



Choice Orientations, Discussions, and Prospects

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An examination of the contemporary choice discussion yields four somewhat distinct choice orientations and cases: an education-driven argument for choice; an economics-driven argument; a governance-driven argument; and an argument from particular national policy concerns of the past several decades. Each of these cases is sketched. Some logical and other features of the choice discussion are noted, and finally some predictions are offered about the likely course of the choice discussion over the next several years.

THE idea of inviting family choice among public schools has been around for almost a quarter of a century. Of course, it can be argued, as some do, that choice is really far older than that and indeed has been a feature of American education from the start: choice, that is, between public and nonpublic schools and as to residence location, hence school assignment. The focus in this article, however, is the contemporary choice movement currently producing an array of policy initiatives at federal, state, and local levels. This kind of interest in choice dates from the 1960s and has been manifest in four fairly distinct, though parallel forms representing different sponsorship, conceptual lenses, and agendas. We have in effect spawned four different

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species of choice proposals. Differing influences and impacts can be linked to the four, as well as waxings and wanings — although because several have coexisted for much of the period, the four can hardly be viewed as phases or evolutions.

But if the idea of choice is not new, its burgeoning is a relatively recent development. Over the past several years, a variety of choice proposals have been set forth, producing a scene of considerable complexity. This article attempts a broad-stroke mapping of today's choice terrain. It sketches four different routes whereby people have come to choice — hence four distinct orientations marking the choice movement — and it identifies several of the more arresting features of today's choice discussion. Finally, it ventures some predictions about the likely course of the choice movement for the coming decade. Such purposes call for broad strokes in preference to detailed mapping and fine-grained analysis. They also direct attention to exploring the situation rather than to assessing it, even though the proposals clearly are not of equal merit and might all be challenged. The purpose here is to introduce some of the initial clarifying that might desirably precede critical assessment.

The four approaches identified here are distinguished by the primary orientations that they bring to choice — what they are trying to accomplish and the conceptual resources they bring to bear. As distinguished in this way, there are *education*-driven choice advocates; *economics*-driven espousers; specific *policy*-inspired advocates; and *governance*-oriented proposers. The types reflect central tendencies rather than sharp differences and are not mutually exclusive. Some espousers seem inspired by more than a single orientation. Nevertheless, distinctive tendencies are often discernible, even when proposals might superficially appear similar — for example, in the voucher espousal of Milton Friedman and Christopher Jencks. Both have urged vouchers but for quite different purposes, with economist Friedman bespeaking the economically oriented case and Jencks urging equity, or a policy-driven case. But despite the fact that the categories are not finely honed and mutually exclusive analytic sets, they may still be useful in understanding the different voices of today's choice movement, in recognizing the sorts of assumptions leading advocates to their positions and defining their nonnegotiables, and in projecting and interpreting policy proposals.

Because analysts of the choice discussion, as well as advocates, find some concerns more salient than others and select conceptual lenses and tools for their analyses, the four approaches may also help in understanding the sorts of ways that the choice movement is being studied and interpreted. Thus the pages that follow make reference to choice analyses as well as to proposals.

EDUCATION-DRIVEN CHOICE

Of the four varieties of choice advocacy, the educational orientation was the first to emerge. It was initially inspired by the alternative schools of the 1960s and was captured in the counterculture's expansive invitation to "Let 100 Flowers Bloom" (Graubard, 1972). The idea of an array of options among which to choose was not really very central to much of the discussion of the times, however, and indeed a number of the early alternatives considered themselves not an "alternative" to conventional schools but the vanguard that would eventually replace them. The argument that there was room for, and even merit in, sustaining a *variety* of schools was initially articulated by Mario Fantini. In his role as foundation officer and later as academic, Fantini had ties to alternative education as well as to policy circles. The dust jacket of his *Public Schools of Choice* (Fantini, 1973) bore the description "A Plan for the Reform of American Education." Fantini proposed the deliberate diversification of schools on the grounds that differences among youngsters as well as among teaching styles recommend the provision of differing school environments and classroom orientations in preference to a single standard type. His argument was buttressed with the appearance of historian David Tyack's (1974) *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*. Tyack's book traced the emergence of the uniformity dominating public education — as to structure, organization, and practice — and documented the problems that it brought. The book's title quickly became a slogan for education-oriented choice advocates who used it to allude to the arbitrarily narrow character of school practice.

