
Public Choice, Yes; Vouchers, No!

Diversifying the public schools and allowing parents to choose among them may be the best possible solution for what ails U.S. education, Ms. Raywid maintains — whereàs vouchers could exacerbate our problems.

BY MARY ANNE RAYWID



IN THE MINDS of some, choice proposals are all of a piece, and there is little difference between public schools of choice and vouchers. For others, public schools of choice are just one step on the road to vouchers: where we find the one, we will soon find the other. Certainly there are those who espouse both public schools of choice and vouchers — President Reagan and Secretary of Education William Bennett being two prominent examples. But there are good reasons for separating the two types of choice rather sharply, and for advocating one while rejecting the other. Public choice may be the best possible solution for what ails U.S. education; vouchers could exacerbate our problems.

Brief definitions of the two terms, as I use them here, may be helpful to readers. By *vouchers* I mean an arrangement whereby individuals are in effect handed the funds (typically in the form of a chit) to purchase the schooling of their choice outside the public sector.¹ I define *public choice* as the deliberate differentiation of public schools, permitting students and their families to se-

MARY ANNE RAYWID (Long Island New York Chapter) is a professor of education at Hofstra University, Hempstead, N.Y.

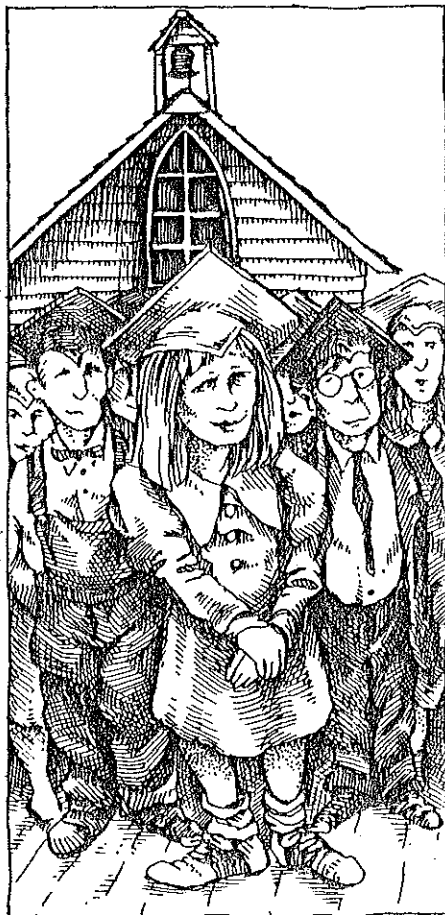
lect the type of school each youngster will attend.²

Although I have been an advocate of public choice for more than a decade, I remain an opponent of vouchers. My opposition springs from my conviction that most youngsters in the U.S. will continue to rely on the public schools. Thus we need to improve these schools and to insure their continued good health. There is reason to believe that choice among public schools would be an excellent way to accomplish such purposes. Vouchers, by contrast, might well undermine education and leave public schools less capable of effective performance than they are now, by reducing — below levels of critical mass — enrollments (of middle-class students, in particular), school funding, and the willingness of an aging population to view education as a public good deserving of support.

I intend to elaborate on both of these stands: for public choice and against vouchers. Let me begin with vouchers.

VOUCHERS

Rather than run through the full list of



objections that opponents have raised, I will focus on the handful of concerns that I happen to find most worrisome. The first of these is the tenuous position of public education today. Nationally, our hopes for refashioning education are high at the moment; if disillusionment follows, it could prove disastrous. Some business leaders have already concluded that the public schools will fail to deliver on the hopes raised by the excellence movement.³ Simultaneously, many educators are seriously questioning whether the public schools can survive. Under the circumstances, we ought to be doing everything possible to shore up the public schools — which certainly would not include stimulating and facilitating the flow of students and resources *out* of those schools.

Building public appreciation of the importance of education to our national well-being is, perhaps, an equally fundamental challenge over the long run. Whether schooling ought to be seen primarily as a *private benefit* or as a *public good* that benefits the community at large has long been debated. There are abundant reasons to consider it both. But unless the understanding of education as a *public good* can be confirmed and maintained, a society in which fewer than one-third of the households have school-aged youngsters⁴ is not likely to be highly supportive of the schools — especially when many youngsters attending those schools seem resistant to and ungrateful for the opportunity. Thus a sense of education as a public good seems crucial to the continued survival of public education.

