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Volume 18, Number 2—Spring 2005

# MID-WESTERN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCHER

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University of West Georgia

## Feature Issue: School Choice

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2

### ***Charter Schools in an Arena of Competitive Educational Reforms: An Analysis of the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey***

*Zeng Lin, Dianne C. Gardner,  
and W. Paul Vogt, Illinois State University*

16

### ***Parental Characteristics and Satisfaction with their Child's School: A Comparison of Public, Voucher, and Charter School Families***

*Kelli M. Paul, Indiana University  
Kim K. Metcalf and Natalie A. Legan,  
Monroe County Community School Corporation*

21

### ***Annual Meeting Highlights***

27

### ***Does the Discourse of Employer Linked Charter Schools Signal a Commitment to Work Force Development or Transformational Learning?***

*Eric Freeman and Richard D. Lakes  
Georgia State University*

35

### ***School Choice: Structured through Markets and Morality***

*Thomas J. Lasley II and Carolyn R. Ridenour  
University of Dayton*

43

*Book Review  
School Choice Trade Offs  
reviewed by Marie F. Holbein  
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# *Charter Schools in an Arena of Competitive Educational Reforms: An Analysis of the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey*

Zeng Lin  
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## **Abstract**

*Accountability, choice, equity, and social cohesion are core parts of the public debates over the charter school movement. To examine these important issues, we utilize the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey to estimate the possible charter effect on public and private schools. Analyses of charter, public, and private schools suggest that they may co-exist in a competitive education system because each type of school demonstrates different advantages that present potentially attractive conditions for children. The charter movement has changed the landscape of competitive education reform in the United States. It is premature, however, to claim that the charter movement has created a resounding positive effect on both public and private schools.*

## Introduction

Charter schools are a unique American experiment in privatizing public schools and are part of a larger debate over the relative efficacy of public and private schools (Levin, 2001). Charter schools are public schools that enjoy statutory exemptions from select state and local rules and regulations (Gruber, Wiley, Broughman, Strizek, and Burian-Fitzgerald, 2002). It is estimated that over 2000 charter schools operate in the United States, indicating a very rapid rate of growth in the decade since the first such school was established (Center for Education Reform [CER], 2000; Vergari, 2002). Despite their limited numbers (perhaps 2% of all public schools), proponents of charter schools claim that their influence forces public schools to move in the direction of greater accountability and market-driven school reform (CER, 2000; Hassel, 1999). This study provides an initial description of charter schools to begin to assess the potential of the charter movement to reform education on a large scale through competition.

Like other educational reforms, the charter movement is the subject of public debate. The proponents of charter schools view the movement as having the potential to transform American public education (Finn, Manno, and Vanourek, 2000; CER, 2000). Free from the scrutiny and needless regulation imposed by the public education bureaucracy, they argue, charter schools are sources of inspiration and innovation for a failing system. On the other hand, charter opponents suggest that the vast majority of parents are satisfied with their children's public schools, and counter that privatizing public schools through charters compromises social cohesion and undermines the core values of public education in a democracy (Ascher, Fruchter, and Berne,

1996). Researchers have suggested that studies taking empirical approaches are needed to evaluate the effects of charter schools, particularly in light of their short history and the limited research on their impact (Brouillette, 2002; Fowler, 2003; Hassel, 1999; Levin, 2001; Maranto, Milliman, Hess, and Gresham, 1999).

To examine the potential of charter schools in competitive educational reforms as part of a larger privatization movement, this study adopted two related assumptions that are consistent with market views of educational reform. First, charter schools may affect other schools by providing attractive initial conditions on the supply side for clients, drawing these clients away from public schools and forcing them to examine their practices and conditions. These conditions include attractive staffing, innovative curricula and instruction, and the availability of educational technology among others. Second, using the logic of market-driven innovation, when students and parents are pleased with their experiences in charter schools, they create pressure for comparable improvements in other schools. Both attractive initial conditions and student/family satisfaction with charters, therefore, may be variables that influence public education reform independent of measures of student achievement.

To date, much of the research into charter schools uses standardized tests to assess success or failure (Martinez and Little, 2002), but the underlying staffing and school conditions on the supply side are largely neglected, even though these factors are likely to influence student and parent choice in a competitive education marketplace. School staffing and other school conditions and resources can be treated as possible predictors of student outcomes, including achievement. The *1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey* (SASS) provides a series of cross sectional snapshots of the kinds of conditions that may attract families to educational options embodied in the charter movement.

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## Debate over the Charter Movement

The charter school movement stems from several possible sources. First, three waves of expansion in mass public education and large scale public sector growth during the twentieth century have resulted in questions about the effectiveness and efficiency of public education and other government programs (Murphy, 1996; Lin, Sweet, and Anisef, 2003). The charter movement is just one recent attempt in two decades of efforts to counter public sector expansion with private, market solutions. The word "privatization" first appeared in the dictionary in 1983 (Murphy, 1996), the same year as the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the landmark report often linked to school reform efforts in the last part of the twentieth century. In the ensuing twenty years, school privatization emerged as a key element in to reform efforts. Second, is an erosion of public support for schools as demonstrated by the growing unwillingness of tax payers to support public schools. Educational leaders struggle to justify increasing spending even in times of fiscal crisis that threaten to close local schools. Third, parents' dissatisfaction with public education is said to be a major factor in the creation of charter schools (Kane and Lauricella, 2001). Accountability and student learning achievement are the key issues underlying parents' concerns. Lastly, to proponents of privatization, charter schools represent a compromise in the renewal of education (Finn et al., 2000). Charter schools operate as "quasi-public schools," straddling the boundary between the public and private realms (Vergari, 2002, p.2). There is a prevailing view that schools need to be fixed in ways that do not expand the public sector or increase public funding, even if the resulting system compromises the public/private division of schooling. This, at least partly, explains why charter reform has bipartisan support in Washington.

As a movement that represents different things to different people, it remains an open question whether the charter movement can keep its promises. Public debates over the charter school movement concentrate on a few important issues. These include school accountability, student choice, equality, and social cohesion (Levin, 2001, p. 9). According to Vergari's assessment, the charter movement appears to hold more long-term significance than the typical fad in education reforms, and long waiting lists for student admissions show evidence of citizen demand for options in public education. Despite evidence that school choice in all its forms is not a passing fad, the pool of empirical research is not well-balanced in terms of the issues it addresses or the objectivity that researchers bring to it (Fowler, 2003).

### Research Design

A large proportion of the research explores the charter movement either from the demand side in terms of student and parent satisfaction or in terms of broader policy perspectives that contrast free market solutions with concerns about social stratification (Finn, et al.; Fowler, 2003; Levin,

2001; Martinez and Little, 2002; Vergari, 2002). Few studies systematically investigate supply side attractors, using a national sample of representative data on school staffing and other resources across public and private sectors. By exploring these conditions and comparing charters with both public and private schools, this study makes an initial effort in this direction.

Data from the *1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Surveys (SASS)*<sup>1</sup> were analyzed to compare charters to both public and private schools. The *SASS* includes surveys of districts, schools, teachers, and principals under four types of school control: public, private, charter, and Indian<sup>2</sup>. *SASS* investigates a broad range of educational issues, such as school safety, class size, district budgets, teachers' salaries, and the quality of instructional programs and school libraries (Gruber, et al., 2002). In this study, school resources, accountability, student choice, parental involvement, equity between student groups, evidence of innovative curriculum and instruction, and the quality of teachers and principals were selected for analysis as supply side conditions with the potential to attract students and families. Evidence on how charters compare to other public and private schools might suggest whether 10 years of charter reform has affected the broader educational system.

Sample descriptions of all *SASS* surveys used in this study are provided in Table 1. The *SASS* samples are randomly drawn. The un-weighted case numbers in the table are the respondents who actually participated in the survey. To use these samples to represent the whole country, the U.S. Census Bureau weights each case according to its characteristics. The weighted samples used here represent 111,958 schools, 3,451,315 teachers, and 110,021 principals across the country. Among three types of schools, almost 75% were public, less than 1% charter, and 24.3% private, and the number of principals roughly matched the number of schools. Almost 87% of the teachers worked in public schools, 0.5% in charter schools, and 13% in private schools<sup>3</sup>. Overall, charter schools were still a very small fraction of the education system in contrast to public and private schools.

As described earlier, the first assumption guiding the study is that charters may affect public schools when they provide attractive initial conditions for clients. These conditions include the quality of school resources, teachers, and principals, as well as schools' successes at developing into learning communities through building equality and parental involvement. The second assumption of this study is that charters could have a positive effect on public schools when students and parents believe they are appropriately served. To investigate these effects, we compare public, charter, and private schools. Within each school type, we compare and juxtapose three types of potentially attractive initial conditions: the quality of school resources, teachers, and principals. In some cases, data that were unavailable at the school level were found in the school district survey which was then used in the analysis.

## Results

Comparisons are drawn from 10 related but distinct surveys. Our study of charter school effects is based on data for School Resources (Table 2); School Levels and Locations (Table 3); Accountability (Table 4); Social Responsibility (Table 5); Student Choice (Table 6); Parental Involvement (Table 7); Curriculum and Instruction (Table 8); Quality of Teachers (Tables 9 and 10); and Quality of Principals (Table 11).

### *School Resources*

Table 2 shows that public schools have an advantage of scale efficiency over charter and private schools. Public schools served 89.1% of the nation's student population, charter schools 0.5% and private schools 10.4%. The aver-

age public school size (539) was more than twice that of both charter (264) and private schools (211). In terms of average number of pupils in each class, private schools had the smallest classes (18.8); public (23.6) and charter (23.1) schools had similar average class sizes.

Teacher-student ratio largely reflects the real cost of schooling. Charter schools showed the highest ratio (17.4), and thus the lowest costs; private schools had the lowest ratio (13.2), with public schools (15.6) in the middle. This high teacher-student ratio may partly explain why charter schools can operate more economically than public schools. Computer and internet access are significant school resources. Information technology over the few past decades has changed school operations, and parents increasingly demand that schools be well-equipped with computer technology (Tapscott, 1998). Public schools had the lowest ra-

Table 1

### *Sample Description of 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey*

Name of Survey	Number of cases		
	Un-weighted	Weighted	Percentage
<b>Districts</b>			
Public school districts	4,690	14,505	100.0
<b>Schools</b>			
Public schools	8,432	83,725	74.8
Public charter schools	870	1,010	0.9
Private schools	2,611	27,223	24.3
<b>Teachers</b>			
Public school teachers	42,086	2,984,781	86.5
Public charter school teachers	2,847	17,477	0.5
Private school teachers	7,098	449,057	13.0
<b>Principals</b>			
Public school principals	8,524	82,802	75.3
Public charter school principals	891	988	0.9
Private school principals	2,734	26,231	23.8

Source: Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter Elementary and Secondary Schools. NCES

Table 2

### *School Basic Information*

Characteristics	School Type		
	Public	Charter	Private
<b>Total Students</b>			
Percent	89.1%	0.5%	10.4%
Number of cases	45,099,506	266,721	5,262,848
<b>Size</b>			
Average school size	539	264	211
Average class size**	23.6	23.1	18.8
<b>Ratio</b>			
Estimated student-teacher ratio	15.6	17.4	13.2
Number of students per computer	6.5	7.2	9.7
Number of students per internet access	39.4	29.3	59.2
<b>Schooling Length</b>			
School day-hours	6.2	6.3	6.3
Days of school year	179*	180	181

\*Data from district survey

\*\*Data From teachers' survey

tio of number of students per computer (6.5) in contrast to charter (7.2) and private (9.7) schools, which is a clear advantage for public schools. On the other hand, charter schools had the lowest ratio of number of students per internet access (29.3), followed by public (39.4) and private (59.2) schools. This charter school advantage may be due to their relative novelty, which, as compared to schools in older facilities, has made it easier for them to build technology infrastructure.

Charter and private schools had slightly longer school days (6.3 hours school day) than public schools (6.2 hours school day). Private schools had the longest school year (181 days), followed by charter schools (180 days) and public schools (179 days). As a supply side condition, parents who seek school success for their children may seek to expand the amount of schooling children receive. The amount of time in school is already expanding as schools respond to

parental pressures by offering four-year-old kindergarten for the first time and expanding both four and five-year-old kindergarten to full days. Reform pressures in this direction can be seen in the 1990s expansion of summer school and year-round schooling. The United States has the shortest school year in the developed world as well, creating a subtle pressure as test scores between the U.S. and others are compared (deMarrais and LeCompte, 1999). Be that as it may, as of the 1999-2000 academic year, differences among the three school types studied here were trivial—one day per year and six minutes per day on average.

In brief, public schools are in an advantaged position in scale, resources such as class size, and show some strength in educational technology. But public schools do less well than charters (but better than privates) in access to the internet and might face some competition in length of the school day and year.

Table 3  
*School Levels and Locations*

Characteristics		School Type		
		Public	Charter	Private
<b>School Levels</b>				
Elementary	Percent	71.5	58.0	60.8
	Number of cases	59,900	586	16,562
Secondary	Percent	24.7	23.2	9.5
	Number of cases	20,651	235	2,583
Combined	Percent	3.8	18.8	29.7
	Number of cases	3,174	190	8,078
<b>Urbanicity of school</b>				
Large or mid-size central city	Percent	23.7	53.1	42.4
	Number of cases	19,858	537	11,534
Urban fringe of large or mid-size city	Percent	44.7	32.0	39.9
	Number of cases	37,462	324	10,860
Small town/rural	Percent	31.5	14.8	17.7
	Number of cases	26,405	150	4,829

\*Data from district survey

\*\*Data From teachers' survey

Table 4  
*Accountability*

Outcomes Reported	School Type		
	Public ** %	Charter * %	Private * %
<b>Standardized Tests Reporting Rate</b>			
Test results from standardized assessment	97.8	86.4	***
SAT/ACT	79.4	23.6	***
<b>Attendance/ Demographics Reporting Rate</b>			
Attendance	94.4	83.0	***
Dropout rate	87.1	45.3	***
Demographics	66.9	56.1	***
Graduation Rate	85.6	44.1	***
<b>Reported Outcomes</b>			
Percentage graduated last year (grade 12)	87.8	76.8	97.5
Percentage to 4 year college	35.3	18.4	55.6
Percentage to 2 year college	21.7	25.0	16.1
Percentage to tech school	9.1	10.1	7.4

\*Includes 71 charter schools that have no performance report

\*\*Data from district survey

\*\*\*Data not available

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## *School Levels and Locations*

Public schools assume the major responsibility to nurture the youngest children by maintaining separate schools for them (see Table 3). Public schools were generally configured as either elementary (71.5%) or secondary schools (24.7%) and very few (3.8%) combined elementary and secondary schools. In contrast, private schools had the largest percentage of combined schools (29.7%), with charter school in the middle (18.8%).

Large proportions of the charter (53.1%) and private (42.4%) schools were located in large or middle-sized central cities. Public schools were more often located in small towns and rural areas (31.5%), as compared to private (17.7%) and charter (14.8%) schools. The public schools were the largest in size and the most far reaching, serving small town and rural areas, while charter and private schools were largely in urban settings. Geographic differences represented variations on the supply side, leaving rural populations with few choices other than the local public school. If there is to be a charter effect on public schools, such geographical barriers will have to be overcome.

### *Accountability*

Accountability is a puzzle for the charter movement, which some view as its Achilles heel. Others fear that accountability measures will lead to the demise of charter schools (Finn, et al., 2000, p.127). This fear is rooted in the fact that many accountability measures listed in Table 4 are part of the charter exemptions. It is debatable whether these accountability measures are valid as proxies for student learning, but the reality is that all education reforms will be eventually examined using some form of accountability, and several of these, such as high school graduation, are important in their own right (Ascher, et al, 1996; Hassel, 1999; Levin, 2001; Murphy, 1996). If parents value these accountability outcomes, then accountability can serve as a reasonable supply side indicator of a charter effect on public schools.

Table 4 suggests that charter schools in the survey were less accountable than public schools; they were less likely to report school outcomes. For instance, public schools (97.8%) were more likely than charter schools (86.4%) to report the results from national, state, or local standardized tests. Less than one in four (23.6%) of the charter schools reported SAT or ACT scores, while almost eighty percent (79.4%) of the public schools were required to do so. In 1999-2000, public schools were more likely to report attendance rates (94.4%) than charter schools (83.0%); similar differences appeared in the reporting of dropout rates (87.1% vs. 45.3%) and demographics (66.9% vs. 56.1%). Graduation and college entrance rates are important indicators of accountability. Using the SASS, less than half (44.1%) of the charter schools reported graduation rates to policy makers, while almost nine out of ten (85.6%) public schools were required to report them.

When the three school types report their outcomes, and we can make comparisons, the charter schools did least well by most measures. For those schools that included grade 12, the graduation rate was 97.5% for private schools, 87.8% for public schools and 76.8% for charter schools. After high school graduation, 55.6% of the private school graduates went on to four-year colleges, but only 18.4% of the charter and 35.3% public school graduates did so. One in four (25%) charter school graduates went to two-year colleges. By contrast, 16.1% of the private and 21.7% of the public school graduates went to such institutions. The percentages of graduates who went on to technical schools and colleges among three types of schools did not differ significantly.