Fantini's argument remains the essential core of the education-inspired case for choice, although it has been elaborated and substantially extended since. His argument for students' need for diversification was based almost exclusively on differences in learning style and in the amount of structure that youngsters need. Other differences — notably, in student interests — have now expanded the educational case for student choice. Moreover, Fantini had said little of parent entitlement to choice nor of the case for educator choice, so the argument has now been supplemented. A recent summary by Raywid (1987) of the educationally oriented case for choice summed up the grounds for *student* choice:

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

The case for *parent* choice was summarized in the same work as follows:

(1) There are many viable, desirable ways to educate, and (2) no one best program can prove responsive to the diverse preferences a pluralistic, democratic society accepts as legitimate. Hence, (3) the diversification of schools to accord with family value patterns and orientations is desirable. (pp. 16-17)

The educationally oriented case for choice also includes an argument for teacher choice, identifying it as an effective vehicle for arriving at the professionalism now widely sought (Nathan, 1984). Schools of choice, it is asserted, render teachers more collaborative, less isolated, more autonomous, less role bound, and more efficacious than do conventional schools. They are also claimed to be happier in, and more committed to, programs that they have chosen.

The educationally oriented case argues, then, that choice among schools is desirable in that it makes education work better and to the greater benefit and satisfaction of the participants. This approach dominated the choice discussion of the early 1970s, perhaps because there was not much discussion. This was the period overwhelmed by the discovery of how little difference so many of the innovations of the previous decade had made. Thus there was a distinctly diminished audience for "A Plan for the Reform of American Education." Even though general receptivity to reform warmed late in the decade, the education-driven argument for choice never managed to claim much attention. The concern of the late 1970s and early 1980s with raising standards makes that understandable, with standards urging the case for uniformity, not diversity. But it is more notable that even in the late 1980s, as reform talk in educational circles turned to seeking many of the traits most salient in the choice arrangement, such as school-home value agreement, school responsiveness to individuals, student motivation, teacher empowerment, and school-level autonomy, the choice idea claimed scant attention from educators.

ECONOMICS-DRIVEN CHOICE

As here understood, the economics-oriented case for choice enjoys the most varied sponsorship of the four types. The orientation is reflected by those who urge various forms of privatization in the interests of forcing public schools to compete with private ones and who talk of competition, consumer satisfaction, and markets that will drive bad schools out of business. The economic orientation is also reflected by those who are not choice advocates

but who accept and pursue the market analogy in discussing education and employ it as a root metaphor for explaining public situations and events and thus for recommending solutions. This means that many who are advocates neither of vouchers nor privatization nevertheless fall within the economics-inspired genre. Described in a bit more detail are three prochoice orientations that appear economics driven in some significant sense.

In an obvious sense, some (though not all) voucher and tuition tax credit advocates can be deemed economics-driven choice advocates. Those who prefer nonpublic schools for their children or those who operate schools outside the public system might understandably fall within this category. Thus one of the first voucher proposals came from a priest, who reasoned that because government subsidizes the education of children attending public schools, it ought to extend comparable subsidies for those who attend nonpublic schools (Bloom, 1958). State governments might extend vouchers to students, and the federal government might extend tax refunds to those paying tuition to nonpublic schools. The argument continues in much the same vein, holding that public support should be understood as a benefit to children rather than to institutions.

A second and more fundamental version of the economics-driven position on choice is reflected in the effort to make the ends and purposes of commerce foremost in public school aims and to model business's orientation and methods in operating schools. This is an economics-driven case for choice in a sense quite similar to that in which Raymond Callahan (1962) found public education to be dominated by the spirit of business, having imbibed its criteria and overall orientation.

Critics have charged that *A Nation at Risk*, the influential product of Education Secretary Bell's National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983), was a prime example, making the economy's needs paramount in judging and reforming education. President Reagan's well-known belief that competition is the best organizing principle for almost any collective endeavor is another such example, and critics have attributed a similar outlook to President Bush.

Such an orientation is surely familiar, but perhaps two illustrations will suggest just how it can govern a conception of educational purpose and organization. The first comes from a media sheet detailing the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's (1991) position on *Choice in Education*: "Incorporating competitive forces into our nation's schools can lead to a higher caliber work force and increase productivity and economic growth." A second example comes from the Select Committee on Educational Reform (1990) named by

Arizona's business community. Its report, *Better Schools for Arizona*, suggests the extent of the guidance that the business/market analogy can yield in recommending school structure.

