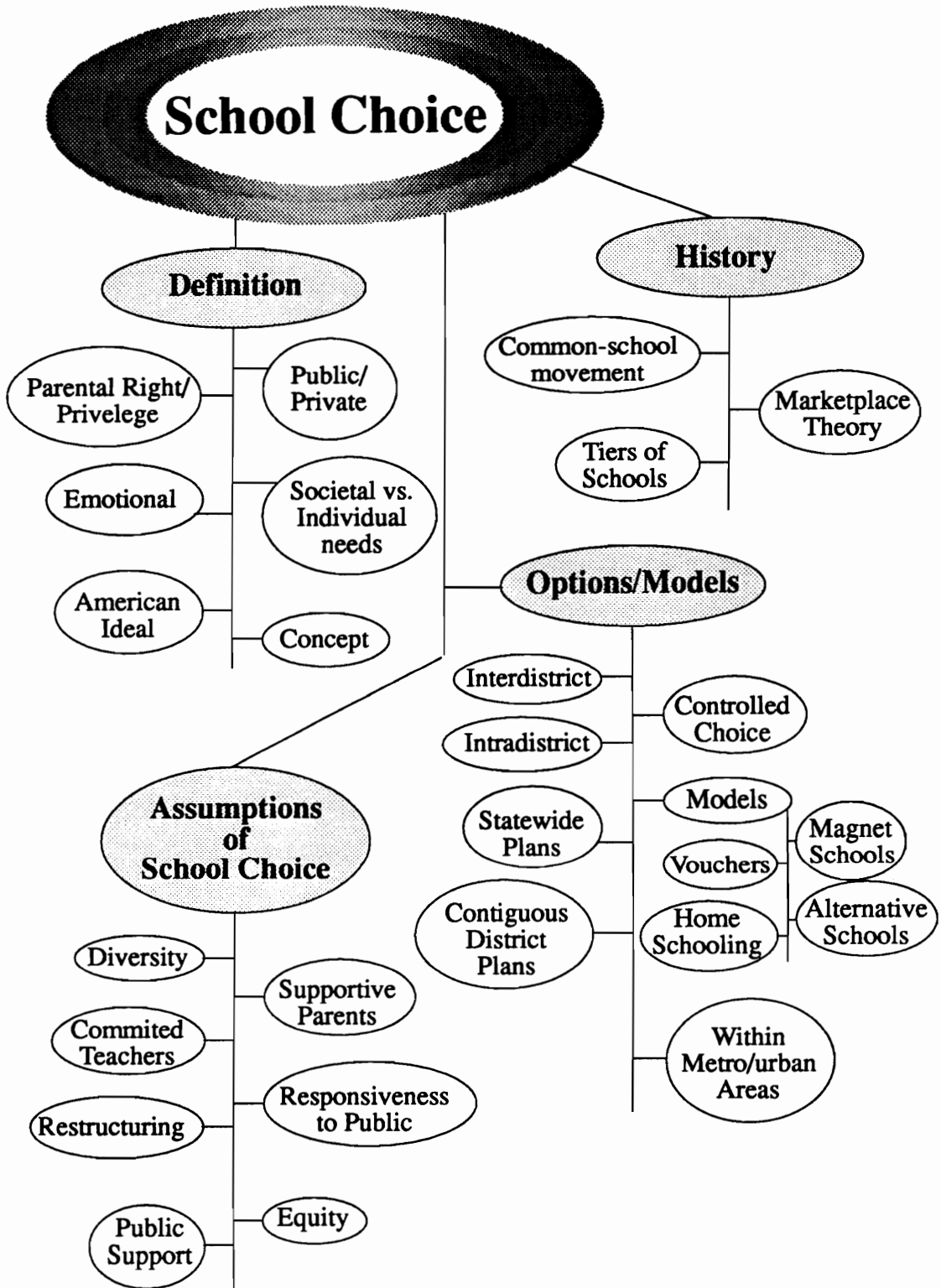
TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
CHAPTER 1. School Choice: An Overview	1
Introduction	2
Definition	3
History	7
Assumptions of Public School Choice ...	12
Choice Options	19
Intradistrict Choice	19
Interdistrict Choice	20
Contiguous District Choice	21
Choice Within Metropolitan Schools	21
Statewide Choice	22
Other Choice Options or Models	26
Table 1: School Choice Option Plans/Models	27
Summary	30
CHAPTER 2. Magnet Schools	32
Introduction	33

Definition	33
History and Description	34
Planning Magnet Schools	44
Intradistrict Magnet Schools	45
Interdistrict Magnet Schools	46
Magnet School Costs	47
Prominent Examples of Magnet Schools ..	49
District 4--Manhattan's East Harlem	49
San Diego City Schools	51
Montclair, New Jersey Schools	53
Other Examples of Magnet Schools ...	55
Summary	56
CHAPTER 3. Vouchers	57
Introduction	58
Definition	58
History	60
Alum Rock Voucher System	62
Pros and Cons of Vouchers	63
Voucher Models	71
Milwaukee's Voucher Plan	71
Epsom Tax Abatement Plan	76
Other Voucher Programs	77

	Summary	78
CHAPTER 4.	Alternative Schools	80
	Introduction	81
	Definition and Characteristics	82
	History and Development	84
	Options or Models	87
	School-Within-a-School	87
	Schools-Without-Walls	89
	Continuation Schools	90
	Learning Centers	91
	Other Models	92
	Current State of Alternative Education	92
	Effectiveness of Alternative Programs	93
	Summary	98
CHAPTER 5.	Home Schooling	100
	Introduction	101
	Definition	101
	Issues	105
	Home School and Public School Cooperation	108
	Cupertino, California	109
	San Diego County	111

Other Examples	111
Pros and Cons	112
Summary	114
CHAPTER 6. A Summary of Observations and Reflections About School Choice	116
Introduction	117
Purpose of Study	117
Literature Reviewed	118
Observations About Choice Issues	122
Definition	123
Parental Rights	124
Politics of School Choice	125
Effects of Choice on Public Education	127
Frequently Cited Benefits of Choice	128
Frequently Cited Disadvantages of Choice	129
Emerging Trends and Issues in Choice ..	130
Author's Personal Feelings About Choice	135
References	139
Vita	153



CHAPTER 1

School Choice: An Overview

Introduction

From Boston, where students from one district can attend school in another, to Colorado, where high school students can take college courses on campus, to Milwaukee, where students can use vouchers to attend private schools, to East Harlem, where magnet school choices abound, school choice is spreading across America.

The school choice phenomenon, based upon a growing public conviction that school choice is a right rather than a privilege, is an issue beset with emotional reactions and controversy. The choice scene in education has grown so rapidly in recent years that educational policy makers need to understand the types and levels of choice programs being proposed or implemented. Decision makers from the family to the school to governmental levels have a need to clarify the issue of school choice, to strip away as much as possible the rhetoric and to study the facts in planning the educational future for children.

Ernest Boyer (1992) in the foreword of the Carnegie Foundation's Special Report, School Choice, described the issue of school choice as an urgent one, one that has emerged at the top of the national educational agenda. "The decade-long struggle to reform American education seems suddenly to hang on a single word: choice" (p. 1).

Definition

As with any other highly emotional topic, defining the term school choice becomes a crucial and complex task. Choice, for many people, means picking the magnet school for the arts or maybe the hands-on alternative school or even the school closest to the parents' work or the babysitter's house. School choice is much more than parental and student preference; it is indicative of a debate in education, business, and politics that could entirely redefine and restructure the educational system. Rosenberg (1989) maintained while it has "been the salvation for some, it also has been the damnation of others" (p. 10). Jce Nathan (1989b), a leading choice advocate, has suggested that

ten years from now, the right of public school choice will be as established as voting or civil rights. Terms such as privatization, options, alternatives, vouchers, magnet schools, or tuition tax credits are often treated as synonyms for choice, complicating the efforts to define school choice (Nathan, 1989b). However, they represent different models or approaches that need clarification within the larger conceptual framework of schools of choice. The word choice has so many interpretations that any real discussion of choice must be framed within the question, "What type of school choice are you talking about?"

The word choice in connection with schools means the ability to select freely. School choice is typically described rather than defined; it is a concept with meaning but few clear definitions. One defining point is that choice plans frequently have a feature of parental control or parental influence (Witte, 1989). The term schools of choice encompasses a wide array of structures, but key to the definition of school choice is the critical feature of selection by parents and students (Raywid, 1989b).

Coleman (1987) has described educational choice as an issue that pits in opposition two deeply held American values--the value of parents being able to do the very best they can for their children and the value placed on having an unfragmented, undivided society that is not segregated, exclusive, or elitist. The struggle between the individual value of choice and the societal value of the common good provides a strong definitional basis for the choice movement in education and for the controversy surrounding it. Choice in education must be defined within a theoretical framework of the purpose of education, as both a private and a public good and within the framework of a common educational experience versus an individual educational choice by students and parents (Levin, 1991).

Choice, in the broad sense of the word, has always existed in American education; selecting where to live gives parents a great degree of control over the school their children attend. Opting for private schools also gives parents choice and a higher degree of control over their children's education (Witte, 1990). Choice generally is a feature of American society that is

often idealized or even glorified as the ability of the individual to select freely and without constraints; historically, choice in America has been a luxury rather than a right, often based upon privilege or opportunity or even upon gender or race.

In a democracy, choice is viewed in and of itself as good, an American ideal, an indicator of freedom. Geiger (1991) has described choice as the ultimate feel-good word of public policy, a word able to conjure up desirable and admirable features for Americans-- freedom, power, options. It is a value in our society; broadening or extending choice is viewed as broadening freedom and possibility (Raywid, 1987b). Choice, as an educational issue of the 1990s, is complex, not only from an individual but also a societal perspective.

Educational choice is a freedom including both private and public schools. Two levels can be perceived in the issue of educational choice: choice that includes private schools and choice within the public schools. Choice in U.S. education often focuses on the right to choose the type of education, with religious and philosophic values assuming importance; just as family values and traditions are important

choices so, too, is the choice of education that reinforces them (Coons & Sugarman, 1978).

Another defining factor of choice is the idea that families should be able to select the schools that best fit the specific educational needs of the child; small or large schools, traditional or nontraditional curriculum or organization, or one particular instructional style versus another become important factors in school choice.

History

The educational debate of individual needs and goals versus the benefits to society permeates the choice issue in both private and public school arenas. The common school movement of the nineteenth century had to balance these issues when the states established common schools and compulsory attendance but at the same time also permitted great diversity and choice that challenged commonality of education (Levin, 1991). The choice debate of the 1990s has intensified this longstanding debate about the purpose of education.

The common school of 1890 was important in dealing with America both as a land of farmers and a land of immigrants; the population was largely uneducated so that a general prescribed curriculum was a window to the outside world for children. Choice in 1890 likely would have been characterized by lack of knowledge or restrictions based on the ethnic, linguistic, religious, or cultural choices of parents (Coleman, 1987). The television world of 1990 has shifted the role of education in the lives of families; no longer is the choice primarily to pull the young out of reluctant, information-poor families but instead to deal with information-rich families in a media-infiltrated world (Coleman, 1987).

Choice in education has existed to some degree in America since the nation's birth. A society with different social and economic classes, America has always had at least two tiers of schools--elitist, private schools for the wealthy and public schools for middle class or poor children. Around the middle of the nineteenth century, despite the common school movement, private schools remained, joined later by

parochial schools that offered choice for a large number of parents and children (Kraft & Deering, 1989).

A review of the more current history of the school choice movement begins with Milton Friedman's proposal of educational vouchers in 1955. Hoping to establish a competition, a free market in education, Friedman (1955) suggested that families use vouchers in either public or private schools. This proposal and variations of it were studied and debated during the 1970s and 80s. The growth of the choice movement in the 80s moved beyond vouchers and tuition tax credits to include the many varieties of choice that were experiencing a fast growth. Chubb and Moe (1990) brought the issue to a higher pitch of emotionalism with their work, Politics, Markets, and America's Schools, in which they suggested a major restructuring of the public education system in which a) parents could freely choose the school for their children, b) each school would have sole authority over its operation, c) any group that applied and met the criteria established could be chartered as a school, d) public funds for schools would be based on enrollments,

and e) any school receiving public education money would be a public school.

The current choice issue seems not to be whether public school choice will survive, but, more likely, what kinds of choices will prevail in both public and private schools. Considerable debate surrounds the topic of choice; some people see choice as a threat to the balance between public and private involvement in education, while others see it as a means of putting the institution of education in a more democratic framework (Raywid, 1991). Some educators see choice as a thinly disguised form of segregation or as an elitist approach; others see it as a way to ensure equity, to restructure schools, and to improve student achievement.

The issue of whether parents should select the school their child attends has a considerable amount of political and public support. With a public backing of 2:1 as indicated by Gallup polls in 1991, 1992, and 1993 and with programs of public school choice in some form in at least forty states, choice seems to be more than a fad and worthy of serious consideration by

educational decision makers (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1993; Raywid, 1992).

Further accenting the need to study carefully the issue of school choice are recent findings revealed in the 1992 Carnegie Report, School Choice. First, according to the Carnegie Report, Americans in general feel positive about the idea of school choice. The vast majority of parents, however, appear quite satisfied with their current school arrangements, and very few have elected to participate in statewide programs now in place (p. 9). Eighty-seven percent of parents surveyed in the Carnegie study indicated they were somewhat or very satisfied with the public school education their children were receiving. Seventy percent answered "no" to the clarifying question, "Is there some other school to which you would like to send your child?" Yet, a 1992 poll by the Associated Press revealed that 68 percent felt that parents should be able to choose which schools their children attend (Goldberg, 1992).

Former President Bush promoted school choice as did the 1986 report from the National Governors Association, Time for Results: The Governors' 1991

Report on Education, as well as both Republican and Democratic governors and leaders. Just as powerful as the public support of choice is the anti-choice movement in education. Many agree with Levin (1991) that the "cultural cohesion in the U.S. requires a relatively fixed set of formative experiences for all members of society" (p. 248).

In contrast to the public support for school choice, educators, administrators, and school board members are opposed, two to one, to choice (Elam et al., 1991). Therefore, many of the assumptions of choice espoused by its advocates are frequently turned into negative statements in the argument against choice. School choice has definitely arrived as a national issue, both politically and educationally (Lieberman, 1990).

Assumptions of Public School Choice

Raywid (1989b), a leading advocate of public school choice, identified three fundamental beliefs in the public school choice movement:

1) There is no one best school for everyone. 2) The deliberate diversification of schools is important to accommodating all and enabling each youngster to succeed. 3) Youngsters will perform better and accomplish more in learning environments they have chosen than in those to which they are assigned (p. 14).

In addition to these basic assumptions undergirding public school choice, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), in its Issues Analysis: Public Schools of Choice (1990), cited other assumptions:

Teachers will be more committed to and satisfied with their work in schools they have chosen.

Parents will be more supportive of and satisfied with schools they have chosen. Schools of choice create shared values and expectations that result in the accomplishment of common goals (p. 10).

The National Governors Report, Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education (1986), focused on the appeal of choice as a form of educational policy

by noting the belief that public schools will be more responsive to their clients:

Today the public school system controls both production and consumption of education. The system tells the students what they will learn, at what speed and what quality. Students and their parents have little to say about it. A more responsive system would incorporate what students and their parents say they need with the educational services necessary to meet those needs (p. 67).

