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Education Vouchers: Virtue or Vice?

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INTRODUCTION

The school choice debate is very visible in today's discussions of public education. One approach to change is through the use of vouchers. Vouchers allow parents to consider more than the neighborhood or assigned school.

The voucher system is an issue because of problems with the status quo in public education. A solution would not be offered unless there was a problem. Identification of the reasons behind the proposition of an alternative such as a voucher is presented in this paper.

A thorough definition of a voucher system is necessary to establish a firm foundation upon which one can base an opinion. For this reason, a complete definition has been provided for the reader. This paper explains exactly what a voucher system entails.

Throughout history, many different voucher plans have surfaced. The idea continues to re-surface as an alternative to the present educational establishment. Several voucher proposals are described in this paper in order to present a historical perspective of voucher programs.

The opposing viewpoints of the voucher issue were researched. Voucher advocates have many strong arguments for its implementation. Voucher opposition is as strong as voucher support. Reasons for both support and opposition to vouchers are presented in this paper.

The results of a voucher program already in use is fundamental in the formation of an opinion on the validity of the issue. In 1990, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, implemented a choice plan. The researcher obtained a report from the State of Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction that presents results of the implementation.

A conclusion may only be drawn after the examination of the status quo, definition, history, arguments for and arguments against voucher programs, and the results of voucher program implementation. The author formed an opinion after the in-depth research process; this opinion concludes the paper.

IDENTIFICATION OF STATUS QUO

The current United States educational establishment has been in place for nearly one hundred years. The quality of education has recognizable strengths, but for the purpose of this paper, research focused on the weaknesses. Urban schools tend to have more than their share of weaknesses and this is the basis of wanting a change. Research results present evidence of such weaknesses.

The traditional American pattern has been for children to attend the public school in their neighborhood. Where children live determines where they will be educated. However, if a family is not satisfied with their neighborhood school, then there are other options available to them. The alternative to public schools is private schools (including parochial schools) which are a significant force in American education, comprising 20,000 schools, employing 13% of all teachers, and educating over 5 million elementary and secondary students. Enrollment in parochial schools is 85% of private school enrollment (Nelson 1993).

When Richard Nixon was president, he said, "if the nonpublic schools were ever permitted to go under in the major cities in America, many public schools might very well go under with them because they simply could not undertake the burden" (Nelson 1993, 31). Americans are very supportive of private schools. Most people have no objections to these schools receiving public subsidies. A 1986 Gallup poll revealed that 43% of those

questioned wished to see some tax dollars diverted to private schools. This is a much higher percentage of the population than that which actually patronizes private schools (Nelson 1993).

Some common characteristics of urban public educational establishments are: large class sizes, run-down buildings, beat-up and outdated textbooks, inexperienced and emergency-certificated teachers, and inadequate supplies and space all across the board. Educational overburden occurs when a school has an unusually high number of students who require special services (for example, handicapped or disadvantaged in some way). City schools typically have educational overburden, and suburban schools typically do not (Nelson 1993).

Municipal overburden occurs as taxpayers must support many public services in addition to the schools. Cities are more likely to have municipal overburden than are suburban areas. The result of educational and municipal overburden is found in cities, especially large cities where high educational costs are not balanced with good revenue bases. Even when states try to help, the children in inner cities get a less expensive education than the children in suburban cities (Nelson 1993).

At present, American school districts receive funds through appropriations from local, state, and federal governments (Catterall 1984). A state can increase the funds for public schools of a poor district to bring its financial status to the level of richer districts. The more it does this, the more it will cost the state. That means the state will have to collect

tax money in rich communities and give it to the poor communities. This brings equality to the poor; however, it is at the expense of the rich (Nelson 1993).

The shortage of funds in some districts actually diminishes the local control of the curriculum in the public schools and in the ability to attract good teachers. School boards in poorer districts do not have the option of instituting special services when their budgets do not include adequate funds even for essentials. In this sense, local control is not possible. It is control for the wealthy not for the poor (Nelson 1993).

The United States Supreme Court ruled that the spending (per pupil in high and low economic areas) in the state of Texas did not violate the equal protection guarantee of the 14th amendment to the constitution. This ruling obviously implied that such inequalities are constitutionally tolerable. Challenges are still being brought in state courts under their state constitutions (Nelson 1993).