Although the report backs school-based management as well as choice, it qualifies its recommendation for the former as follows:

We take exception to one practice prevalent in school-based management — giving parents who serve on site councils equal participation in making educational decisions. . . . We would not let customers set our budget, determine our manufacturing or service-delivery processes, or determine which employees we should hire — and we don't think the schools should either. (p. 15)

These examples suggest an economics-driven perspective in that economic concerns supply the ends and means of schooling and its operation. But there is a separate, third sense in which some perspectives on educational choice appear to be economics driven: It consists in the acceptance of the basic concepts of the discipline of economics as a guide to understanding and perceiving human affairs. Thus some have applied those concepts to interpret individual human motivation, and some have applied it to interpret the behavior of the role takers who operate organizations and institutions. Accordingly, some attribute public schools' shortcomings to their noncompetitive, monopolistic, no-incentives status and look to market solutions to cure these ills (e.g., Kearns & Doyle, 1988; Kolderie, 1985a, 1985b).

Others appear simply not to have considered the appropriateness of treating school choice in market terms, rather than placing it within an alternative theoretical framework. This seems a strong tendency for a number of scholars. For example, even in a work subtitled "The Theory of Choice and Control in American Education," the question of the aptness of the market analogy for understanding school choice goes unraised (Clune & Witte, 1990). Not all of the authors employ the analogy, but all who do have used it without examination or question, despite the fact that challenges have been brought to such an "economization" of schools in particular and of other institutions as well (see, e.g., Callahan, 1962; Etzioni, 1988; Garner & Hannaway, 1982).

POLICY-DRIVEN CHOICE INITIATIVES

A third sort of sponsorship has emerged when choice has been selected to implement major policy directions. Throughout the 1960s and much of the 1970s, equity was a primary commitment of national domestic policy. Choice early became a way to pursue equity with respect to school finance. In *Private Wealth and Public Education*, Coons, Clune, and Sugarman (1970) argued

But for many, the link between choice and excellence has appeared less clear and direct than the connection between choice and equity. Choice was obviously a clear means of equalizing the opportunities of families to find a good school or of enabling a youngster to escape a bad one; but it seems that fewer have been able to find it a means for improving the quality of schools. Thus as national focus shifted to replace equity with excellence as the major target of domestic policy, interest in choice was initially eclipsed by a preoccupation with curriculum, standards, and teacher qualifications. Although the interest in choice certainly revived, with some form of choice legislation now in effect in more than half the states (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1991), that legislation far more typically is geared toward enabling individuals to find better or more appropriate schools than toward improving school quality or excellence. When a recent move in Congress sought to make magnet school monies available in the interests of enhancing school excellence as apart from desegregation purposes, it could not muster sufficient support to pass.

GOVERNANCE-DRIVEN CHOICE

A governance-oriented case has been part of the choice discussion throughout the past several decades, advanced first by libertarians, then fueled by populist sentiments, and more recently taken up by new sources.

The libertarian case for choice rests on the desire to remove education from the arena of collective decision and return its control to individuals. John Stuart Mill has often been quoted to express the risks to freedom of public schools. Mill (1859) was highly dubious about such schools, concluding that "an education established and controlled by the State should only exist, if it exists at all, as one among many competing experiments." His fears about the coercive potential of such schools have been mirrored by those currently recommending school choice in the interests of restoring freedom to individual families. Placing schooling under market control in preference to political control is perhaps one of the most assured routes to such a goal. Accordingly, economist Milton Friedman "put Mill's analysis into modern economic dress" (Coons & Sugarman, 1978, p. 20) and recommended that all youngsters receive vouchers spendable in any state-approved school, public or private (Friedman, 1962).

Not all libertarian arguments move in the direction that economists take them, however. Stephen Arons (1982), for example, was disposed to supporting the choice position in legal and political terms rather than in those of economics. For example: "The majoritarian assumption transformed the pub-

that as a matter of constitutional principle, the quality of education offered in a particular school or district must not vary from that of other schools within the state as a consequence of differences in wealth. The authors also spoke not only of district-to-district equity but of family-to-family equity. Coons and Sugarman (1978) subsequently elaborated their "family power equalizing plan" designed to enable families to choose both the school their children would attend and the amount of tuition assistance they would receive. Families would receive vouchers to purchase education from private or public schools. The vouchers were to vary in amount, depending on the school's tuition, the family's income level, and the family's willingness to invest in education (with taxes owed varying according to all three factors).