Responsiveness to public concerns is a repeated theme for proponents of choice; editorialists, politicians, parents, and others hit the theme over and over. Former Minnesota Governor Rudy Perpich (1989) wrote in The New York Times: "By allowing market forces to work in our educational systems, families are empowered to make discerning choices about their schools. And they compel schools to be more responsive to the people they serve" (p. 17). Critics of public school choice maintain that choice will do little to improve the quality of teaching and quickly will become

a permissible form of segregation and elitism (Levin, 1987).

Another important assumption about public school choice is what Clinchy (1989) referred to as the need to recognize that students need options to maximize their learning; he maintained:

...that we abandon our cherished notion that there can be a single, all-inclusive definition of educational excellence: a single, standardized approach to schooling; a single, canonized, culturally literate curriculum, and a single way of organizing and operating a school that is suitable for all students and serves all students equally well (p. 290).

Several other assumptions pervade the debate about school choice. Prominent in the rhetoric of both advocates and opponents is the free-market concept. Hinged on the concept of supply and demand, it maintains that if schools become more consumer oriented, then administrators and teachers will create programs that truly meet the needs and desires of students and parents. A free market approach would aim

to make schools responsive to their clients, with the end result being that both educators and students perform better (Lieberman, 1990).

Critics hold that the marketplace concept of supply and demand does not transfer neatly to the educational setting. Allowing choice of schools or programs will not automatically have a positive effect upon instruction (Elmore, 1990b). Proponents such as Chubb and Moe (1990), however, have maintained that a marketplace approach to public education helps develop accountability in schools. Fears abound, however, about what Toch (1991b) called "a host of education charlatans who would prey on students in much the same way unscrupulous trade school operators do in higher education" (p. 20).

Another popular assumption about choice is its role in forcing changes in school governance (Raywid, 1992). Roles, relationships, and authority could be altered when choice becomes a component of the school. Choice would likely empower those who receive and use it, and the relationships between choosers and those chosen or not chosen would be altered.

A shift in the bureaucratic controls of a school is almost inevitable with choice. Lessening a school's bureaucracy is suggested as one of choice's assumptions and values (Elmore, 1990b). Choice challenges the remote control feature of a centralized system's governance, moving the authority toward the school and away from uniformity. Choice assumes differentiation rather than standardization (Elmore).

A commitment to equity has been one of the more questioned assumptions of the choice movement. Some educators perceive choice as a surrogate for segregation while others see it as a way to correct the inequities in education. Choice advocates hold that schools presently vary so greatly in their offerings and achievement results in the nonchoice approach that an egalitarian argument holds little credibility in asking people to think that schools currently are based on true equity (Walberg, 1989). Critics of choice see the selection process in the choosing of schools as a means for schools to develop even more rigidly along lines of race and class with particular worries about the unwanted difficult-to-teach children (George, 1990).

Many choice plans in existence, particularly in urban areas, use racial ratios as a way to control the composition of the school. Since many urban areas have traveled the full circle from segregation to desegregation back to resegregation because of residential segregation, choice plans are frequently proposed or court-order imposed as a way to re-integrate (Coons & Sugarman, 1978; Alves & Willis, 1987; Coons, 1990).

Another prominent assumption about school choice is that it is a route for school reform and improvement. The implication of diversity in pedagogical styles and program offerings is inherent in the concept. Clinchy (1989) warned that it may be tempting to hope that the introduction of choice, diversity, school autonomy and independence, and equity controls would ensure real educational excellence; instead, he maintained that public school choice is simply a framework which improves the chance of solving some of the problems of public education.

Raywid (1992) asserted that she is a strong proponent of choice not because it is a panacea for

educational reform but because it is a good catalyst to bring about needed improvements.

Choice Options

The range of choice options is rapidly growing both in numbers and complexity. Interdistrict and intradistrict are two designations under which many choice options fall. Controlled choice, another designation often used, describes locations that deal with choice as it is directly related to desegregation plans.

Intradistrict Choice

In an intradistrict choice plan, parents and children choose the school to attend within their district of residence; when a child attends a school outside the regular attendance zone but within the residential district, intradistrict choice has been utilized. It is an option that has been in existence to varying degrees and levels for many years.

Interdistrict Choice

Interdistrict choice, a less common option, allows students to go from a public school in their own district to one in another district. The purposes of interdistrict choice programs may range from promoting equitable access to offering different programs to attempting to achieve racial balance in providing schooling options (Virginia Department of Education, 1991).

Competition typically becomes a feature of interdistrict choice options. If parents and students choose a school, the message is that the school is successful; if a school is not chosen, the message is to change, to improve, or to shut down a school. Beyond the surface of this competitive, marketplace philosophy is the concern that schools might be chosen or rejected for reasons other than educationally sound ones. Bastian (1989) suggested that, theoretically, choice means that schools will earn their enrollment, improve the range of options, and spur weak schools to improvement, but that, in reality, choice is unproven in its track record to improve all schools.

Three main types of interdistrict plans exist:

1. choice among contiguous school districts,
2. choice within metropolitan and urban-area schools, and
3. statewide open enrollment.

Contiguous district choice

Contiguous school district choice, the most limited of the three, offers parents the option to enroll students in districts that border their home district. Some school districts in Virginia and Ohio offer contiguous interdistrict choice (Virginia Department of Education, 1991). In 1990-91, more than 6,700 students in Virginia attended a school outside their home districts (Virginia Department of Education, 1991).

Choice within metropolitan schools

Cambridge, Massachusetts, was one of the first cities to abolish attendance zones as a voluntary attempt to desegregate schools. Its school choice program is credited with increasing from 72 percent to 82 percent the number of children attending public

school; achievement scores also have improved steadily (Massachusetts Department of Education, 1988).

Choice in metropolitan areas often involves an urban area that has magnet schools aimed at reducing racial segregation. Frequently, suburban students apply or are recruited; Kansas City, Missouri, is an example of the latter. In addition to Kansas City, several other areas of the country are using this approach. Milwaukee's need to desegregate led to a group of 24 public school districts forming a consortium to work toward integration. St. Louis has a similar program. Roanoke City, Roanoke County, and Salem City public schools in Virginia also have a plan for open enrollment (Virginia Department of Education, 1991).

Statewide choice

Statewide choice or open enrollment is the most extensive form of interdistrict choice. In a statewide plan, a student may enroll in any public school in the state. Minnesota pioneered statewide interdistrict choice; any child's attendance at any public school is

limited only by desegregation guidelines and available space. Minnesota's state education dollars go with the child to the chosen school. The Minnesota plan, which was phased in over four years, is still relatively new. In 1989-90, less than one-half of one percent of the state's students used the option to attend a school outside their home district (Effects of Open Enrollment in Minnesota, 1990).

Other states which have followed Minnesota to create statewide interdistrict plans include Arkansas, Iowa, Ohio, Nebraska, Massachusetts, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, and Washington (Center for Choice in Education, 1992).

ARKANSAS: Open enrollment legislation in Arkansas passed in 1989. State money follows the student, racial balances must be monitored, and receiving districts must approve the transfers. Receiving districts get additional funding for transporting students. About 1,660 students participated in the choice option in 1991-92.

COLORADO: For several years, Colorado has had legislation permitting interdistrict choice and now has a pilot interdistrict choice program. Transportation

funds are not provided. Denver is excluded from the program because of its court-ordered desegregation plan. The state legislature also permits secondary students to attend post-secondary institutions for both secondary and post-secondary credit. 5,000 students were involved in a choice option in 1991-92.

IOWA: In 1989, Iowa passed school choice legislation similar to the Minnesota open enrollment plan. State aid follows the student, and the state subsidizes transportation for poor students. In 1991-92, 5,000 students participated in the statewide choice plan.

IDAHO: In 1990, Idaho passed an open enrollment bill that prohibited transfer discrimination based on race or handicapping conditions. If school districts have no space, they can choose to adopt a no-interdistrict-transfer policy. In 1990-91, 2,580 students attended schools outside their home districts.

MASSACHUSETTS: 1991 marked the enactment of an interdistrict choice bill in Massachusetts. The state may take money from a city or town's local aid package to help pay the tuition of a student transferring to another school district. No provisions were made for

funding transportation. In 1991, 1,100 students from 30 districts opted for a choice transfer.

NEBRASKA: Nebraska provides no transportation for its open-enrollment plan, which has been in effect since 1988 and the plan involved 3,300 students in 1991-92.

OHIO: In 1989, the Ohio legislature passed an Omnibus Education bill that dealt with both intradistrict and interdistrict choice plans. State funds follow transferring students. Only 115 students transferred in 1991-92.

WASHINGTON: In 1990, Washington mandated a statewide interdistrict choice system. Transfers are not permitted if they negatively affect desegregation plans. Intradistrict transfers also are permitted. The legislation also included the Running Start Program to allow high school juniors and seniors to attend vocational-technical institutes or community colleges while concurrently enrolled in high school. As of 1991, twenty-four thousand students had participated in intradistrict choice; 9,900 in interdistrict plans; 575 in Running Start; and 5,800 in seventh- and eighth-grade choice (Center for Choice in Education, 1992).

Other Choice Options or Models

The different models of choice options are so varied that choice typically becomes almost synonymous with the option rather than standing alone as a concept. From public and private school choice options to voucher plans to tuition-tax-credit plans to magnet schools, post-secondary schools, or schools-within-schools, choice models offer different appeals to teachers, parents, and students with interests or needs in specialized areas. Table 1 presents an overview of common choice models across the country. The most prevalent options will be discussed in greater detail in the upcoming chapters.

Table 1

School Choice Option Plans/Models

Plan	Description	Issues
Open intradistrict enrollment	Within a school district, parents may choose their children's school	Transportation costs Equity/desegregation Cost of disseminating information Specialized programs Admissions requirements Site-based management or central control
Magnet schools (Focus schools)	Specialized curricula aimed at students from different backgrounds	Transportation Staffing and equipment needs Equity New programs Dissemination of information Staff development Evaluation Admissions requirements
Charter schools	Teacher-initiated schools that are thematically focused	Transportation Staffing and equipment needs Equity New programs Dissemination of information Staff development Evaluation Admissions requirements
Controlled choice	Desegregation plan to maintain desired racial balance	Transportation Staffing and equipment needs Equity New programs Dissemination of information Staff development Evaluation Admissions requirements

Table 1 continued

Plan	Description	Issues
Second-chance programs	Alternative program for at-risk students	Extensive range of choices Transportation Cost of facilities and equipment Staff development Parental cooperation Curriculum Staffing
Alternative schools	Special programs to respond to needs of individual students	Extensive range of choices Transportation Cost of facilities and equipment Staff development Parental cooperation Curriculum Staffing
Vouchers	Families receive direct financial support to purchase educational services at private or public schools	Funding of public and private schools Transportation Curriculum standards Monitoring Accountability State and federal regulations
Tax credits	Tuition tax credit for educational expenses	Funding of public and private schools Transportation Curriculum standards Monitoring Accountability State and federal regulations

Table 1 continued

Plan	Description	Issues
Home schooling	Parents educate children at home	Funding of public and private schools Curriculum standards Monitoring Accountability State and federal regulations
Schools-within-a-school	Thematically or pedagogically based program within a school in addition to the core or regular program in the school	Funding Space Staffing Admissions Staff development Curriculum

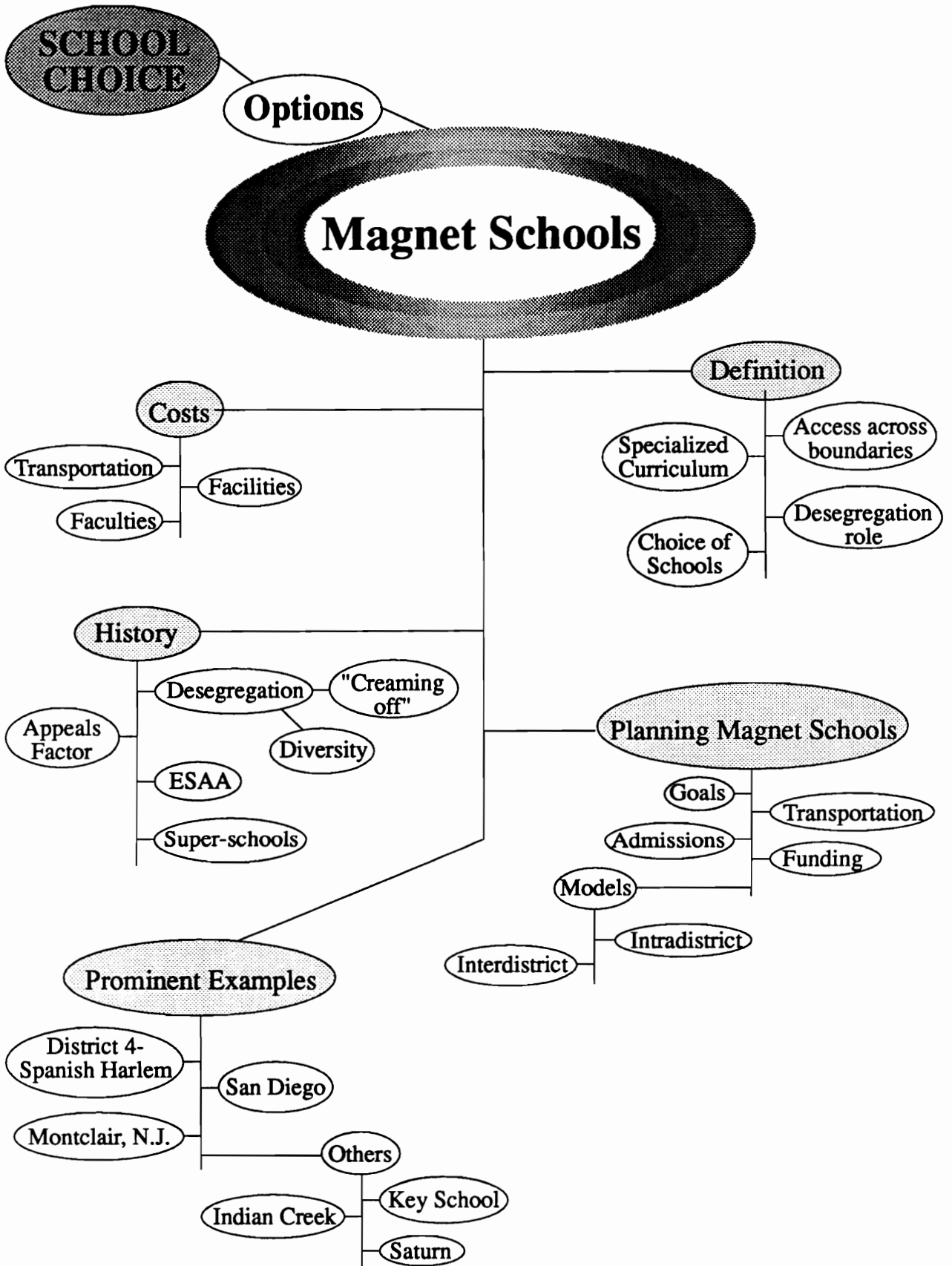
(Virginia Department of Education, 1991)

Summary

School choice has survived an initial flurry of publicity and politics to emerge as a major piece of educational reform; it has not faded away as do most fads. Difficult to define, school choice carries its strength in its conceptual framework, enhanced by the all-American appeal of the word itself. Intensity, emotionalism, and, at times, zealotry characterize arguments of both choice opponents and proponents. Different plans and models of school choice options must be reviewed individually to determine their effectiveness in improving education for students. The Carnegie Foundation Special Report, School Choice (1992), noted that the report card on school choice is mixed:

While school choice does not appear to be a panacea, we did find impressive evidence, especially in districtwide programs, that it can stimulate school renewal. With proper planning and strong commitment, well-crafted choice programs can, indeed, empower teachers, engage

parents, and improve the academic performance of students (p. xvi).