I fear, though, that vouchers would have the opposite effect. To assign parents full and unfettered responsibility for choosing their children's education in an open market is to telegraph the message that the matter is solely their affair and not the community's concern.⁵ Under most circumstances, a community could endorse that approach only if it felt that it had little stake in and would realize little value from the education of the young. Thus I fear that vouchers would bring in their wake a further downplaying of education on the public agenda and a further waning of public commitment to the enterprise. The nation would be much weaker and poorer for that.

A third important concern is that, in the cities, vouchers would quickly solidify a two-tiered educational system

consisting of nonpublic schools and pauper schools. That development would impoverish us all, because it would represent an abandonment of efforts to improve education for disadvantaged youngsters, who are already a majority in most U.S. cities. A two-tiered system would prove injurious to those youngsters who need high-quality education the most, if they are to escape poverty: inner-city minorities. The families of such youngsters may have few political, financial, or knowledge resources with which to force improvement in the schools (which have never really served them very well). A two-tiered system would be injurious to the more fortunate members of society as well. By constituting a step backward in the march toward opportunity, such a system would undermine the nation's long-term stability.

Minority demands related to schooling have shifted discernibly in recent years, due to a growing realization that access to desegregated schools is not enough to insure admission to the societal mainstream. What is essential is access to schools that *work* — to high-



quality education.⁶ For a large and growing number of minority youngsters, however, such hopes could become increasingly remote under a two-tiered system of schools. The experience with vouchers in France seems to confirm the likelihood of such an effect; private schools in that nation are reportedly attracting the affluent, and public schools are serving the poor.⁷

In the U.S., the evidence from which to project the degree to which access to private schools might help the disadvantaged is mixed. On the one hand, inner-city youngsters have sometimes fared better in private and parochial schools than have their counterparts in public schools.⁸ On the other hand, those proprietary schools that serve essentially the same group of students, grown older, have a fairly negative record.⁹ Their history suggests that only a highly regulated and closely monitored voucher arrangement could protect disadvantaged students from the ills of the marketplace.

This leads directly to another concern I have about vouchers: the unlikelihood of a voucher trial or experiment. As a number of analysts have noted, the political and social realities of contemporary life would make a decision to use vouchers extremely difficult to reverse. To implement a new approach affecting so many people would require institutionalization of that approach on a substantial scale, quickly generating large numbers of constituents and stakeholders who would begin to function as interest groups and coalitions. This could make reversal of the policy instituting vouchers virtually impossible, thus escalating the risk of experimentation.

A MISGUIDED ANALOGY

I want to argue now a different sort of case against vouchers. It seems to me that the voucher idea becomes fundamentally wrong-headed when applied to education and schools. I cringe at advocates' assurances that competition will improve the schools and force the bad ones out of business. Those individuals often seem to know so little about schools and classrooms, how they work, and what they require to succeed. Yet such lack of knowledge is not too surprising. Vouchers are actually a plan for financing schools, not for improving them. Advocates have argued that the change in method of financing will yield

school improvement — but as a by-product of competition in the marketplace, not of any particular plan for school improvement.

The voucher proposal, then, suggests that we cure the ills of the schools by borrowing and applying some concepts from economics (the study of the production and distribution of goods and services) and from business (our major form of economic organization). Since education appears to be a service, it seems plausible to seek enlightenment on how best to produce and distribute it from economists and business specialists. This thinking is flawed, however. The fundamental elements of the U.S. economy are a buyer, a seller, the good or service to be exchanged, and a marketplace in which the transaction occurs. In the case of the public schools, who is the buyer: the family or the society? Is schooling primarily an exchange of goods (e.g., plane geometry, the alphabet, Shakespeare), or is schooling a service industry? If the latter, what kind of service? Custodial? Developmental? Something else?