These findings are noteworthy. Contrary to the claim made by Center for Education Reform (2000), public charter schools were less accountable than public schools, at least by the accountability factors demonstrated in Table 4. If the charter movement cannot adequately address the issues of accountability, and if this is indeed a supply side issue for students and parents, we would anticipate a reverse ripple effect favoring public schools which have well-developed accountability systems that allow comparisons. It would be an ironic confirmation of market theory if excellence in accountability in the public sector put pressure on private and charter schools to improve. The notably lower charter school graduation and four-year college attendance rates suggest that students and parents seeking supply side information to inform school choice may need information that is often unavailable under charter exemptions. In fact, both graduation and college matriculation were substantially higher for public schools when geographic and related socio-economic factors are not controlled. The poor showing of charters in this regard may be partially attributable to their predominantly urban locations, suggesting that they are not unlike urban public schools in terms of the challenges they must address. Multivariate analyses would be required to determine this.

### *Social Responsibility*

Equality of opportunity is one of the highest principles of our democracy, in which education plays an intended role as an equalizer (Dewey, 1966; Fuller, 2003; Spring, 2000a; Vergari, 2002). One of the advantages of the charter movement is that public schools on the warning lists can be converted to charter schools (CER, 2003). Proponents observe that charter schools provide students from lower-income families or/and minority backgrounds with educational options that were previously available only to affluent families able to pay private school tuition or the expense of residing in neighborhoods with good public schools (Vergari, 2002, p.13; Finn et al., 2000, pp.160-64). Charter school movement reformers publicly advocate social responsibility and equality (CER, 2000). Race, social class, special education needs demonstrated students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) and Limited English Proficiency (LEP) were used here to measure how different types of schools deal with the issue of equality.



Table 5 reveals that slightly over half of the charter school student population (50.3%) was minority in contrast to 32.6% in public and 25.1% in private schools. Among minority students, almost three in ten students in charter schools (27.1%) were black, while 15.5% in public and 12.5% in private schools students shared the same racial background. In addition, charter schools included 17.5% Hispanics in the student body, whereas public and private schools had 12.3% and 8.6% respectively. The fact that more than half of the charter school students were minority, including high proportions of Hispanics and Blacks, presents challenges to the charter movement.

Title I data is as one means of exploring the challenges of poverty in schools of all types. Almost three in ten charter school students (29.2%) came from a family background of poverty, while public (20.5%) and private (19.0%) had fewer students served by Title I programs. By contrast, public schools had the highest percentage of special education students (12.8%), followed by charter (11.3%) and private (7.1%) schools. Public schools attracted more immigrant students (5.6%) than charter (4.9%) or private (0.9%) schools as measured by percentages of LEP students. Finally, charter schools had magnet programs<sup>4</sup> twice as often as public schools, which may attract the attention of the larger community.

Charter schools show extraordinary strengths in confronting and potentially dealing with issues of social equality. The previous discussion on accountability is largely focused on horizontal comparisons, such as comparing absolute graduation rates, college admissions, or standardized test results. A fair assessment of school performance should be based on vertical comparisons, that is, comparisons controlling for variables that influence academic outcomes. In other words, if charter schools are able to add more value to students' education than other schools and demonstrate this value-added effect, then the charter movement could have a positive influence the education system.

### *Student Choice*

Student choice is one of the selling points promoted by the charter movement (CER, 2003); charter schools free students from public school residence requirements. The SASS data make it clear that the admissions process played a critical role as a gatekeeper to select "qualified" students in all three school types. We examine school admissions practices as reflections of their relative openness to student choice.

Table 6 suggests that most private schools had admission requirements (66.6%), followed by charter (26.3%) and public (13.2%) schools. Among schools with admissions requirements, public schools paid more attention to students'

Table 5  
*Equality*

Issues	School Type		
	Public %	Charter %	Private %
Minority students	32.6	50.3	25.1
Student Composition by Race*			
White	67.4	49.7	74.9
Black	15.5	27.1	12.5
Hispanic	12.3	17.5	8.6
Indian	1.9	3.6	0.6
Asian/PI	2.8	2.2	3.4
Schools have magnet program	6.5	12.6	*
Ratio of total students and student served by Title I	20.5	29.2	19.0
Percent of students with an IEP	12.8	11.3	7.1
Percent of students with LEP	5.6	4.9	0.9

\*Total may not equal to 100% because of rounding.

Table 6  
*Student Choice*

Admission Practice	School Type		
	Public %	Charter %	Private %
Admission requirements	13.2	26.3	66.6
Admission-special needs*	57.1	41.4	33.4
Admission-academic record*	56.0	31.8	76.4
Admission-recommendation*	35.3	42.7	60.1
Admission-interview*	30.0	73.8	85.5
Admission-special talents*	20.7	11.6	18.6
Admission-standardized test*	17.3	11.6	42.1
Admission test*	10.5	12.7	47.5

\* Among those schools which have admission requirements.

special needs (57.1%) than either charter (41.4%) or private (33.4%) schools. Over seven in ten (76.4%) private schools with admissions requirements used academic records, and slightly over one in two (56.0%) public schools and more than three in ten (31.8%) charter schools did so. Over 60% of the private schools used recommendations, but just 42.7% of the charter and 35.3% of the public schools required these. Interviews were the most often used requirement by both private (85.5%) and charter (73.8%) schools, but only 30% of the public schools used them as part of the admissions process. Charter schools paid the least attention to special talent (11.6%), and public schools the most (20.7%), with private schools in between (18.6%). Charter schools used standardized tests least (11.6%), followed by public (17.3%) and private (42.1%) schools. Almost half (47.5%) of the private schools used admissions tests, while slightly over one in ten charter (12.7%) and public (10.5%) schools did.

For each school type, these differing admissions profiles suggest distinctive missions. For public schools, service to all students in the community is required, so the admissions process is largely a matter of internal school selection based on special education service delivery in the district. For private schools, the choice is chiefly theirs, not the students'. For charters, the commitment to choice and the ability to avoid many public school regulations place them in a middle ground. These data on charters suggest a variety of admissions procedures that match local goals and contexts are developing in the movement that may be useful in demonstrating a "value-added" effect of charter education in a system where they must balance goals of equity and achievement. One concern has been the ability of charter schools to select the most readily educated students, leaving the most challenging students in the public system. As Tables 3 and 5 show, however, urban ethnic and linguistic minorities and low socio-economic-status (SES) students do attend charter schools. These data suggest that students can choose charter schools even where admissions processes could potentially exclude them. Charters may seek to avoid high needs students without necessarily applying elite se-

lection criteria (Lacireno-Paquet, Holyoke, Moser, and Henig, 2002). Local context and differences in control and governance are almost certainly factors in how admissions are used, and this merits further exploration (Fowler, 2003).

### Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is an issue that has played an important role in the development of the charter movement (CER, 2003; Vergari, 2002). Some charter schools were initiated by parents dissatisfied with public schools (Brouillette, 2002, pp. 225-230). Parental involvement has also been a selling point by charter proponents, and charter schools must reach out to bring students in. Most charter schools in California (75%), for example, required parents to sign a school involvement contract when enrolling a student (Vergari, 2002, p. 49). Table 7 shows that all three types of schools sought open communication with parents and communities in general. Public schools relied most heavily on open house activities to communicate with parents (94.7%), followed by charter (93.1%) and private (88.5%) schools. There was no significant difference among three types of schools in terms of holding teacher-parent conferences.

Beyond school-parent communication, public (67.6%) and charter (65.5%) schools were more likely than private (35.7%) schools to invite parents to participate in school instructional decisions. School governance was perhaps the most significant distinction between charter and other types of schools. Over six in ten of the charter schools (63.0%) required a school-parent contract, but almost half of the public (49.6%) and private (47.2%) schools had the same requirement. Slightly over half (50.1%) of the charter schools invited parents to participate in budget decisions, whereas 44.9% of the public and 36.4% of the private schools had the same policy. Over three quarters of the charter schools had parent governance bodies, and slightly less than sixty percent (59.2%) of the public and 40.9% of the private schools shared the same policy. Volunteerism was one of the most popular means for parental involvement in all three

Table 7  
*Parental Involvement*

Activities	School Type		
	Public %	Charter %	Private %
Communication			
Open house	94.7	93.1	88.5
Parent-teacher conferences	88.4	87.2	88.1
Instruction			
Parent-instructional issues	67.6	65.5	35.7
Governance			
School-parent contract	49.6	63.0	47.2
Parent-governance	59.2	75.1	40.9
Parent-budget decisions	44.9	50.1	36.4
Role of Parent Volunteers			
Use of parent volunteers	87.7	88.9	83.4
Requirement for parent volunteers	*	39.7	*

\*Data not available

types of schools. There was no significant difference in terms of accepting or perhaps encouraging parent volunteers among three types of schools. Almost four in ten (39.7%) charter schools required parents to volunteer, however.

### Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum is related to the questions of what and how values, knowledge, and skills are taught in schools (Spring, 2002b). The *SASS* does not provide data that would allow an analysis of core curriculum and instructional practices as these might vary between the three types of schools. Yet information about how schooling is structured and what supplementary or special interest programs each type makes available provides an opportunity to understand distinctive curricular features in each setting as potential supply side attractors. Based on survey responses about curricular and instructional arrangements (see Table 8), we found that private schools (86.3%) were the most rigid in terms of using the same instructional cycle for all students, followed by charter (78.3%) and public (58.7%) schools. Charter schools (54.9%) were more likely than private (28.5%) and public (19.5%) schools to use new instructional approaches in their programs. In addition, charter schools (58.3%) were more likely to use block scheduling for extended instruction than either public (42.8%) or private (33.6%) schools. Bobo, de Kanter, Pederson, Noeth, and Weinig (2000) suggest that after school programs enhance student safety and achievement. Table 8 shows that charter schools lead the way on before/after school enrichment programs (60.3%), followed by public (54.1%) and private (43.3%) schools.

In terms of schools dealing with students' different needs, public schools (70.2%) dedicated more resources to inter-session or summer school for students who needed extra assistance to meet academic expectations than did charter (53.1%) and private (40.3%) schools. Public schools (68.5%) were also more likely to have gifted and talented programs, followed by charter (32.3%) and private (13.5%) schools. It seemed that public schools paid more attention to using their relatively rich resources to individualize instruction for those who were behind as well as gifted and talented students, while charter schools (31.8%) were more willing to assist students with academic advancement or acceleration during the inter session or summer school than public (27.3%) and private (23.2%) schools. Public (48.6%) and charter (45.6%) schools had more programs for students with discipline problems than private schools (15.8%). Charter schools (18.5%) were more likely to provide Advanced Placement (AP) courses than public (14.6%) and private (14.1%) schools. This is interesting given that charter graduates have lower rates of attendance at four-year colleges and universities.

Career education is one objective of schooling. Public schools (39.3%) were more likely to offer healthcare programs than either charter (25.8%) or private (17.3%) schools. However, private schools (52.6%) were more likely to offer daycare programs than charter (48.5%) or public (37.2%) schools. Programs in technology preparation and career academies were not especially popular in any of the three types of schools. Public schools showed a higher percentage (12.9%) of tech preparation programs than charter (9.1%) and private (2.2%) schools. Charter schools (13.2%) had

Table 8  
*Curriculum*

Content	School Type		
	Public %	Charter %	Private %
<b>Curricular Arrangements</b>			
Do all students attend on the same cycle?	58.7	78.3	86.3
Before/after school enrichment	54.1	60.3	43.3
Block class scheduling for extended instruction	42.8	58.3	36.6
Program with instructional approach*	19.5	54.9	28.5
<b>Supplementary Programs</b>			
Academic inter-sessions or summer school activities**	70.2	53.1	40.3
Program-talented/gifted	68.5	32.2	18.0
Program-students w/discipline problems	48.6	45.6	15.8
Academic inter-sessions or summer school activities***	27.3	31.8	23.2
Programs-advanced placement courses (AP)	14.6	18.5	14.1
<b>Career Education Programs</b>			
Programs-healthcare	39.3	25.8	17.3
Programs-daycare	37.2	48.5	52.6
Programs-tech-prep	12.9	9.1	2.2
Programs-Career academy	6.4	13.2	1.4
<b>International Interest Programs</b>			
Program-foreign language	12.7	13.6	13.5
Program-International baccalaureate (IB)	.06	1.2	0.6
Support Home schooling (yes)	*	14.1	3.7

\* among the schools which have magnet programs.

\*\* for students needing extra assistance to meet academic expectations

\*\*\* for students seeking academic advancement or acceleration

higher percentage of career academy programs than public (6.4%) and private (1.4%) schools. In brief, career education was not a priority in any of the three school types. However, public schools took the lead in health education, private schools emphasized childcare education, and charter schools had a slightly higher percentage of career academy programs. International education was largely ignored by American P12 education in all three types of schools. Foreign language programs were offered in nearly 13% of all schools, and International Baccalaureate education was offered in only about 1%. Since both home schooling and charter school reforms are products of dissatisfaction with public education (Ayers, 1994), the greater willingness of charter schools to accommodate home schooling (14.1%) when compared to private schools (3.7%) is not surprising. Neither public nor private schools offered any appreciable level of support for home schooling.

### Quality of Teachers

Teacher quality has been consistently demonstrated to be a primary factor in student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1997), and few market mechanisms have the potential to affect the success of charter schools more than the recruitment and retention of highly qualified teachers. As Table 9 reveals, only 0.6% of public schools did not require full certification in hiring, whereas 6.8% of charter schools, and 18.8% of private schools did not do so. Public schools regulated hiring practices more than the other two school types with 81.5% requiring full certification for newly hired teachers, while only 51.8% of the charter schools and 38.9% of the private schools had this requirement. Although almost half of the charter schools did not require full certification in hiring (48.2%), 41.5% of them still used it. Most of the private schools did not require full certification

Table 9  
*Teacher's Hiring Practice, Salary and Benefit*

Teacher's Hiring Practice, Salary and Benefit	School Type		
	Public	Charter	Private
<b>Teacher Hiring-Full Certification</b>			
Not used	0.6	6.8	18.8
Used but not required	17.9	41.5	42.4
Required	81.5	51.8	38.9
<b>Teacher Hiring-Teacher Ed Program</b>			
Not used	8.4	15.5	27.5
Used but not required	21.4	34.1	33.7
Required	70.2	50.3	38.8
<b>Teacher Hiring-State Skills Test</b>			
Not used	28.4	28.3	53.7
Used but not required	7.7	24.4	24.7
Required	63.9	47.3	21.6
<b>Teacher Hiring-State Subject Test</b>			
Not used	35.2	37.2	58.1
Used but not required	10.5	27.6	25.5
Required	54.3	35.2	16.4
<b>Teacher Contract Period</b>			
9 months	36.4	13.9	19.8
9 1/2 months	16.4	11.5	10.0
10 months	35.9	43.9	48.2
11 months	0.2	5.5	1.1
12 months	11.0	25.2	20.9
<b>Salary</b>			
Salary schedule (%)	96.3	62.2	65.9
Bachelor with no experience	\$25,888	\$26,977	\$20,302
Bachelor with 10 years experience	\$34,009	\$34,264	\$25,359
Masters with no experience	\$28,285	\$30,083	\$22,473
Masters plus 30 credits	\$29,812	\$31,191	\$23,177
Masters plus 20 years experience	\$44,006	\$41,881	\$31,303
Highest step on schedule	\$48,728	\$46,314	\$34,348
<b>Benefits (%)</b>			
Benefit rate for teachers	24.9	20.2	23.3
General medical (yes)	96.0	96.7	76.9
Dental insurance	77.7	80.7	53.9
Group life insurance	75.8	68.9	51.1
<b>Union Status</b>			
Teachers union agreement	69.8	14.4	*



(61.1%), but 42.4% of them used it. Even when full certification was not required, a significant proportion of the charter and private schools still used certification as a criterion in hiring.

Over 70% of public schools required graduation from teacher education programs for new teachers, but only 50% of charter schools and 39% of the private schools had such a requirement. While many charter schools and private schools did not require graduation from teacher education for all teachers, 34% of charter schools and 38% of private schools still used the requirement as a hiring criterion.

Over sixty percent (63.9%) of the public schools required state skills tests for hiring, while 47.3% of the charter and 21.6% of the private schools required them. However, charter schools actually have used the state skills tests (47.3% required plus 24.4% used) as much as public schools (63.9% required plus 7.7% used). Over half (54.3%) of the public schools required state subject tests for new hires, while 35.2% of the charter and 16.4% of the private schools required doing so. As with trends in other hiring requirements, charter schools actually followed public schools very closely. In brief, public schools were more regulated in terms of hiring practices, but most charter and private schools still used full certification as a hiring requirement.

The majority of teachers had either nine or ten month contracts. Charter schools had the longest contract period, with one of four teachers (25.2%) contracted for twelve months. Over one in five teachers in private schools and slightly over one in ten teachers in public schools had a simi-

lar contract period. Almost all (96.3%) public schools used salary schedules, and 65.9% of the private and 62.2% of the charter schools used pay schedules as well. Charter schools were likely to pay more to new teachers who had bachelors (\$26,977) or masters (\$30,083) degrees without teaching experience, in contrast to public (Bachelors \$25,888; Masters \$28,258) and private (Bachelors \$20,302; Masters \$22,473) schools. By comparison, public schools paid experienced teachers who had reached the highest step on the salary schedule more (\$48,728) than charter (\$46,314) and private (\$34,348) schools. Public schools also provided the best overall benefit rate (24.9%), followed by private schools (23.3%), and charter schools (20.2%). Benefits, such as medical, dental, and life insurance were comparable between public and charter schools. Private schools normally provided fewer benefits than public and charter schools.

For many years teacher unions have been singled out by critics as the greatest impediment to implementing real reform in schools (CER, 2003). Since almost seven in ten (69.8%) of the teachers in public schools were union members, criticizing unions is often tantamount to criticizing public schools. In contrast, only 14.4% of the teachers in charter schools had union agreements. But, the emergence of unions in even 14.4% of charters may be evidence of a reverse ripple effect of public on charter schools.