CHAPTER 2

Magnet Schools

Introduction

Magnet schools, which are aimed at students from a variety of backgrounds and have a specialized curriculum not available in the neighborhood schools, have one of the longest histories as a schools-of-choice option. In fact, the oldest specialty school, Boston Latin, was established in 1635.

Definition

Magnet schools can be defined or described as schools or programs within a school that have the following characteristics:

1. a special curriculum, theme, or method of instruction;
2. choice of school by students and parents;
3. access for students beyond regular attendance zones; and
4. a role in voluntary or mandated desegregation in some localities (Fleming, Blank, Dentler & Baltzell, 1982).

The concept of centering a school around

differences has been used to enhance the community's perception of a school, to increase teacher motivation, to offer parents more voice in the education process, and to appeal to student interests (Rossell, 1987). Other objectives of many magnet school programs include: promoting racial desegregation, keeping middle-class families in urban areas, securing federal or state funds for program development, and pursuing educational reform (Rossell).

History and Description

Magnet programs surged in growth primarily in the 1970s to deal with both voluntary and court-ordered desegregation. By 1983, more than one-third of the largest urban districts had magnet schools; today, it would be difficult to find an urban school district without a magnet school (Blank, 1989). There are perhaps as many as 5,000 magnet schools in America, with 20 percent of high school students attending magnet programs. Magnet schools exist in increasing numbers in nonurban school systems and for purposes

other than desegregation as well, such as planned options in school choice (Toch, Lennon, & Cooper, 1991).

Congress provided funds in 1976 for magnet schools as a part of desegregation plans and continues to do so today. The goal was to draw magnet school students from a larger attendance area, typically back to urban areas where many magnets were located (Lieberman, 1990). The U.S. Supreme Court allowed magnet schools in the desegregation of Denver's public schools in 1973 and in Houston in 1975. Thus, magnet schools became institutionalized as a desegregation strategy (Lieberman).

Desegregation of the Minneapolis schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s was pivotal in the use of magnet schools to serve as a desegregation tool (McMillan, 1980). The court endorsed the plan and sanctioned the use of magnet schools as desegregation tools. Magnet schools became an alternative to forced busing, and now every state in the union uses them to deal with desegregation, voluntarily or court-ordered, or to offer distinctive programs of study to attract a cross section of students.

Magnet schools offered a gentler, less strife-ridden solution to school desegregation than busing; they generally have been credited with softening resistance to desegregation and reducing white flight from urban areas (McMillan, 1980). Some people have viewed magnet schools, however, as dodges to desegregation, saying that the message of magnet schools is that they are so wonderfully attractive that white children will enroll despite the fact that black children will be there (Foster, 1973).

The magnet school movement also meshed with the alternative education initiatives of the late 1960s; hoping to develop schools to address different interests and learning skills, the alternative schools movement was also often characterized by a goal of offering students choices and different options (Fantini, 1973).

The role of the federal government in magnet school education has been significant. The Emergency School Aid Act (ESAA), through an amendment presented by Rep. John Glenn of Ohio, provided support for magnet schools, beginning in 1976 with \$10 million. In 1981-82, there were 1,019 magnet schools in 138 school

districts; 74 of those districts had developed programs without federal support and 91 of the nation's 275 large, urban school districts had instigated magnet schools (Blank, 1983).

Funds were reduced considerably in 1981, from \$400 million to \$25 million, with the repeal of the amendment. Funds are again available through the Magnet Schools Assistance Program, which had \$75 million appropriated in 1984-86 (U.S. Department of Education, 1985). This program's purpose is to encourage the development of courses of instruction to strengthen knowledge as well as to reduce segregation. The U.S. Department of Education has been a major source of funding for magnet schools, supporting the program nationwide with \$110 million a year (Toch et al., 1991). This money has not always been used on magnet school programs that were court-ordered or even voluntary desegregation efforts. The quality of the programs has occasionally been more impressive than the impact on racial desegregation. With the exception of gifted and talented programs, most magnet schools are nonselective. A U.S. Department of Education-sponsored

study in 1983 found that only 33 percent used criteria such as grades or tests for admission (Blank, 1984).

Making a magnet school attractive to white students as well as students of color, enticing whites to travel to predominantly black neighborhoods where magnet schools are frequently established, and using, rather than destroying, a black community's sense of ownership in its school requires certain features. A study of the "appeal factors" of magnet schools for both minority and nonminority students revealed that schools were selected for the following reasons:

1. program
2. faculty
3. principal
4. school location
5. quality of the school plant
6. opportunities for parental involvement
7. voluntary nature of the magnet
8. opportunities provided for a second chance for students with learning or behavioral difficulties
(Royster, Baltzell, & Simmons, 1979).

Inger (1991) found that elementary and secondary magnet schools in urban settings appeal to families and their students for the following reasons: program coherence, safer environment, sense of shared enterprise, focus on career preparation, committed principal, and school autonomy. The image of

excellence, the perception of a school as a good school, has also been identified as an important factor in a school's magnetic pull for both black and white students (Rossell, 1985).

Prince Georges County, Maryland, has had an increase of 3,000 formerly private school students since it initiated its magnet school plan in 1985. Buffalo, New York, and the Georgetown area of Washington, DC, have also attracted parochial and private students to return to public schools with a magnet school program (Snider, 1987).

In a study of three magnet schools within a single system, Metz (1986) found that magnet schools made it easier to work with students from diverse backgrounds and those with academic or social difficulties. Metz suggested that good multiracial relations among students and teachers in magnet schools are advanced by minimizing the visibility of low achievers, by faculties that give great importance to the social relations of students, and structures that facilitate interracial contact and planning. To be effective, all of the magnet school options need to be viewed as of

similar quality so that parents have confidence in the choices.

Magnet schools make up around 25 percent of the existing schools of choice and have increased greatly since the mid-80s, particularly at the elementary level (Bolick, 1990). Increasingly, magnet schools have gone beyond their initial mission as a tool of desegregation to become one of the planned options in public schools of choice, with their appeal centering on programmatic or pedagogical differences from other public schools in the district (Bolick).

Despite the fact that the magnet school model has been used frequently as an approach to desegregation, it has been challenged forcefully as being inequitable to some children of color, particularly African Americans. Accused of having been created for only a handful of minority students and for a large number of white students, magnet schools have also been viewed as competing primarily for the students who are already doing well instead of trying to improve the lot of the less able or poorly achieving students (Moore & Davenport, 1989a).

The charge of "creaming off" is frequently leveled at magnet school programs. Magnet schools often are characterized as attempts to persuade middle-class parents to keep their children in public schools. White flight has been a major problem in urban areas. In 1988, minority enrollment in the fifteen largest districts in the U.S. ranged from 70 to 96 percent (Kellogg, 1988). Related to the "creaming off" charge is the contention that a magnet school within a district takes the best teachers, gets the most motivated and active parents, is too selective in its admission processes, and creates disparities between regular schools and magnet schools (Kellogg).

Since demand for magnet schools often exceeds the availability of space, magnet school applicants are frequently chosen on a racial balancing basis, a first-come-first-served basis, a lottery system, or a combination of approaches (Virginia Department of Education, 1991). Waiting lists are common for magnet schools.

Holding that differentiated schools focus on human diversity needs, school-choice proponents have pushed magnet schools as attempts to reinstate student

motivation by shaping different school climates or cultures and highlighting different themes and teaching styles. Differentiating the options among public schools has, in some cases, the effect of creating a student body with commonalities of interests and goals; they also are alike in an educational way (Raywid, 1987a).

Magnet schools are often looked upon as "super schools"--a syndrome of the favored, good features of school improvement: shared mission, adequate planning time, staff development, and discretionary resources. They often become lighthouses or model schools of excellence. Staff members often have greater autonomy than teachers in traditional schools.

A U.S. Department of Education (1987) study identified the following as characteristics of an effective magnet school:

1. a policy commitment by the leaders in the district,
2. an innovative principal, and
3. a great degree of coherence in the school's theme.

The types of magnet schools vary greatly. For example, the schools of Kansas City, Missouri, all of

which are in the process of becoming totally magnetized in a court-ordered desegregation move, range from Latin grammar schools to theme schools for science, technology, military science, law, languages, agriculture, classical Greek (scholar/athletes), computers, and college preparation (personal tours, May 1992, International Magnet School Conference). Children identify their top three choices and are guaranteed enrollment at one of those schools.

Many magnet schools combine the organizational traits of alternative schools with an emphasis on content, theme, or pedagogical approach. Others create cooperative ventures with public and private organizations: Buffalo, New York, has a magnet school at the city zoo; Houston, Texas, has a school located in a hospital. Many magnet schools are affiliated with colleges, medical schools, law schools, technical training centers, practicing artists, and many other entities.

Planning Magnet Schools

Joe Nathan (1989a), a senior fellow at the Minnesota Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, has indicated that the most effective plans for magnet schools had the following elements:

1. a clear statement of goals and objectives for all schools and their students;
2. information and counseling to help parents select among various programs for their children;
3. student assignments and transfer policies that do not discriminate against students on the basis of past achievement or behavior;
4. nondiscriminatory admission policies that draw from a wide spectrum of students, not "first-come, first-served" admissions;
5. encouragement and assistance for most schools within a given geographic area to develop distinctive features, rather than simply a concentration of resources in a few schools;
6. opportunities for educators in the schools themselves to create programs;
7. available transportation within a reasonable area for all students, with a priority given to those coming from low-income and non-English-speaking families;
8. a requirement that dollars should follow students (i.e., sending and receiving institutions should not both receive funding);
9. procedures that promote more desegregation

- and integration among students; and
10. provisions for continuing oversight and modification (p. 30).

Magnet schools often must deal with the likelihood of waiting lists of students wanting to get into the school. Newspapers have carried accounts of people standing in line all night, for example, for the Prince Georges (Maryland) magnet school openings (Buckley & Sanchez, 1990). Some school systems respond by establishing lotteries, opening additional magnet schools, or doing nothing at all. Admission criteria become all-important in establishing the school as either a model of choice with open enrollment for students of all races and abilities or as an exclusive school that discriminates in operation, if not in name.

Intradistrict Magnet Schools

One approach to magnet school design and planning is the system-wide, intradistrict model in which all schools in that district have been organized as magnet schools. Frequently, a core curriculum or basic skills approach is enhanced by the addition of an overall

theme or focus for each school.

Magnet schools in intradistrict choice can be islands or oases of choice within a traditionally structured school district. Intradistrict magnet schools often have open enrollment policies for interested children within the district; an attempt to control the racial makeup of the school also characterizes many intradistrict magnet schools. Other admission standards for magnet schools might be based on first-come, first-serve or a lottery, in addition to a racial-balance requirement (Education Commission of the States, 1989).

Interdistrict Magnet Schools

Another variation of choice magnet schools is the regional, interdistrict magnet school model which seeks to draw students from outside a district as well as from within. The governance of a regional school becomes more complex because the number of different school systems and their respective policies make decision-making more difficult. Interdistrict magnet schools are less common than intradistrict magnets.

Regional schools, such as the Virginia Governor's Schools, are often features of gifted and talented programs; typically, these schools are very selective in their enrollment criteria. The Virginia schools are among the few statewide magnet school programs in the nation (Virginia Department of Education, 1991).

Magnet School Costs

The funding of magnet schools in a true choice program is an expensive venture, usually costing 10 to 12 percent more to operate than a traditional school (ASCD Issues Analysis: Public Schools of Choice, 1990). Additional costs are likely to occur in the areas of transportation, facilities, staffing, staff development, and parental involvement and education.

Free transportation is a key component to an effective choice or magnet school program; without it, existing socioeconomic differences are exacerbated, giving advantage to those children whose parents can afford to take them to school at their own expense (Nathan, 1989a; Glenn, 1989).

Magnet schools may require additional facilities or special program modifications; often, older schools in need of renovation in poor neighborhoods become magnet schools, adding to the cost of the facility. The specialized program of a magnet school creates a need for additional funds for staff development and training. Time to learn and plan is a crucial component in the preparation of magnet school teachers. Smaller classes may also result from the special theme or focus of a magnet school. Funding of parent involvement programs is another important feature of successful magnet school programs (ASCD Issues Analysis: Public Schools of Choice, 1990).

Chabotar (1989) conducted a cost analysis of a group of eight magnet school programs which he identified as being representative of other magnet schools. He found that elementary and intermediate magnet schools cost less per pupil than non-magnet schools; on the secondary level, magnet schools cost more per pupil than non-magnet schools. Magnet school secondary facilities cost more than those of non-magnet schools. Facilities for magnet schools are likewise more expensive, but after the first two years of

operation, the cost of magnet schools usually begins to decline (Chabotar, 1989).

Prominent Examples of Magnet Schools or Programs

Whether the primary purpose of a magnet school is for desegregation, for choice options, or for a combination of these two purposes, and whether the district chooses to call the school a magnet, alternative concept model, or some other variation of the name, individual schools and programs vary greatly. The following are descriptions of successful magnet school programs.

District 4--Manhattan's East Harlem

If a renaissance in public education could occur in East Harlem, it can happen in any city of America. The district has romanced the children of Harlem into the pleasures of the life of the mind (Maynard, 1987, p. A7).

Since the mid-70s, Spanish Harlem has been transformed from a school district with reading scores

placing it last among New York's community school districts, to a district with more than 60 percent of the students reading at or above grade level (DiBlasi, 1987). With more than 20 schools or programs of choice from kindergarten to high school, District 4 has a student population two-thirds Hispanic and one-third black. It is a high poverty area and has a high percentage of families on welfare assistance (New York City Board of Education, 1987).

The magnet school programs in East Harlem, called alternative concept schools by the district, have been largely teacher-initiated, designed, and directed. Content and theme, as well as different organizational features and climates, are major distinctions in the District 4 program. Young adolescents in middle or junior high schools have been targeted, with all of the junior highs operating on a choice basis. Schools with a focus on pedagogical approaches such as those for underachieving, gifted, or at-risk students, and schools with a variety of themes--the sports school, the maritime school, the math and science school, a center for communication arts, the progressivism school--are housed in innovative ways to deal with the

availability of school space. Several programs with their own directors but not building principals are in the same building, much the way an office building might be run (Fliegel, 1989).

District 4, East Harlem, has been magnetic, drawing great media attention and community pride to the creative and successful way the district has been operating its schools for more than the last decade. The magnet school plan in East Harlem has also been a part of an overall school improvement restructuring process that has evolved over more than 15 years (Brandt, 1991).

San Diego City Schools

San Diego City Schools combined a successful program called Voluntary Ethnic Enrollment Programs, designed to allow students to attend schools outside their neighborhoods to improve racial-ethnic balance, with the concept of magnet schools as a voluntary alternative. San Diego's magnets typically function as total school programs to which nonresidents must apply and in which residents are automatically enrolled.

With more than 40 magnet schools, San Diego offers a wide range of choices--math/science/computer magnets, arts magnets, international baccalaureate magnets, business, languages, career, literature and writing magnets. One newer program, Sherman Elementary School, focuses on the future of the importance of international trade in the Pacific Rim. Sherman also offers an extended day and a child care program designed to appeal to workers in the downtown San Diego area (Frey, Brown, Garbosky, Shelburne, & Tomblin, 1990).