States have reduced spending gaps. In some poor communities, the state covers 75% or more of the school budget. Even with all the state assistance, the poor communities still spend less on their students than wealthier communities elsewhere in the state. This continues to be true even after federal aid is added. The assumption of federal officials that poor districts which are receiving aid now have spending equality with rich districts is not true (Nelson 1993).

Two problems with local funding exist: 1. People in poor communities, who have low incomes (property tax is paid out of income), bear a heavier tax burden than people in rich communities. A larger proportion of their income is spent on property tax than is true for wealthier people. Since poor people do not have much income to begin with, this hits them especially hard. Considering that a tax on real property is the most common source for school taxes which local residents have to pay, and considering that the poor have little real property the public schools are hit hard, too. 2. Even when poor people make the extra effort to support their schools, they come up with less money per pupil than people in wealthier communities. The amount spent on each public school child in a wealthy community can be two or three times the amount spent per pupil in a poor community (Nelson 1993).

As stated, the traditional practice has been for public schools to receive their financial support from the communities in which they are located. A standard claim is that there would be greater support for the public schools if people could not avoid using the public school system. The increased support would include money from rich and powerful families who currently are not dependent on the public schools (Nelson 1993).

The lack of support for public education is said to facilitate the declining performance of students. Many studies have determined that schools are not adequately educating youngsters. Nearly one third of American seventeen-year-olds do

not know that Abraham Lincoln wrote the Emancipation Proclamation; nearly one half do not know who Josef Stalin was; and, about thirty percent could not locate Britain on a map of Europe. These findings tend to indicate that American education is deficient in several areas. Thomas Sowell believes one of the reasons that basics are not learned is that they are not taught, at least not at the same level or with the same emphasis as in the past (Sowell 1993).

When compared to students from some other countries, American students do not perform as well. The results of an international study of thirteen-year-olds found that Koreans rank first in mathematics while Americans rank last. When asked if they thought they were "good at mathematics," only 23% of the Koreans said "yes"- compared to 68% of American thirteen-year-old students. A recent belief in American education is that students should "feel good about themselves." This is a success in its own terms, but not in any other terms. A related educational belief is that learning must be enjoyable to be effective (Sowell 1993).

The international study of thirteen-year-olds showed that American youngsters fell further and further behind, the more they were required to think. The American children held their own at the level of simple facts. However, the advantage definitely shifted in favor of the Korean children when thinking was involved. As more sophisticated levels of reasoning were required, the advantage escalated to a two to one margin for the

Koreans. Americans answered 96% of everyday facts correctly; the Koreans answered 100%. Americans answered correctly 78% of questions that applied simple procedures; the Koreans answered 93%. Americans answered correctly 42% of questions that analyzed experiments, the Koreans answered 73%. Americans answered 12% of questions that involved a high level of analysis correctly; the Koreans answered 33% (Sowell 1993).

Many people attribute the poor performance of American students to a lack of capital investment in education. However, in a comparison among developed nations, the U.S. ranked near the top in over-all per-pupil expenditure. Unfortunately, the performance of its students often ranked at or near the bottom. Within the U.S., the ratio of pupils to teachers declined throughout the entire era from the 1960s to the 1980s, while test scores declined. There are claims that money is needed to hire more teachers to relieve "overcrowded classrooms"; but, the U.S. already has a smaller average class size than a number of countries whose educational achievements are higher. Japan, for example, averages 41 students per class, compared to 26 for the U.S. In mathematics where the performance gap is especially noticeable, the average class size in Japan is 43, compared to 20 in the U.S. The period of declining test scores was also a period when disbursements for education were rising. The increase of money spent on education was measured in real terms, allowing for inflation (Sowell 1993).

One reason that spending has little effect on educational performance is that most of the money never reaches the classroom. Studies of the Milwaukee and New York city school systems show that less than half the money spent per high school student in New York or per elementary school student in Milwaukee actually reached the school, and less than one third of the total expenditure went to classroom services. Over a period of a quarter of a century, teachers' salaries have been a declining percentage of school budgets. Bureaucratic organizations and other non-instructional costs absorbed the growing sums of money being spent on the educational establishment (Sowell 1993).