The information in Table 9 mainly depicts employer-employee relations, while Table 10 more directly assesses the quality of teachers. Demographically, charter school teachers were slightly younger than the teachers in both public and private schools. Charter schools not only had the

Table 10  
*Profile of Teachers*

Profile	School Type		
	Public	Charter	Private
<b>Demographics</b>			
Average age	42.3	37.4	42.0
Minority teachers (%)	14.6	26.7	15.4
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	25.1	25.7	23.9
Female	74.9	74.3	76.1
<b>Attrition 2000-2001 (%)</b>			
Stayer- teaching in same school	85.0	70.8	80.3
Mover- teaching in another school	7.3	12.3	7.1
Leaver- leaving teaching profession	7.7	16.9	12.6
<b>Attacked (%)</b>			
Never attacked	90.5	92.7	96.3
Attacked, but not in past 12 months	5.3	2.4	1.5
Attacked in past 12 months	4.2	4.9	2.2
<b>Employment</b>			
Total teaching experience (years)	14.8	7.3	12.5
Total hours per week, school activities	48.05	48.93	46.25
Had a job outside education? (%)	0.9	4.0	3.1
<b>Educational Attainment (%)</b>			
Has a bachelor's degree?	99.3	96.9	92.7
Has a master's degree?	46.6	30.4	36.5
Has a PhD/EDD/professional degree?	0.7	1.2	1.8

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highest percentage of minority students but also the highest percentage of minority teachers (26.7) in contrast to private (15.4%) and public (14.6%) schools. About 75% of all school teachers were female, and gender differences were not significant among the three school types.

Public schools had the highest teacher retention rate (85%), while charter schools had the lowest (70.8%), and private schools were in between (80.3%). Charter schools had a relatively high percentage (16.9%) of teachers who left the profession altogether. Instability in the teaching staff may threaten the smooth development of charter movement. Over 90% of the teachers in all schools had never been attacked, which indicated that schools appeared to be generally safe places to work. However, teachers in public schools were slightly more likely to be attacked than those in charter and private schools. Public school teachers tended to have more teaching experience (14.8 years) than both private (12.5 years) and charter (7.3 years) schools. Charter school teachers had the longest work hours per week (48.93 hours), followed by public (48.05 hours) and private (46.25 hours) schools. Charter school teachers were also more likely to have jobs outside of school (4%) than private (3.1%) and public (0.9) schools.

Public school teachers generally had higher levels of educational attainment than those in charter and private schools. Almost one hundred percent (99.3%) of the teachers in public schools had a bachelor's degree, followed by charter (96.9%) and private (92.7%) schools. Almost half (46.6%) of the teachers in public schools had masters degrees, while 36.5% of the teachers in private schools and 30.4% of the teachers in charter schools had the same level of education. A small proportion of the teachers in the three types of schools even had PhD/EdD or professional degrees. Mass graduate education apparently has made advanced degrees in education a regular part of the landscape for teachers in all three types of schools.

### *Quality of Principals*

The quality of principals and the vision of the principals are important for school improvement (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992; Lyman, 2001). The quality of school principals may also be a supply side factor in student and parent choice to attend charter schools, particularly given the role that a school principal can play in community relations (Fullan, 2001). Because charter schools face challenges to their success (Brouillette, 2002), building level leadership would logically play a significant role.

There were no significant age differences among school principals, and since many charter schools opened quite recently, the years experience as principal by school type is not a meaningful comparison. However, in terms of average years of total principal experience, public schools ranked first (9 years), private schools second (8.7 years), and charter schools third (6.9 years). Principals tended overall to be experienced teachers. On average, private school principals had over 14.5 years teaching experience, slightly higher than

principals in public (14 years) and charter schools (12.1 years). Males were the majority of the public school principals (64.3%), while females were the majority in both charter and private schools. Over nine out of ten principals (92.0%) in private schools were white, compared to 87.1% in public schools and 76.9% in charter schools.

A principal's vision for the school plays an important role in school operations (Ashby and Krug, 1998). When ask about their number one goal, public school principals ranked basic literacy the highest (27.8%), followed by charter schools (25.6%) and private schools (21.8%). Academic excellence was ranked in similar ways among all three types of school principals (private 27.9%, charter 24.2%, and public schools 24.1%). Principals in public schools ranked students' work habits the highest (20.7%), followed by private schools (20.0%) and charter schools (19.6%). Charter school principals placed slightly greater emphasis on personal growth (13.9%) than private (13.4%) and public (11.2%) schools. In terms of human relationship skills, almost nine percent (8.7%) principals in public schools ranked it as their primary goal, while 7.1% of principals in charter and 4.9% principals in private schools did so. Moral values and occupational skills overall were not ranked highly as principals' primary goals, but principals in private schools ranked moral values higher (10.3%) than principals in charter schools (4.4%) and public schools (3.1%). Occupational/vocational skills were not really on private principals' agendas (1.8%), but 4.5% of the principals in public schools and 5.2% of the principals in charter ranked these skills as their number one goal in schools. The overall picture is one in which school type makes only modest differences in how principals rank their goals.

Educational attainment is another measure of the quality of principals. In general, a principal needs a credential higher than a bachelor's degree, but the largest discrepancy was observed in private and charter schools. It was reported that 54.3% of the principals in public schools, 51% in private schools, and 45.1% in charter schools had a masters degree. Requirements for principals in a so called "credential society" (Collins, 1979) include a graduate degree: 17.7% of the charter school principals had doctorates or specialist degrees, while 10.1% in public schools, and 8.5% in private schools had the same certificates. Private schools had the most principals with bachelor's degrees (23.6%), and charter schools ranked second (17.7%). Public schools had the fewest bachelor-level principals (1.6%). No principals in public schools had less than a bachelor's degree, but 7.1% of the principals in private schools had associate's degree, and 6% of them had no post-secondary degree. Just 1.7% of the charter school principals belonged in this category.

In brief, although certification and education requirements are common exemptions for charter schools, they share with private schools an apparent reliance on these familiar markers for the quality of both teachers and administrators. One explanation may be their supply side appeal of these markers.

## Discussion

Analyses of three types of schools suggest that they may coexist in the competitive education reform arena, because each type of school has different advantages to students and parents seeking to exercise educational choice. While broad national averages undoubtedly conceal much local variation, several trends are clear. For example, concerning school resources that are potential attractors of students and parents, public schools have great advantages in size and wider geographic penetration compared to charter and private schools. However, charter and private schools have slightly longer school days and years, and they offer more before/after school enrichment programs. In short, the supply side attractors in each school type vary and draw different clients, but these choices have genuine limitations as well.

By most of our measures, public schools are more accountable than both charter and private schools. In one of the most striking results of the initial data analyses reveal that charter schools have produced far fewer high school graduates than either public or private schools. Yet charter schools offer more AP courses than public or private schools, which suggests that staff, students, and parents have the expectation that charter students will succeed in higher education. This misalignment of intentions and results suggests

the potential benefit for further scrutiny. If market forces are to have their promised effects, this kind of comparative data is necessary for students and families to be truly market-savvy in a system that increasingly stresses accountability as a key to education reform.

Overall, charter schools are relatively free from accountability reporting of test scores and attendance and graduation rates and are noticeably distinct from public schools in this regard. But accountability has been and will likely continue to be the number one measure of any school reforms. In fact, parents may learn to demand more accountability measures in the wake of very public mandates like the 2002 *No Child Left Behind* legislation. Our findings suggest a need for further research into charters that considers different local contexts and missions, state and local policy environments, and the potential for a dynamic, reciprocal impact between charter, public, and private schools.

In terms of equity, charter schools have higher rates of minority students than both public and private schools, and have a higher ratio of students who are served by Title I, suggesting a commitment to equity as well as a challenge. By contrast, using IEP, LEP, and other measures of equity, it is clear that public schools more than charter and private schools provide educational opportunity to difficult-to-serve students. Admission requirements are considered an indica-

Table 11  
*Profile of Principals*

Profile	School Type		
	Public	Charter	Private
<b>Experience</b>			
Total teaching experience in years	14.0	12.1	14.5
Total principal experience in years	9.0	6.9	8.7
Years as principal in this school	4.9	2.3	6.3
<b>Demographics</b>			
Average Age	49.3	48.3	49.9
<b>Gender</b>			
Male (%)	64.3	46.0	45.4
Female (%)	35.7	54.0	54.6
<b>Ethnicity (%)</b>			
White	87.1	76.9	92.0
Black	11.3	19.6	6.1
Asian	0.8	1.9	2.0
Native	0.8	1.6	0.6
<b>Principals' Three Most Important Goals (Multiple Responses %)</b>			
Basic literacy	27.8	25.6	21.8
Academic excellence	24.1	24.2	27.9
Work habit	20.7	19.6	20.0
Personal growth	11.2	13.9	13.4
Human relations skills	8.7	7.1	4.9
Occupational/ vocational skills	4.5	5.2	1.8
Moral values	3.1	4.4	10.3
<b>Highest Educational Attainment (%)</b>			
Master's degree	54.3	45.1	51.0
Education specialist/professional diploma	33.9	17.9	9.9
Doctorate or first professional degree	10.1	17.7	8.5
Bachelor's degree	1.6	17.7	23.6
Associate's degree	0.0	0.7	1.1
Do not have a degree	0.0	1.0	6.0

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tion of student and parent choice. A few charter schools have admission requirements, making them much more open than private schools, but much less so than public schools.

There are no significant differences with regard to parental involvement, between public and charter schools, although both are slightly higher than private schools. However, a large proportion of the charter schools have parent governance and school-parent contracts.

In terms of curriculum and instruction, the distinctive missions of public, private, and charter schools can be seen in variations of what is identified as the primary goal for the school, commitment to programs for learning differences, remediation and enrichment, and career and international education programs. Public schools also are more flexible in school semester cycle and reallocate more resources to summer school than charter and private schools. Charter schools, in contrast, are more likely to offer innovative instructional approaches than other two types of schools.

Teacher quality as indicated by educational attainment, experience, and state test performance, indicates variation among different types of schools, but also indicates that charters and privates may hire certified teachers from teacher education programs even when they are not required to do so. Graduate education for teachers is most common in public schools, but only slightly less so in charters and private schools. Of particular interest is the stronger presence of minority teachers in charter schools. Given the urban nature of these schools and the number of minority and Title I students they educate, this appears to be a strength for these schools. Teachers in charter schools, especially those having bachelor's degrees without experience are paid somewhat better than the teachers in public and private schools, while they receive similar benefits, such as medical and dental plans. Yet charter school teachers are most likely to leave the profession. It may be that instructional innovation, the hands-on governance arrangements, and other factors that typify charters present special challenges to novice teachers even as the charter system attracts them with higher starting salaries. New teachers may burn themselves out trying new practices in highly interactive environments in which parents are particularly engaged. In contrast, the preference for rewarding the upper end of the pay scale in public schools may increase stability in the teacher workforce but reduce innovation.

Indicators of principal quality parallel the teacher quality indicators. Charters and privates tend have more female principals, and principals from the three different settings have somewhat different visions about what matters most in their schools. If charter schools are indeed more innovative than public schools, the clarity of the principal's vision as well as their ability to take steps towards implementing that vision is probably a significant factor in student and parent choice and is a particular challenge in light of parent involvement.

## Conclusion

The charter school movement is "quasi privatization." It likely gains support from politicians and the public in part because it is a compromise that satisfies some in both the privatization and public camps, at least for the moment. As charter schools develop in both common and idiosyncratic ways, they will become relatively more private or relatively more public, especially as local entities supported by parent choice and volunteer support. The tensions inherent in the compromise may not be sustainable (Wells, 2002), and these data suggest that public schools still have some normative influence on charters in such areas as resources, instructional time and class size, accountability, social equity, student choice, parental involvement, curriculum, and the quality of teachers and principals. But the variations between charters and others suggest ripple effects might operate in multiple directions among schools.

Our analyses suggest that charter schools have demonstrated the potential to address some important issues related to public dissatisfaction with current public schools. Not subject to some regulations, charter schools are able to target a large proportion of minority students and students from disadvantaged families, to offer relatively higher salary for inexperienced teachers, to attract higher parent involvement, and to offer programs with innovative instructional approaches. The charter movement has changed the landscape of the competitive education reform in the United States. However, claiming that the charter movement has created a resounding positive effect on both public and private schools is not supported by the data reviewed in this study. The promises of accountability and of reforms driven by student achievement are far from met. The charter movement still has far to go before it is a serious challenge to public and private schools.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> SASS is sponsored by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). It has been conducted four times in school years 1987–88, 1990–91, 1993–94, and 1999–2000. The unrestricted data set of SASS is used in this research.

<sup>2</sup> Indian schools are not considered in this analysis.

<sup>3</sup> Percentages of schools and teachers are different because public schools are larger on average than charter and private schools (see Table 2).

<sup>4</sup> A magnet program offers enhancements such as special curricular themes or methods of instruction to attract students from outside their normal attendance area (SASS 1999-2000).

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# *Parental Characteristics and Satisfaction with their Child's School: A Comparison of Public, Voucher, and Charter School Families*

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## **Abstract**

*Research suggests that families who make active choices regarding their child's education differ from families who do not. Differences between families of private (voucher), charter, and public school students were examined using data collected as part of the evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program. While both voucher and charter school families were more satisfied than public school families with their child's school, charter school families were found to differ from both voucher and public school students in that they were more White, were of higher income, were more likely to be married, and were more highly educated.*

School choice is one of the most debated educational policies in the United States today. As the number of educational options has increased (e.g., intra-district choice, charter schools, vouchers), so has the ability of parents to choose their children's school. With the beginning of the highly visible DC School Choice Program in fall of 2004, the issue of school choice, and particularly of publicly-funded vouchers, once again is in the spotlight of the media. While many dimensions of parental choice have been studied (e.g., reasons for choice), this article focuses on characteristics of families who exercise choice and parental satisfaction with their child's school.

Communities in which parents have a range of educational options offer a context in which it is possible to examine characteristics of families who make choices about their children's education. In such situations, it is possible to empirically examine issues that, otherwise, can be considered only hypothetically. Are families who choose non-traditional schools (charter or private schools) different from families who choose to send their children to public schools? If so, how are they different? Do these differences help explain why they make differential choices among the available options? Answers to these questions provide policymakers and educators with information that would allow schools of all types to become more responsive to the needs and values of the families they serve.

In the following pages, we describe a study of just these issues. The study was conducted within the broader longitudinal evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program, the state-funded voucher program in Cleveland, Ohio. Families in Cleveland are provided with an extremely wide range of publicly-funded educational choices. At the

time of the study, families in Cleveland had a number of choice options available to them: they could enroll their children in their neighborhood public school, they could choose from other public schools as part of a limited intradistrict choice program, or they could apply for admission to one of 27 magnet or special program schools operating within the public school district in Cleveland. Beyond these relatively traditional public school choices, families also could apply to enroll their child in one of 19 charter schools throughout the Cleveland area or one of 44 private schools that participate in the state-funded voucher program. Thus, Cleveland offered the opportunity to examine the educational decisions made by families who have available to them a variety of traditional or non-traditional, public or private school options.

## *Research on Family Demographic Characteristics*

Research indicates that families who exercise choice through participation in choice programs differ from parents who do not. Most choice programs target low-income families and do so fairly successfully. For example, research on publicly-funded voucher programs in both Milwaukee and Cleveland have found that families who are offered vouchers are of lower income, reside in the inner city, and are headed by a single mother (e.g., see Metcalf, Boone, Muller, Stage, and Tait, 1999; Witte, 2000). Additionally, families who participate in choice programs tend to be smaller, more educated, and more involved in their child's education than non-choosing families (Beahles and Wahl, 1995; Heise et al, 1995; Martinez et al, 1995; Powers and Cookson, 1999). Similar results have been found in studies of privately-funded voucher programs. For example, in San Antonio, choice families, regardless of whether they were

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actually admitted to the program, consisted of parents who were more likely to have attended college, have higher incomes, and have fewer children than non-choosing families (Martinez, Godwin, and Kemerer, 1995, 1996).

### *Research on Parental Satisfaction*

Research suggests that parents who actively make choices related to their child's schooling are more satisfied with their child's school than parents who do not. Much research has focused on satisfaction of parents who have chosen to use a voucher to enroll their children in private schools. Overall, parents who exercise choice report higher levels of satisfaction with the educational experience (including academic quality, safety, class size, parental involvement, etc.) offered their children at choice schools (Beales and Wahl, 1995; Finn, Manno, Bierlein, and Vanourek, 1997; Gill, Tempane, Ross, and Brewer, 2001; Greene, Howell, and Peterson, 1997; Heise et al, 1995; Manno, Finn, Bierlein, and Vanourek, 1998; Metcalf, 1999; Smith, 2002; Witte, 1996) and report greater dissatisfaction with public schools (Beales and Wahl, 1995; Heise et al, 1995; Metcalf, 1999; Powers and Cookson, 1999; Witte, 1991). Choice parents tend to be less satisfied with their former public schools than non-choosing public school parents, especially regarding school discipline and how much their children learned in public schools. However, these parents tend to be more satisfied in their chosen private schools, especially in terms of discipline and what their child learned at school, the same aspects with which they were most dissatisfied in public school (Godwin, Kemerer, and Martinez, 1997; Powers and Cookson, 1999; Witte, 1991, 1996, 2000).