San Diego has changed its magnet schools' themes over time to appeal to parents and students. The fundamental magnets began to draw fewer and fewer students after the back-to-basics movement declined; one fundamental skills school changed to an academy of life sciences; another focused on plant and animal marine science. University lab school magnets, which were supported by colleges and universities, proved not to be very successful in San Diego (Frey et al., 1990).

The San Diego school system has focused its work on planning magnet schools, change, and restructuring, acting on the belief that magnet schools will be the

leaders in the positive changes in the public schools. The strategic planning guide used in San Diego focuses on the curriculum, staffing, staff development, involvement of parents and community, and evaluation (Frey et al., 1990).

Montclair, New Jersey Schools

Montclair, New Jersey, a residential community for commuters to New York City and Newark, implemented a magnet school system in 1976 to deal with racial imbalance. It initially placed its gifted and talented programs, designed to lure whites, in black neighborhoods, and its fundamental programs, designed to appeal to blacks, in predominantly white neighborhoods. The Montclair magnet program has undergone extensive evaluation and modifications since 1976, so that each elementary and middle school has become a magnet school, and the racial balance in Montclair has stabilized (Clewell & Joy, 1990).

Efforts to determine whether the quality of education improved as a result of the magnet school program focused on a study of student achievement,

learning environment, curriculum, and instruction. Clewell and Joy (1990) found in their update on the Montclair magnet program that performance in reading and math, as measured by the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, had improved since the implementation of the magnet program in 1976. They used longitudinal data and minority and nonminority scores to determine the percent of students scoring below grade level. The data revealed a difference in the performance of minority and nonminority students; a higher percentage of minority students scored below grade level. Montclair established a plan to deal with the gap. This plan has a strong parental component, emphasis on self-confidence of students, and advisory councils (Clewell & Joy).

The Montclair magnet plan has been cited by both teachers and parents for the diversity of its schools (ETS Policy Notes, 1990). By gradually introducing magnets, eliminating attendance zones, placing programs in strategic locations, offering transportation to all programs, and encouraging community involvement, the Montclair school district has become an effective magnet school model (Clewell & Joy, 1990).

Other Examples of Magnet Schools

Key School in Indianapolis was established in 1987 from an idea by an elementary school teacher and has flourished as an elementary magnet with a collaborative interdisciplinary curriculum. Heterogeneous, multi-age classes focus on enrichment rather than remediation (Bolanos, 1990).

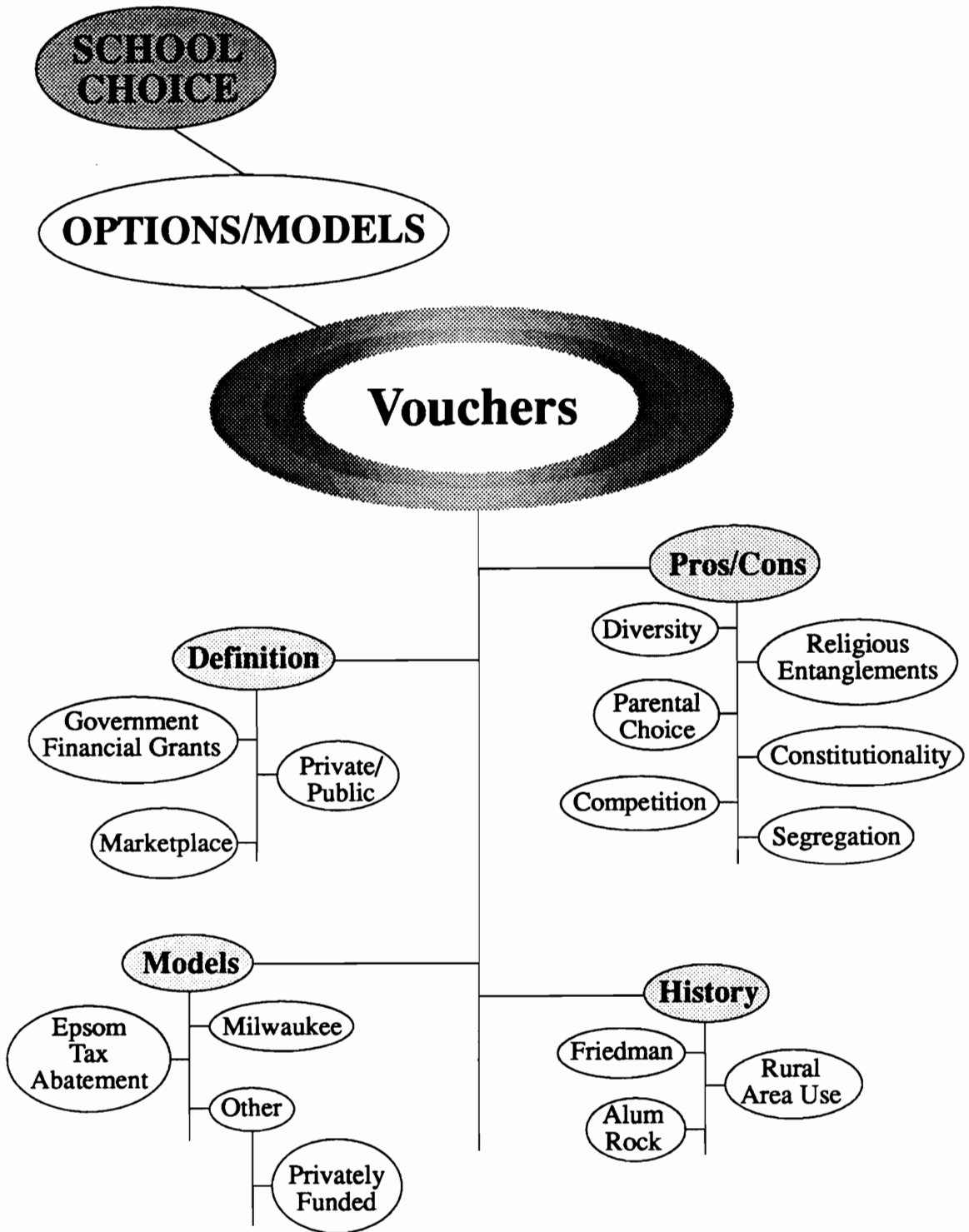
Indian Creek Elementary, another magnet school in Indianapolis, focuses on science and technology. Recognized both on the state and national levels for excellence in student achievement (Indiana Four-Star Schools and Blue Ribbon School from the U.S. Department of Education), Indian Creek also relied on the teachers and community as primary planners (Gould, 1991).

Saturn School in St. Paul, Minnesota, is an experimental school modeled on the Saturn Corporation concept of building a car from scratch; traditional boundaries were ignored as many different groups of people planned the school. Saturn's population, fourth through eighth graders, receive no report cards, have no grade levels, and no long summer vacations (Natale,

1991). Saturn has received national attention with visits from the President of the United States. However, the school's director is the first to point out that it is in its infancy, with much growth yet to come. It is a magnet school in concept, with a heavy emphasis on restructuring the nature of schools (Natale).

Summary

Magnet schools have proven to be a continuing trend in education; funding, despite a temporary reduction during the early Reagan era, has been steady. Magnet schools vary widely as to type, offering a plethora of themes or focuses for students who have special interests or skills. Desegregation policies for urban areas have used magnet schools as remedies. Some areas use magnet schools, however, as a half-hearted, partial approach to desegregation. Some magnet school plans still leave pockets of segregated schools (Dentler, 1990). Magnet schools, nonetheless, remain a popular option of choice and of desegregation in school systems.



CHAPTER 3

Vouchers

Introduction

One of the most radical moves to reform public education has been the movement toward privatization, particularly voucher proposals (Lieberman, 1989). In any debate on the merits of parental choice in education, the discussion inevitably moves to the use of vouchers.

Definition

Vouchers, defined as direct governmental financial grants to families for the purchase of schooling, usually outside the public sector, shift the control of education. Vouchers could offer parents a rather unrestricted choice over their children's school through the use of a check or a bill to be cashed in for education. Creating a competitive market for education is a major intention of a voucher system. Inherent in the voucher rationale is the assumption that vouchers could create markets because of competition and that

schools would have to improve or lose the market (Lieberman, 1989). In a voucher system, parents would have far more discretion in the use of vouchers since schools could become dependent upon vouchers to develop their budgets and to pay bills (Cooper, 1989).

Under most voucher plans or proposals, the voucher could be used to attend private or public schools. Voucher plans typically have three broad areas: finance, regulation, and provision of information to consumers (Levin, 1979). Different voucher systems vary in the value of the voucher, whether the voucher is the full payment of tuition, whether a family's financial need affects the amount of the voucher, and whether participating private schools have to follow regulations and guidelines (Levy, 1986). Some voucher systems deal only with minority or disadvantaged children; others take on the form of scholarships for different groups of children from the needy or the talented or the handicapped. Parents of handicapped children, however, must have the approval of the local school board to send those children to private schools at public expense. Thus, for the handicapped child, a true voucher system does not exist.

History

There have been very few examples of educational vouchers, but the voucher approach was first discussed seriously in the 1960s and is usually associated with Milton Friedman's work that called for a governmental grant to each student in elementary and secondary schools that was equal to the average public school cost (Friedman, 1965). The government's role would have been simply to issue the vouchers and establish a level of education that a school would have to provide. Schools, in this plan, would have been unregulated, that is, able to charge whatever tuition the school chose (Kutner, Sherman, & Williams, 1986). Vouchers have not been used extensively or permanently to change policy in elementary and secondary education, but direct financial transfers to an individual from the federal government have occurred in other areas of domestic policy, such as Pell Grants in higher education (Kutner et al., 1986). Former President Reagan attempted to change the focus of the \$3 billion Chapter I program into a mini-voucher system, a federal

scholarship of sorts. There was also a proposal in the early 1980s to create a voucher modeled on the Pell Grants, allowing parents who sent their children to nonprofit schools to receive financial assistance. Political support for programs of these types has not been strong enough to effect a change (Kutner et al., 1986). In November 1993, for example, a voucher proposal was soundly defeated by California voters (Associated Press, 1993).

There has been only a very limited use of vouchers in the United States. Rural, sparsely populated school districts, particularly in Vermont and other New England areas, have used entitlements or de facto vouchers for children rather than operate their own schools. In some cases, the children have gone to schools in neighboring districts; in others, the districts have given students vouchers to be used in any private nonsectarian or public school. Many small school districts have chosen tuition grants in lieu of establishing their own schools (Young & Clinchy, 1992).

Alum Rock Voucher System

In the 1970s, the Alum Rock Union School District in San Jose, California, began the Alum Rock voucher system as a demonstration project sponsored by the Office of Educational Opportunity and the National Institute of Education. Actually, even though private school participation was a part of the first plan, state law prevented that involvement; even when legislation was passed to allow the inclusion of private schools, there was no involvement with them. Choice, then, was limited essentially to educational programs in a mini-school approach. The Alum Rock experiment is not used by voucher/choice advocates as a good example because there were many compromises to the original design as the program was implemented (Cohen & Farrar, 1977).

The evaluations of the Alum Rock voucher system were neither all positive nor all negative. While parents, who for the most part were poor, minority, and non-English speaking, first chose to send their children to neighborhood schools, they later began to send their children outside the neighborhood. The

number doubled from 11 percent going outside to nearly 22 percent between the first and third years (Bridge & Blackman, 1978). The majority of parents, nonetheless, continued to send their children to the neighborhood school.

The Alum Rock voucher system did not prove to make a difference in instructional practices or in the students' reading scores. Studies of the content of the instructional programs in Alum Rock did not reveal a significant difference among such variables as use of English or Spanish in instruction, the degree of teacher- or student-initiated instruction, or the pacing of content (Barker, 1981). Reading achievement studies did not reveal any significant differences among the schools' students (Capell, 1981).

Pros and Cons of Vouchers

Vouchers have routinely been rejected in ballot referenda. Voucher plans have been introduced in Congress and state legislatures, but voters have rejected almost all of them. Only one state, Wisconsin, has implemented a voucher plan, an experimental program

in Milwaukee that deals with non-sectarian private schools. The driving force behind vouchers to a great degree has been the sectarian school lobbies and political groups. These groups often assert that vouchers will ensure parental choice and offer a constitutional way to assist parochial and other private schools. Opponents hold that since private schools are free to discriminate in admissions and hiring, the concept of choice does not play a significant role in the voucher approach. The real choice, they hold, is whether children are accepted or rejected by the private school (American Center for Separation of Church and State, 1991).

Myron Lieberman (1989) suggested that if education is bought and sold on a free market competition basis, a highly segregated and stratified educational system will result. The wealthy will likely segregate their children in expensive schools while the poor will be left to struggle with a voucher that is not large enough to pay for an excellent private school. Public schools could be left as the only choices for poor urban areas where few private schools currently exist; stigmatized, tracked, nondiverse, and gravely weakened

public schools could result from a voucher system (Lieberman, 1989). "Gourmet restaurants," said Lieberman, "do not compete with McDonalds" (p. 155).

Federal courts have struck down various plans to funnel public aid to private education, and many states have strict constitutional provisions forbidding the appropriation of public funds for religious purposes. The Supreme Court narrowly upheld a Minnesota tax deduction plan for both private and public schools, but the high court has not dealt with the direct form of aid in a voucher plan. Peter Drucker (1974) argued that educational institutions are ineffective because of the way they are funded; funding through an involuntary tax does not recognize the importance of customer satisfaction, as vouchers would.

Advocates of vouchers frequently argue that government assistance for all types of education in a voucher system would stimulate greater choice, diversity, and efficiency in schools. In a competitive voucher-driven market, schools--public and private--would have to compete for students as a source of income; responding to consumer needs or preferences would become a driving force in the school. Opponents

of a voucher system worry about racial and economic segregation and the separation of church and state. Public schools, they fear, could become wastelands or dumping grounds for poor, minority, or handicapped children. Vouchers could also, they contend, lead to excessive entanglement between religion and government (McGuire, 1981).

Full education vouchers, that is, those that pay the total cost of education, are not usually the focus of any discussion within the voucher movement. The real focus, instead, has been on reduced or limited vouchers that, at least on the surface, are aimed at helping low-income families have a broader range of options in the education of their children (Kutner, Sherman, & Williams, 1986).

Mary Ann Raywid (1987a), a leading choice proponent and voucher opponent, has maintained that one of the more pervasive arguments against vouchers is that most children in the United States will go to public schools and it is those public schools that should be improved, rather than forced into an even more competitive situation. The debate of whether schooling is a private benefit or a public good takes

on real meaning in a society in which fewer and fewer households have school-age children. The public, in order to support public education, must see real application of the public-good argument for education (Raywid). "Vouchers," Raywid (1987a) has said, "telegraph the message that the matter is solely the parents' affair and not the community's concern" (p. 763). Vouchers, some contend, uphold education solely as an individual right rather than as a societal need to maintain a way of life. Individual needs take on greater importance than the overall public good in a voucher system. Vouchers could, many fear, leave a trail of public disinterest and remove education even more from the public agenda of concern (Raywid).

A pro-voucher perspective is that vouchers would facilitate, not discourage, racial integration by supplementing the vouchers of low-income families and breaking the connection between area of residence and the school. Critics fear that vouchers would challenge the overall education policy in the United States that has traditionally held that the individual interest of parents and students should be secondary to broader public policy and concerns such as educational

opportunities for all (Elmore, 1990a). Vouchers, some fear, would undermine national priorities and extend class separations.