The educational establishment often claims that there is a shortage of money, expressing it as a lack of "commitment" by the public or the government. It implies that more money means better education. This is an entirely unsupported statement. Neither comparisons among states, comparisons over time, nor international comparisons, lend any creditability to this claim. States that spend more per pupil in the public schools do not generally have any better educational performance. The correlation between financial inputs and educational outputs is very weak and shaky (Sowell 1993).

A Rand Corporation study determined that in low-income, crime-ridden neighborhoods, Catholic and other private schools often produced better academic results than the public schools in the same areas. The public schools' could not avoid this comparison by claiming that the Catholic and other private

schools have children from higher-income, better-educated families. This study not only confined its sample of Catholic schools to those in low-income, ghetto and barrio neighborhoods in New York; it also included youngsters whose parents did not pay to send them to Catholic schools. Their tuition was paid by private individuals who wanted to enable an unselected sample of public school children to attend Catholic schools, to see if they would do better than those who remained in the public school. The youngsters who transferred into the Catholic school did significantly better than their peers who remained in the public school (Sowell 1993).

A report from the Brookings Institute found that schools in which students do well academically tend to be run more democratically and collegially than other schools, even when there is no difference in the background of the pupils. Following student aptitude, school organization emerges as the factor with the second largest impact on total test-score gains. Parental influence follows close behind school organization. These desirable features are easier to produce in small, independent schools than in large schools that are part of a big bureaucratic system (Nelson 1993).

Several factors are believed to hinder the effectiveness of public schools. One belief is that there is too much higher level administration in the schools (Catterall 1984). John Chubb and Terry Moe say that it is the very nature of public schools that makes them ineffective: "Our reasoning is that much of [the

excessive bureaucracy] is an inevitable and logical consequence of the direct democratic control of schools" (Nelson 1993, 32-33). Sowell believes this control is a government monopoly of public education. The supply of customers and the supply of labor are almost totally under the control of the educational establishment (Sowell 1993).

Many factors contribute to the declining performance of American students. In addition to the reasons previously mentioned, it is believed that the process of making public school textbooks easier to read is aiding in the decline. It has been going on so long and so widely that it has even acquired a well-known name- "dumbing down" (Sowell 1993).

To improve the quality of education requires that the quality of educators be improved. Factors currently exist preventing the necessary improvements. Many complain that public school teachers are among the most difficult of all employees to fire- regardless of the level of their competence or incompetence. Rates of pay have virtually no relationship to competence or incompetence. Rather, pay is determined by years experience and college credits (Sowell 1993).

Public school teaching is an overwhelmingly unionized occupation. The profession has virtually iron-clad job security. Virtually everyone has a degree or degrees and yet there seems to be a lack of substantive intellectual qualifications. The intellectual calibre of public school teachers in the U.S. is shockingly low (Sowell 1993).

The declining performance of American students is evidence of weaknesses in the educational establishment. The test results of American students were shockingly low. Several studies were researched and presented to convey the current situation that has led to the proposal and support of a voucher system. Changes in the status quo may be necessary to improve the education of American children.

DEFINITION OF THE VOUCHER SYSTEM

A thorough definition of a voucher system is the foundation for understanding such a program. The underlying theory as well as the many variations of the theory are crucial to forming an opinion. Several aspects of the voucher proposal were researched and presented.

The basic idea behind a voucher system is simple. A voucher is issued by the government directly to the pupil or the family. The voucher is used as a payment for the educational program provided by the school chosen by the pupil or the family. The vouchers are then exchanged to the government by the school in order to receive funds (Catterall 1984).

A voucher plan allows parents to choose from among different schools. Some plans include all the schools, public, private, and parochial, in a large geographic area. Other plans limit the choice to public schools only. Another variation of the plan limits the choice still further to only the public schools within an existing school district. The choice may even be restricted to minischools within the same building, sometimes known as "schools-within-schools" (Nelson 1993, 29). However, most voucher plans incorporate both public and private schools. To be included in the plans, private schools usually must adhere to certain eligibility criteria (Catterall 1984).

Voucher plans differ on the grade levels to be included in the program. The most commonly proposed plans are for elementary and secondary schools. However, plans have also been proposed

for college students. Vouchers could not only limit participation to certain grade levels, but also to certain types of services, such as special or remedial instruction. One such plan, suggested by President Reagan, provided federal subsidies for pupils with specific needs (Catterall 1984).