While much research has focused on parents of voucher students, few studies are available which have examined the satisfaction of charter school parents (see Horn and Miron, 1999, 2000). In general, though, research suggests that parents whose children attend autonomous schools (e.g., charter schools, private schools using a voucher) are more satisfied than parents in similar public schools (Gill et al, 2000; Peterson, 1997; Powers and Cookson, 1999). Similarly, parents who actively choose their child's school report greater levels of satisfaction with their child's current school (public or private) than parents who do not (Bielick and Chapman, 2003). For example, Gill et al (2001) found that charter school parents, like voucher parents, are happier with their child's school, and the Pioneer Institute (1998) similarly found that parents of charter school students were more satisfied with their child's school than were parents of students enrolled in traditional public schools.

### *The Present Study*

Addressing why choosers are more satisfied requires more than simply comparing choosers of alternative educational options to non-choosers. While comparisons between choosers of non-traditional educational options is informative, investigations into families who actively choose their public school of enrollment either by intra- or inter-district

choice options would add to the school choice knowledge base. The nature of choice in Cleveland, Ohio, provides an opportunity to do this. Because of the variety of choice options available to families in Cleveland, it provides a unique opportunity to examine the educational desires and levels of satisfaction of parents who make a range of educational choices.

The present study describes examinations of the responses of families who indicated that they actively chose their child's school, whether the school was a traditional public school or a nontraditional school option. This article is unique in that it compares the characteristics and satisfaction of parents of three very different subgroups: (a) parents with children in traditional public schools who indicate they consciously chose their child's school, (b) parents who use a voucher to enroll their children in private schools, and (c) parents with children attending charter schools. Specifically, the following questions are examined:

1. Are there differences in family characteristics between parents of students who attend private schools using a voucher, students who attend public schools, and students who attend charter schools?; and
2. Are there differences in satisfaction between parents of students who attend private schools using a voucher, students who attend public schools, and students who attend charter schools?

### *Method*

In the spring of 2002, researchers at Indiana University conducted in-depth telephone interviews with families of children enrolled in public, private, and charter schools throughout Cleveland as part of the longitudinal evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program (CSTP), the ongoing voucher program in Cleveland. The interviews were intended to obtain information on the extent to which parents residing within the boundaries of the Cleveland Municipal School District (CMSD) deliberately and intentionally made choices about their children's education, the information they utilize in making those choices, and what factors and/or values impact their decisions.

### *Sampling Methods*

In order to provide information that was representative of families at varying stages of their children's schooling and because the voucher program served children only through eighth grade at the time of the study, sampling focused on families whose children were enrolled in second, fourth, or eighth grade. Using CMSD records and data from the CSTP Office, parental contact information was obtained for *all* students who, during the 2001-2002 academic year were believed to be enrolled in second, fourth, or eighth grade in participating private schools (for voucher users) and all CMSD public schools. Because information maintained by charter schools is not subject to public release

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without parental permission, charter schools serving students in second, fourth, and eighth grade during the 2001-2002 academic year were contacted by research staff to solicit their assistance in the study. Charter schools willing to participate then identified families who agreed to be interviewed and provided research staff with contact information. Eight of a possible 17 charter schools in the Cleveland area were included in the current sample, and represented families who agreed to participate after being contacted by their school or who identified that their child was enrolled in charter schools at the time of the interview. Upon obtaining parental contact information across these populations, a stratified random sample was drawn to reflect each of the three primary groups of interest at each of the three grade levels.

### *Choosers vs. Non-Choosers*

The interviews were conducted with the intent of enabling examination of the differential educational choices made by families and their subsequent satisfaction with those choices. For families of voucher users and charter school students, it was presumed at the outset that intentional choices were made that resulted in the current school of enrollment of the child due to the necessity of applying for enrollment at these schools. However, for public school families who had not applied for a voucher or enrolled their child in a charter school, it was important to ascertain whether public school enrollment was a result of deliberate choice (e.g., after awareness and possible consideration of other options) or of acceptance of assignment by the district. Thus, early in the survey, respondents were directly asked if they deliberately chose their child's current school. Only respondents who indicated that they had deliberately chosen their child's school were included in subsequent analyses, and the findings reported herein reflect their responses

Across all subgroups, a total of 1,066 interviews were completed with parents who had consciously chosen their child's school, with 710, 316, and 40 interviews conducted with families of public school students, voucher students enrolled in private schools, and charter school students, respectively. In nearly all cases (81.2%) the child's mother was the respondent, with fathers (9.9%) and grandparents (8.9%) constituting the majority of the remaining respondents. Respondents ranged in age from 24 to 76 years old, with a mean age of 39.97 years.

### *Interview Content*

Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and was directed at the child's primary caregiver. Items required responses in the form of Likert-type scales, rating scales or assigning letter grades, closed-choice items, and open-ended questions. After initial questions to allow verification of the respondents' appropriate subgroup classification and their deliberate choice of schools, the interview was organized around two sections. The first portion of the interview was structured to collect a common set of data across multiple groups focusing on parental satisfaction with their children's

current schools of enrollment and family demographic characteristics (e.g., parental education, income, involvement). The second portion of the interviews was tailored to examine unique aspects of each subgroup and consisted of questions designed to gather data related to parents' awareness of, attempts to exercise, and direct experiences with the various educational choice options available in the Cleveland area. The present study focuses on the results from the first portion of the interview.

In addition to the data collected in the interviews, data were obtained from the CMSD website regarding the demographic characteristics of students in the school district. Cleveland Municipal School District Race/Ethnicity data from the 2000-2001 annual report were utilized (<http://www.cmsdnet.net/administration/2000annualreport.htm>.) These data were used to compare the current sample to the overall school population in the district.

### *Data Analysis*

Data analysis was conducted appropriate to the type of data available and the groups who responded to the particular questions. Specifically, data were analyzed using chi-square analyses ( $\chi^2$ ) and analysis of variance (ANOVA) techniques, and when appropriate, follow up post hoc comparisons were conducted. When significant differences were found for the overall  $\chi^2$ , follow up 2 x 2 chi-square tests were conducted for all pairs. When significant differences were indicated by the omnibus ANOVA, follow-up post hoc comparisons were conducted either using the Games-Howell (used when sample variances were unequal) or the Tukey-Kramer (used when sample variances were not found to differ) procedures. All post hoc comparisons were conducted to ensure control of the family-wise error rate at 0.05 using the Bonferonni correction. All post hoc results reported in the text are significant at the 0.0167 level.

## Results

*Question 1: Are there differences in family characteristics between parents of students who attend private schools using a voucher, students who attend public schools, and students who attend charter schools?*

### *Race/Ethnicity*

Parents identified the race of their child, with the majority of students (60.8%) being identified as African American, followed by 22.2% identified as White, 10.4% identified as multiracial, and 6.6% who identified a race other than those presented. Because the majority of children were identified as either African American or White, the race categories were collapsed into minority (African American, multiracial, other) and non-minority (White/Caucasian). Two sets of comparisons were conducted on children's minority status. Namely, the three groups (public, voucher, and charter) were compared with: (1) one another; and (2) to the racial statistics reported by Cleveland Municipal School



District (CMSD). The latter comparisons were conducted in order to examine the current sample with the broader population of students enrolled in the CMSD.

*Subgroup comparisons.* Statistically significant differences were found between subgroups on the proportion of minority students,  $\chi^2(2) = 85.069, p < .001$ , such that charter school students consisted of a greater proportion of non-minority students (70.0%) than either public school (15.6%) or voucher students (31.1%). No differences were found between public school and voucher students with both groups consisting primarily of minority students (84.4% and 68.9%, respectively).

*CMSD comparisons.* Comparisons of the minority status of the students in the sample revealed statistically significant differences between data reported by CMSD and all three subgroups ( $\chi^2[1] = 8.618, p = .003$ ;  $\chi^2[1] = 23.982, p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2[1] = 62.500, p < .001$ , for public, voucher, and charter school students, respectively). More public school families in the present study were of minority status (84.4%) than were public school families in the CMSD as a whole (80.0%), while both voucher and charter school families were less likely to be of minority status (68.9% and 30.0%, respectively) than students in the district.

### *Socioeconomic Status*

Examination of family socioeconomic status focused on comparisons of family size and family income. Significant differences were found between families of public, charter and voucher students on the number of adults ( $F[2, 1060] = 3.289, p = .038$ ) and the number of children living in the household ( $F[2, 1061] = 4.389, p = .013$ ). Charter school students lived in households with a greater number of adults ( $M = 2.08$ ) than public school students ( $M = 1.85$ ) or voucher students ( $M = 1.75$ ), but there were no differences found between the public school and voucher students. However, due to controlling for family-wise error, post hoc comparisons indicated no statistically significant differences between the three groups on the number of children living in the household with the mean number of children being 2.51, 2.31, and 2.88 for public school, voucher, and charter school families, respectively.

Using a range of values, families indicated their household income, and statistically significant differences were found between groups,  $F(2, 1014) = 17.266, p < .001$ . Specifically, families of charter school students had significantly higher incomes ( $M = \$45,576.42$ ) than families of public school ( $M = \$31,434.41$ ) and voucher students ( $M = \$29,535.92$ ). However, there were no differences in income between public school and voucher families.

### *Education of Primary Caregivers*

Using four forced-choice options that ranged from 0-11 years of education to a doctorate or medical degree, respondents indicated the highest level of education achieved by the primary male and female caregivers. Their responses were

recoded into two categories: 1) high school or less; and 2) some college or more. Statistically significant differences were found for the male primary caregiver's highest level of education,  $\chi^2(2) = 8.418, p = .015$ , such that a greater percentage of male caregivers of charter school students (55.9%) reported attending at least some college than caregivers of public school students (34.9%). However, there were no significant differences found in the education level between the male caregivers of public school and voucher children (42.1% attended at least some college) or between the male caregivers of voucher and charter school children. Statistically significant differences also were found for the primary female caregiver's highest level of education,  $\chi^2(2) = 19.259, p < .001$ . A greater percentage of female caregivers of voucher students (62.0%) reported having attended some college or more than female caregivers of public school (47.1%) children. No differences were found between female caregivers of charter school children (55.0%) and female caregivers of public school or voucher children.

### *Marital Status of Primary Caregiver*

Respondents indicated the marital status of their child's primary male and female caregiver using the following categories: married, living with a partner, widowed, separated, divorced, or never married. To facilitate comparison across subgroups, marital status was collapsed into two categories: married and not-married. A majority (greater than 62.0%) of male caregivers across all subgroups reported being married, with statistically significant differences found between groups on the percentage of male caregivers who were married versus not married,  $\chi^2(2) = 9.712, p = .008$ . Male caregivers of charter school children (85.3%) were more likely to be married than male caregivers of public school children (62.0%), though there were no differences between male caregivers of voucher children (68.8%) and those of the other two groups. Similarly, there was a statistically significant difference found in marital status of the primary female caregivers,  $\chi^2(2) = 16.318, p < .001$ , but unlike the marital status of male caregivers, a greater percentage of female caregivers of charter school children were found to be married (75.0%) than were female caregivers of both public school (43.4%) and voucher (48.9%) children. There were no other significant differences between groups.

*Question 2: Are there differences in satisfaction between parents of students who attend private schools using a voucher, students who attend public schools, and students who attend charter schools?*

Parents were asked questions that were intended to examine their level of satisfaction with their child's current school. Specifically, parents assigned letter grades to twelve aspects of their children's schools representing four broad categories of school characteristics. Parents graded these aspects using the standard grading scale (e.g., A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-), and their responses were aggregated into a 4-point grading scale by eliminating all plus/minus signs. Specifically, parents graded the following aspects of their child's current school: (a) the school overall; (b) dynamic aspects

of the school (teachers, communication between the school and home, school administrators, and parental involvement); (c) resources (availability of equipment, such as computers and video projectors; availability of supplies, such as books and paper; support services, such as nurses and counselors); (d) school climate/culture (student discipline, extracurricular activities, the topics and subjects students learn, and academic expectations of the students). There were statistically significant differences across groups on each of the twelve aspects of schooling that were graded by respondents. Table 1 presents the chi-square results and the mean grades assigned to the various aspects.

*Overall school.* Parents of voucher, public school, and charter school students were found to assign different grades to their child's school overall at a statistically significant level. Specifically, parents of voucher and charter school students gave higher grades to their children's school than did parents of public school students.

*Dynamic aspects of school.* Across the four items asking parents to grade the dynamic aspects of their child's school, a consistent pattern emerged. Parents of voucher students and charter school students graded all four aspects higher than did parents of public school students, with only one exception. When grading communication between the school and home, parents of charter school families did not give significantly different grades than public school families.

*Resources.* When grading the resources available at their child's school, parents of voucher students again consistently assigned higher grades than did parents of public school students. Similarly, parents of charter school students assigned higher grades than parents of public school students, but only for two of the three aspects, namely the availability of sup-

plies (e.g., books and paper) and the support services (e.g., nurses and counselors) at their child's school. However, charter school families assigned significantly similar grades to public school families for the availability of equipment (e.g., computers, video equipment, overhead projectors), and in fact, both charter school and public school families assigned lower grades to the availability of equipment at their child's school than did parents of voucher students.

*School climate/culture.* Across the four aspects of the school climate and culture graded by parents, a consistent pattern emerged once again in the grades assigned by parents across the three groups. Parents of voucher students graded school discipline, the availability of extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, clubs), academic expectations, and the topics/subjects learned at their child's school higher than parents of public school students. Similarly, parents of charter school students gave higher grades than parents of public school students for all but one of the four aspects, the availability of extracurricular activities. For this aspect, both charter school and public school families assigned lower grades than did voucher families.

Across the four broad categories representing twelve aspects of their child's school, grades given by public school families were consistently lower than those given by families who had chosen non-traditional options for their children. It is notable, however, that all families tended to give their children's schools relatively high grades, with a mean grade across the groups and the various aspects being roughly an A-

## Discussion

The current study focused on examining demographic characteristics and satisfaction of families who actively chose

Table 1

*Overall Chi-square and Group Means for Grades Assigned to Current School*

	Chi-square			Group Means		
	<i>df</i>	<i>n</i>	$\chi^2$	Public	Voucher	Charter
School Overall	8	1066	62.733*	3.07	3.43	3.64
Dynamic Aspects of School:						
Teachers	8	1065	45.058*	3.26	3.51	3.83
Communication	8	1064	37.347*	3.11	3.48	3.46
School Administrators	8	1062	43.129*	3.10	3.37	3.70
Parent Involvement	8	1056	66.127*	2.89	3.33	3.53
Resources:						
Availability of Equipment	8	1046	39.877*	3.08	3.44	3.07
Availability of Supplies	8	1062	93.352*	3.02	3.60	3.65
Support Services	8	1043	33.154*	2.76	3.07	3.13
School Climate/Culture:						
Academic Expectations	8	1062	51.587*	3.26	3.59	3.64
Topics/Subjects	8	1065	50.597*	3.34	3.64	3.85
Discipline	8	1059	102.850*	2.82	3.49	3.55
Extracurricular Activities	8	1050	39.505*	2.53	2.98	2.24

\* $p < .001$

Note: Mean is on a 4-point grade point average scale with 4 = A; 3 = B; 2 = C; 1 = D; 0 = F. Sample sizes varied across groups by item with ranges as follows: Public  $n = 695-710$ , Voucher  $n = 309-316$ , and Charter  $n = 39-40$ .

(Parental Characteristics article continues on page 25)

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The 2005 Annual Meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association will be held in Columbus with an exciting program of invited speakers, focused workshops, and peer-reviewed papers presented in a variety of session formats. We will kick off the program with our traditional Fireside Chat with Dr. Michael Schwartz, President of Cleveland State University, who will also be giving our keynote address. Our luncheon speaker is Dr. Bernard Franklin, Senior Vice President of the National Collegiate Athletic Association. We are very fortunate to have two such outstanding individuals giving our invited addresses. Teachers, administrators, and other school personnel are especially invited to come and share their visions of academic integrity at the 2005 MWERA conference. Educational researchers across North America return to MWERA to renew acquaintances, make new contacts, and engage in exciting conversation in a collegial atmosphere. Come and be a part of MWERA!

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**Featured Speaker**

***Dr. Michael Schwartz***



Michael Schwartz, President of Cleveland State University, was unanimously selected by the Board of Trustees on November 13, 2001, after serving six months as Interim President. Recently, he agreed to serve through at least June 2008. Dr. Schwartz came to Cleveland State from Kent State, where he is President Emeritus and Professor Emeritus.

Dr. Schwartz is a native Chicagoan who received three degrees from the University of Illinois: a B.S. in psychology (1958), a M.A. in labor and industrial relations (1959), and a Ph.D. in sociology (1962). He began his academic career at Wayne State University, later moved to Indiana University at Bloomington, and then to Florida Atlantic University as Chair of the Department of Sociology. He then served as Dean of the College of Social Science at Florida Atlantic before moving to Kent State in 1976 as Vice President for Graduate Studies and Research. He served as acting president briefly in 1977, and then as Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs. The title of "Provost" was added to his vita in 1980. He became President in 1982, serving in that capacity until 1991.

He stepped down to return to the classroom, teaching graduate courses in higher education administration and statistical methods.

Dr. Schwartz has published in the area of social psychology of adolescent deviant behavior and with Sheldon Stryker, was the author of the first monograph published by the American Sociological Association in the Arnold and Carolyn Rose Monograph Series. He has authored numerous articles on higher education issues. More recently, he has co-authored with William Bowen *The Chief Purpose of Universities: Academic Discourse and the Diversity of Ideas* (Mellen Press, 2005). He has served as a trustee of the Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine and Central State University. He is a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools' consultant-evaluator corps and its Accreditation Review Council. He also has served on the Association of Governing Boards' Commission on Strengthening the Academic Presidency. He was named Distinguished Alumnus of the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana. Youngstown State University awarded him a Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities has given him its Distinguished Service Award.