As these questions suggest, there are major strains in the analogy right from the start. Not surprisingly, serious distortions result. For example, if education is a good or a service sold in the marketplace, what does that make students? Are they *customers*? Surely not; few people assume that a 6-year-old — or even a 16-year-old — is ready for the “consumer sovereignty” that economists associate with buyers. Moreover, public school students are not buyers in the sense of paying from their own pockets for the ministrations they receive. For that same reason (and others), their parents are not the school's customers, either. Nor are parents the school's patrons in any economic sense.

Well, then, are the students *clients* — a relationship created by the purchase of certain other professional services? Not exactly. The client of a doctor, a lawyer, or an architect has entitlements and prerogatives that the very circumstances of school attendance would deny. As these examples suggest, roles from the economic metaphor don't seem to fit relationships in education, in part because of differences between buyers and students in their levels of maturity and in their capacities to assess and to finance. But there is another, equally important reason for the misfit: to place the student in the role of buyer is to ob-

scure society's interest and stake in the transaction. 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.

Is the fact that the economic metaphor fits education so poorly of any real consequence? Does thinking about education in this fashion change the way in which the schools operate? I suspect that it does. The economic analogy has major ramifications for school practice that its rejection would rule out.

For instance, the economic/business analogy seems to have shaped and propelled the drive for accountability in education during the last decade. Since there are no profits to serve as indicators of whether or not schools are doing a good job, test scores have been assigned that function instead. The insistence on quantitative measures of school effectiveness has reduced educational outcomes to testable products and deemphasized the role of the school in other areas, such as preparing young people for civic participation, encouraging their personal development, and helping them master higher-level intellectual skills. It has also left little room for the “process” goals that are important to parents: the kinds and qualities of school experiences that they simply want their youngsters to undergo, quite apart from specific



“My professor said that I've probably never had an original thought in my life. That idea never crossed my mind.”

expectations regarding outcomes. All these features of the present push for accountability in education are, I suspect, very much tied to the widespread welcoming of economic solutions for educational problems. Reject the analogy — deny the applicability of the marketplace to schooling and the comparability of business to education — and these practices would have to be replaced.

From the perspective of many advocates, perhaps the central value of vouchers is the competition they would introduce. Some see competition per se as a good thing; others prize competition primarily for its alleged instrumental benefits. Specifically, the spur of competition is expected to improve schools (as they seek to attract customers) and to put the poorest schools and teachers out of business (as they fail to obtain a large enough clientele). Thus competition is expected to improve school quality.

But here again, the economic analogy is questionable. Competition quite understandably operates in the matter of which suit or which mayonnaise or which car to buy. But does it operate in the decision on whether to buy a car or a truck? Or a truck instead of an appendectomy? Of course, in one sense it does: if resources are limited and one purchase precludes another, then we can say that any two items are “competing” against each other. But the most important differences between a car and a truck — or a truck and an operation — are not qualitative differences at all. The purchase of one or another is a matter of *need*. Thus one might quite plausibly settle for a second-rate truck in preference to a first-rate car, by virtue of one’s needs. But if that is the case, where does competition fit in — and where is its widely touted stimulus to improvement?

Or, to take a different example, religious denominations — churches — can be said to be “competing” against one another, in that virtually no individual affiliates with more than one of them simultaneously. A person is rarely a Methodist *and* a Presbyterian. Does this mean that one chooses one’s affiliation on the basis of differences in quality between the two denominations? Or does the decision rest more heavily on some other factor, such as the denomination’s particular doctrines, the match between the denomination’s spiritual

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orientation and one’s own, or other features that make one feel at home? Does the existence of more than one denomination spur each on to higher quality?

The two examples I have offered — the choice between a car and a truck and the choice between two religious affiliations — are not accidental. They represent, I think, the two major choices involved in selecting among schools. In other words, it makes sense to choose a school primarily in terms of need or primarily in terms of values and orientation.

One youngster, for instance, may need a program that provides a high level of activity and that emphasizes experiential learning. Another child may need the stimulation and the freedom of choice afforded by a variety of learning centers in an open classroom. A third youngster may need the structure and security of individual learning packets. Systems that afford educational options generally try to respond to such differences in learning style. They enable parents and students to find the kinds of activity structures that respond to such diverse needs. Thus, when given a choice, it is not uncommon for parents to select a different school for one child than for another.