The sources of funding for vouchers is the same for most of the plans. Existing appropriations for school operations are transferred to some type of voucher fund. For example, if the annual per pupil expenditure for a school district is $2,000, then a voucher worth this amount is issued to the pupil or the family. The sources that fund the voucher are the same sources that contribute to the current educational establishment (Catterall 1984).

Schools may or may not be restricted to accepting only the amount of the voucher for payment of fees. If schools are allowed to charge their students more than the basic value of the voucher, some parents must supplement the voucher with their own money in order to purchase a more expensive education for their children. The willingness of private schools to participate in a voucher system is affected by the permissibility of "add-ons." An "add-on" refers to an amount parents could add to the voucher amount. For example, a private school which charges $3,000 for tuition probably would not be interested in replacing those revenues with $2,000 vouchers unless the parents could be charged the difference (Catterall 1984).

Specific curriculum requirements for schools that participate may or may not be included in a voucher plan. These requirements often entail particular instructional offerings such as, a minimum length of the school day, or a minimum number of school days per year. Certain standards and requirements may be established for a high school diploma. In addition, specific types of education may be prohibited or encouraged, such as religious instruction or teaching particular ideologies (Catterall 1984).

Some, but not all, voucher plans include transportation provisions. The families that can afford private transportation or public transit fares would probably have more school options within their reach. Those who can not afford transportation to schools encounter a limited set of school choices and would benefit less from a voucher plan. Some voucher advocates believe the provision of transportation services in a voucher plan is necessary to ensure fair access to schools by all pupils (Catterall 1984).

In recent years, various voucher plans have been proposed. Their purpose and means of implementation may be different, but all voucher plans have some common characteristics. First, the proposed methods of funding schools are very different from the way public or private schools are currently financed. Second, the number of students a school can attract will largely determine it's success. Third, all voucher plans begin by funding the pupils. Fourth, the availability of choices among a

variety of schools for children and their families is assumed (Catterall 1984).

The success of a voucher system is largely dependent on information services. Because pupils and their families choose their own schools, accurate and complete information about different schools is critical (Catterall 1984). The underlying theory of a voucher proposal may seem simple, but the overall system is quite complex. To form an opinion on the validity of the voucher issue, a thorough definition of the proposal has been completed.

HISTORY OF THE VOUCHER SYSTEM

The voucher idea has been proposed at different times throughout history. Three major proposals were researched to present a picture of the development of voucher plans. The three proposals have many similarities and many differences.

In the 1950s, economist Milton Friedman introduced the application of the voucher system to our modern school system. Friedman's plan is presented as a chapter in one of his books. He concentrates on a fundamental framework and suggests a minimum of regulation and no supplementary services. He presents his plan as part of an extensive study on the importance of freedom in our society. The voucher system proposed by Friedman does not include details for implementing the plan. Friedman simply addresses the inadequacy of the public schools, the advantages of a competitive system, and the values of freedom of choice for families to select schools for their children (Catterall 1984).

The Friedman plan suggests an equal voucher for each elementary and secondary school child. His plan does not specify sources of revenue. It is implied that existing subsidies to schools will be replaced with vouchers to pupils. Friedman's design allows parents to add money to the voucher amount (Catterall 1984).

The Friedman plan calls for little regulation. There are no specific curriculum requirements for schools to participate, but training in basic language, mathematics, and civic values is suggested. There are no restrictions on a school that is

associated with a particular ideology, philosophy, politics, or religion. No personnel standards for schools (no required certification of teachers) is addressed in the plan. Schools would establish their own admission practices, as private schools do currently. His plan provides for neither information nor transportation services (Catterall 1984).

In the 1960s, Christopher Jencks, a sociologist working for the U.S. Office Of Economic Opportunity, developed an experimental plan to test the effects of a voucher system. Like Friedman, Jencks also believed competition among schools was a remedy for the mediocre performance and unresponsiveness of the public school system. Jencks formulated a detailed voucher proposal. The federal government wanted to target poor and minority children with this program. His voucher proposal contained a strong emphasis on compensatory education (Catterall 1984).