The voucher idea lacked sufficient political viability, even when linked to equity, but it early became clear that the choice arrangement well served equity interests of a different sort. It was a politically advantageous response to school desegregation orders — advantageous in the sense that it was almost universally preferred to the forced busing otherwise imposed. Thus the magnet school monies made available by the federal government subsequent to 1976 have offered incentives and assistance to the development of choice. The purpose of the new arrangement was made quite explicit by then Assistant Secretary of Education Mary Berry. She told reporters that magnet school support was a civil rights matter, not a school improvement initiative, and indeed that there was no evidence of the educational effectiveness of magnet schools (Middleton, 1977).

Yet in the interval, there had been efforts to yoke the choice arrangement to the orienting policy commitment that succeeded equity: that of excellence. The State of Massachusetts provides a good illustration of how choice was seen to fit both purposes sufficiently to be selected as the major instrument for implementing both. Charles Glenn, the former director of the state's Bureau of Educational Equity, used the influence of his office to urge choice as a primary means of school desegregation and, subsequently, as a major route to school improvement. Glenn (1990) believed choice to be the most effective means yet found for "breaking the link between residence and access to educational opportunities" (p. 156). In oral testimony to hearings of the National Governors' Association in 1985, he also espoused choice as "our most powerful single force for improving education."

Choice has also been brought to bear by others as an instrument for achieving educational excellence. Policy analyst Ted Kolderie (1985b) for example, asserted that "the opportunities and incentives created by choice are the essential leverage for almost everything sought in the way of change and improvement in the schools" (p. 5).

lic schools into a battleground for determining public orthodoxy” (pp. 24-25), “By requiring that the majority decide how all children should be socialized we in effect require that people contest the most intractable issues of individual conscience” (p. 29); “The current structure of education in the United States is broadly inconsistent with the values advanced by the First Amendment” (p. 30).

But not all governance-oriented choice advocates have been libertarians. Some came to the choice idea as parents’ rights advocates who asked why it was necessary that school assignment be determined by officials. The revolt in the 1960s against urban school governance highlighted the conflicting interests between families and school officials; and the later failure of school advisory councils to empower parents very significantly underscored the difficulty of extending not just voice but influence to parents (Schraft & Kagan, 1979). It is not surprising, then, that a demand for the power to choose and to reject a school occurred to some as a solution.

But there were other, somewhat different versions of the governance-oriented case. For instance, some made much of accountability, suggesting that schools where families could “vote with their feet” were accountable to their constituents in ways that schools cannot be when families constitute a captive audience. The resulting accountability to families as well as to bureaucratic superordinates was claimed to constitute a significant modification in school governance.

Choice was also argued as a way to restore a more appropriate balance of power between families and schools on the grounds that our traditional commitment to a division of powers and to checks and balances called for a restoration of authority to families (Raywid, 1987). This was a case for changing school governance to render it more democratic by readjusting the power balance. In contrast, a more recent governance-driven choice proposal has identified democratic governance as the problem rather than the solution. This is the conclusion of Chubb and Moe (1990), who argued that school governance must change radically because (a) democracy makes bureaucracy inevitable and (b) the democratic governance of public education means the external imposition of values on schools—values that have been negotiated and compromised. Thus Chubb and Moe called for a radically redefined “public education” in which many schools, not just publicly operated ones, can become public schools and thus the recipients of public support. According to their proposal, each public school would be expected to meet only very minimal, largely non-instruction-related requirements (e.g., information requirements and nondiscrimination laws), and each would be governed according to its own self-chosen structure.

Chubb and Moe's book, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, has brought high visibility to the governance-oriented discussion of choice. Although the authors' proposal probably has little chance, it paved the way for a number of other suggestions now being discussed. Most prominent, and perhaps most politically viable among them, is the proposal that the power to create public schools be extended and multiplied. Instead of limiting public schools to those operated by school districts, boards would be encouraged, perhaps required, to authorize public schools that they do not directly operate.

A still more far-reaching version of this proposal would seek not only to proliferate the types of public schools but the ways in which they are authorized and created. In most locales, the power to create public schools belongs exclusively to the board of education governing the local school district. What is now proposed is the simultaneous empowerment of multiple levels of government (town or city, county, state, and federal, as well as district) plus multiple public agencies (legislatures and city councils, social welfare departments, courts, and so on) to sanction public schools. The consequence would be that within a given locale, families could select among public schools operated by the board of education, schools enfranchised as public by the board of education but not operated by it, and public schools established by the county, state, and/or the federal government.