**Featured Speaker**  
***Dr. Bernard W. Franklin***

Dr. Bernard Franklin is currently Senior Vice President for the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Governance and Membership. He is responsible for working with the NCAA president, senior vice presidents, vice presidents, and governance structure team for the national office. Dr. Franklin has responsibility for assuring the development of policies and procedures that support the effective functioning of the governance groups and to work closely with the president to support the NCAA Executive Committee. Administrative areas also reporting to him are governance, membership services and research.

Dr. Franklin previously served as president of Virginia Union University in Richmond, VA; Livingstone College and Hood Theological Seminary in Salisbury, NC; and Saint Augustine's College in Raleigh, NC. He is a former member of the NCAA Division II Presidents Council and the Executive Committee. Dr. Franklin began his career in higher education in 1983 as an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Miami University in Ohio. He has presented papers, lectures, and programs for various higher education audiences over the last 22 years. A panelist on the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities National Conference in 1991, he is also a member of the executive committee and board of directors of the United Negro College Fund and is also on the Board of Trustees of Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa.

He received his B. A. in 1974 from Simpson College, his M.Ed. from Western Maryland College, and his Ed.D. from Teachers College, Columbia University.



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their child's current school, whether it was a private school via a voucher, a charter school, or a public school within the Cleveland Municipal School District. With the exception of similarities in family size such that students in each group were most likely to live in a household with two adults and an average of two children other than themselves, families in each of the three groups were very different from one another. Specifically, charter school children and their families appeared to be quite different from the families of children enrolled in public schools or using a voucher for private school enrollment.

Charter school children were comparatively more likely to be White and to live in a household with a mean income of over \$45,000. Their primary male caregiver usually was married and had attended at least some college. Their primary female caregiver also was likely to be married and about as likely as the primary male caregiver to have completed at least some college. In contrast, public school children were likely to be an ethnic minority living in a household with mean income of slightly more than \$31,000 per year. They were less likely than charter school children to have a primary male caregiver who was married or who had attended school beyond high school. The primary female caregivers of public school students were slightly more likely to be unmarried than married, and about equally likely to have attended some college or merely completed high school. Voucher students looked much like public school children in that they were likely to be an ethnic minority, living in a household with slightly less than \$29,000 annual income, and about as likely as public school students to have a primary male caregiver who was married and who had attended at least some college. Their primary female caregivers also were about equally likely to be married and to have attended at least some college, but were much more likely to have attended at least some college than female caregivers of either public school or charter school children.

Further differences were found among voucher, charter, and public school families in their levels of satisfaction with their child's current school. Examinations of satisfaction among parents within each group revealed that public school parents appear to be less satisfied with their child's current school than are parents of students in non-traditional schools, who were found to be similarly satisfied with their child's school. Across the twelve aspects of their child's school that were graded by parents, voucher and charter school families consistently assigned significantly higher grades than did public school families. For some of these aspects, such a finding might be expected. For example, discipline, parent involvement, communication, and academic expectations often are presumed to be somewhat more prevalent in private and charter schools, thus parents tend to report greater satisfaction with these aspects of their child's school. However, this pattern of grading was found even for aspects of the school in which public schools might be assumed to have more resources.

Specifically, private (voucher) and charter schools were awarded higher grades than public schools on the availability of supplies, extracurricular activities, and support services, aspects which are not generally thought to be readily available or accessible in private schools. In general, then, voucher and charter school families appear to be more satisfied with their educational decisions than do public school families.

### Conclusion

Few studies have examined the family characteristics and reported levels of satisfaction of parents of children who attend charter schools and how they compare to parents whose children attend private schools (e.g., voucher students) or traditional public schools. The present study strove to do just that. As described above, the current study provides some evidence of differences and similarities between families who make active choices regarding their children's education. The results discussed above seem to be consistent with the literature on family characteristics and satisfaction. Specifically, the findings suggest that the socioeconomic status and level of education of the family may play a role in the educational choices made by parents and that parents of children enrolled in autonomous (e.g., non-traditional) schools are more satisfied than parents of children enrolled in traditional public schools.

Despite finding differences among the families who actively make choices about their child's education, what still remains unknown is how and why these decisions were made and what role the various factors had in the decision-making process. Further, while differences among various choice families is both important and informative, future research can further illuminate differences in choice families by continuing to compare choice and non-choice families, specifically those enrolled in traditional public schools. Most research examining choice families compares those enrolled in private and charter schools to their non-choosing counterparts in public schools, overlooking that some public school families have made an active choice to enroll their children in public schools. By examining these varied families, greater insights into factors affecting choice (or non-choice) can be gained.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Throughout the remainder of this article, the terms families, parents, and respondents will be used interchangeably to refer to the individuals participating in the study.

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# *Does the Discourse of Employer Linked Charter Schools Signal a Commitment to Work Force Development or Transformational Learning?*

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## **Abstract**

*The latest model for educational reform emerging in the US vocational-technical delivery system is the employer linked charter school (ELCS). This emerging concept is viewed as a partnership between constituents in the regular school organization and employers who are directly involved in the school's design, governance, and delivery of learning to students. The incursion of neo-liberalism into educational politics, policy, and discourse has permitted educational experiments such as the ELCS to link skills training to corporate imperatives of building enterprise culture and entrepreneurial attitudes in direct opposition to liberal humanist values and culture.*

*Charter schools in general and an ELCS in particular can elect to challenge the socioeconomic relations of post-Fordist production or legitimate them. Our analysis suggests that increasing pressure from neo-liberalism and globalization are likely to exhort vocational education to subordinate schooling to its narrower economic functions.*

The dominant and increasingly triumphant philosophy of American education policy during the last 25 years has equated schooling ever more strongly with economic growth and prosperity. As the primary justifications for school reform coalesce around education as an instrument for material progress and individual advancement, our vision of social policy and the purposes of schooling narrow to a point where broader educational thinking is undermined. Although the contribution made by education to the vitality of the nation's economic life is an important one, it represents only one measure of education, not the sum of its many parts. To the extent that we crowd out the moral, cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic purposes of education by elevating schooling's economic ends, we acquiesce to the notion of education as a positional good in which the productive benefits of being better educated and reaping greater monetary rewards than the next person outweighs the encompassing social benefits from which society is entitled to profit. Education is about more than economic relevance. When policymakers become fixated with the quantitative connections between school reform and the nation's economic status, qualitative purposes and practices are neglected and the nation as a whole impoverished.

Ours is not the first period in history in which ambitious school reformers have attempted to make schooling more consistent with the nation's economic objectives. Progressive reformers of a century ago rationalized and adopted a number of reforms predicated on the perceived economic benefits to individuals and the needs of a rapidly industrializing urban society. Today, a new generation of school reformers advocates a resurrected and fortified version of this enduring concept. Corporate critiques of the shortcomings of contemporary schooling and management solutions to the perennial problems of education resonate as loudly among

today's electorate as they did for a previous population in the throes of cultural and economic change. These corporate recommendations are grounded in assumptions about the nature of the twenty-first century world that parallel the erosion of America's manufacturing sector and the rise of a globally competitive economy characterized by rapid rates of technical change. The technology driven imperatives of a global free-market and the role of schooling in fostering this vision seem to cry out for bold alterations to the curricular and governance structures of public schools that would bring them into closer alignment with the ethos of modern corporate ideology. Reformers operating under the auspices of community-based interests eagerly invite powerful business allies into the realization of their social action agendas.

The fervor of current reform rhetoric focused on the virtues of school decentralization and economic rationales has brought to the forefront of the school restructuring debate questions about the intersection of business values, educational goals, and the reorganization of vocational education. While the uncertainties surrounding these questions have failed to generate clear-cut solutions, the struggle to enhance our insights and judgments regarding the intensification of corporate and economic influence on public schools continues nonetheless (Shipps, 2000). The nominal arrival of the knowledge economy and concomitant calls for escalating amounts of the particular educational raw material that presumably brought this world into existence are reducing the chances that a balanced discussion of school aims and purposes will take place (Wolf, 2002). In this hyper-rational climate, policymakers proceed as though they were entranced by what they perceive to be the linear relationship between schooling and economic development. But not only is such faith misplaced, it distorts the civic and equity functions of public schooling.

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## A New Context for Vocational Education?

The latest model for educational reform emerging in the US vocational-technical delivery system is the employer linked charter school (ELCS). This emerging concept is viewed as a partnership between constituents in the regular school organization and employers who are directly involved in the school's design, governance, and delivery of learning to students. Within the protocols of this arrangement, business and industry leaders take active responsibility in the actual policymaking process of school operations, including extensive decision-making in regard to curriculum and instruction. Despite the long history of business involvement in the development of public education, the configuration of the ELCS collaboration is unusual and represents a break with prior patterns. The overarching purpose of this relationship is to bring a coalition of educators, parents, employers, and government officials into the organizational design of workforce development. ELCS stakeholders are invited to play a major role in the governance of the school through key assignments to steering committee and board seats.

The model was initially recognized in 1997 by the US Department of Education as a vehicle for demonstrating how some of the premises of school-based reforms, such as parental choice, changing skill sets, and active learning can be integrated into the administrative system of vocational-technical education (Public Policy Associates et al., 1998). Driving this endorsement was the concern of influential industrialists—such as the 5,000 members in the National Alliance of Business—for the implications of the new economic turn toward globalization, shortages of skilled labor, restructuring within the manufacturing sector, the rise of computerized information systems, and greater attention to customer service. These trends dramatically converged in the 1980s and 1990s to create a new set of occupational conditions that were seen to permanently alter the traditional educational landscape in which young people were prepared as future workers. As established methods and approaches proved inadequate for the demands of this shifting environment, it was believed that students needed to be exposed to a new generation of learning structures and opportunities in which they could acquire mastery of changing workplace proficiencies.

Coterminous with ongoing questions about the educational system's responsiveness to workforce development was the heightened awareness of policymakers that newly enacted and federally-funded charter school legislation might potentially provide a facilitative set of conditions that would stimulate educational innovation. In terms of promoting the ELCS concept, this fortuitous combination of factors appeared to point the way toward "significant new marketplace dynamics in public education," (Public Policy Associates et al., 1999, p. 2). With their increased flexibility, charter schools had the potential to provide a ready laboratory for redefining the parameters of public education. US policymakers enthusiastically endorsed this model of workforce development for a couple of reasons: (a) the design offered considerable au-

tonomy in which to circumvent the traditional bureaucratic structures within the public school system; and (b) it leveraged change that empowered a variety of actors to become directly invested in the bottom-up process of reform. From the outset, the intended outcome of this relationship was to "assemble a learning program to meet today's learning needs and goals for students and stakeholders such as employers" (Public Policy Associates et al., 1998, p. 14).

The precursor to the ELCS was a set of school-based reforms now titled the new vocationalism. Policymakers in the 1980s tried a number of experiments brought about by declining enrollments in the building trades and industrial training programs in manufacturing. Graduates of traditional vocational education programs encountered unaccustomed difficulty finding job placements (Carlson, 1997). Employers, facing the need for a general upgrade in skills and problem solving abilities in the post-Fordist economy, desired workers with higher levels of math and academic literacy instead of narrow trade-specific specializations. The decline in student enrollments was also exacerbated by the intractability of gender-segregated vocational programs that failed to change with the times, and the image problem of vocational schooling as a dumping ground for low-track, low-achieving students. In this latter sense, "the image or representation of vocational education not only kept many students away from vocational programs, but also provided a rationale for closing vocational programs, since policymakers could claim that by eliminating such programs they were promoting higher standards for students" (pp. 47-48).

Business values and enterprise culture are privileged now in this new economic era. Previous educational settlements that served working-class kids under Fordism have been reconfigured and renamed to reflect the perceived needs of industry (Brown, 1987). Schools—long associated with the tenets of a progressive social policy—today receive criticism for their failure to instill good work habits, self-discipline, and attitudes that would make students into good employees (Ball, 1999). Post-Fordist settings are unlike earlier workplaces, requiring employees to possess skills deemed social and emotional, systemic and technological. Shop-floor work is coming under increased control by managerial directives at the same time that it is disappearing, and young people are shifting career trajectories into regendered service work. New cultural forms are emerging out of the conflictive meanings of masculinity within the household and the family. Workers who were once secure under unionized, blue-collar labor now are adrift in what Beck (1992) terms the risk society, with no safety net in place to cushion the fall.

## Old Questions and New Directions

The confluence of charter schools with corporate interests has given rise to unanticipated tensions. Much of this anxiety emanates from the politics of privatization, which has carved out a place in the school reform movement with such alacrity that public schooling now appears as a legiti-

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mate branch of local industry. It hasn't helped that charter schools have been sanctioned to achieve a variety of purposes, because global demands on education have resurrected old questions without necessarily offering new directions. Whether schools should emphasize democratic equality by providing a rich, learner-centered education or treat students as human capital by preparing them to become economically productive workers and consumers is a question that continues to occupy a central place in educational discourse (Hursh, 2000; Noddings, 1995; Rallis, 1995).

The crux of the debate over the defensibility of the ELCS concept revolves around the relative value of different types of knowledge and the nature of the relationship between the individual and the larger social order. This argument draws nourishment from the contradictory imperatives of capitalism and democracy and the ways this conflict has shaped the institution of schooling. In large measure, the deep regularities of schooling that anchor schools in place are an amalgam of the values and beliefs shared by the American people about the appropriate means and ends of schooling (Tyack and Tobin, 1994; Tye, 2000). Embedded in the cultural construction of schooling and attempts to alter patterns of practice are fundamental themes involving the changing nature of schooling in society, disagreements over who should control and have access to education, and how schools should be organized and what they should teach (Reese, 2001; Spring, 2002).

Levin (1987) tells us that "public education stands at the intersection of two legitimate rights" (p. 629): the right of the state to ensure its political continuity and the right of the family to choose the kinds of influences that will shape their children's lives. The challenge posed by the ELCS is situated within the vortex of this policy debate. When the needs of business become the dominant value expressed by families, we risk draining the richness of human possibility from the vision of what schooling can accomplish. When the needs of the state intrude on the prerogative of families to act on their personal conception of the good life, then we risk allowing education to operate in an oppressive manner. A middle way must be sought that doesn't unreasonably limit the ability of the state to provide for the common good or excessively restrain families from acting in accord with their particular needs and ambitions. Because students come from diverse backgrounds, schools are expected to induct students into a marketplace of ideas, values, and knowledge that carries them beyond the intellectually and culturally bounded worlds they already occupy when they enter the classroom (Banks and Banks, 1997; Reese, 1988). Like any public school, an ELCS needs to acknowledge the hierarchical nature of society and build on the varied traditions, histories, and experiences of students so that they have the opportunity to develop a critical understanding "of the operations of power that would enable them to both locate themselves in the world and to intervene in and shape it effectively" (Giroux, 2000, p. 91).

The incursion of neo-liberalism into educational politics, policy, and discourse has permitted educational experiments

such as the ELCS to link skills training to corporate imperatives of building "enterprise culture and entrepreneurial attitudes in direct opposition to liberal humanist values and culture" (Moore and Hickox, 1999, p. 50). But a critical education for work should utilize analytical tools with which to question the relationships between elite power and the quality of working life (Kincheloe, 1999). Students entering the workforce may thus begin to understand frameworks for establishing economic democracy and actions for maintaining principles of social justice and equity. Schools created around the ELCS concept have an ethical responsibility to interrogate these enduring patterns in order to generate cultural norms that are significantly different from those now prevalent in schools (Eisner, 1992). This context is critical to understanding how the ELCS concept introduces new educational possibilities that are consistent with the intellectual and social foundations of a democratic theory of education.

### Method

We analyzed the rise of an employer linked charter school called the Central Education Center (CEC), a local educational alternative 40 miles south of Atlanta in Newnan, Georgia. Policy research in the social sciences is a broad endeavor that involves a variety of activities and approaches. The typical goal of policy research is to provide decision-makers and communities with pragmatic and action oriented recommendations for alleviating fundamental social problems. But in addressing an issue, question, or concern, policy research may also follow a different purpose: the edification of decision-makers and communities. One of the most effective methods for bringing additional knowledge into the decision making process is by identifying and disseminating a range of understandings about a problem.

We employed the policy research method known as focused synthesis (Majcharzak, 1984), which entails the selective review of written materials and existing research findings that are germane to a specific research issue or question. Information sources are used only to the extent that they materially contribute to the quality of the overall review. The wide range of source material relating to values, ideas, attitudes, perceptions, and behavior is one of the principal strengths of this method, especially when it generates a realistic picture that captures the essence of a political or social issue. Our research on the CEC incorporated information from formal and informal sources: research databases, newspaper articles, memoranda from steering committee members, letters of support from government officials, discussions with experts and stakeholders, anecdotal stories, and field notes. Additionally, our research objectives were addressed through semi-structured interviews with CEC administrative and advisory stakeholders who were familiar with the issues surrounding the school. We conducted these interviews over a four-month period in early 2002. Included in the interviews were: (a) two members of the CEC steering committee, one of whom was a curriculum director of the Coweta County school system and the other a performance technologist and educational con-



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sultant; (b) the school's Chief Executive Officer; (c) the director of the Coweta County Chamber of Commerce; (d) the plant manager of a well-known metals extrusion company in the area; (e) an adult literacy specialist; and (f) two employees of the Georgia Department for Technical and Adult Education, one of whom was the commissioner and the other director of special projects.