Jencks' plan was presented as a proposal for a federal experiment. The plan, designed for elementary schools, provided many detailed provisions and guarantees. The basic voucher would reflect the cost of schooling. The plan was a proposed experiment without a specific location, so the actual value of the vouchers was to be determined by the costs of schooling in the area chosen for the experiment. The transfer of existing funds for schools to a voucher fund was implicit and supplementary federal funds were to be added to the regular district funds, all to be distributed through vouchers. Extra

funds were to go to poor children. Under this plan, schools would be permitted to obtain funding from outside agencies, but they would not be allowed to charge extra fees beyond the voucher. Private contributions to schools would not be allowed (Catterall 1984).

Although the Jencks' proposal includes numerous regulations, details of many of the requirements were left to those who would execute the proposal. The plan would not permit schools to participate that had certain philosophical or political orientations (such as schools sponsored by racist organizations). School admissions policies would have to be nondiscriminatory. Standards that governed curriculum, personnel, and other state requirements had to be met by the participating schools (Catterall 1984).

Information and transportation services were provided in Jencks' proposal. Free transportation was to offered as needed. A central authority (such as the federal government) would administer and run Jenck's proposed system. Information services, such as standardized test results, were to be furnished to aid pupils and their families in making informed choices. Information regarding educational programs, teacher qualifications, and school facilities would also be made available to parents (Catterall 1984).

In the late 1970's, two California lawyers, John Coons and Stephen Sugarman, who specialize in school finance reform proposed a constitutional initiative for a state system of

education vouchers in California. Their plan emphasized both the benefits of a competitive system and the inherent fairness of the voucher system as opposed to the uneven per pupil funding system that existed in California. The plan, written as a voter initiative, included specifics on critical elements of their voucher plan (Catterall 1984).

The Coons-Sugarman proposal for California involved issuing education vouchers to all elementary and secondary school children in the state. The vouchers would be funded in essentially the same way the state funded school districts; the state per pupil subsidies would take the form of a voucher. The value of the voucher would be set at a level equivalent to 90% of statewide per pupil costs. This proposal allowed the state legislature to create a system to vary the amount of the voucher according to a variety of pupil characteristics, such as grade level, curriculum, bilingualism, special needs, handicaps, and etc. (Catterall 1984).

The allowance or disallowance of additional money beyond the voucher amount is crucial to examining a voucher plan. The Coons-Sugarman proposal explicitly prohibited "add-ons". However, the plan did not prohibit gifts and contributions to schools by parents (Catterall 1984).

Schools that would participate in the Coons-Sugarman system would be required to meet current laws governing curriculum and personnel in California's private schools. The plan has numerous regulations in addition to the basic standards of school

eligibility that are currently established. Schools are not prohibited from participation in the voucher plan because of their political, religious, philosophical, or ideological affiliations. Schools are required to maintain nondiscriminatory admissions policies with regard to race and religion, but they can limit attendance by sex (Catterall 1984).

Pupil transportation and information services are mandated in the Coons-Sugarman proposal. Included in the dollar amount of the voucher is a reasonable limit of transportation costs. Participating schools are also subject to reasonable information disclosure requirements regarding curriculum and teaching methods, personnel qualifications, resource utilization, and if legislated, pupil scores on standardized tests (Catterall 1984).

Since the proposals by Friedman, Jencks, Coons and Sugarman, the voucher theory has continued to resurface. In 1981, the Boston public schools system was in serious financial trouble, and the Boston Finance Commission established a Citizens Task Force to research methods to help save the public school system. A voucher system was proposed. The system faced opposition by professional educators and professional education associations in the courts who claimed the proposed voucher plan was unconstitutional. The Massachusetts Supreme Court eventually found the plan to be unconstitutional on two points. There was a question of separation of church and state and of the channeling of public money into schools which were not available to the general public (Melendez and Shea 1992).

In 1983, then-President Ronald Reagan established a presidential campaign education goal which proposed that poor families be allowed to obtain educational vouchers (worth a proposed $250 to $300 per year) for their children to attend schools of their choice. The funds were to be a federal subsidy in the form of a school voucher for qualified families. The vouchers could be used at a public or private school of their choice. After Reagan was re-elected, his Secretary of Education attempted unsuccessfully to get Congress to pass a law establishing a voucher system (Melendez and Shea 1992).