Another major concern about a voucher system is economic segregation, or the likelihood of a two-tiered educational system, especially in major urban areas (Raywid, 1987a). A poor school in a poor neighborhood does not stand as much chance in luring voucher-holders and thereby improving its financial situation. Vouchers look strongly at financing schools with improving schools being only a hoped-for, not planned-for, byproduct. Buying an education, critics contend, cannot be compared to buying a product. "Society has no real stake in whether an individual buys a Toyota or a Buick. What sort of education a youngster obtains can matter a great deal to the rest of us, however" (Raywid, 1987a, p. 764).

Vouchers are often touted as making public schools better because of competition, putting public and private schools on an even playing field. Critics point out that public schools must educate all children of all academic abilities, family background, or

handicapping condition. Private schools may select or reject children.

Judith Pearson (1989), a critic of the choice movement, has speculated that combining politics, the private sector, and public schools will lead to an oversimplification of the "competition-equals-increased-productivity" concept. She pointed to the abuses of competition in businesses as a forewarning of educational competition:

How long before we see abuses in the recruitment of school athletes and scholars? What form will insider trading or industrial espionage take? Who will worry about unattractive students--the handicapped and the emotionally disturbed--who come with high costs and little prospect of a public relations payoff (p. 823).

Another major argument in the voucher movement is whether all parents would benefit from a voucher plan. More than 85 percent of parents count on the public schools to educate their children, tuition-free and voucher-free. Private school tuition is often

expensive, with wealthy people seeming to benefit from voucher proposals more than lower and middle-income families.

Legal issues also play an important role in this choice option. Plans to use public funds for private schools, 85 percent of which are religiously based, are challenged as abridging the establishment clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which prohibits governmental behaviors that impede or advance religions or that excessively entangle church and state.

The national PTA has opposed the voucher system, believing that vouchers may actually not increase choice and do not guarantee parental involvement in education. They feel that parental choice may be reduced to mere chance due to selective admissions to public and nonpublic schools, varying costs of private schools, transportation costs, and geographical location. There are, they feel, far too many unanswered questions in voucher proposals (Fege & Waterman, 1989).

Voucher Models

Milwaukee's Voucher Plan

Milwaukee is the only voucher experiment that uses public funds for private schooling. Up to one thousand low-income students have received \$2,500 vouchers to be used for attending nonsectarian private schools approved by the state to participate in the voucher program. The state superintendent of public education, the state's two largest teacher unions, the Milwaukee branch of the NAACP, and many educators challenged the plan as diverting public money to private schools (Peterkin, 1990). Parent groups also sued the state superintendent, asserting that the regulations he had established for participating private schools were burdensome. A circuit court judge upheld the voucher's constitutionality, saying that the purpose was to provide a quality education, a true public purpose (Peterkin).

The Milwaukee Choice Program (vouchers) began modestly, to target a small number of students and schools, and has been under a legal cloud since its

beginning (Witte, 1991). Students in this program must be from families whose incomes do not exceed 1.75 times the national poverty line (approximately \$22,000 for a three-person family); must not have been in a private school the previous year; and must not exceed 49 percent of a school's population. One percent of the Milwaukee Public Schools' enrollment (approximately 1000 students) make up the total number of students enrolled in the voucher/choice plan (Witte, 1991). Schools must admit voucher, or what Milwaukee calls "choice," students without discriminating, but private schools do not have to comply with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

The Milwaukee voucher plan was developed to prevent vouchers being used by non-poor families. Funds for the private schools come from the general school aid that typically would have gone to the Milwaukee Public Schools. Julie Underwood (1991) pointed out that the impact of the Milwaukee Choice Program can be illustrative of how voucher plans can affect other public school systems. The Milwaukee Choice Program in its second year could reduce the Milwaukee Public School budget by \$2.5 million with no likely reduction

in expenses since the 1,000 students would come from different schools in the system and would not reduce the day-to-day operating costs of the schools. The Milwaukee Public Schools also transport the children to the private schools, so expenses have actually increased (Underwood, 1991).

Robert Peterkin, former superintendent of Milwaukee Public Schools, had been a supporter of some choice plans, but he has called the voucher law in Wisconsin "a threat to education," claiming that the law will drain resources from inner-city schools, contains no mechanisms to improve the schools that are losing students, and does not support the racial-balance objectives of the school system (Peterkin, 1991).

In a major study of the Milwaukee choice plan conducted by John Witte and the Robert M. LaFollette Institute of Public Affairs (1991), a number of methodological approaches were used. Parental surveys were conducted at different stages of the plan, case studies were developed at the voucher schools, teacher and administrators were interviewed, students completed questionnaires, and researchers observed at school and

community meetings and conducted analyses of achievement and attendance data.

The preliminary outcomes after the first year of the program revealed that achievement test scores did not make dramatic gains and the choice students' test scores remained approximately equal to low-income students in the public schools, higher on reading but lower on math (Witte, 1991). Parental attitudes toward choice schools, opinions about the choice programs, and parental involvement were positive. Attendance was slightly higher for the choice schools compared to average attendance in the public schools. Parental evaluations of the choice schools were more positive than those of their prior public schools. Attrition was high in the first year; one school, Juanita Virgil, closed during the year over disputes about religious curricula, leaving 63 children scrambling for space in the public schools and trying to catch up with their new classmates. Seven schools enrolled 341 choice students in 1990. In June 1991, 249 students were enrolled in six choice schools; 86 of those did not return in the fall. Forty of the 86 returned to the public schools (Witte, 1991). Choice school enrollment

in September 1991 was 562; 73 percent were African-American, 23 percent were Hispanics, and four percent were white. The majority of the students were enrolled in four schools. Two other schools, one an alternative school and the other a Montessori school, enrolled 37 and four students, respectively. One school had an Afrocentric curriculum and one a focus on Latin American culture.

The closing of one of Milwaukee's choice schools and the dropping out of another has caused some concerns about the concept of marketplace education. "Closing a hardware store and closing a school in the middle of the year are different," said Witte in a Newsweek (1991) article.

In 1992-93 the number of participating schools jumped from six to 11; enrollment in the Choice Program increased from the 341 students in 1990-91 to 613 in 1992-93. The number of applicants exceeded the number of students enrolled by 357 in 1992-93. The program limit of 1000 students has not been met because of the 49% rule on school limits for choice students and the limited number of schools in the program (Witte, 1993).

Annette (Polly) Williams, the African-American Wisconsin state legislator who sponsored the choice bill, offered it as a national model, but the future of the program is still uncertain as the voucher debate continues nationally. The question of whether private schools can succeed where public schools are failing with inner-city, minority, poor children remains unanswered by the Milwaukee voucher system (Toch, 1991a). The Wisconsin Supreme Court, however, upheld the state's use of vouchers by a 4-to-3 ruling, overturning a 1990 state appeals court ruling that the legislature had enacted the plan improperly (Toch).

Epsom Tax Abatement Plan

A twist on the voucher plan is a tax abatement policy enacted in Epsom, New Hampshire. Under the policy, citizens or businesses who sponsor a high school student's private education receive a tax break. Epsom, a rural community of 4,500 people where the average annual tax bill is \$2,500, sends its secondary students to a public high school in a neighboring community. Property owners can cut their tax bills by

as much as \$1,000 if they pay a portion of a high school student's tuition at a private school, either secular or religious. Property owners, however, cannot break even on the abatement, and the student does not have to be the property owner's child. The proposal was intended to help students and taxpayers (Diegmüller, 1991). Opponents claim the Epsom plan violates the state's constitutional prohibition on spending public money for parochial schools.

Other Voucher Programs

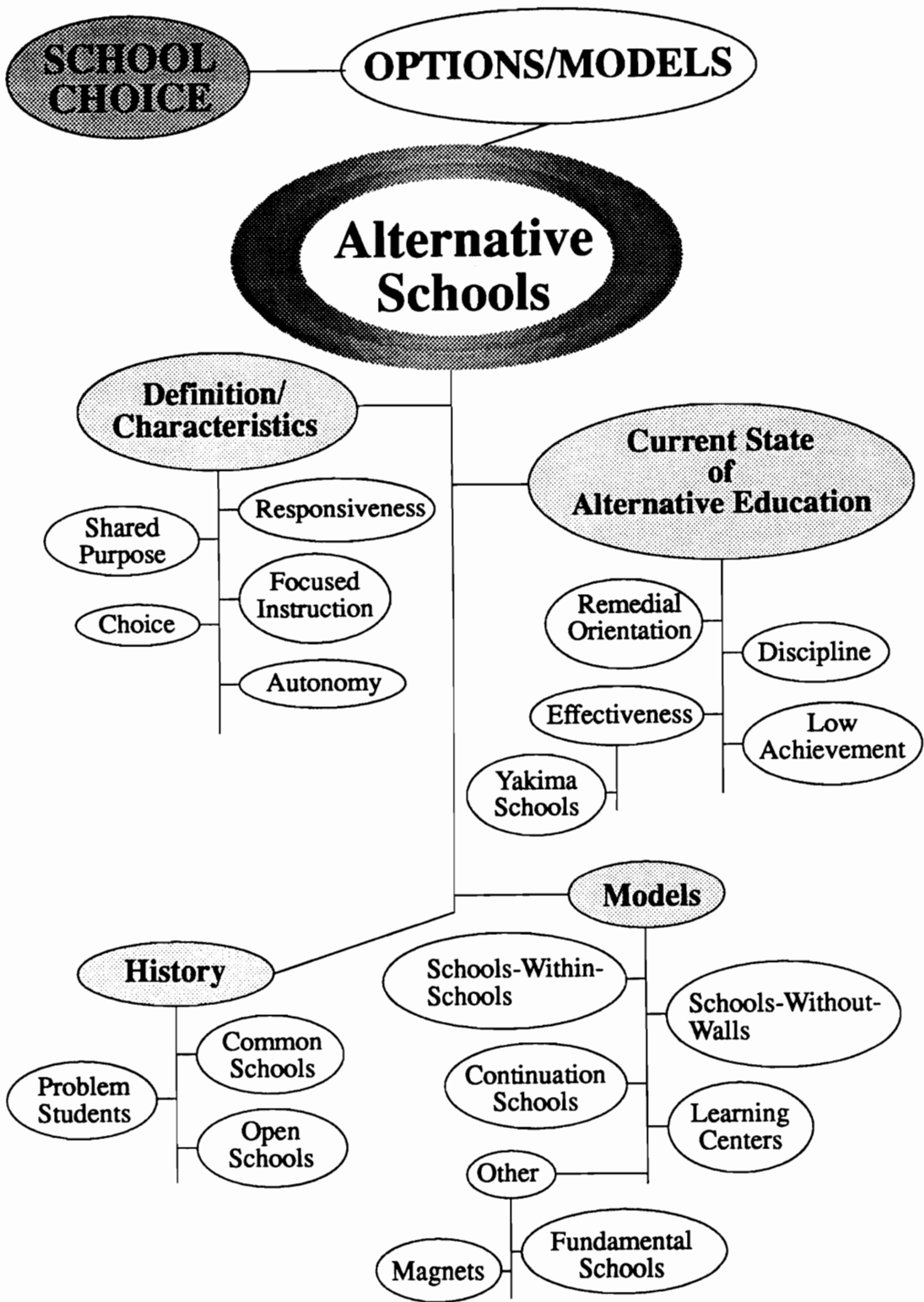
Privately funded vouchers experienced a boomlet in 1992 with pupils in Atlanta, Little Rock, San Antonio, and other cities being targeted for assistance by the business community (Walsh, 1992). The sponsors, who have voiced an unwillingness to wait for public school reform, typically pay approximately fifty percent of the tuition for children whose families meet federal school-lunch criteria. The Georgia Public Policy Foundation agreed to provide grants of up to \$3,000 in the Atlanta area. Funding came from an anonymous gift of \$1 million. Three major Milwaukee companies,

Wisconsin Electric Power Company, Johnson Controls Incorporated, and Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company, have announced grants of \$500,000 each to bolster the Milwaukee voucher program. The Free To Choose Trust in Little Rock plans to help 19 low-income children. The Choice Charitable Trust in Indianapolis, in an effort launched by the chairman of the Golden Rule Insurance Company, inspired many of these programs (Walsh). The Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation in San Antonio pledged \$1.5 million from three businesses to replicate the Indianapolis program. One of the benefactors was Blant Hurt, who has been raising voucher money in Arkansas. He has said, "I'm not doing this to give away money. I believe in breaking the government monopoly on education" (in Walsh, 1992, p. 18). Some public educators are leery of even private assistance, feeling it is detrimental to the funding of public schools.

Summary

Voucher plans are an essentially untested approach to school choice and to education in general. Whether

the voucher proponents are exploiting the choice movement to accomplish direct financial aid to private and parochial schools or whether they genuinely seek to improve public education through a competitive marketplace approach is not clear. Voucher plans need to be analyzed one by one to determine whether equitable education for all children will result. Issues such as providing transportation, equal access to schools of choice, procedures to prevent discrimination and ensure accountability, safety standards, and curriculum should be carefully reviewed in all voucher plans (Fege, 1991). Benefit or hoax -- the role of vouchers remains unclear in the education of children. The basic question, according to Herbert Grover (1991), former Wisconsin State Superintendent of Schools, is, "Will a private voucher system guarantee a high-quality and equal educational opportunity for all children" (p. 51).



CHAPTER 4

Alternative Schools

Introduction

As a choice option, alternative schools are probably one of the least talked about but most persistent in operation. Dissatisfaction with conventional education in the 1960s led to the introduction of schools that offered alternatives-- often in the form of open schools or schools without walls (Young, 1990). Over three million students were participating in alternative schools, estimated to be 10,000 in number, in 1981 (Raywid, 1981). More recently, alternative schools have focused on programs for at-risk students, such as learning centers or continuation schools for students who cannot or will not attend regular schools (Young).

First considered an anomaly because they emerged almost simultaneously, unnamed, and undescribed across the country, alternative schools were often dismissed as a fad, something outside the realm of mainstream education (Young, 1990). Few educators took them seriously or expected them to survive. Almost three

decades have seen alternative schools survive--survive even when the typically passionate creators of the schools moved on to other positions; they have also survived numerous educational reform movements and trends.

Definition and Characteristics

The term public alternative school means "any school that provides alternative learning experiences to those provided by conventional schools and that is available by choice to every family within its community at no extra cost" (Smith, 1974, pp. 14-15).

The alternative school approach has proved itself as an effective means of aiding students who have had difficulty in traditional schools (Thomas, Sabatino, & Sarris, 1982). The concept of a flexible structure to focus on individuals' needs fits an overall goal of alternative education to increase opportunities for academic success without compromising educational standards of achievement.

Timothy Young (1990) in his book, Public Alternative Education: Options and Choice for Today's

Schools, has identified certain characteristics that differentiate alternative schools from conventional schools. Alternative schools have the following:

- A greater responsiveness to a perceived educational need within the community;
- A more focused instructional program, usually featuring a particular curricular emphasis, instructional method, or school climate;
- A shared sense of purpose;
- A more student-centered philosophy;
- A noncompetitive environment; students are not pitted against one another for grades and recognition;
- Student progress measured in terms of self-improvement;
- A greater autonomy; principals, teachers, and students have a greater freedom from the central administration than their counterparts in traditional schools; and
- A smaller school and a more personalized relationship between students and staff (pp. 2-3).

The U.S. Department of Justice (1980) described alternative schools as offering subjects or courses and teaching methodology that are not offered to students of the same age or grade in a traditional school setting. Young (1990) has said that alternative

schools, in shoppers' terms, would be specialty shops rather than department stores.