For other families, the general orientation of a school looms larger. For them, choosing a school is not unlike choosing a worldview. Here again, the choice of a school has less to do with school quality than with how closely the school’s philosophy and values accord with the family’s view of life and of child rearing.

Where, then, does competition enter

in? I suspect that it may play a much less important part in the choice of a school than is often supposed. Competition is a real and important feature of school selection if — and only if — we assume that the primary differences among schools are differences in their quality. If the only important difference between one school and another is that one is better and one is worse, then it makes sense to construe school selection as a competitive situation. But if we assume that schools differ in *kind*, then school selection seems a somewhat different matter, not readily explained by competition.

It is sometimes said that, in systems providing choice, schools do compete with one another and this competition accounts for the improvement that is often associated with choice. Certainly the improvement takes place. But it is not at all clear that competition explains it. In fact, many features and processes that have nothing whatsoever to do with competition have been offered as explanations, e.g., the increased control that teachers have over instruction in schools of choice; the greater amount of teacher interaction and professional collaboration that take place in such schools; the stronger sense of affiliation that students, teachers, and parents have with schools of choice.¹⁰ Research findings to date suggest that these factors play a larger role than competition in school improvement.

Choice brings other changes, as well. It creates a different kind of relationship between the home and the school, for example. It causes teachers to examine and reflect on their own practice more often, and it enhances their interest in exploring new solutions to old challenges. But to attribute such effects as these to competition is to embrace an “ether” theory, much as those scientists did who for centuries explained a variety of natural mysteries in terms of a ubiquitous gas. Similarly, our culture sometimes seems to view competition as an all-pervasive force that penetrates and controls all collective behavior. Yet the evidence suggests that schoolpeople deliberately mute and downplay the competitive aspects of a system of choice.¹¹ And additional lines of evidence substantiate the fact that educators are not likely to be highly competitive.¹² Thus the vision of principals and teachers hustling to outmaneuver the competition appears more fanciful than likely.

In sum, as all of this is intended to suggest, vouchers represent the application of economists' concepts and solutions to the problems of education. Vouchers seek school improvement via deregulation and privatization. They would make schools more like businesses and cast students and their families in the role of customers. But the analogy that likens schooling to business breaks down under close scrutiny. In fact, schooling may be a unique kind of endeavor that makes any root metaphor troublesome and the wholesale transfer of features from other enterprises dangerous.

A number of educational philosophies have foundered by likening the process of education to such other processes as "gardening," "taming," and "manufacturing." In the 1960s some observers urged that the schools become participatory democracies; they called for collective decision making, the principle of one person/one vote, and the right of the majority to determine the overall direction of the enterprise (in terms of goals as well as activities). A number of people were very uncomfortable with this line of reasoning — including, perhaps, some of those who are now espousing an economic analogy instead.

Schooling seems to be a unique enterprise, at least in some important respects. Schools are not marketplaces, nor are they governments. They are neither concerned primarily with the production and distribution of goods and services nor with regulating the interactions of citizens and organizations. Schools require solutions tailored to their own needs, not devised to respond to the needs of some other undertaking.

THE CASE FOR PUBLIC CHOICE

If vouchers pose such problems for public education, why do public schools of choice seem such a good idea? The answer is twofold. First, choice looks to be perhaps the best solution to a number of the most pressing problems now facing public education. Second, it seems quite possible to have choice in the public sector without taking on the difficulties that vouchers would introduce.

Here again, I will confine my case to just a few crucial considerations rather than the full array. These considerations have to do with youngsters' needs, adult preferences, and the governance of public institutions.