As President-elect, Bush strongly supported the idea of choice in education. He declared that "choice has worked" and that he intended "to provide every feasible assistance to the states and districts interested in further experimentation with choice plans". After he became president, Bush asked Congress to appropriate $100 million for magnet schools that would increase parental choice of schools. In 1991, the Bush administration lobbied hard for a $30 million choice program that would involve private schools. The proposal was rejected by a 57-36 vote in the U.S. Senate; opponents of the proposal argued that it would be an abandonment of public schools (Nelson 1993).

In 1986, the National Governor's Association went on record in favor of choice within the public school sector and by the end of 1988, 23 states either had choice plans or were considering them. At the close of the 1990-1991 school year, Minnesota

allowed interdistrict choice of schools for all students (Nelson 1993).

Choice is an idea that has been in use in education for a long time. The heart of choice plans is the value of liberty. Although choice plans can increase equality, they can also decrease it (Nelson 30). Some cities have had choice plans for several years. These choice plans give parents and pupils a choice among magnet or theme schools where students can focus on particular interests. For example, District 4 of New York City, commonly known as Spanish Harlem, has a magnet school plan with 53 different schools in 22 school buildings. These include a bilingual school, a music academy, an environmental science school, and a communication arts school (Nelson 1993).

The freedom to choose among schools such as with a voucher program has and continues to exist in discussions of educational reform. The three proposals by Milton Friedman, Christopher Jencks, John Coons and Stephen Sugarman occurred at different points in time. The proposals were closely examined and presented for similarities and differences. Since those proposals, the voucher idea continues to re-surface. It is a current issue on political agendas and party platforms. Understanding the history of the voucher idea is helpful in forming an opinion on the voucher issue.

ARGUMENTS FOR VOUCHER SYSTEMS

The voucher idea has a great constituency of supporters. In this section of the paper these arguments will be presented and examined in detail. The arguments that promote a voucher system need to be carefully examined. The advocates of vouchers have many reasons and suggestions for implementing such a system.

The renowned conservative Republican William F. Buckley argued that superior students, regardless of socio-economic background, should be given the opportunity to attend a superior public or private school of their choice by using a voucher system. Buckley's main points were that a voucher system would provide the top students from disadvantaged and minority backgrounds a freedom of choice and an opportunity to obtain educational excellence. A voucher plan would improve equality of educational opportunity for disadvantaged and minority students (Melendez and Shea 1992).

A voucher plan would change existing systems and force renewal and revitalization of our national educational system (Melendez and Shea 1992). Sponsors of education voucher proposals seem to agree that choice is an important prerequisite to school improvement. They have uniformly claimed that choice is lacking in America's public school systems (Catterall 1984).

> Public schools are monopolistic enterprises; their pupils are captive audiences. Except for those whose families can afford private options, pupils must take what is offered in the way of schools. Complaints can easily go unheeded and mistakes unrectified because teachers and school administrators do not have sufficient incentives to respond. The theoretical avenues open to dissatisfied parents and citizens, such as school board and legislative elections,

> petitioning processes, and open hearings conducted by school boards, are all portrayed as either sluggish or too remote to make decisions about individual children (Catterall 1984, 24-25).

The current school system has the power to decide who is qualified to teach, as well as what is to be taught, without much concern for what parents might feel is right for their children. The current educational establishment is not meeting the great variety of needs among the children they serve (Catterall 1984).

A voucher plan would be accomplish two democratic ideas. It would give students and families the right to choose the school and education system of their choice. As a result, student and family involvement and self-interest would increase. It would also eliminate the idea that families who are now paying private or parochial school tuition are paying educational taxes and not receiving any of the benefits (Melendez and Shea 1992).

Choice proponents argue that vouchers will motivate schools to make necessary changes to attract students. They suggest that applying the principle of marketplace competition to schools will provide incentive for schools to change, if only to prevent the loss of students to other schools and the loss of accompanying student funding (Melendez 1992). Vouchers inject competition into the system. Pupils are offered alternatives and are permitted to shop for schools. Two positive outcomes follow: First, those who operate schools would have strong incentives to do things to attract students. Schools that fail to meet pupils' needs, in the eyes of those pupils and their families, would lose enrollments to their competitors. The loss of pupils would mean

the direct loss of funds. Teachers and administrators should become responsive in such a system, if only to preserve their jobs. Second, if pupils' needs vary considerable, or if individual children learn in different ways and at different paces, they might end up in more appropriate school settings through their own choices. The better matching of pupils to school programs through a voucher system might improve education for all involved (Catterall 1984).