History and Development

The development of alternative schools in the United States can be traced to an early alternative, the free common school advocated by Horace Mann, and to the growth of Catholic parochial high schools in the nineteenth century as a private alternative to public education. Progressive educators in the 1900s experimented with activities and democratic classroom practices, extended year schools, and community-based learning; at the turn of the century more vocational courses were offered for secondary students. The Cold War and Sputnik were the death of the progressive experimentations, shifting the educational emphasis to competition, with ability grouping becoming significant in the ways schools were run. In the 1960s and 1970s individualized instruction became the battle cry of alternative approaches to education. Open education, often in the form of non-graded, continuous school programs, became popular. Building on students'

interests and curiosity was a guiding approach to education. These open schools sought to provide a less restrictive, more stimulating educational alternative (Young, 1990). Raywid (1983) has pointed out that another model of alternative schools also quickly evolved from the open education initiative--the model of alternative schools for problem students. She has decried the use of the terms alternative or choice in connection with these schools; typically, children in behavior or discipline schools have only one choice--go to the "last chance school" or be expelled. "Dumping ground" has become a fairly common synonym for this type of alternative school.

Many educators in the 70s and 80s proposed alternative schools as solutions to social problems such as violence, crime, racism, dropouts, inner city demands, and others. Alternative schools have been used for greatly diverse aims and purposes (Raywid, 1983). Students in alternative programs represent an assortment of abilities and achievements, but one trait that has emerged in the alternative school movement is the commonality of a lack of success in conventional schools as well as disappointment or even

hatred of conventional schools (Raywid, 1983). Success stories are usually powerfully emotional about students who have often turned their lives around in attitude, success, and behavior. Of course, not all alternative education students are successful, but the individual success story has had a strong impact on the continued growth of alternative schools. By 1985, 40 percent of 900 junior and senior high schools surveyed by the U.S. Education Department's Office of Educational Research and Improvement offered some form of academic-assistance program or alternative school for disruptive students. Since 1985 many other school divisions have begun to use systemwide alternative school options (Viadero, 1987).

Alternative school has become the generic term for programs of many different kinds of choices, purposes, methods, and philosophies that serve a wide variety of children (Gold & Mann, 1984). Whether they aim to offer new opportunities for children or address weaknesses or problems, the common trait of alternative schools is simply that they are different from the majority of schools in the school division. Whether to describe alternative schools as a part of the choice

movement becomes a consideration of semantics and definitions; alternative schools are, in some districts, choice options for students, but other alternative schools make no pretense of allowing student or parental choice. Assignment, not choice, is the reality for some students.

Options or Models

School-Within-a-School

Breaking down the size of large secondary schools was the impetus behind the school-within-a-school model. Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1969, created the Pilot School to offer a more informal learning atmosphere for 200 students having difficulty adjusting to a large high school. Quincy, Illinois, developed one of the best known models with Quincy II High School's seven schools-within-a-school that focused on learning styles, interests, and career paths (Young, 1990).

The California Partnership Academies, structured as schools-within-schools, are three-year high school

programs that begin at grade ten and feature block scheduling, occupational themes with rigorous academic courses, a variety of motivational activities, small groups of teachers who work together, and a student selection process that identifies ninth graders who are low achievers with potential for improvement (Dayton, Raby, Stern, & Wiesberg, 1992). The partnership refers to the active relationship between schools and businesses; businesses serve on school steering committees, help develop up-to-date technical curriculum, serve as mentors, and provide summer and part-time jobs as well as full time jobs for graduates.

The California legislature, driven for the most part by businesses, has funded replication bills to expand the partnership academies. There are now 47 state-supported academies in California as well as others with their own funding.

In an evaluation of the program conducted from 1985 through 1988 by an independent research group at Stanford University, the dropout rate of the academy class was half that of a comparison group; parents reported positive feelings about the school and staff; and student testimony revealed that they liked the

academy schools and saw clear connections between school and post-high-school plans (Dayton, Weisberg, & Sterns, 1989).

A 1991 follow-up study of academy graduates found that 94 percent were working, going to school, or doing both; graduates were usually working in fields related to their high school training; and 64 percent were continuing their education at community colleges (Dayton & Sterns, 1991).

Schools-Without-Walls

The concept of community or unity is a key feature of a school-without-walls model; classes are often located in museums, universities, business offices, banks, or other community locations. These classes are frequently taught by community people. One such program, Philadelphia Parkway, began in 1969 as a part of a Ford Foundation grant; units of sixteen students, a teacher, and a university intern met for tutorials during the week. Students also completed coursework for the regular curriculum taught by high school

teachers. They earned credits rather than grades (Young, 1990).

The schools-without-walls model proved initially to be an appealing one; about 22 percent of public alternative schools used this model in the early 70s, but its popularity declined to six percent in a 1975 survey (Barr, 1975).

Continuation Schools

The continuation schools are an alternative education model designed for students needing a less competitive, smaller setting; typically continuation schools provide alternatives for pregnant students, potential dropouts, or students with behavior problems. Behavior modification, contracts, and nongraded programs usually characterize continuation schools. A survey in 1975 revealed continuation schools to be the most popular model of alternative education, with 20 percent of the alternative schools using this approach (Barr, 1975).

Learning Centers

Learning centers offer the alternative of specialized resources or programs in one place; typically centers have been vocational or technical at the secondary level with fewer numbers at the elementary level, focused usually around an enrichment program (Young, 1990). Mt. Edgecumbe High School, a 200-student boarding school in Alaska, emphasizes the basics of reading, writing, arithmetic, and Pacific Rim. The program has both a strong cultural emphasis as well as a strong vocational program; both emphases are decidedly entrepreneurial in nature. Students sell smoked fish to international markets, learn Japanese, and practice continuous improvement as a part of Total Quality Management studies (Knapp, 1989).

Another variation of the learning center model is Philadelphia High School for Girls; Girls High has thrived for over fifty years in the face of a co-ed magnet school down the street and has become aggressive in touting the value of a single-sex education (Koepke, 1991). Multicultural schools, ethnic schools, or

single-gender schools offer unique atmospheres in the learning center models.

Other Models

Other options in alternative education have included fundamental schools, which are back-to-basics, conservative, academic-plus schools; some fundamental schools require homework, enforce a strict discipline, and establish a uniform dress code. Pasadena's well-known John Marshall Fundamental School was the first at the secondary level in 1973 (Young, 1990). Magnet schools--theme or speciality schools--also emerged and have grown so rapidly that they are most often considered a separate choice option not necessarily associated with alternative education. Fundamental schools, for the most part, went out of style or were transformed into magnet schools.

Current State of Alternative Education

The 1980s found that many of the estimated 10,000 alternative schools were variations of the earlier

models. The separate schools, satellite or annex schools, and remedial/corrective schools became the most prevalent models--with separate schools making up 38 percent of alternative education models; remedial/corrective schools, 13 percent; and satellite/annex schools, 9 percent. The schools-within-a-school model constituted 20 percent (Raywid, 1981). A more recent survey of 104 alternative programs in the state of Washington revealed that remedial orientations have replaced the more progressive, open orientations of the 70s. The perception of the alternative education student has shifted from "all kinds" to low achievers/disruptive (Young, 1990).

Effectiveness of Alternative Programs

The research base for alternative programs has relied, for the most part, on studies of programs in the 70s. Daniel Duke and Irene Muzio (1978) reviewed research done on 19 programs to find out how well alternative schools educate children. They concluded that they could not answer the question with any

confidence; the weaknesses of the evaluations revealed poor record keeping, failure to report data on program dropouts, lack of pre- and posttest comparisons, no randomized samples, and a tendency to apologize for or to use impressionistic data concerning negative results.

Raywid (1982) had over 1200 of the 2500 alternative schools she contacted respond to her survey, which revealed certain characteristics common to alternative schools: high staff morale--90 percent of teachers felt strong program ownership; increased attendance--81 percent of schools had increased attendance; good student-teacher relationships--63 percent of the schools selected this as their most distinctive feature; smallness--69 percent had fewer than 200 students; choice--79 percent of the students were there by choice. Raywid did not attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of the schools in improving student achievement in this study.

In Expelled to a Friendlier Place, Martin Gold and David Mann (1984), analyzed academic achievement and attitudes of delinquent students; they compared students from three alternative schools to a matched

group of students from the same district. They found that the alternative students, at the end of the study, were less disruptive than the conventional students; teachers rated alternative students returning to regular school as slightly better behaved than conventional students; alternative students were more positive about school than conventional students. Alternative students' grades were slightly improved when they returned to regular school, but their achievement test scores did not improve and were no better than those of the conventional students (Gold & Mann).

The National Governors' Association (1986) in its report, Time For Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education, indicated that alternative education can offer conventional education some strengths:

Experience with public alternative schools shows that many have the distinct shared philosophy, mission, and faculty agreement called for in literature on effective schools. Indeed, many outstanding schools share certain characteristics of effective corporations. One of the

characteristics is a clear, distinct, focused mission. When schools are permitted to develop some specialization, their effectiveness increases (p. 69).

An interesting approach to alternative education has been in Yakima, Washington. An agricultural area, Yakima, with a total population of about 50,000, has a substantial Hispanic population, indigenous Native Americans, and both agricultural workers and professionals (Greater Yakima Chamber of Commerce, 1989). The school system's schools are all designated Chapter I, and 44 percent of the students participate in the free lunch program. Its achievement scores placed it twenty-fourth out of the twenty-five largest districts in Washington (Nelson, 1989). Drug use in 1989 was above the national average for high school seniors (CLASS Newsletter, 1989).

The Yakima school district has an extensive alternative education program, with participation by choice. Unlike many other programs, Yakima's alternative schools do not get labeled as dumping grounds. In 1990, fifteen percent of Yakima's students

attended alternative schools such as Stanton, a large program focused on family and aimed primarily toward teenage mothers or mothers-to-be. Another school, called The Place or the Yakima Learning Center, began as a joint program by the school district and the state Division of Juvenile Rehabilitation. Serving mostly male students, the school offered conventional high school and vocational programs. Yakima's Key Program attracted students interested in its nationally-affiliated job-training program who like the idea of dealing with only two teachers. Project 107 served students who were in unsatisfactory living conditions, had no extended family, and usually had experienced drug abuse. Outreach served 24 of the most troubled and difficult children in Yakima and focused primarily on affective skills; students typically spent two days a week camping out around Washington State in an effort to remove them from their negative home environment. Stride, the newest program, has served mainly blacks and Hispanics and has a strong family and ethnic studies program (Young, 1990).

The Yakima program has been successful in providing supportive environments, small settings, and

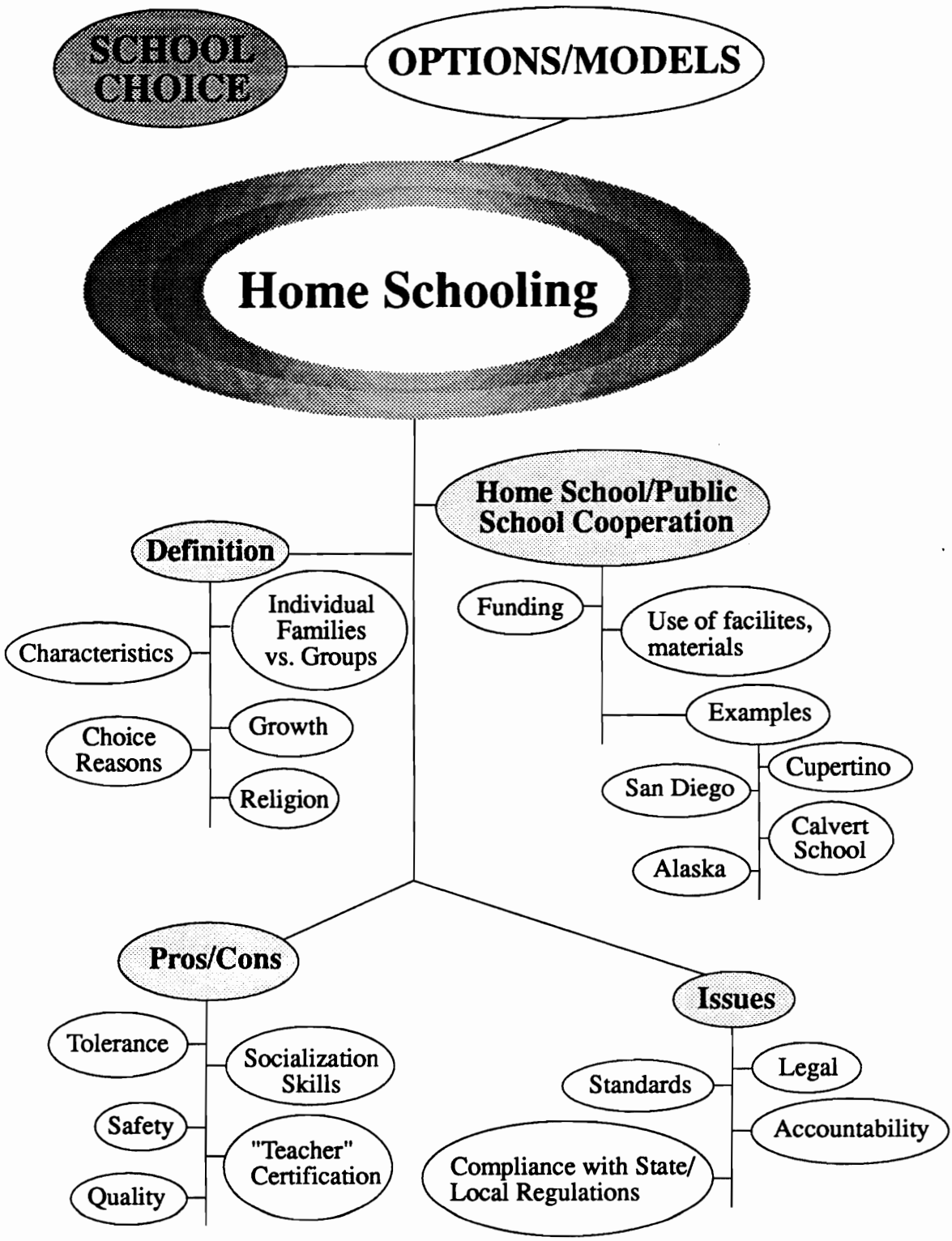
concern for the whole student. The academic curriculum is still its major weakness. Almost all of the students who choose these alternative programs failed a conventional academic curriculum in their regular schools, but graduation and attendance rates are increasing steadily, if slightly (Young, 1990).

Summary

Alternative education is not considered as prominently in the literature on choice as are other options. Across the country, however, alternative education options do provide many students and their parents with choices other than the conventional school setting. Smallness, concern for the whole student, choice, specialized and concentrated focus, autonomy, and shared values and goals among students and staff--these traits characterize alternative programs in public education.

The approaches to alternative educational programs are as varied as the school districts within the fifty states. Many of the alternative education programs are not choice options since neither parents nor students

are free to choose the school; other alternative programs do offer choices beyond a traditional school setting. The issue exposes a number of concerns-- hidden agendas, dumping grounds, elitism, and minority discrimination, to name just a few. Across the country, alternative programs offer students a wide diversity of options and have, in the broad perspective, been successful in keeping more students in schools longer. Alternatives, in education as well as in society, have become an accepted way of life.



CHAPTER 5

Home Schooling

Introduction

Home schooling, as old as education itself, is an ever-increasing choice option for parents. John Stuart Mill, Winston Churchill, Sandra Day O'Connor, Agatha Christie, Abraham Lincoln, and Jamie Wyeth were home-school educated (Common & MacMullen, 1987). Many other famous as well as ordinary people join them in the growing ranks of home-educated persons. One of the most highly publicized home-schoolers, the Colfax family in Boonville, California, has sent all four sons on to Harvard. While some families choose home schooling because of the isolation of their location, for example, Alaska or Montana, most people educate their children at home as a point of choice, usually a value-driven choice (Lines, 1985).