Both of these proposals would change the face of public education and, in fact, redefine it. The predictions offered in the final section of this article elaborate their change potential. Although in the past the governance-driven argument for choice had not gained much prominence or had much influence, that concern is presently figuring quite heavily in the choice discussion.

SELECTED LOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL FEATURES OF THE DISCUSSION

The choice discussion—or discussions—have now been going on fairly steadily for almost 25 years. A broad look at these four rather distinct sets of dialogue yields some interesting conclusions. In the first place, they continue to occur in considerable isolation from one another. It seems fairly common for choice advocates and analysts to combine two thrusts—recall Charles Glenn's education- and policy-driven concerns—but more than two are rare, and many come to the choice discussion inspired by a single concern, be that to improve schools, desegregate them, force them to compete, or revise the way they are governed.

Predictably, the four main positions from which choice is argued disagree extensively as to what kind of choice is desirable—enough so as to prevent

collaboration or even compromise among at least some advocates (e.g., between those who urge choice in the interests of equity and those who do so in the interests of privatization or between the educator advocates, who hold that the deliberate cultivation of diversity is essential to making a choice system work, and the economics-driven advocates, who hold that open enrollment yields competition and that is all that is necessary). Accordingly, choice is clearly not one policy or proposal but more like a dozen proposals, among which the differences are no trivial matter but often indicative of the crux of what is sought.

Indeed, one of the logically interesting things about choice is that it is espoused for contradictory sorts of reasons. Some have urged it in the interests of establishing selective schools that would eliminate indifferent or poor or minority students; others insist that choice is the best hope for exactly these neediest students. Some espouse choice in the interests of saving public education; others espouse different applications of the idea in the interests of subverting it.

The question of who espouses choice reveals some interesting contrasts, pitting educators against the public and dividing educators among themselves. The backing of the business community and of many political figures for choice is well known. Interestingly, at the national level, choice has been a Republican proposal, whereas at the state level, choice initiatives have at least as often been successfully spearheaded by Democratic governors. General public support for the choice idea seems extensive. A 1989 poll found more agreement about the desirability of choice than about any other educational feature (Elam & Gallup, 1989). The following year (Elam, 1990), 62% of those interviewed supported the right of people to select the public school that their children attend. Support among the parents of public school children was even higher: 65%. Educators who have experienced the choice arrangement often exhibit high degrees of support for it—sometimes, near unanimous affirmation (Raywid, 1989). But those who have not experienced the arrangement may be almost as unanimous in their opposition to it. Administrators, too, seem generally cool to the choice idea, although there are some slight differences among them, with principals somewhat more receptive to choice than superintendents (Feistritzer, 1989).

One of the most interesting features of the choice debate involves the position of researchers on the matter. The question arises in connection with the issue of the research base for choice. A recent publication of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1990) argued that there is virtually none, and at the last American Educational Research Association (AERA) meeting, it was striking how many presenters in the several sessions

on choice began their presentations with some such statement as "Of course, there is very little empirical research in support of choice." Whether one agrees with that claim or not, the frequency with which it was asserted was both marked and unusual. The AERA meeting included even more sessions devoted to school-based management than to choice—but there were no parallel introductory statements about the lack of evidence related to school-based management. The difference is noteworthy because there is considerably less evidence about this newer parallel restructuring strategy than about choice. Furthermore, the evidence available on school-based management is largely negative (Malen, Ogawa, & Kranz, 1990).

COMING NEXT FOR CHOICE

The choice movement will likely remain a prominent part of the educational policy scene as 29 states now have some sort of choice provision (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1991). Some are permitting cross-district choice, some are encouraging within-district choice, and some have specified choice only for specific populations (e.g., high school students desiring to attend classes in colleges and universities and students who have not succeeded in the schools to which they have been assigned). Even without the substantial support emanating from the White House, it is doubtful that the idea will die. Support sources are too broad and substantial, and even if they should dwindle, it could prove politically difficult to remove such a widely discussed prerogative after it has been claimed and exercised.