Catterall believes the voucher system is a simpler way of funding schools than the current systems. Existing school district funding typically involves a complex web of tax levies, multiple appropriations for special programs from several government levels, state legislative formulas generated to accommodate partisan interests, and so on. Many regulations and several levels of bureaucracy are necessary to administer the funding system. Vouchers are a simpler way of granting an appropriate amount of support directly to the child. Under the voucher plan, schools would be funded by their freely-choosing clients. Simplicity would result from the elimination of many intermediate levels of school administrations and local systems (Catterall 1984).

If pupils are funded directly, much of the program supervision and control in state, regional, and district offices might become unnecessary. Such control would be shifted to the pupils and their families who could elect not to support unproductive or inappropriate schools. A voucher plan would

resolve the long-standing debate in the school finance reform agenda over the issue of unequal pupil funding within states and even within school districts (Catterall 1984).

Advocates for voucher plans believe that one way to make schools more competitive is to increase the options to public education. Offering choices only among public schools would not amount to much choice. There is a great deal of similarity in among such schools. Inclusion of private schools in a voucher system is a way of doing providing more choice because they differ in methods, organizational formats, and philosophies. Diversity in schools would be enhanced if private schools were eligible for participation in voucher programs (Catterall 1984).

For proponents of choice, the right to choose is not only a fundamental right, but it will bring improvements in the schools. Proponents believe that the improvements will result from competition between schools and accountability demanded by parents (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

> "The egalitarian seeks a collective equality, not of opportunity, but of results. He wishes to wrest the rewards away from those who have earned them and give them to those who have not.' One of the rewards people in American society earn is the right to give their children a good education. If children cannot benefit from their parents' effort, or can benefit no more than other people's children, a powerful work incentive has been taken from the parents" (Nelson 1993, 25).

Proponents strongly believe that implementation of a voucher system would be beneficial to America. Implementing competition will force schools to improve in weak areas to attract students. In this system the strong will survive and the weak will perish.

The result is a better educational establishment. Advocates feel very strongly about the voucher issue. However, this is one side of the issue.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST VOUCHERS

Just as voucher plans have strong support, they also face a great deal of opposition. Opponents of voucher programs have very sound arguments against implementation of such programs. Thorough research of the arguments against vouchers has been completed and is presented and discussed in this section of the paper.

DISPARITIES

Although the proponents of the voucher system argue that such a system is designed to benefit low-income families and offer them better educational opportunities, research shows that, in general, many disparities exist in the system. These disparities include: transportation, funding, regulations, information, and current investments that already are in place in American education. Each of these disparities is discussed individually in this section of the paper.

Opponents of a voucher system rightly argue that the target groups of such a system are not the ones who participate or benefit from its implementation. A study was done in 1987 that involved the Ravenswood City Elementary School District in California. Under court-supervision, each year 206 primary-grade minority students were given the opportunity to leave Ravenswood for a school in one of eight surrounding districts or a magnet school within their district. Students from those districts also had the option of entering Ravenswood (Waterman and Murnane 1992).

> "Proponents of school choice argued that it would give the most powerless children greater access to a more rigorous academic environment, and that it would help diversify the economic composition of the student populations. Unfortunately, the Ravenswood experience did not support this idea" (Waterman and Murnane 1992, 24-26).

Records indicated that the targeted children tended not to participate when these programs were implemented, and the economic stratification actually increased as a result. Results revealed that it was the economically advantaged families of Ravenswood students who participated in the program. The result was that middle-class students left Ravenswood to attend other schools. The program was designed for the benefit of low-income and minority students. In actuality , many of those families either could not or chose not to participate in the program. Even though the program had transportation provisions, the majority of low-income and minority parents could not meet the transportation requirements. Many of these parents used public transportation, and lacked the time and ability to take their children to and from the school bus. Concerned with the safety of their children, they preferred that they attend a school close to home rather than walk alone through dangerous neighborhoods (Waterman and Murnane 1992).