### The Linkage between Business and the Central Education Center

The CEC opened in August of 2000 with an enrollment of 400 students in grades 10 through 12. Expansion occurred rapidly, and after the first year of operation, it doubled in size. The school offered vocational programming within four occupational clusters: human services, with programs in child care and foods; health and medical, with programs in health occupations and certified nursing assistant; business, marketing and information systems, with programs in graphic arts, marketing and business education; and technology and engineering, with programs in computer repair and networking, construction, metals, and manufacturing. In accordance with Georgia charter school law, parents, educators, and industry representatives sat on the CEC governing board. Of the seventeen-member council, nine seats were assigned to parents; faculty and administration held four (including one from the county high school system and the one from the technical college system); and business representatives four. Of this business group, one seat was designated for small firms with less than 100 employees; one for large firms greater than 100 employees; one for a representative from the Chamber of Commerce; and another from the business community at-large.

A number of stakeholders within the nexus of business-industry-education-community-government surfaced to create the school. Governor Barnes worked closely with the stakeholders during the chartering process and offered a \$7 million incentive grant that matched \$7 million provided by the county in the form of an existing middle-school facility and surrounding acreage. The county sweetened the pot even further by providing \$2 million in a Special Local Option Sales Tax (SPLOST)—a one-cent sales tax increase to be used for capital construction to renovate the facility. Area businesses and industries contributed another \$500,000. Of particular interest in this project was the cross-fertilization of secondary and post-secondary program offerings—called seamless education—that required articulation agreements between the Coweta County Board of Education and the Georgia technical college system. Governor Barnes touted the advantages of fusing together under one roof these hitherto separate educational domains: “If they plan it right, students can graduate from high school on Friday, graduate with a technical college certificate on Saturday, and begin work on Monday in a job that has been waiting for them” (quoted in Robinson, 2001, p. A36). The governor offered four reasons why the CEC was destined to become a model of ex-

emplary learning in the state: (a) it tapped into the resources of Georgia's post-secondary technical college system; (b) it allowed for articulation no matter where students were physically enrolled; (c) it recruited business leaders to participate in the planning of the school; and (d) it utilized Georgia's charter school law to finance a public experiment in the education of children.

The combined endorsements of the governor, county and local business leaders added up to an unusual degree of institutional support that helped the CEC survive the precarious start-up phase that dooms many charter schools. “It was an idea whose time had come,” observed the chief executive officer of the school. “There was zero opposition; everyone was completely on board” (Foster, 2001, p. 70). What distinguishes the ELCS from traditional school-to-work programs is the way business leaders are integrated into curriculum design, developing standards and assessments, making decisions about staffing, and mentoring students:

In giving business partners the chance to actually run the school and decide policy, employer-linked charter schools can allow the businesses to do things they always say they want to do, things that are important in the business culture. This includes hiring the right people, being performance-based, deriving a learning program from the outcomes you want to achieve (versus the other way around), and working year-round. (Public Policy Associates et al., 1998, p. 27)

Members of the steering committee began planning for the school several years before the charter was approved. The process dates back to a study conducted in 1997 that identified area employment concerns and compared these findings to data gathered from the Georgia Department of Labor, area technical colleges, and national sources. Among the major indicators that were identified, job growth was expected to have a significant impact on the delivery of educational services in the region. During the time that the CEC was preparing its charter, a partnership between local government and the private sector issued a report, *Coweta Vision 2020*, which spelled-out the potential pitfalls for the local economy in the not-to-distant future (21st Century Coweta, 1999). The authors determined that the tax-base was weak due to a lack of vital job growth, a factor that contributed to economic sluggishness in the early 1990s. Moreover, county employers and community leaders were troubled by the inadequate preparation of job seekers, about a third of whom lacked a high school diploma. College graduates numbered less than 15 percent. Compounding this low level of educational attainment was a teenage pregnancy rate that ran four points above the state average. The conjunction of economic and social indicators made the impact of these factors more potent than either would have been by itself. Their combined presence was seen as a significant impediment to the creation of a stable and quality workforce in the years ahead (21st Century Coweta, 1999).



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Once Georgia employers realized that rising industry standards would make it harder for educators invested in vocational-technical training to fully identify and chart the impending sea change in career pathways and skills preparation, their interest in public education rose. With economic development around Newnan attracting a new generation of manufacturers, area businesses assumed an increasingly influential role in redefining the educational needs of students attending local schools. Industrial representatives jumped at the opportunity to lend their expertise to redefining learning outcomes within the world of work (Raby, 1995). The founding of the CEC dovetailed nicely with businesses wanting to relocate to Coweta County that were hesitant about labor's access to technical educational facilities. The CEO of the school pointed out that in the past, the first thing a company did was scout around for a trained workforce. But in the new economy, nobody has the workforce able to perform at the requisite skill level, so companies have to shift their priorities. Changing employment patterns dictate that future workers will gain work-based learning through vocational-technical education. The president of the Coweta County Chamber of Commerce explained that corporations not presently located there would look to the CEC as "a training ground to help build their companies."

The CEC quickly became a regular stop on economic development tours by international visitors investigating expansion possibilities in the county. For example, representatives from 20 telecommunications and software firms in Finland on a tour of Newnan's technology parks made a side trip to visit the school (Jackson, 2000). Business partners such as 3M Corporation provided \$107,000 worth of fiber-optic material and labor for the school's 800 computers, and Lab-Volt of New Jersey donated \$126,000 in equipment for the information technology program (Foster, 2001; Skinner, 2001). With impressive speed, the CEC managed to realize much of its initial promise by stitching itself into the economic fabric of the greater Coweta County area. As the school continues to solidify its operations, it appears capable of sustaining an even greater number of profitable partnerships. Its future as an integral factor in the economic revitalization of the region seems assured.

Although vocationally oriented high schools have long been a part of the educational scene, the CEC contends that the new version of applied education it offers represents a discontinuation from past practices. Consequently, the public has a twofold interest in the school. One concern is whether the CEC's status as a charter school enhances the goals of public education or provides a screen behind which private aspirations may be realized. A second concern is whether the school represents an improved model of vocational education or if it is repackaging many of the same stale ideas and restrictive learning opportunities that have long dominated the field.

But beneath the luster of the CEC's impressive accomplishments lies an answered question: For students alienated by an abstract academic curriculum and for whom the

asking price for conforming to mainstream notions of what constitutes a good student is too much to pay, is the CEC achieving its democratic function of reinventing vocational education (Fine, 1991; Willis, 1977)? In the final section of this paper, we consider whether an ELCS such as the CEC is poised to transform the utilitarian nature of vocational education or perpetuate a dual educational system in which some schools prepare students for high status knowledge and jobs while others prepare students for subordinate occupations and social positions (Apple, 1993).

### Reinvention versus Retrenchment

The culture of contemporary schooling is characterized as embracing a dominant economic worldview (Apple, 2001a; Labaree, 1997). Whereas democracy was once cast in largely political terms, its meaning today is migrating toward a definition celebrating the expansion of consumer choice. Bolstered by such dependable imagery as freedom and equality, democracy comes couched in the language of hyper-rationalization and neo-liberal visions of the good life.

Among the political and ideological interests vying for control of American education are those who believe that preparing young people for gainful employment is the paramount purpose of public schooling. Apple notes of such a formulation, "the citizen is seen as a possessive individual, someone who is defined by his or her position in market relations" (Apple, 2001b, p. 724). When the logic of the marketplace is elevated to a position of moral superiority within the educational system, then academic success increasingly gets viewed as just another form of capital accumulation (McLaren, 2003). The more this value gets inscribed into policy, the more it encourages individuals to compete in our schools for the rewards of status, power, and income in ways that are similar to those existing in the job market.

In a society infatuated with success and wealth, this is a troublesome situation. When students are unable to discern how to accrue meaning and stature from the abstractions threaded throughout traditional academic curricula, they will look elsewhere for their future. Given the paucity of good alternatives offered in classrooms in which academic stardom is presented as the preeminent goal, students who don't mesh well with prevailing institutional sensibilities often have no other form of schooling to turn to than vocational programs (Deschenes, Cuban, and Tyack, 2001). This constraint would be less of a problem if vocational programs weren't typically a second-tier track inclined toward the utilitarian functions associated with social efficiency in which students are sorted according to race, ethnicity, social class, gender, and linguistic background.

The observations we conducted in the CEC illustrate this. They are consistent with those made by Chow (2002) in which CEC technical certificate holders exhibited traditional sex-segregation by program. That is, student completers in predominantly male-defined occupations such as computer repair technician, basic machine operator, computer-aided design

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and welding are contrasted with female-defined student completers in the health occupations, including patient-care assistant/technician, dental assisting, and child care. The fact that more females (52%) than males (48%) earned certificates that year is offset by the reality that health and community services areas are less economically rewarding than the information technology areas and the shop-floor trades. In 1984, passage of the Perkins Vocational Education Act paved the way for a system of federally mandated programs administered by states to expand access to job training for girls in nontraditional fields as well as provide schooling for single parents and displaced homemakers. Since then, progress in implementing and replicating these programs has been less than ideal. This failure became more acute with the 1998 reauthorization of the Perkins Act in which gender equity set-asides and federal funds to hire state sex equity coordinators were eliminated (Annexstein, 2001).

Another palpable feature of the CEC was its emphasis on “soft” skills. Steering committee planners relied upon the results of a needs assessment survey that indicated local employers were discontent with the perceived work deficiencies of new hires: tardiness, absences, poor teamwork, unsafe behavior, resentfulness of authority, conflicts with supervisors, cursing, theft, racist and sexist actions, and so forth. Consequently, work ethics were taught in every class in addition to regular academic work, and students were assessed on ten of these traits. The CEC teachers expressed their understanding of student empowerment in terms of an individual’s appropriation of quantifiable outcomes in the acquisition of hard (technical) and soft (attitudes) subject matter. There was scant enthusiasm for pushing past these conventional curricular boundaries.

So how can vocational schools transition from a curriculum molded around specific job skills to a more ecological type of instruction grounded in all dimensions of an industry? Nearly a hundred years ago, Dewey articulated the underlying dilemma facing vocational education. He proposed that correctly instituted, vocational education had the potential to unify the long-standing and artificial split between the work of the hand and the work of the mind. Concerned that urbanization and industrialization (comparable to globalization and today’s knowledge-based society) were instigating momentous shifts in the lives of working people, he envisioned a role for vocational education that rejected the notion of adapting workers to a contemporary industrial regime systematically reorganized in accordance with the hierarchical theories of scientific management expounded by Frederick W. Taylor (1911). Dewey professed no love for this oppressive workplace and the undignified manner in which workers were treated as “tools of their employers [and] appendages of the machines they tended” (Westbrook, 1991, p. 176).

Wrongly instituted, vocational education would serve as a segregative vehicle designed to steer low-income, low-status students away from classrooms in which the level of intellectual activity was presumably beyond their reach. Dewey (1916/1966) saw such a division as “illiberal and

immoral” (p. 260), and condemned it as a “form of class education which would make the schools a more efficient agency for the reproduction of an undemocratic society” (Westbrook, 1991, p. 175). He cautioned against the reification of a bifurcated education system that would “separate training of employees from training for citizenship, training of intelligence and character from training for narrow, industrial efficiency” (Dewey, 1913, p. 102).

From Dewey’s perspective, the enduring value of vocational education resides in the opportunities it provides students for learning through activities situated in everyday commerce, that is, the intellectual exchange and social interactions that occur in the real world. By bringing together the experiences and interests of the child with conventional models of knowledge, the curriculum can be personalized in ways that invite inquiry, exploration, and discovery. The incorporation of vocations into all aspects of the curriculum frees learning from a study of existing social conditions and opens up the problems of the future as a source of knowledge that is fluid and uncertain. Within this approach, students are guided to construct their own meanings based upon the questions they ask of the complexity of events, objects, and people with whom they are brought to interact (Rallis, 1995). When students feel compelled to act on what they have learned, they do so because of a maturing sense of how the work they do establishes them as active participants in the productive and social relations of society.

For employer linked charter schools such as the CEC that endeavor to redefine vocational education, applying these judgments is critical. The concomitant shift in authority of the agencies of production required of this kind of education would make it less likely that workers continued as blind subjects of a fate imposed on them from forces originating outside of their control. Given the degree to which the technologies of capitalist production are part of the warp and woof of American society and culture, this proposition may appear impractical, but it nonetheless suggests a structure for vocational education built around an ideal in which children are educated to become adults capable of sharing in the mutual responsibilities of governance and the collective shaping of society. Political and economic education fashioned along these lines necessitates forsaking the consumerist notion of democracy highlighted in this paper.

We draw attention to the need for a critical perspective because the CEC respondents were understandably effusive about the salutary effect the school had on attracting desirable forms of industry into the county. By bolstering commercial development, the CEC played a strategic role in assisting the county to expand and balance its tax base. The creation of jobs closer to home was considered essential to the county’s long-term economic vitality because many residents commuted outside the county for work. The benefits of these expanded opportunities were passed along to the CEC students by increasing the likelihood that they would be able to find gainful employment with local firms without having to leave the county. A healthy community requires many types

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of resources, and a community cannot thrive without a sound economic base on which citizens can depend.

More weakly articulated by the CEC respondents was a mission in which a democratic learning environment formed the understory of a reconceived vocational education. The development of a critical social intelligence of the kind that Dewey advocated deserves to be operationalized on more than a rhetorical level. Although the CEC respondents weren't oblivious to this need, they seemed complacent about it, as if the urgency to graduate students capable of transitioning smoothly into existing jobs somehow exempted them from assigning this issue a prominent place in the curriculum. The history of vocational education teaches us that schooling for work can be accomplished without questioning the prevailing relations of power and the institutional structures that perpetuate these arrangements. The difference between going to school and becoming educated is enormous, and vocational education shouldn't serve to constrain the options for substantive reform. If vocational education isn't to divert attention away from basic social, political, and economic disparities and provide students with the skills and knowledge needed for full and equal participation in society, then space must be carved out of the school day that deliberately addresses these concerns.

What stood out in our analysis of the CEC was insufficient mindfulness about the residual assumptions about vocationalism that punctuate the lives of high school students such as those enrolled in the CEC. The evidence was less than convincing that the CEC was confronting the tendency of neo-liberal economic policies to calculate the value of education in terms of its contribution to the economy and for workforce development to encroach upon other educational purposes (Hursh, 2000). The CEO of the school emphasized the teaching of job-ready skills so that graduates would be serious contenders in the competitive environment of business: "We're here to ensure that there's a viable 21<sup>st</sup> century work force for this community.... We're not about getting people to college or getting people educated in English, science and math ... We teach academic classes here, but it's a little bit different" (Gutierrez, 2004). Georgia officials are so impressed with this objective that they have asked the CEC to replicate its model by creating two charters in neighboring counties. State utilization of a public charter school as an engine of economic development can be more readily justified if there is commensurate interest on the part of employer stakeholders to examine the disparate social, political, and civic contexts of students' lives and those of the communities in which they live. Corporate interests should not unduly focus on the conversion of life into property because such an education is neither the product of a free market nor an invisible hand. In fact, it hints of manipulation when it crowds out the broad elements of an empowering education that all students deserve. Vocational education will reinstate the constrictions of the past if it fails to provide students with no greater capacity than strategic advantages in the labor market.

Advocates of a corporate model of schooling have experienced a large degree of success in insinuating their ideas about school reform into federal and state policies. But the decentralization of educational governance and the mechanisms of corporate influence will not be kind to public schooling if they are manifested in a push for profit and control while undercutting other educational purposes. The interests of business and the interests of citizens are not necessarily congruent when it comes to sharing a common vision of the kind of human beings children should become (Packer and Tappan, 2001). When democratic communities cede control of their schools to proprietary interests and social efficiency goals, teachers are less able to influence their work and students less able to shape their futures (Engel, 2000). Charter schools—especially employer linked charter schools—can actively choose to challenge the socioeconomic relations of post-Fordist production or legitimate them. What the CEC's ultimate role will be in this turbulent market environment remains to be seen. The early indications we observed in the CEC suggest that the academic press being shaped by the forces of globalization will exhort vocational education to subordinate schooling to its narrower economic functions.

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# *School Choice: Structured through Markets and Morality*

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## ***Abstract***

*School choice is increasingly promulgated as a promising education reform policy for failing urban schools, but no solid evidence has yet shown the promise fulfilled. The authors argue that choice based on market theory without a moral center is insufficient. Without a moral foundation, such market-driven choice programs may actually disadvantage some children further. A market approach, absent a moral perspective, fails to encompass all the necessary dimensions for an educational system that can fulfill the traditional commitment to the common good and effectively serve all urban children, their families, and society. Six moral principles are offered along with examples of reform initiatives that may begin to evidence a morally-centered market viewpoint.*

School choice is the current educational reform mantra, especially for conservative critics of public education. Competition putatively will improve educational quality, drive down educational costs, and ultimately create a more dynamic educational system. Whether or not the choice theory holds is questionable. Although experiments in market competition are increasing, no clear evidence exists to show that market-driven systems result in enhanced student achievement. The critical question is: Does choice result in more educationally advantageous approaches for America's most vulnerable students—the students who are poor, of color, and reside in urban environments? This question looms large over educational policymakers because school choice schemes are an increasingly popular strategy for urban school reform; choice schemes are almost nonexistent in suburban and rural areas. School choice is in essence an issue of urban schools.

Many of the historic public school structures created for K-12 students have failed to deliver on implicit promises (Tyack and Cuban, 1995), necessitating strong calls for school reform. That failure is most pronounced in America's urban secondary schools. The comprehensive secondary school has served America's rich and poor for decades. Unfortunately, a one-size-fits-all school has not accommodated a significant segment of America's minority and low income population who are disproportionately enrolled in inner city (and typically high poverty and highly diverse) schools. For example, within the 61 largest urban school systems in this country, almost 77% of the students in 2001-2002 were African American, Hispanic, or other students of color; this proportion compares to about 38% in all schools across the country (Council of Great City Schools, 2004). Of students in these largest urban systems, 63% were eligible for free lunch subsidy in 2001-2002, compared to about 40% of students across the country (Council of Great City Schools, 2004). And, African-American, Latino, and Native American students dropped out of schools in absurdly large numbers (in excess of 50 percent in many urban environments). Even for white students in affluent areas the gradu-

ation rates are often distressingly low. And, while it is true that many students drop out and then secure a GED, it is equally true that serious questions arise as to whether a GED equates to a traditional diploma.