The education-oriented case for choice may be strengthened. As the emergence of an increasing number and variety of choice systems permits the amassing of systematic evidence regarding them, the objection about a lack of evidence may be met. The continuing demand for adequate programs for the most challenging students is likely to continue to stimulate the number and variety of choice programs. And the continuing preoccupation of the business community with education is likely to sustain pressures for choice, particularly in the cities.

New sponsorship and espousal patterns for the choice arrangement may also emerge. As has been suggested, for political groups and figures to oppose something that 72% of the people under 30 years of age favor, that 70% of people of color favor, and that 68% of the people in big cities favor is not very wise politics (Olson, 1991). Because these are populations to which the Democratic Party has sought to appeal, it may be rethinking the choice question. It is early yet to tell just what sort of difference the Democratic Leadership Council's decision to back choice ("Across the Nation," 1991) will make in the idea's political fortunes. Up to this point, the appeal of choice

to libertarian-minded and to more substantively oriented conservatives has sometimes seemed stronger. At least nationally, choice has been more closely linked to the Republican than to the Democratic Party, and advocates within the Republican Party have appeared to be interested primarily in either an economics-driven or governance-driven form of choice rather than in types more educationally oriented or calculated to serve other particular policy interests. Democratic espousal could bring more choice proposals with an equity orientation or more that are specifically designed to improve the quality of urban or other weak schools. Thus Democratic Party acceptance of the choice idea could lead to new policy initiatives linking some sort of choice arrangement with purposes both equity oriented and excellence oriented.

Otherwise, probably the main thing that lies immediately ahead in the choice movement is an increasing prominence for the governance-oriented position. Indeed, the current preoccupation of education reformers and restructurers with school governance may make the choice idea considerably more prominent than it has been to date. But it may also mean a new sort of choice with a new focus. The choice idea is certainly emerging now under new aegis, with an emphasis on "supply-side choice" rather than on the "demand-side choice" that has dominated discussion to date. The latter refers to the options available from the consumer's perspective, the former to the options from the producer's perspective.

As applied a couple of years ago, the term "supply-side choice" referred to diversified schools and programs among which *teachers* could choose. The context in which it arose seemed to suggest that supply-side choice had to be considered in order to make a choice system work: if consumers are to have a range of options to select among, then options — or the permission to create them — must be encouraged by those controlling suppliers (Elmore, 1986). Today, the referent of the term "supply-side choice" has shifted. The term appears to address the matter of which institutions or agencies will provide public education and to what governing bodies they will report. In the course of this metamorphosis, an idea initially introduced in the context of how to make a choice system function adequately is now an idea about how to end run the Establishment — in other words, an idea about redesigning the governance and control of education.

It is happening this way. Open enrollment arrangements, which now exist in a number of states, have not led to the diversification among schools that market loyalists predicted and which their case requires. This led to the question of what would be necessary to produce such diversity. The answer proposed by analyst Ted Kolderie (1990) — and which Education Secretary Alexander, among others, has adopted — is that "the exclusive franchise"

must be broken. To date, this has led to two kinds of thinking and developments. The first has to do with breaking the hitherto exclusive franchise held by teachers and building administrators hired by a school district. To break this sort of exclusivity is, then, to let outside people operate public schools and educational programs.

The second sort of exclusivity that might be revoked is that held by school district officials (i.e., school boards and superintendents). Thus other institutions and agencies might also be enfranchised to authorize, operate, and supervise public schools within a district side by side with those that the district administers.

Currently, under the banner of "breaking the exclusive franchise," two things are happening: School districts are increasingly sponsoring the operation of schools and educational services supplied by multiple sources, and states are beginning to talk about the sponsorship of public schools by entities other than school districts.

Actually, the first idea is not so radical. There are numerous examples now where boards have made a variety of contractual arrangements for purchasing services from groups outside their employ. This has long been the case with respect to the provision of auxiliary services such as school buses and custodial and cafeteria services. But it is also the case with respect to the provision of education for special groups and in relation to particular sorts of instruction. For instance, New York City has long contracted with private providers for programs for particular severely handicapped populations, and in Washington State, some districts have for several years been sending their most challenging students to privately owned "education clinics." Elsewhere, commercial firms are supplying special reading and study skills instruction in public high schools and foreign language instruction in elementary schools (Walsh, 1989). In Dade County, Florida, a Minnesota-based commercial corporation is running a school, having won a district-sponsored competition to launch an innovative new program (Holmes, 1990). And in Chelsea, Massachusetts, the school board signed a 10-year contract with Boston University to operate its schools (Foster, 1991). The widely publicized Chelsea agreement, like the other arrangements identified, are generally not linked to choice—that is, they do not create simultaneous *multiple* suppliers among which families may choose—but they have substantially broadened the precedent and the base for privatization through school board contracting with private suppliers for educational services for public schools.