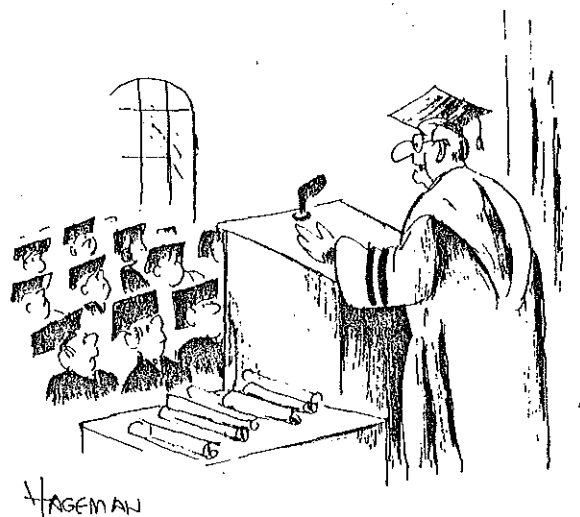
First, it seems clear that the wider the range of youngsters to be accommodated in the schools, the harder it is to deal effectively with them under a narrowly specified range of circumstances. Only 11% of the age group were attending high school at the turn of the century; in those days school officials could count on dealing with a fairly elite group of youngsters whose parents chose to have them in school and saw to it that they conformed to the school's expectations. Even when the high school population expanded sufficiently after World War II to yield diplomas for half of the age group, self-selection still limited the range of differences in such important factors as family background, level of aspiration, and socioeconomic status — factors closely tied to educational achievement. Today, to our credit, we are dissatisfied that 27% of American young people fail to complete high school. Viewed from another perspective, however, many of the youngsters attending high school today are simply not going to function well in the same kind of institutions that worked for smaller, more select populations whose home conditions and parents' attitudes more fully supported the mission of the schools.

Today's schools serve youngsters whose backgrounds, interests, hopes, and talents vary widely. Not all of them will thrive under the single set of conditions we have laid down for our schools. To succeed, they will need different kinds of school environments, different kinds

of instructional approaches, and differently packaged content. I do not mean to suggest that we now have two types of students instead of one, creating the need for two types of schools and programs. There are *many* types of students, creating the need for a wide variety of school programs and arrangements, if we are serious about responding to the needs of every youngster.

Clearly, we must call a halt to our century-long march toward standardization. We must forget such fruitless battles as whether or not to begin all reading instruction with phonics and seek instead to match our teaching strategies to particular students — starting some youngsters with phonics and others with drastically different approaches. The evidence supporting such a strategy is extensive, varied, and certainly not new; we know for a fact that different youngsters learn in different ways and according to different patterns. When we persist in imposing a single instructional approach on all children, we succeed with some students and systematically handicap others. There is no reason (beyond our own perversity) to continue to assume that some single, "right" approach exists that will suit every student.

Much the same thing can be said of school environments. Some youngsters thrive in large, comprehensive high schools that permit motivated students to pursue advanced knowledge under the supervision of highly specialized teachers. Other youngsters perform bet-



"As you leave this institution of higher learning to embark on new and exciting careers, I can't help thinking to myself how much easier it will be to find a place to park."

ter in more personalized and supportive surroundings. Only by closing our eyes to human diversity can we continue to impose on all students a single, standardized school climate.

If choice enables differentiated schools to deal better with human diversity, it also enables them to motivate students more effectively. The excellence movement has largely ignored motivation, proceeding instead as though educational achievement were simply a matter of backing up the right demands with sufficient insistence. Teachers who have given up on making schools work under prevailing conditions have also abandoned their efforts to motivate students. Recent studies offer all sorts of evidence — including truancy and dropout rates, classroom “treaties” that require minimal work, even direct student testimony — regarding the disengagement of students from schoolwork. But just as clearly, learner interest is absolutely essential, if the schools are to attain the excellence to which the nation seems so dedicated. Enabling students to select from among an array of schools — featuring different themes and emphases, different learning environments, and different instructional approaches — could go a long way toward restoring motivation among students of all ability levels.

Such an arrangement could also enable teachers (and thus schools) to function more effectively, since choice often fosters other features that collectively enhance educational quality. For example, choice yields a student body whose members are alike in some educationally important way — perhaps a shared interest, a common learning style, or a preference for a certain type of school climate. When choice is extended to teachers, it yields a faculty with a common philosophy of education and shared values. The outcome is a widely shared ethos, which makes group cohesion and a stronger sense of affiliation with the school more likely for all.