Enter Friedman and a myriad of neoconservative choice advocates. For Friedman and other market theorists, parent choice is the golden coin of the educational realm. Ostensibly, they do not oppose public schools; rather, they argue for a wide variety of for-profit, charter, parochial and government schools. Some choice advocates agree that the competition may initially create unevenness in quality, but over time those in poor urban environments will benefit from what those with affluence have demanded—better schools. Friedman captures the idea through an analog:

Throughout history, hasn't the relationship been just the other way around [with affluent families selecting the best schools for their children and poor families relegated to poor schools]? When automobiles first came out, they were very expensive. Only the rich could afford them. What happens over time, the well-to-do provide, as it were, the experimental funds to develop an industry. Automobiles are developed. The well-to-do buy them, and that provides the basis for a small industry. The industry grows, it develops better techniques, it becomes cheaper, and now almost everybody has an automobile. Surely, there's much less difference in the stratification of people buying automobiles now than there was, let's say, a hundred years ago, when the automobile industry was just getting started. Again, televisions were developed in the 1930s. They were very expensive; only the rich bought them. But now everybody has a television. And in general, over history, every improvement has benefited mostly low-income people. (cited in Kane, 2003, p. 58)

The public school was established not as a consumer good or a technological advancement such as the automobile, but historically has served a public purpose: to prepare

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effective citizens and, therefore, to enhance and stabilize the “common good.” Whether or not the automobile argument for market choice makes sense, Friedman’s theory has successfully captured the attention of those looking for solutions to the abject failure of so many urban schools to educate far too many students.

A focus on school choice is a focus on urban schools. School choice is not a significant issue in suburban or rural schools. Friedman’s arguments achieved persuasive power because many in the public schools who advocate against choice have not addressed the pronounced and serious problems confronting urban schools (i.e., high dropout rates and unacceptable racial achievement gaps in standardized test scores). Market advocates are seemingly winning the ideological battle for control of educational policymaking. Although 48% of 89 state legislators in six states expressed preferences for 10 reforms *other* than vouchers (such as enhanced teacher preparation and better early childhood education), they still tended to accept pro-market arguments for school reform in urban areas (Laitsch, 2002). Public schools, argue the critics, have not served urban families well. Market orientations have become the political and, for some, the practical solution.

Our contention is simple: Whatever reform policy is embraced to address the urban educational crisis must adhere to certain moral principles. First, it must do no harm to the educational opportunities available to students and, second, it must empower all within the educational system to achieve more fully to their personal potential, or in Dewey’s terms, “to live life to the fullest” (Cremin, 1961, p.123). Such principles necessarily constitute the moral foundation of schools paid for by the public to serve the common good.

In the next section, we present a discussion of the reality of the need for urban school reform and a discussion of the increased dominance of market theories in the reform effort. We then argue for the need for moral perspectives in relationship to embracing school choice program reforms. And, finally, specific recommendations for school choice are proffered that emphasize moral foundations as the core of any market theory for public schools.

### Urban Schools and the Emergence of Market Approaches

Public education is perceived by many conservative critics as the domain of the public school monopoly; that monopoly, the critics contend, is fraught with a variety of common evils: inefficiency, waste, and a lack of teacher accountability.

The public schools have had opportunities to “heal themselves,” especially since the issuance of the *A Nation at Risk* report in 1983. The Risk report argued for internal reforms (tougher coursework and higher, more flexible teachers’ salaries); the conservative reformers are demanding external form: choice. Some educators used the report as a vehicle

to argue for more resources and lower class sizes. Conservative critics are using the current “crisis” to argue for choice.

Choice is not a new concept. Adam Smith argued against monopolies as a mechanism for providing service; Milton and Rose Friedman (1980) “modernized” Smith’s concept suggesting that market forces could and should influence both school efficiency and teacher effectiveness. Indeed, the Friedmans argued for a voucher plan that “would give parents at all income levels freedom to choose the schools their children attend” (p.188).

Market advocates argue that by creating competition and giving parents options, strong schools will thrive and weak schools will be forced to change or close. Choice proponents argue that the way to solve the (urban) school crisis is to use competition to weed out weak and ineffective schools. The same students who have historically had a disproportionate share of unqualified teachers are now going to be a part of a reform experiment to see if competition can produce better schools with more effective teachers.

Market theorists were so successful that in 2002 the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) federal legislation was passed that proffered “public school choice” as a policy mandate. Specifically, schools that failed to achieve specified adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals must (after two years) provide parents with the option to transfer their children to higher performing public or charter schools, with priority status offered to the lowest achieving, low income students. NCLB made real what previously had been a practical possibility in just selected communities. It also opened the door to a wide variety of choice options that would challenge the “hold” of public schools on public education.

Choice advocates place the emphasis on the private good and the right of each parent to exercise choice. According to Halchin (1999), “As a market-based education system, charter schools present education as a consumer good, parents as consumers and students as commodities. The fragmentation of the school system, the weakening of the common school ethos, and explicit messages encouraging parents to shop around, all challenge views of education as a public good” (p.24). The immediate winners and losers of this shift from public to private good are unclear. Friedman argued that it would be the most privileged who benefited first (with opportunity trickle down to the poor). The long-term consequences of choice for society are potentially significant. That is, questions arise as to whether policies on school choice potentially place urban school communities at greater risk by diminishing the capacity of urban schools to serve the least advantaged students (both immediately and in the long-term) and by undermining the morale of urban teachers (Fiske and Ladd, 2000; Sawhill and Smith, 2000). That is, does choice mitigate a collective community demand to improve the schools for the “adversely selected” by placing too much emphasis on what fulfills personal needs?

Choice critics assert that whether high quality “choice” schools will be available (the supply side) for the urban poor

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cannot be assured through current reforms because the resources (that is, the requisite number of classroom seats) may not be available to support the exercise of choice. Further, they question whether the parents with access to choice programs possess the requisite social, emotional and intellectual resources to make good education choices (Robenstine, 2001). Elmore and Fuller (1996) argue:

...since parents and students with the least social capital seem also to be the ones who are least likely to engage in active choice, there are few demand-side incentives in choice programs for educators to engage in the deliberate design of programs that appeal to, and work well for, the most disadvantaged students. So it seems unlikely that choice, by itself, will stimulate creativity and improvement in the development of new, more effective educational programs. The problem seems to lie in the fact that the designers of choice programs have focused most of their attention, in all but a few cases, on demand-side issues, such as who gets to choose and how choices will be coordinated, rather than on crucial supply-side details, such as how schools and classroom actually differ. (p.197)

Critics of choice assert that the market solution falls short in producing advantages to those most disadvantaged (that is, those without adequate parental advocates). Some evidence to support this claim may be emerging in Great Britain. After two new laws were enacted in the late 1990s allowing parent choice, middle class Catholic parents exercised choice motivated only by *their* private interests in what was good for *their* children (Grace, 2002). Economists such as Hoxby (2001) argue that the market will engender viable schooling alternatives and enhanced teacher quality. The problem is whether more universal opportunity for all students will emerge. For example, there is little or no long-term evidence to suggest that market theory will help *all* schools perform more effectively, as is evidenced by what has occurred in both New Zealand (Fiske and Ladd, 2000) and Chile (Keller, 2001). Just as some Eastern European countries may lack sufficient capital to use capitalistic principles to ground their economies, so, too, some schools may be sufficiently different and insufficiently resourced as service providers that market approaches may (within the context of current resource allocations) be an inappropriate mechanism for enhancing quality on a broad community-wide scale.

That market theories have encompassed or are capable of encompassing a strong moral dimension is our concern. Real free markets rarely exist; market capitalism in which all the profits *and* all the costs are taken into consideration are rare. Market advocates fail to factor in their formulas all the “costs” of the consequences of choice for those most in need of public advocates. As long as schooling is valued for all children, the costs of educating all children are costs the public must bear. The financial costs of educating both those who opt out of traditional public schools (by exercising

choice) and those who are left behind in those schools (because they are unwilling or unable to exercise choice) must be taken into account. Further, those left behind will likely ratchet up huge costs as it’s likely they will be left in most dire and desperate circumstances and with evidence of the greatest personal need.

Thus far, there is little evidence that competitive market theories include all relevant stakeholders and, therefore, sufficiently benefit all educational consumers. Despite Friedman’s trickle down dream, evidence indicates that markets frequently do not benefit all consumers. Markets have always enhanced the lives of some but, concomitantly, appear to be incapable of enhancing the lives of all. So far, economic schemes are silent on ways to adequately support a high quality education for both those exercising choice and those left behind. In any choice scheme, market theories must be built that ensure benefits for all, which is, admittedly, an enormous, perhaps impossible, challenge that heretofore has not been realized, creating a certain moral void.

An additional consequence of the market approach is the wide spectrum of options created to serve children and families. Not all choice options may further the common good (i.e., prepare students to be full members in a free and equal democracy) because some choice options may be either intentionally or unintentionally exclusionary (e.g., an all-girls or all-boys school). Assuring each child an education for democratic citizenship is a longstanding and fundamental moral good. This moral good, this right of all children to a quality education, is built into the heritage of public schooling (Guttman, 2003). Those creating new school paradigms extol the virtues of the learning communities they are creating and the innovative ways of socializing children (Fuller, 2000), but some options fail to assure tolerance and equity, and to sustain the traditional values that schools historically have held. For example, some faith-based schools might restrict freedoms for groups such as gays and lesbians rather than guarantee unrestricted democratic liberty.

Additionally, if market choices expand too rapidly, traditional public schools may be weakened to the point that the government cannot guarantee space and opportunity for each child, especially if and when some choice schools fail. Such a governmental “quality” guarantee is essential within a compulsory educational system and that guarantee may be particularly difficult to achieve in smaller cities where resource options are more limited.

Many who oppose choice as a false and empty solution to failing urban schools call for massive investments in existing public schools. Their bottom line is that *all* children must have access to high performing schools with excellent teachers and that all students need options if choice schools fail (Fiske and Ladd, 2000). Unfortunately, one of the emerging NCLB problems appears to be that too few high-quality schools are available and proximate for students in urban



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areas. Brownstein (2003) writes: “given the choice between the low performing school in their own neighborhood and the mediocre school ten miles away, [urban] parents may stick to the path of least resistance [and choose low performing schools]” (p.48).

Moral concerns are naturally raised by school choice because parent choice, believed by some to bolster the power of the most disenfranchised families, actually may situate families and students in an even more vulnerable and risky status. Their status as “choosers” means that the quality of their children’s education in urban environments is not assured as it is in more privileged communities. “Choice” is offered disproportionately to those most disadvantaged and those least well served by traditional public schools. As a result, charter schools, one manifestation of the reform efforts, are an option for students in urban but not suburban schools (Finnigan, et al., 2004). Privileged parents can comfortably avoid the “advantages” of the market because historically, more likely than not, they have been served by effective schools and certified teachers. The elite and the middle class have had less risky circumstances and they have had the resources to choose housing in areas that demand and assure high quality schools.

The reality is that charter schools, while smaller in enrollment, employ fewer certified teachers than do traditional public schools—a 79% to 92% disadvantage (Finnigan et al., 2004) and were less likely than traditional public schools to meet state standards (Finnigan, 2004). There is also heated debate regarding whether charter schools serve, proportionally, students who represent the socioeconomic diversity of a community. Critics of charters argue that where charters “fare well” (e.g., Colorado) is the result of having a disproportionately lower number of poor children.

A universal program of school competition is based on a premise of winners and losers and, ultimately, of losers being forced out of business. Yet those schools and students most in need may be the “losers” if market approaches are implemented on a widespread basis because an advocacy system for the education of all children will be diminished as the personal preferences of selected parents emerge and the collective voice of the community is mitigated. Wells (1996) conceptually plays with this idea:

What will happen to these [high poverty] children in an educational free market predicated on the existence of both winners and losers? Who will advocate for them? Who will respond to their sense of injustice or their need for the security and cultural familiarity of a neighborhood school? These are important policy questions. In a truly deregulated system there is no guarantee and no safety net for these students. (p.48)

Though the NCLB legislation is still in its infancy, there are early signs that it is not achieving its goals. Although the legislation was intended to widen opportunities and fuel competitive pressures to force improvements in public

schools, some evidence exists that the law is not fully achieving intended effects. Brownstein (2003) observes:

It’s not only in the largest cities where the [NCLB] law has fizzled. In Cleveland, where 15,000 students in 21 schools were eligible, just 36 children requested transfers in the fall semester—and, of those, nine eventually returned to their original schools. In Boston, where students in 65 schools were eligible, apparently no students have used the new law’s provisions to change schools. Likewise, no students have moved in Dayton, Ohio, though 10 of the district’s 25 schools were on the state’s list of failing schools. In Louisville, Kentucky, 2,900 kids in the Jefferson County Public Schools were eligible to transfer. Only 180 have moved. (p.42-43)

It is because of the “resistance” described by Brownstein that many neoconservatives are now arguing for the *voucher* option. Vouchers are an outgrowth of the perceived failure of public school choice (i.e., there are an insufficient number of quality public schools).

Undoubtedly, *public* and *private* school choice options are going to become an educational reality. The salient question is whether choice will be able to fulfill the moral obligation to provide quality schooling to America’s K-12 student population. Or will choice further engender social and economic segregation and, as a result, mitigate the likelihood of comprehensive moral solutions?

### School Choice: A Moral Obligation

In this section, we attempt to lay out six moral principles that should ground school governance. Clearly, the debate regarding school choice has been heated and ideological. Two perspectives have gained visibility. Conservative critics who advocate choice view the education establishment as a protectionist monopoly, one seemingly willing to tolerate mediocrity in order to preserve the status quo. Educators dedicated to public schools view choice as a threat, one that is willing to sacrifice the educational success of some children in order to achieve ideological goals.

Our intention is not to suggest that either perspective is the best or right or most appropriate for children because we already know the current system has failed far too many young people and the choice system has still not demonstrated that it will succeed. Our principles are designed to attempt a way of thinking about markets based on the moral foundation that is the obligation of public education in this country, a profession of moral actors (Soder, 1990).

Principle 1: *The policies and practices put into place must be ones that create opportunities for all students to succeed without engendering, intentionally or unintentionally, the circumstances for some students to fail.* Reformers must aspire to a zero tolerance program for structures that exist as opportunities for unintentional failure. Some stu-



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dents do choose intentionally to fail. It is regrettable but true. However, no system of education should be created that encourages such a choice. The current traditional system has fostered such choices for far too many students. And competition commonly operates within a framework of winners and losers. Plans must be designed in such a way that they preclude the kinds of loopholes that leave some children vulnerable, leave some children behind. For instance, not all educators in urban schools have effectively interacted with parents and adult family members of children they serve. Without adequate information and access, these parents and adult family members can find themselves ill-prepared to make appropriate choices for their children (Ferrero, 2003). These are the children that many choice programs do, indeed, leave behind, a consequence unacceptable in a choice program that integrates markets with a strong moral dimension. They are also the students who have been left behind in traditional educational structures. New structures must “mend” the broken information and communication bridges between families, communities, and schools. Families cannot make good choices absent good information about their children and about their schools (Ferrero, 2003).

Principle 2: *The choice programs that emerge must expand beyond secular and religiously based schools.* All schools in a choice program supported by public money must practice nondiscrimination and commit to ethnic, gender, religious, ability (both physical and cognitive) and racial equity. “Choice markets” that include schools where equality, tolerance, and nondiscrimination are not fundamental values are flawed and will create pernicious long-term consequences for American society. Some sectarian schools discriminate on the basis of religion, for example. This reality is contrary to a central moral principle: schools that leave no child behind must ensure equity and militate against segregative practices.

Principle 3: *The market policies on choice (and/or any governance structure instituted as a result of choice schemes) must be structured in a way that ensures high quality system-wide educational opportunities with no schools receiving, for whatever reasons, disproportional numbers of students of high poverty* (see Van Lier, 2004a). The idea is not new. Dewey’s writings consistently argue for such an approach; schools (within any community) must represent for each child an essential guarantee. In Goodlad’s terms, the “schools represent the only means to comply with the law [regarding compulsory education]” (p.73) and because of that fact any policy must foster more universal access, especially for students who do not have advocates, to place, even unintentionally, overwhelming numbers of “adversely affected” students in specific schools.

Principle 4: *The “right” to an education in any choice program is a right exercised by parents on behalf of their children.* Advocates of “parental choice” rely heavily on the word “parent.” These advocates frequently decry the fact that parents who opt to send their children to private schools are (unfairly) charged double for their children’s

education: first by their school taxes and, second, by the private school tuition (see discussion in Macedo, 2003). Education “adequate for a first-class (free and equal) citizenship” is a child’s right in this country (Gutmann, 2003) but it is a right exercised by parents.

Parents have no constitutional guarantee to select a school of choice for their child to be paid for by taxpayers. Hence, because of the disestablishment clause of the U.S. Constitution, parents who select private religious schools for their children are not guaranteed public financial support (Gutmann, 2003).