There is, then, little that is strikingly new about the prospect of public schools contracting for services or about obtaining some instructional services from outside suppliers while providing others through system employ-

ees. What is now being proposed, however, is that we ought to end the monopoly, or the "exclusive franchise" enjoyed by school district officials and their employees, and deliberately cultivate the provision of multiple sets of services existing side by side and open to selection.

The second move to break the exclusive franchise might well prove considerably more far-reaching in its revision of educational governance. Kolderie (1990) who pioneered the "ending the exclusive" notion, summarized it this way: "In order to create new public schools, and ultimately a new system of public education, the states would simply withdraw the local districts' exclusive franchise to own and operate public schools" (p. 1).

This would mean that school districts would no longer be in a position to control all public schools within their boundaries or even to decide what public schools may operate there. They could control their own schools, but other public schools could be franchised by other authorities to operate side by side with the district's schools. Such a change could happen in a number of ways. The simplest is through direct state chartering of schools with varied sponsors. For example, the state itself might operate some schools or it might give charters to colleges and universities, educator groups and associations, or commercial organizations. If so, local district officials could no longer control or limit the number and variety of public school programs offered within a particular area. The intent is to end exclusive control by any single body. The means is by extending the franchise to operate schools to new groups or by extending the *right* to enfranchise public schools to multiple groups.

Actually, this idea is not as remote from present practice as it might first appear. The so-called "governor's schools" introduced several years ago represent state-run schools operating in a number of states. These are typically magnet schools offering special programs to a highly selective group of students, but they have nonetheless introduced a new genre of state-operated schools. Kolderie's idea is that the state might open the opportunity to sponsor these or other types of programs to other organizations as well, including colleges and universities.

In effect, this is what Britain's Education Reform Act of 1988 provided, but it did so in ways somewhat different from what is being talked about in the United States. The Act sought to end the exclusive franchise held by local education authorities (equivalent to U.S. school districts) by enabling individual schools to "opt out" of control by the local authority. They could thus become autonomous, yet remain publicly funded institutions. This has proved tantamount to an arrangement in which private schools are publicly funded because the "opting out" schools become, in effect, independent,

self-governing institutions (Adler, Petch, & Tweedie, 1989). Kolderie's plan differs in leaving a district's set of existing schools intact, affecting only the auspices for launching new schools. It also keeps the newly enfranchised public schools squarely in the public sector by requiring them to remain accountable to the franchising body for the educational outcomes they produce.

Thus the possibilities of Kolderie's ideas for drastically altering the face of school governance are considerable. To date, attempts to implement them have consisted primarily of proposals that the state (as well as districts) "charter" individual public schools as independent organizations to be held publicly accountable only through outcomes rather than by public operation and regulation. Such a bill was passed by the Minnesota legislature in 1991, but only after modifications were made limiting the number of schools that can be chartered and limiting the chartering agency to school districts. But the broader version discussed here will doubtless be introduced again, both in Minnesota and elsewhere. Meanwhile, although it is early to tell, President Bush's proposal that Congress fund the creation of 535 "New American Schools" — one in each congressional district — looks as though it is intended, at least in part, to accomplish similar purposes. It would certainly increase and diversify the sponsorship, authorization, and control of public schooling, with highly visible and much touted schools having been chartered not in school districts but in congressional districts and possibly not by school districts but by states or even perhaps by the federal government.

The widespread determination to restructure school governance means that the governance-inspired branch of the choice movement is likely to attract a lot of attention in years to come. Not all governance-refashioning proposals involve choice, of course — school-based management makes choice an afterthought, when it is included at all, and a proposal by Philip Schlechty (1991) that communities should periodically decide whether to leave their schools in the hands of district officials or to competitively award extended contracts for school operation makes no provisions for choice at all. But as Kolderie's proposal suggests, the idea of choice can be brought to bear in enormously altering present control structures and balances in American public education. I suspect that over the next decade we are likely to hear more of plans for harnessing it to do so. Such possibilities are likely to dominate the choice discussion, even though they will not totally monopolize it.

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