Choice and diversity almost automatically place greater instructional autonomy at the school level, and — in some schools, at least — this autonomy is distributed among the staff. The teachers in such schools enjoy a greater sense of professionalism, while, at the same time, a shared ethos sustains commonality and prevents fragmentation. Instructional autonomy requires teachers to collaborate more extensively, and this professional interaction improves their per-

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formance and increases their job satisfaction. The record suggests that, in these and a number of other ways, school differentiation and choice are likely to improve school quality.¹³

For several reasons, differentiation and choice are also likely to increase parental satisfaction with the schools. Clearly, parents hold a range of views on how best to educate children. Parents at the extremes favor practices that most other people would judge misguided. But within such extremes, a wide spectrum of perfectly legitimate viewpoints exists on how best to educate children. (A similarly wide spectrum of viewpoints exists among educators, of course.)

Consider, for example, the contrast between those parents (and educators) who see education in analytic, “divide up the skills and conquer each” terms and those who see education more holistically. The first group wants children to master distinct sets of knowledge and skills (phonics, the alphabet, the multiplication tables, spelling, grammar, vocabulary). The second group prefers having youngsters work on broad topics that draw on and integrate the desired learnings. There are children who learn best in each of these ways — and thus evidence to support both points of view. Given our growing understanding of the importance of a positive bond between home and school, why not enable parents and students to choose between these two approaches (and among other approaches, as well)?

Absolutely nothing prevents us from

diversifying our schools to make them respond much more closely to the legitimate but varied views of adults regarding education. Indeed, there are important reasons for doing so. First, as I have already noted, diversifying schools would make them more effective. The feature of choice improves the performance of both teachers and students. Second, parents want the right to choose the public schools their children attend. In the 1986 Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, 68% of parents favored having that right (even though a large number of them were quite satisfied with their children's current schools).¹⁴ Third, there are reasons why parents *ought* to be empowered to make such choices.

THE NEED TO RETHINK SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

The power that schools hold over youngsters is considerable, and their capacity to inflict long-term harm is substantial. If an institution with a policy requiring compulsory attendance is to avoid tyranny, surely those who attend that institution must retain the right to go elsewhere. But such a right does not currently exist. In most locales, the opportunity to go elsewhere is available only to families affluent enough to move to a different neighborhood or to pay tuition for a private school. To insure everyone the privilege of going elsewhere would require a change in school governance policies.

Such a change is sorely needed because, over the years, the balance of power between family and school has tilted sharply in favor of the school. Parents have no say today regarding which schools their children will attend, which teachers will teach them, what content they will study, when and how they will study it, what values will be emphasized and enforced, which educational goals will be paramount, and which goals will receive short shrift. The fundamental commitment of Americans to a division and balance of powers calls for the restoration of some kind and some degree of parental authority.

Our political system relies on checks and balances to prevent tyranny, including the kind of tyranny that public institutions can exert over their constituents. It also counts on the overlapping powers of the several interested parties to prevent instances of harm or injury. The

application to schools of the principle of checks and balances has meant that the various levels of government (federal, state, and local) divide the authority for education, while the various parties to the enterprise (educators, school boards, parents, and students) divide the power. When conditions change to the point that such power sharing no longer exists and one party dominates the rest (or one of the parties is rendered impotent), the system's protections are no longer functioning. Many observers feel that this is what has happened to school governance.

We recognize in principle that, within most institutions, changing conditions call for periodic adjustments in order to keep the necessary protections working. Yet we have made no move in years to adjust school governance, despite major shifts in the balance of power that would seem to strongly recommend such action. Formal school governance arrangements today remain essentially as they were at the turn of the century.

Meanwhile, strong forces have shifted control of the schools further and further from parents and from those directly responsible for educating their children. As control has become increasingly centralized and increasingly inaccessible, many parents have come to see themselves as essentially powerless — caught between the school bureaucracy, professional education organizations, and, of late, state officials. At the same time, and partly because of these shifts in control, schools have become less responsive to individuals and more likely to perceive them as interferences than as citizens who are voicing appropriate questions, suggestions, and expectations.