Definition

The term, home schooling, often used interchangeably with home education, is used to mean

instruction by a parent or guardian of children in their own family. It typically does not include instruction of children from multiple families, such as the Mormon Kitchen Schools (Lines, 1985).

Since the early 1970s, the number of families choosing home schooling for their children has increased (Lines, 1987). The estimates of home schooled children vary widely from 50,000 to a quarter million to over one million (Adams, 1984; Lines, 1985). Lines (1991) estimated that between 248,500 and 353,500 school-aged children were educated at home in 1990-91; she indicated that state departments of education reported 82,061 children whose parents had filed papers for home schooling. Her first estimate was based on a survey of the membership of the Home School Legal Defense Association. In identifying a major trend for the future, John Naisbitt (1984) in his book, Megatrends: Ten New Directions Transforming our Lives, estimated a possible one million students who were being schooled at home. It is difficult to have a reliable estimate of numbers because many home-based programs exist "underground" or illegally in some restrictive states. Parents often fail to report their

home-based education programs (Ramsey, 1992). While home school researchers disagree greatly about the number of students, it is clear that home schooling is a growing choice option for parents at all economic levels across the country.

The reasons parents choose to school their children at home are also varied; generally, however, the reasons fall into several categories: 85 to 90 percent of parents choose home education for religious reasons (Adams, 1984). Another major factor has been the developmental perspective. Many parents feel the structured school curriculum for young children is inappropriate before the age of eight. This particular perspective has been promoted heavily by the Hewitt Research Foundation, which has studied the physiological and psychological effects of formal early schooling for young children (Moore & Moore, 1982).

Other parents choose home schooling as a means to insure a quality education for their children. Some parents feel there has been a demise of academically challenging programs in public schools; others hold the philosophy that parents, in a one-to-one, family-

centered situation, can better educate their own children.

Still others maintain that public education has become a political monolith, no longer responsive to parents or children (Cizek, 1988).

Whatever the reason, the choice to home school children often becomes controversial, centered around the concern that children educated at home will fail academically and socially.

States which test home-schooled children report that the children, on national, standardized tests, perform above average (Lines, 1985). Demographic information also reveals that many children taught at home eventually return to structured schools; most home-schooling parents are better educated than the general population; approximately two thirds of all students in home schools live in eleven states (California, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington, Ohio, and Oregon); and about a third of home schools use a commercially prepared curriculum (Weston, 1989).

Issues

When parents choose to keep their children out of traditional schools, they enter into the conflict between the rights and duties of the state and the rights and duties of the parents. Compulsory attendance laws and the states' control over public education have led many parents to go to the courts to gain the right to educate their children at home. Laws for home schooling vary from state to state and range from restrictive and controlling to tolerant and supportive. In every state, there is a way to home school legally (Richoux, 1987). Iowa, Michigan, and North Dakota are most restrictive in regulating home schools; Michigan is the last state requiring parents to be state-certified teachers (Ramsey, 1992). States like Wisconsin, Montana, Hawaii, and others have very straightforward, non-restrictive laws allowing home schooling (Weston, 1989). Wisconsin, for example, requires only that homeschoolers notify the state of their intention. Other states, such as Ohio, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, require that families develop a curriculum for state approval

(Richoux, 1987). Since 1982, more than 18 states have changed their statutes to make home schooling easier (Richoux). Usually, educators and school systems want laws that have standards and controls on home schooling; home schoolers tend to seek laws that allow them to educate their children as they deem appropriate.

Other issues quickly arise in this conflict: notification and approvals, minimum standards in instructor qualifications, curriculum requirements, and evaluation or accountability procedures. Most home schooling laws contain four ingredients or provisions that:

- require communications between the parent and the school district;
- establish minimum standards for home schools;
- establish accountability procedures and mechanisms for evaluating a student's progress; and
- impose sanctions on home schools that fail to comply with home schooling laws (Weston, 1989, p. 2).

Some states seek to approve each home school request as opposed to accepting a simple notification from parents of their intention to home school their

children. Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, and Montana, for example, require parents to notify their public school superintendent of their plan to home school each year. Alaska and Maine, however, require that home schooled children be served in a school board-approved experience.

Almost all states that have statutes on home schooling require home schools to meet some standards. Often, teacher qualifications are the stickiest issue, with requirements ranging from stringent to none. Michigan requires that home schoolers meet the state certification requirements; West Virginia requires four years of education beyond the child's; Arizona requires that home schoolers pass a state examination; and New York has no qualification standards (Weston, 1989).

Some states, such as Connecticut, require that home schoolers receive a curriculum equivalent to that of public school students. Several states, including Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, and Florida, require that home school children take tests, usually nationally normed tests, to prove their academic progress. Others are using different mechanisms, such as portfolio

compilations of work to be reviewed by state or local officials (Weston, 1989).

Some of these states have sanctions for students who fail to learn or home schools which are ineffective. These sanctions usually take the form of minimal score cutoffs and requirements of retesting, supervised probation, or placement in private or public schools.

Home School and Public School Cooperation

Some school systems go even further in accepting the notion of home schooling by allowing home schooled students to attend some public school classes such as driver education or computer classes. Some states allow partial day enrollments. Others use itinerant teachers who serve as resources for home schools. Still other states and school systems allow the use of other public school resources such as libraries or laboratories. In Eugene, Oregon, a parent challenged the ruling that his home schooled ninth-grade son could not play basketball. Under state law, any child who is a resident is eligible to play. The parent took the issue

to the state legislature and won. Now all home-schooled Oregon children can participate in public school sports, providing they meet the criteria that they score at least at the 23rd percentile on standardized tests. Opponents of the decision viewed the situation as, "If you make a choice to home school, live by it all the way." The Oregon School Boards Association took a more generous, cooperative perspective, hoping that tolerance in giving all students access to the schools will lure them back to public schools (Natale, 1992).

Examples of more tolerance and acceptance of home schoolers by public education are becoming more common. In Hiram, Maine, Jonathan Marshall (1992), a home schooling parent, served on the elected school board. He has stated that attitudes about home schooling on the board and in the community have moved toward tolerance.

Cupertino, California

Another example of tolerance and support for home schooling is in the Cupertino Union School District in Cupertino, California. Within its policy of open

enrollment/alternative education programs, the district, since 1975 has provided options for parents, even before choice was a popular concept (Lamson, 1992). Home schooling is one of these options, falling under what California calls independent study, which allows parents to choose to educate their own children. Patricia Lamson (1992), Cupertino's superintendent, described her program as unique, since all home-schooling students are enrolled at one of their alternative schools; the district receives the state funding for each student (\$2,961) and allows the parents to use \$1,000 of that to purchase books, materials, software, or field trips. A resource teacher is assigned to each family. Parents receive curricular materials, set goals with the resource teacher, and evaluate progress in a joint effort with the resource teacher. Parents must submit attendance reports, journals, portfolios, and other work samples. Parents may enroll in district staff development courses and use the resources of the school district as other teachers would. While the district does not actively promote its home schooling option (148 students in 1992, up 32 from the previous year), it does believe

its mission is not to build roadblocks but to cooperate with and to support families in making choices (Lamson).

San Diego County

San Diego County District also has a history of providing programs and resources for home schools; its Community Home Education Program, a part of the public school system, aims to provide materials and curriculum of a uniform quality to home schools. With bringing home schooled children back into the mainstream of public education as a primary objective, the school district found that cooperation has been effective in offering the best education for the children (Esterbrooks, 1988).

Other Examples

As early as 1908, the Calvert School in Maryland began enrolling home-schooled children who used the same materials and curriculum as did children enrolled at its Baltimore site (Lines, 1987). Many other

institutions, correspondence schools, and even the state of Alaska have modeled their programs on Calvert's. Extensive support from publishers and organizations is available to parents who want to develop their own curriculum or buy already developed materials and curriculum, either religious or philosophical in nature (Lines, 1987).

Recent dual enrollment policies in Iowa, like the older California versions, have created cooperative climates where home schoolers take advantage of course enrollment, services, or resources (Ramsey, 1992).

Pros and Cons

Not all public school educators tolerate or cooperate with home schooling. Just as other choice options threaten the status quo of a school district, so does the concept of home schooling. Many educators point to anecdotal examples of young children schooled at home who, in reality, are being put to work or who are babysitting siblings. Others say home schoolers aim to trap their children in the 50s with children remaining dependent non-decision makers (Ramsey, 1992).

The often-used issue of socialization of children with their peers is thrown back into public educators' faces with home schoolers' countercharges that public schools lack safety and teach negative values such as drugs, gangs, and early sexual behavior. Public educators criticize the lack of teacher certification that could allow a poorly educated parent to teach their children. Home schoolers have become organized with strong lobbyists, raising tension and concern among public school educators who fear loss of business and reduced per-pupil funds. Home schoolers, in turn, resent being viewed as vanishing dollar bills.

Bob Pike, a public school teacher for 25 years, took his multiracial adopted children out of public school for several reasons, an important one being discrimination in the form of teachers who accepted "any kind of academic slop and out-of-line behavior" from their non-Caucasian children (Pike, 1992, p. 564).

The list of point-counterpoint criticisms could go on and on. Only more data collection and interaction could settle the issues about home schooling. Patricia Lines (1987), a policy analyst for the U.S. Department

of Education and a longtime observer of the home schooling movement, has written:

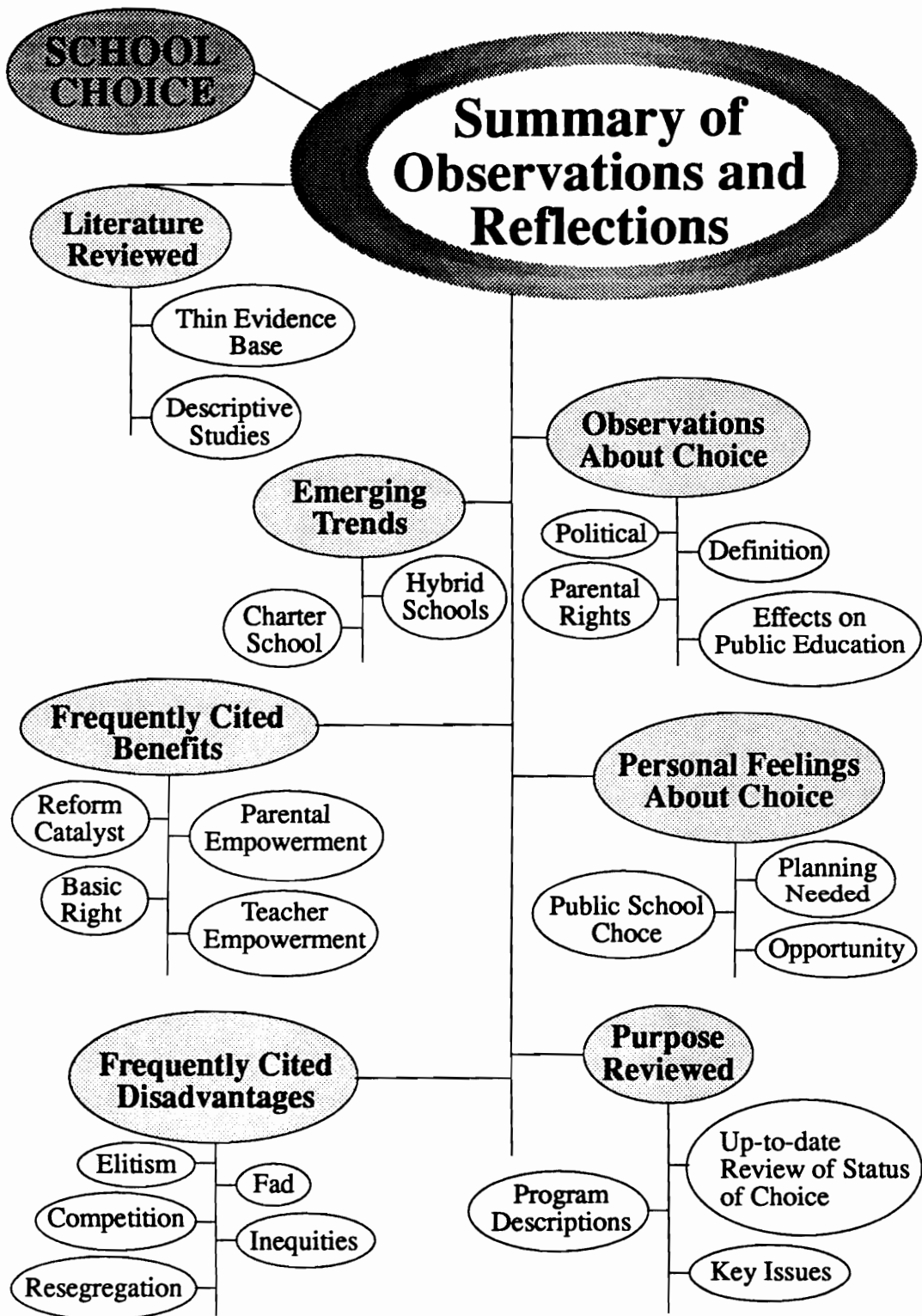
Stated boldly, public educators face a choice: have no contact with the home schooling movement (which would suit some home schoolers fine) or work to build mutual trust, friendship and respect (p. 516).

Cooperating with homeschoolers could mean more ultimately than reclaimed funding. Home schooling could be a laboratory for studying experimental instructional strategies, exploring learning styles, theories, and approaches, comparing students' achievement or instructional approaches in matched-set studies (Holt, 1983). A coalition could facilitate long-term research and comparative studies. Still, public educators, for the most part, fail to accept or support the home school option as a parental choice in educating their children.

Summary

Controversy and conflict or cooperation and respect seem to be the choices that public educators,

as the "bigger" of the two parties involved in the issue of home schooling, face in this choice option of continuing growth. Laws, more and more, side with the home schoolers; acceptance and open-mindedness seem to be the approach to avoiding a public battle and, more importantly, in educating children.



CHAPTER 6

A Summary of Observations and Reflections About School Choice

Introduction

School choice--a key reform movement or a diversionary tactic to use public funds for private education? A rationale to facilitate integration of children and provide equity among schools or a nice phrase to cover up goals of elitism and increased segregation? A plan to improve education for all children or a scheme to reduce the cost for those who have already determined to send their children to private schools? Parents' rights for their children or a detriment to the greater needs of a society? School choice is an issue replete with many unanswered questions.

Purpose of Study

The purposes of this study have been to provide an up-to-date review of the status of the public and private school choice movement on the national level, to identify key issues in the movement, to describe

choice options and programs, and to describe several prominent choice programs or models.

Included in this summary are observations about the choice movement, the method used in gathering information, emerging trends in the choice movement, and the author's personal position on the choice issue.

Literature Reviewed

Perhaps the one observation that can most strongly be stated about school choice is that it is an issue for which the evidence is inconclusive. The difficulty of isolating the effect of school choice on school effectiveness, improvement, or student achievement lends a certain speculative tone to the school choice literature. Most successful schools of choice typically engaged in some other change such as decentralization, shared decision making, or site-based management at the same time that school choice became a reality for them. School choice usually cannot be assigned the sole credit for many of the improvements reported to have taken place.