From a moral perspective, some argue that parental power with respect to their children’s potential should not be unlimited in a market milieu. Swift (2004) differentiates between “unfair inequality” in the life chances of students vs. “simple inequality” in life chances. School governance policies necessarily will tolerate simple inequality, unfairness when it is the result of legitimate parent “partiality,” he claims and if the “unfairness does no harm to the worst-off” (p. 326). Admitting that there is real inequality in status due to the unequal family backgrounds among children (i.e., some more privileged toward formal education success than others), he argues, from principle, that this is “simple inequality.” In a market sense, he identifies an “unfair inequality,” as circumstances where “parents are allowed differentially to invest in their children’s potential-development...unfair if some children have their potential developed more than others just because of their parents’ preferences and/or capacity to act on those preferences.” (p. 326). To assure justice, schools (and communities) must, then, act *in loco parentis* to preclude the population of students they serve from sliding into “unfair inequality” environments. This moral argument is grounded in the nexus between the child’s right to an education and the parents’ economic power is relevant to the next principle as well.

Principle 5: *Teachers and schools must ensure that all students, regardless of their financial wealth or personal resources, receive equal access to quality schools.* School funding, community tax base, and family wealth all need to be taken into consideration as sources of student support. If students are forced to attend school to ensure the public good, schools and teachers must treat all students of every social class fairly and equitably in order to assure the students’ good.

It is somewhat ironic that the market forces that allure reformers are, in some sense, the same forces that explain the disintegration of the urban schools reformers who are ostensibly trying to make better. A shrinking tax base within large urban inner cities resulted from dramatic outsourcing of jobs to the outer cities, the suburbs, and then off shore. The move from a manufacturing to an information economy upended the economic base of urban areas. In addition, corporate productivity is enhanced through improved efficiency, including lower labor costs (i.e., job losses). For instance, manufacturing jobs are almost nonexistent and other job opportunities that historically supported the jobs of urban

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families and urban schools are gone. Corporate globalization has changed the labor force dynamics throughout the country, most dramatically in urban areas. Schools supported by those tax dollars are increasingly vulnerable, particularly when schools compete with other state services for diminishing state funding as states attempt to make up for lower federal funding for all programs. According to Anyon (1997):

Corporate profits flow to other countries because such practices go unchallenged. We have been in a long period of social quiescence. There has not, in recent years, been sufficient will to challenge federal and state policies that maximize private wealth while minimizing the public good. (p. 185)

This principle, then, obligates any choice scheme to be one in which financial costs to urban schools will be no greater than the financial benefits the choice program will reap for those same schools.

Principle 6: *The moral foundation of a market scheme is related to the role of teachers and administrators:* A choice program must strengthen the professionalization of teaching as well as bolster its moral foundation. Teaching is a moral act. Teachers in traditional schools are held to clear standards of professional conduct. When teachers assume roles in the marketplace, it is imperative that they behave equally professional and ethical. Some argue that choice might engender teacher deprofessionalization because of the rapid turnover of teachers in choice environments. If true, what costs redound to students in particular and education in general because of choice reforms where the emphasis is somewhat singularly on student achievement as opposed to more generally on student success? Soder (1990) writes:

Compulsory schooling, then, carries with it immense moral obligations and provides a legitimate basis for restructuring teacher professionalization rhetoric...it is precisely because children are compelled [to attend school] and children are defenseless and have low status that teaching has moral obligations and moral praiseworthiness. (p.74)

When schools compete for students, teachers are rewarded for increased enrollments (and those enrollments result from student achievements). Teachers' success is measured by the extent to which they can account for what might be a record of higher test scores (what the market values) at the expense of equally substantive dimensions of the common good, for instance, providing equitable access to learning to poor and minority students, improving the quality of life in inner city neighborhoods devastated by poverty, and enhancing the job skills of future workers. These measures, while beneficial to the common good, may be devalued in a choice market because the emerging choice environment may be "value-added" oriented through a narrow measure of student test scores.

The value-added concept ensures that some structures, some systems, and some teachers function better than others. High performers in market driven schools are those who achieve a defined goal: high test scores. And the cen-

tral player in fostering that achievement is the teacher. Those who embrace the market orientation are not concerned with the credentials of the teacher; they are concerned with the "outputs" produced by that teacher: student achievement (Kanstoroom and Finn, 1999). Outputs such as test scores are not readily or even reliably assessed, however. Data need to be collected over several years before conclusions can be reached about a school's success and even informed supporters of value-added approaches argue for cautions around how test scores are used (Promise and Peril of Using Value-Added Modeling, 2004). While market systems surely will allow some schools to flourish with test score increases, others will fail and without some type of centralized oversight the interests of the students will not be protected.

### Policy Recommendations

Two ideas will be proffered regarding how educators should respond to the current ideological tug-of-war regarding choice. First, *controlled* choice should become a policy option. Controlled choice is not a new concept. Al Shanker argued for a form of controlled choice years ago, especially if teachers played a central role (Chubb, 2003). Shanker envisioned charter schools as a form of controlled choice, and they still represent an option. But, clearly some critical questions have surfaced relative to the overall effectiveness of charters and to whether charters are educating the same "mix" of students evidenced in the larger communities within which they are located. Controlled choice occurs when communities work together to identify schools (public or private) that meet students' needs and transcend traditional political and even geographic boundaries. Controlled choice is important because markets are not perfect (Chubb, 2003). Van Lier (2004) describes what it might look like for Cuyahoga County (Cleveland, Ohio):

At least some outer-ring suburban parents might be willing to send their children to areas of Cleveland such as University Circle. There, a magnet school could draw on resources at Case Western Reserve University, University Hospitals and The Cleveland Clinic, says Regano. (Cleveland School of the Arts, a public magnet school adjacent to University Circle, already enrolls suburban students.) (p.7)

Clearly this type of controlled choice creates complications but it also fosters real opportunities. First, it requires schools and school districts to work together to identify better educational options and, second, it necessitates the development of more unique and innovative curricula which are more likely to be appropriate to the unique learning needs of urban students. Urban students are rejecting some of the extant systemic reform educational structures. And, competition (and choice) has still not demonstrated that innovation will result from enhanced choice. That is bad news for students of need in high poverty contexts. Controlled choice, especially when it is based on more innovative cooperative

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structures, may actually engender the innovation that students need because adults will be working together to address a need rather than competing against one another to achieve a political or goal.

The Dayton Early College Academy (Dayton, Ohio) is an example of controlled choice. It represents a cooperative partnership between very different entities (a public school and private university) and it illustrates an entirely new curriculum model for how to reach urban students, which requires yet another form of cooperation between a local and a state educational agency. The school is part of the public system even though it operates outside some of the district's union agreements, which illustrate another form of cooperation. In the DECA case, cooperation brings together educational reformers with traditional educational leaders.

Second, school districts should begin to evolve more loosely coupled administrative structures to ensure that all schools in a school district (regardless of type) are under a common umbrella of administrative oversight and operate within certain educational parameters.

Cincinnati (Ohio) was one of the first communities to experiment with the "umbrella" or "portfolio of schools" concept. All schools (charter and traditional public) were a part of the Cincinnati system, though some were more directly controlled by the school district than others. The key was that the administrators for the district maintained some involvement over all schools so that the students were not adversely affected when and if a school were to fail.

The "portfolio of schools" approach places all schools, regardless of type, under some type of community administrative structure. That structure focuses on ensuring the viability of each school using various forms of accountability data. Each school may have its own independent board that reports annually on student performance, especially as student tests scores are compared to those of students in demographically similar situations. Such community boards would not function without managing at least some anticipated tension between the promises of choice (fewer bureaucratic constraints on instructional innovation) and the realities of accountability (bureaucratically established standards of success) (Cohen-Vogel, 2003).

The umbrella administrative unit is essential because market force approaches in education work under a spurious assumption that parents are going to make good choices about their children's educational opportunities. For some children and some families the assumption is valid, but for far too many urban children it is, quite simply, not true. Some children in urban environments have absolutely no (or at least very limited) adult oversight. Those children need someone or some "body" to act as an advocate for their needs. That body needs to ensure that adequate performance data for all schools are available and that parents have adequate access to such data and that fair admissions processes are in place for all schools to ensure that the segregation of students by race or gender does not occur.

The umbrella approach is also imperative because of the limited (human and financial) resources available in most communities. Without an umbrella structure, a variety of potential providers (e.g., charters, for profits) compete for extant resources to help with the support of their individual schools. Such competition focuses the energy of adults in opposition rather than having those energies working together for the benefit of all students.

Umbrella structures are also important as a mechanism to ensure that well-designed educational models within a community evolve. Uncontrolled choice is potentially just as problematic (and perhaps more so) than allowing current dysfunctional structures to continue. A Brookings Institution publication explains the rationale for community oversight best:

Choice programs will not be implemented easily or even cheaply. The surest way to help guarantee their successes will be conscious, well-thought-out strategies drawing on the best thinking of the worlds of government and philanthropy. And perhaps the surest way to encourage their failure is to implement choice programs quickly, carelessly, and cheaply, optimistic that at some point things will all work out for the best (School Choice, 2004, p. 36).

A moral educational system is one where the focus is on the students, with adults creating structures to ensure that students in failing schools are not hopelessly on their own when problems occur or not within structures where adults are in a zero sum game for resources with some students being adversely affected because "their" adult advocates cannot compete successfully for educational advantages. The community governing unit exists as a proxy parent that ensures all students have advocates if and when some schools fail. A market theory of choice within which are embedded strong moral constraints is one within which all urban children will be protected from policies or practices that limit their full social and intellectual development.

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## Book Review

# School Choice Trade Offs

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School choice... are the trade-offs worth it? Godwin and Kemerer believe so, and they align their views with John Dewey in that “What the best and wisest parent wants for his child, that must be what the community wants for all of its children” (cited in Gorwin & Kemerer, p. 248). They refer to the work of Amy Stuart Wells and Robert Bulman who suggest that due to the influence of “habitus” and “cultural capital,” some parents will remain non-choosers. Additionally, outcomes of scholarships offered by the San Antonio’s Children’s Educational Opportunity (CEO) program reveal that those who do choose will most likely will be high SES families.

Godwin and Kemerer present a series of contrasting views on the efficacy of choice as it relates to political ideology, student achievement, constitutionality, and free-market competition. They contrast the views of political scientists John Chubb and Terry Moe, proponents of the use of publicly funded vouchers for private schools, with Richard Elmore and Bruce Fuller, who believe that choice will only “exacerbate existing student segregation by race, social class, and cultural background” (p. 24).

The authors acknowledge that choice does skim “better students from neighborhood schools.” (p. 32), and they portray private schools as more effective with regard to autonomy and teacher expectations. Yet, they admit to not having enough reliable data to determine the impact of choice on academic achievement. Causal factors are difficult to attribute as school choice parents tend to have higher educational expectations for their children. According to University of Wisconsin professor John Witte, Catholic schools may admit “better students” (p. 56).

Despite conflicting evidence that suggests students in choice schools outperform students in attendance zone schools, the authors conclude that learning outcomes for students who attend choice schools are greater even though they admit they have only one empirical study as evidence—their own analysis of the San Antonio choice program. Additionally, they acknowledge that “there are almost no data on what happens to the students whom choosers leave behind” (p. 64).

Carolyn Hoxby proposes that competition augments public school performance. Despite Godwin and Kemerer’s acknowledged limitations of her study, they conclude that “competition and decentralization improve learning outcomes” (p. 54). They similarly discount what they view as

statistically flawed, the findings of political scientists Kevin Smith and Ken Meir who found a negative correlation between private school enrollment and public school performance.

Godwin and Kemerer depict the evolution of liberal ideology from the work of John Locke, John Stuart Mill, John Dewey, Amy Gutmann, John Rawls, and William Galston. They present a cursory view of court opinions that support the state’s as well as the parents’ right to choose for their children. Those decisions include such pivotal cases as *Brown v. Board of Education* (desegregation), *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (busing), and *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (Equal Protection Clause). Their treatment of choice from the perspective of parental rights and the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the U. S. Constitution’s Establishment Clause as exemplified in the *Milwaukee Parental Choice Program* and the *Cleveland Scholarship Program* court decisions is compelling. Key factors in these decisions appear to be language in each state’s constitutions, the political proclivity of judges, and the extent to which funneled moneys are channeled and thus insulated from direct deposit into the coffers of religious schools.

The authors suggest that vouchers and the free market system will provide the necessary incentive to motivate public schools to levels of higher student achievement particularly in providing for special needs children. However, their position appears to be incongruent with their statement that “If private schools must abide by the same regulations concerning curriculum, pedagogy, transportation, and hiring that confront current public schools, then vouchers are unlikely to improve efficiency” (p.184). Henry Levin, educational economist at Columbia University’s Teachers College, purports that many private schools receive additional moneys through church subsidies rendering such comparisons inappropriate. The authors admit that “The jury remains out concerning whether choice, particularly choice that includes vouchers, can improve educational efficiency” (p. 188).

Godwin and Kemerer propose that “choice policies validate neither the nightmare of choice critics nor the dreams of choice proponents” (p.64), and that it is parent involvement that will have the greatest impact on student learning. They present a comprehensive plan for expanding school choice that provides for scholarships, accommodations for low-income children and special needs children, guidelines for school size and employment of teachers, and exemptions from state regulatory measures for both state and private scholarship schools.

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Godwin, R. K., & Kemerer, F. R. (2002). *School choice tradeoffs*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

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A major premise of the book appears to be that public choice schools should resemble private schools, and private schools are necessarily better – a case that is presented with often seemingly weak and frequently debatable evidence. The content of the book is often insufficient to support broad claims and endorsements. Likewise, a thorough, critical, and informed reading reveals more questions than answers. If we are to bridge the gap in learning that socio-economic status seems to create, how will we attract and recruit those parents whose current uninformed status prevents them from fully availing themselves of the resources currently available to them in attendance zone schools? What of the growing number of transient students who move several times during a school year from district-to-district and from state-to-state and whose vouchers, if they have them, cannot follow them? How do we propose that competition in the free market will force public schools to ante up and produce better students when, by the authors' own testimony, if choice schools must operate under the same shackles as the public schools currently do, then they will not be successful? And what about the political rhetoric on vouchers and choice that promises parents opportunities for their children to attend private school, but does not fully inform them that not all or

perhaps any of the schools that they select will elect to be subjected to government accountability?

This reviewer's experience with private schools from both a consumer and a service perspective suggests that the cost of social entry into private school culture can far exceed the tuition dollars. Parents' inability to meet those additional costs will increase segregation along socio-economic lines. Findings from the author's own review of the San Antonio study confirm that some students returned to neighborhood school as they experienced difficulties assimilating into private school culture.

The book will inspire a stimulating discussion on the need, feasibility, and efficacy of school choice. Certainly educators, politicians, and other constituents who have a vested interest in supporting the cause of a literate and well-informed public will find meaning in its content. But the reader should be cautious not to be seduced into believing there are comfortable answers for complicated questions. The book is clearly written to promote an agenda of choice, and choice brings with it a complex set of issues, processes, and challenges that may ultimately have to be resolved in the state courts.

## *Call for Reviewers*

### *Mid-Western Educational Researcher*

The Mid-Western Educational Researcher is a scholarly journal that publishes research-based articles addressing a full range of educational issues. The journal also publishes literature reviews, theoretical and methodological discussions that make an original contribution to the research literature, and feature columns. It is the official journal of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association (MWER), a regional affiliate of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Four issues of the journal are published annually.

The editors seek professionals and faculty members at all ranks to add to its growing list of reviewers. Reviewers are electronically sent an abstract of a manuscript in their field of expertise and asked if they can provide a review within four weeks. If they can, a blind copy of the manuscript and a review form are sent. While we prefer electronic reviews and transmission, hard copy is also an option.

Please provide your review information to Deborah Bainer Jenkins, Co-Editor, at [mer@westga.edu](mailto:mer@westga.edu). Please send: name, mailing address, e-mail address, telephone number, institutional affiliation, academic rank, and areas of interest or expertise.

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## **Art Exhibit: *Renoir's Women***

Columbus Museum of Art, 480 E. Broad St.

Tuesday–Sunday 10 a.m.–5:30 p.m. Thursday until 8:30 p.m. Adults \$6. Seniors and students \$4. Members and children under 6 free. Free admission on Sunday. *Renoir's Women* explores the enduring nature of Renoir's interest in women through his depictions of maternity, children, domestic settings and nudes. Known as one of the great masters of Impressionism, Renoir created works that are widely admired for their brilliant color and dazzling brushwork. This exhibition is the first to focus on Renoir's representation of women, one of his favorite subjects. The exhibition features approximately 25 key works, loaned from renowned museums, that reveal the breadth of Renoir's vision during all phases of his career while illuminating the place of women in his art. 614-221-4848, [www.columbusmuseum.org](http://www.columbusmuseum.org). Picture provided by the Columbus Museum of Art.



## **Sports: Ohio State University Football vs. Michigan State**

Ohio Stadium, Woody Hayes Drive.

Saturday, October 15. 614-292-2624, [www.ohiostatebuckeyes.com](http://www.ohiostatebuckeyes.com). Contact Ohio State after September 15 for ticket availability. Picture provided by The Ohio State University Athletic Department.



## **Film: *Roar: Lions of the Kalahari***

Center of Science & Industry (COSI), 333 W. Broad St.

Wednesday-Saturday 10 a.m.–5 p.m. Sunday noon–6 p.m. Film only \$7. \$5 with admission to COSI. This is an epic story of power and dominance. Filmed in the stark yet beautiful expanse of the Kalahari, it details the natural behavior of lions and their prey as they attempt to survive around the last remaining waterhole in the region. Above all, it is an account of territorial conflict and the power inherent in the roar of one of the largest lions ever documented in the Kalahari. 614-228-2674, [www.cosi.org](http://www.cosi.org). Picture provided by COSI.

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