The protests about school governance grow. They come not only from parents, but — increasingly — from other sources as well. Several of the recent national reports on school reform insist that structural arrangements (especially the machinery of governance) must be changed.¹⁵ In fact, demands of this kind are about to become the major focus of the reform movement, in the view of some analysts.¹⁶ School boards are clearly in trouble, since some reforms involve state takeovers of districts, while others shift power in the opposite direction, assigning extensive site-management prerogatives to individual schools. Vouchers would involve

a different kind of change, shifting decision-making power from the public policy arena to the marketplace.

As dissimilar as these three proposals for structural change appear to be, they are similar in one important respect. Each of them would lodge most of the control of education in just *one* of the parties to the enterprise: the state, the individual school, or the parent. Each proposal is a kind of "reform by reversal," since its goal is to shift the preponderance of power from one set of hands to another, rather than to reapportion control more appropriately among all the parties involved. Unfortunately, such a remedy would begin immediately to generate new problems — and, hence, the need for a remedy for the remedy. It would do so because it ignores the fundamental notion of checks and balances, an idea perhaps more important to the democratic operation of institutions today than in earlier centuries, because technology and social organization now concentrate power so narrowly.

Placing a preponderance of control in the hands of just one of the parties involved in the enterprise of education would introduce another and even more fundamental problem, as well. It would resolve by elimination those "tensions" that define a democratic system. The tensions are generated by the not-entirely-compatible values and goals to which this nation is committed. Political struggles often spotlight the potential conflict between, for example, majority rule and our national commitment to protect the rights of the minority. A major virtue of a democratic system is that it continually maintains and balances *both* majority rule and minority rights, *both* individual interests and collective interests, *both* the values of the local community and those of the larger society, *both* the exercise of expertise and the accountability of experts to the public at large. By largely concentrating the control of schools in just one set of hands, we jeopardize the necessary balances between conflicting values, however. In the absence of authority divided by checks and balances, situations in which several values must be served simultaneously can easily result in the affirmation of one value and the discarding of the others — in the conversion of democracy's "tensions" (when multiple values must be served) into either/or choices.

Schools have become less responsive to individuals and more likely to perceive them as interferences.

The recommendation that we diversify public schools and allow parents to choose the schools their children will attend is quite a different kind of proposal for structural change. It would not simply shift the preponderance of control from one interested party to another. Rather, this proposal is congruent with the principle of dividing rights and prerogatives among the several parties involved in education and with the principle of distributing authority for education among the several levels of government that have a direct stake in that enterprise. It gives families a more influential voice in determining the kind of education their children will have; at the same time, it leaves to educators and school boards the decisions on what kinds of schools will constitute the options in a given community.

This would mean a different (but no less necessary and important) role for school boards. Instead of trying to hammer out a "one best way" for all schools in the district to operate, school boards would have to concern themselves with the range and diversity of the options provided by their districts. They would have to think much more carefully about which aspects of education should be standardized and which need not be. In some locales, school boards would undoubtedly have to explore the appropriate limits of pluralism, insofar as educational practice is concerned.¹⁷

As the foregoing suggests, school decision makers must take a variety of interests into account. Allowing parents

to choose their children's schools might encourage school boards to address far more fully and more adequately the "tensions" that a democratic educational system must keep in balance. School boards could not content themselves with framing majority-sanctioned decisions; they would need simultaneously to be concerned much more actively with the interests of various minorities. School boards could not limit themselves simply to insuring that all children are exposed to common educational experience; they would need to allow for differences and encourage initiative and innovation. In sum, the governance change that I have proposed here might impel school boards to renew their focus on such fundamental concerns.

It seems likely that some of the current interest in public schools of choice stems from their potential for changing school governance arrangements in a direction congruent with our fundamental assumptions and commitments regarding power and authority. Moreover, public schools of choice would require an alteration in school governance structures significantly more modest than other proposals now being discussed — such as further enlargement of the state role, school-site management, or vouchers — would entail. Finally, public schools of choice would cause school programs and practices to more fully reflect the multiple concerns to which democratic education must respond.

As I suggested earlier, however, the benefits of turning public schools into schools of choice go beyond improving school governance. Choice also makes sense in strictly educational terms, because it enhances the efficacy of teachers, the accomplishments of learners, the satisfaction of parents, and the confidence of the public in its schools.