Much of the information reviewed for this study has been in the form of school districts' program descriptions; surveys and ethnographies; pro and con articles in journals and magazines; editorials and articles in newspapers; and monographs, most of which are descriptive in nature. Many private organizations and think tanks have also published articles, monographs, or books on the issue of school choice.

Newspaper articles have been an important source of information, particularly during the 1992 presidential campaign, when school choice was a newsworthy political story. An education writer for a newspaper proved to be a valuable resource, having compiled a collection of school choice articles from newspapers across the country. Virginia Congressman Owen Pickett provided information from the U.S. Department of Education and a Lexis/Nexis database search. A search for common themes, issues, and examples of practice characterized the purpose of the literature review. Commonality of issues, in fact, even a sameness of phrasing and language, did emerge from the review.

An initial search for literature in the spring of 1992 was supplemented by another search in the summer of 1993 to seek updated information. One finding in the second review was that an impressive study of the school choice movement, conducted by Mary Ann Raywid from Hofstra University, is underway. Part of a team doing a longitudinal study on the effects of school restructuring on teachers and students, she is studying two schools of choice in New York while others are studying schools in Minnesota and Chicago (Raywid, 1992). Additionally, the second review led to the Carnegie Foundation Special Report, School Choice (1992), that offered a different perspective on parental support for school choice.

The relative newness of the school choice movement has added to the limitations of the research and the evidence. Comparative studies or experimental studies are just beginning to be planned and discussed. For example, comparative studies of students of similar achievement levels who start a choice program and those of students who continue in an assigned school are being conducted in some school districts (Larson & Allen, 1988; Musumeci & Szczypkowski, 1991).

Neither the proponents nor the opponents of school choice have empirical data to support many of their claims. As is characteristic of many other educational initiatives, choice is characterized by strong opinions, program descriptions, and anecdotal support, with very little extensive analysis or controlled study.

This thin evidence base should, perhaps, send cautionary messages to both advocates and critics of school choice. Careful, controlled experimentation rather than total dismissal or acceptance would perhaps begin to offer valuable information for those who seek to improve schools. School districts interested in public school choice might benefit from finding a match for their system, a similar system that has attempted a choice program. Learning from other's mistakes and successes should facilitate the process. Finding a matching district using a nonchoice, conventional approach would also be valuable in comparing the effectiveness of a school choice initiative.

Observations About Choice Issues

Choice actually embodies not just one initiative or concept but many. Every choice model or option has a range of strengths and weaknesses. While choice might sound like a simple issue, it is, in reality, a very complex, hard-to-define initiative in education.

School choice has whirled around in local, state, and national politics for the last decade, making even more difficult the search for truths about the issue. The concept of full choice--private as well as public school choice--has often been lumped indiscriminately with public school choice--choice only among public schools--adding to the confusion and emotionalism about the issue.

If school choice were placed on a continuum, at one end would be regulated, limited school choice and at the opposite end, a totally marketplace, competition-driven model of school choice. Trying to discuss school choice without clarifying the range of school choice approaches leads to more emotionalism and confusion.

Definition

An important observation about school choice deals with the difficulty of defining the term school choice itself. The ability of parents and students to freely select a school is the typical definition of school choice. Choice is a concept with many features that usually are more often described than defined. Any review of the school choice movement should be filtered through the question, "Exactly what type of school choice do you mean?" The models or options of school choice such as magnet schools, alternative schools, vouchers and tuition tax credits, home schooling, privatization, charter, or hybrid schools are frequently treated as synonyms for choice. Actually, however, each of these choice options offers its own special and distinct features that make lumping them together inappropriate. Failing to differentiate between public school choice and private school choice is another danger of using the term school choice without clarification.

Another difficulty of defining the term school choice is the question of who does the choosing. Some

choice options give the power of choice to parents, some to students, some to teachers, some to combinations of these people.

Parental Rights

A persistent issue in the school choice picture has always been the right of parents to select the best school for their children. Choice proponents argue that one-size tee shirts may fit most people, but one-type-of-school does not fit all or even most students. The most vocal and insistent critics of school choice have not attacked the issue of parents' rights to choose their children's schools. Usually they have sidestepped this basic issue and attacked the more controversial aspects of school choice, such as vouchers and privatization. The use of public funds for a private education seems to be at the heart of the controversy of these issues.

Taken to an extreme, parental choice could be antithetical to the common good view that all citizens, not just a lucky or wealthy few, be well educated. Focusing on individual needs or choice shifts the

controls of education and begins to reshape the philosophy of education for the common good of society. This basic, if perhaps theoretical, question often loses out to the more highly charged perspective of choice as an American way of life.

If parents have the sole determination in how their children are educated, the focus of education moves toward meeting individual needs, with the issue of meeting the needs of a society taking a backseat. Equity of opportunity factors strongly into this issue of individual versus societal needs; if all children could be guaranteed an equal education, then perhaps the whole issue of school choice would be a less important one.

The Politics of School Choice

School choice has survived head-on attacks on the political battlefield from the White House to state capitols to school board meeting rooms--and perhaps even thrived. Some of the strength and force of the school choice battle has been diverted by the issues of vouchers and private school choice. These two side

issues have been easy targets for opponents of school choice. The reality of the situation, however, is that private school vouchers have had a very limited use. Vouchers and private school choice have essentially survived in rhetoric only, inflammatory and emotional, but not seriously considered or widely implemented.

School choice has gradually woven itself into the school restructuring movement. Many articles written by critics of school choice charge that advocates view choice as a panacea to the problems of public education. It is nearly impossible, however, to find any proponents of school choice who are actually willing to call choice a panacea; rather, most make the point that choice is a part of school reform or restructuring. Almost all choice proponents offer cautions about planning choice programs, acknowledging that some public school choice plans can cause more problems than they fix (Nathan, 1993).

Some of the choice movement's punch was diminished by President Bush's defeat in the 1992 election. However, President Clinton has supported public school choice and charter schools in particular. The issues of vouchers, tuition tax credit, and private

school choice, which Bush had so strongly supported, have diminished since he left office, but the issue of parental choice remains a very viable one.

Effects of Choice on Public Education

A basic question has to be whether choice undermines support for public schools; vouchers and tuition tax credits as proposed by President Bush would seem to have expanded the support of private school education. Stratification along racial or economic lines seems to be a likely outcome of public funding to private or sectarian schools; tuition at many private schools, especially those with excellent reputations, typically costs more than most vouchers or tax credits have been proposed to provide. Diminution of public schools would seem to be almost inevitable in the movement to provide vouchers, tuition tax credits, and privatization of schools.

If parents and students choose the public school they wish to attend, then a certain amount of competition among schools would seem to be likely. If a school is not chosen, some change must be made to

make it attractive to students and parents. This approach has the potential to be either positive or negative in improving the school.

Frequently Cited Benefits of School Choice

Typically, choice is promoted as being able to deal with many educational problems or needs. Some of the most frequently cited benefits of choice are compiled in the following list.

- Choice is viewed as a catalyst for reform in education.
- Choice reduces barriers to integration.
- Choice helps reduce, if not eliminate, top-down bureaucracy in education.
- Choice empowers parents in the educational process.
- Choice embodies a basic American value and right.
- Choice will enhance academic performance and produce graduates ready for competition in the global marketplace.
- Choice re-energizes teachers to be creative and empowers them as decision makers.
(Raywid, 1989a; Nathan, 1989c; Paulu, 1989; Lieberman, 1990)

Frequently Cited Disadvantages of Choice

A review of the current choice literature also reveals that choice has been attacked as essentially diminishing or, at least, not improving education for all students. Several other often repeated charges include the following:

- Choice works against poor children. The rich already have choices; the poor do not.
- Choice creates elitism.
- Choice creates tiers of inequities.
- Choice can resegregate schools.
- Choice can create inequalities by funding schools unequally.
- Choice focuses on competition rather than legitimate or equal choices.
- Choice can lead to premium as well discount educations.
- Choice detracts needed attention from the real issues of education such as better instruction.
- Choice is a fad, a quick fix.
(Geiger, 1991; Moore & Davenport, 1989b)

Emerging Trends and Issues in Choice

The issue of parental choice in education has spawned new options for students. A relatively new one is charter schools. Charter schools provide certified teachers with the chance to create new schools that focus on some distinctive approach to instruction or curriculum. Improvement in student learning typically is a requirement for the reissuance of the charter. Teachers assume authority and leadership in organizing a new school and applying for the charter. The National Education Association (1992) supported charter schools as having potential for innovation without being competitive and for providing new and creative ways of teaching and learning. Five states in the last two years have passed charter school laws. More than a dozen states have introduced charter school bills in the past two years (Walters, 1993).

Among the states, Minnesota has had the most involvement with the development of charter schools. In 1991 the legislature passed an outcome-based charter schools bill permitting Minnesota teachers to form and to operate independent charter schools (Minnesota

Department of Education, 1991). In Minnesota, up to eight charter schools can be operated as nonprofit, nonsectarian organizations, usually with a board of directors. Funding for the schools will flow from the state directly to the charter school, not through a local school board or school system (Minnesota Department of Education).

The Minnesota legislature identified the following purposes of charter schools:

- improve student learning;
- increase learning opportunities for pupils;
- encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods;
- require the measurement of learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes;
- establish new forms of accountability for schools; or
- create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site.

(Minnesota Department of Education, 1992)

Minnesota requires a letter of sponsorship from the school board of the local district where the charter school will be located. The school board then

accepts a contract with the charter school that deals with assurances that the school is, for example, nonsectarian, has a comprehensive program of instruction, attendance regulations, admission procedures, compliance with health and safety regulations, and specifications about student outcomes. Legislation also ensured that charter school teachers will accrue benefits in the state retirement system (Minnesota Department of Education, 1991).

California's charter school law, passed in 1992, allows up to 100 charters in the state, with no more than ten in each district. Sponsored by local school boards, California charter schools are nondiscriminatory, racially and ethnically representative of the local district, and tuition-free (Williams & Buechler, 1993).

A few models of charter schools are gaining national attention. The Key School, an Indianapolis charter school, has been modeled on Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences and uses a lottery system to enroll students. It also focuses on parental involvement and nontraditional assessment practices (Bolanos, 1990). Many of the schools in Harlem's

District 4, which has been highly praised for its choice programs, were begun by teachers as charter schools.

In Philadelphia, the school district has worked with the Pew Charitable Trusts to create 80 charter schools within the existing 22 high schools. These charter schools are sometimes entire schools or schools-within-schools. The project has emphasized collaboration among educators, enriched curriculum, and improved student outcomes (Bradley, 1992).

Charter schools represent a new dimension of choice in public education. Not only do they offer parents another option for their children's education, but also they extend the choice option to educators and empower them to design schools that are innovative and different from the typical schools of their own districts.

Another offshoot of the school choice movement is the hybrid school, loosely defined as public or private schools, that are managed by private corporations. Educational Alternatives, Incorporated (EAI) became the first private-for-profit company to manage a public school, South Pointe Elementary in Dade County, Florida

(Toch, 1991a). In 1992, EAI agreed to operate nine schools in the Baltimore school district for five years at a cost of \$133 million. The idea that private organizations can offer management services to public schools just as they have been offering transportation, food, and equipment services for years is certainly another option in the public education picture. David Bennett (1992), president of Educational Alternatives, Inc., cited a new order of accountability, competition, innovations, improved professional respect, and support of what works as benefits of private management of schools.

Another variation of school choice beginning to emerge is workplace schools, usually primary school programs, that companies and organizations are proposing to operate. Also emerging are contracted alternative schools that typically serve children with behavioral problems, severe discipline problems, or other problems that lead some school districts to pay for their education outside the public schools of the school district. Private practice teachers are another trend emerging from the school choice movement. Teachers work as entrepreneurs rather than as employees

of a school district. These newer variations continue the growth of the school choice movement begun by the longer-lived school choice options of magnet schools, alternative schools, or home schooling (Randall, 1992).

Author's Personal Feelings About Choice

Public school choice, I feel, offers hope for the students of the future, especially those students who have become disengaged in schools. Over and over, students complain of boredom and disinterest with the curriculum of schools. The ability to choose a school, for example, that has been developed around a theme or special instructional approach might recapture some of the passion and interest that we as educators want children to feel about school. The quietly disinterested student who does not disturb anyone and whose lack of progress and achievement sneaks up on parents and teachers is the student for whom school choice holds the greatest promise of reclaiming. At-risk and gifted children often receive attention in the form of special programs and funding, but the average student often travels through years of schooling

unchallenged and disinterested. School for these students is often coercive and unfriendly; school choice could empower the students and their parents to at least seek a school that fits their interests. School choice could be a step in the right direction toward shifting schooling into a powerful learning experience each day.

With careful planning, public school choice does seem to hold promise in improving education for children. The goals of public school choice focus on increasing opportunities for all students, involving parents more in the decision-making process of education, and building on strengths of teachers, students, and parents. Nonpublic school choice could take resources away from children whose parents cannot adequately supplement the average voucher to buy a quality private education. Vouchers, tuition tax credits, and the short-lived G.I. Bill for Students could take public education funds, leaving already strapped schools worse off financially. They could also open the door for funding private and parochial schools, violating the concept of separation of church and state.

It could be easy for funding inequities or increased gaps between wealthy and poor students' opportunities to occur unless care is given to the planning of any choice program. If all a choice movement does is create a few more super magnet schools, then the majority of students have not been equitably served. Super schools are wonderful, but a good choice plan must expand options, not just isolate opportunities in a few high-profile schools.

The choice movement could provide a rich laboratory for discovering information about many aspects of education: how students learn--matching student interests and learning styles with curriculum and teaching styles; how achievement of nonmagnet school students compares to that of similar magnet school students; how the achievement of home schooled children compares to public school children; how effective new instructional strategies or materials are--comparing their use by home schoolers, alternative or magnet students, or regular school students. Other possibilities could be a study of the role of parental involvement in choice schools compared to non-choice

schools; the engagement of students in their own learning could also be studied.

The field for school choice research promises to be a fertile one. If choice is indeed at the top of the national agenda in the current school reform debate as Ernest Boyer (1992) has indicated in the Carnegie Foundation's report on school choice, then school choice must move from the realm of highly emotional rhetoric to the careful reflection and study of which any significant change movement is worthy.

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VITA

Hazel Hiatt Jessee was graduated from Hillsville High School in Carroll County, Virginia. She received her undergraduate degree with honors from Madison College (now James Madison University). Her master's degree is from The College of William and Mary, and she holds a certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

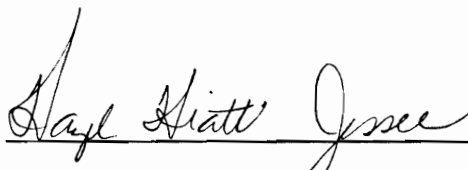
Her career in education began as an English teacher at William Byrd High School and William Byrd Intermediate School in Roanoke County, Virginia. She has taught at Sudbrook Junior High School in Baltimore County, Maryland, and at Independence Junior High School and Old Donation Center in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Presently, she is an administrative coordinator in the Department of Instructional Services in the Virginia Beach City Public Schools. She has served as a language arts specialist and supervisor, gifted education coordinator, and instructional coordinator.

She is an accelerated schools coach, having been trained by Dr. Henry Levin at the National Center for

Accelerated Schools at Stanford University. She is Virginia's state liaison for the International Reading Association for the development of national reading and writing standards. She also serves on the National Council of Teachers of English committee to review language arts curricula.

She has been a presenter at local, state, and national conferences and has offered in-service training in her school district.


Hazel Hiatt Jessee