1. Many arrangements and permutations now exist whereby public funds underwrite educational services, but most advocates of vouchers insist that funds be handled in exactly the manner I have described — rather than, for example, having funds allotted to private schools and paid directly by some public agency. This point is important, because the rationale for vouchers focuses on such features as competition, consumer sovereignty, and the discipline of the marketplace. Obviously, a different arrangement for distributing funds would diminish, if not eliminate, such features.

2. These brief definitions omit the fine distinctions — between regulated, unregulated, compensatory, and second-chance vouchers, on the one hand, and between magnet schools, alternative

schools, open enrollment, and options systems, on the other. For more information on the nature and varieties of vouchers, see Christopher Jencks et al., *Education Vouchers: A Report on Financing Elementary Education by Grants to Parents* (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for the Study of Public Policy, 1970). For more information on the various kinds of public schools of choice, see Mary Anne Raywid, "Family Choice Arrangements in Public Schools: A Review of the Literature," *Review of Educational Research*, Winter 1985, pp. 435-67.

3. This finding comes from a July 1986 Louis Harris poll, conducted for the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy. See *Educational Excellence Network*, November 1986, p. 77.

4. The most recent U.S. Census figure (for 1983) is 30%.

5. Inviting parents to select from among publicly provided options is quite another matter, as I will demonstrate later.

6. See, for example, Derrick Bell, ed., *Shades of Brown: New Perspectives on School Desegregation* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1980).

7. Frances C. Fowler, "The French Experience with Public Aid to Private Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan*, January 1987, p. 358.

8. See, for example, James Coleman, Thomas Hoffer, and Sally Kilgore, *High School Achievement* (New York: Basic Books, 1982); Valerie Lee, "Catholic School Minority Students Have 'Reading Proficiency Advantage,'" *Momentum*, September 1986, pp. 20-24; and Diana T. Slaughter and Barbara L. Schneider, *Newcomers: Blacks in Private Schools*, final report to the National Institute of Education, February 1986.

9. See, for example, *Many Proprietary Schools Do Not Comply with Department of Education's Pell Grant Program Requirements* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Accounting Office, 1984); and *Staff Study on the Tuition Assistance Program for Registered Business Schools* (Albany: Office of the New York State Comptroller, 8 July 1986).

10. See, for example, Mary Anne Raywid, "Success Dynamics of Public Schools of Choice," in *Content, Character, and Choice in Schooling:*

Public Policy and Research Implications (Washington, D.C.: National Council on Educational Research, 1986), pp. 101-8.

11. See, for example, Francesca Galluccio-Steele, *Choice and Consequences: A Case Study of Open Enrollment in the Acton, Massachusetts, Public Schools* (Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University, 1986).

12. Susan Moore Johnson and Niall C.W. Nelson, "Teaching Reform in an Active Voice," *Phi Delta Kappan*, April 1987, pp. 591-98.

13. Rolf Blank et al., *Survey of Magnet Schools — Final Report: Analyzing a Model for Quality Integrated Education* (Washington, D.C.: James H. Lowry & Associates, 1983); and Mary Anne Raywid, "Synthesis of Research on Schools of Choice," *Educational Leadership*, April 1984, pp. 70-78.

14. Alec M. Gallup, "The 18th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 1986, pp. 56-57.

15. See, for example, Carnegie Task Force on Teaching as a Profession, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (New York: Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986); *Barriers to Excellence: Our Children at Risk* (Boston: National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1985); and *Time for Results: The Governors' 1991 Report on Education* (Washington, D.C.: National Governors' Association, 1986).

16. See, for example, Chris Phipps, "Restructuring the Schools: States Take on the Challenge," *Education Week*, 26 November 1986, p. 19; and Thomas A. Shannon, "Second Wave of Reform Outlined by Terrel Bell," *School Board News*, 11 June 1986, p. 3.

17. Adherence to the principle of checks and balances would surely call for placing some limits on a school board's power to deny choice. There is no reason why such limits cannot be set; the California legislature, for example, has proposed that school boards be required to establish educational alternatives upon petition by a specified number of parents (AB 1425, introduced on 4 March 1987). [K]



"I understand you sent your class home before the end of the school year."