Many Ravenswood parents chose not to participate because they felt intimidated by the affluent communities of the neighboring districts. The combination of language barriers, stress of being an ethnic minority in a mostly-white community, and having coming from a poor district often proved to be too much for minority and low-income parents to deal with. In

addition, the teachers and students of other districts may not have been prepared to address the needs of a culturally-diverse group of students (Waterman and Murnane 1992).

The fundamental objective of a choice initiative is identical to the objective of the program in the Ravenswood City Elementary School District. The choice plan has had negative effects on the Ravenswood City Elementary School District. The program was intended to benefit the poor and battle the economic imbalances between neighboring schools. In reality, objectives of a choice system are difficult to reach. Choice did not help diversify the economic composition of the student bodies (Waterman and Murnane 1992).

Equality is actually decreased if a choice plan gives the same amount of benefit to both the rich and the poor. The advantage the rich already have will continue to exist. For example, if both rich and poor families are guaranteed a particular amount of government financial support to seek out the school of their choice, the rich can add this amount to what they are already spending on good private schools and get even better ones. The poor might be able to afford only the kinds of schools they are getting under the present no-choice system. Voucher proposals that give the same amount to all families, regardless of wealth have a disequalizing effect (Nelson 1993).

Advocates of a voucher system claim that minority parents will be able to send their children to private schools they could not otherwise afford. It is likely that they might find long

waiting lists for entry. A voucher program cannot ensure that adequate space will be provided for additional students. The result may be that it is the wealthier parents who benefit most from vouchers. If they are permitted to add their own funds to the voucher, they can afford an even more expensive private school (Melendez 1992).

Tuition tax credit plans that grant all families the same tax credit for tuition also have a disequalizing effect. Only parents who can afford to pay tuition in the first place are eligible for the tax credit. Even more disequalizing would be a plan that allows parents a tax credit in the amount they actually pay for tuition, since the wealthiest people tend to send their children to the schools that charge the highest tuitions (Nelson 1993).

A choice plan is supposed to bring equality to the poor. While trying to accomplish this, it is imposing inequality on wealthier families. Their hard-earned wealth no longer entitles them to purchase education on behalf of their children that the poor can not afford. By being made more equal to the poor, the rich are made less equal to their previous status (Nelson 1993).

Government's attempts to help the disadvantaged do more harm than good to the very people whom is should benefit. Assistance to the poor is a magnet that attracts more and more people into dependency, and the level of assistance is never adequate enough to restore people to independence (Nelson 1993).

TRANSPORTATION

Another concern of the voucher system is the transportation issue. Any voucher system, no matter how limited, must include transportation for students from where they live to the school they wish to attend. If ethnic and racial isolation is to be reduced, disadvantaged students should be able to attend any school of their choice. This must be done in an efficient manner and allow easy access for those who are most disadvantaged. The system must insure that all children receive equal public funding so that equality exists for each child (Hill 1992).

FUNDING

The economics of a choice plan seem simple to its advocates, but eventually, states must make provisions to fund the program. It seems likely that current funding disparities among states and school districts will continue under family choice. In this case, the poor will lose again. The benefit of vouchers will go to parents who are currently sending children to private schools (Hill 1992).

Costs of a voucher system would vary considerably according to the features and services enacted by a particular plan. A voucher issuing and redeeming agency would be needed. If vouchers were valued according to certain pupil characteristics, a method to evaluate individual pupils would also be needed. Pupil transportation is an expensive service; and, if children from each neighborhood were bused in different directions, the costs could be astronomical. The prospect of establishing

agencies to handle these activities seems inefficient (Catterall 1984).

Another issue in funding voucher plans involves the constitutionality of certain private schools receiving public money. Many private schools are church affiliated. Supporting religious instructions with public tax receipts would be unconstitutional under the first amendment involving the separation of church and state (Catterall 1984).

REGULATION

Opponents of the voucher idea claim that support for choice is short-sighted. Discussion of choice diverts attention and resources from other problems in education. They claim that proponents of voucher programs want government money on the one hand but freedom from government regulation on the other. In today's economy, scrutiny of personal tax dollars is greater than ever. This kind of freedom of spending is unacceptable. If private schools receive public money, it's only fair to demand a common regulatory body for both public and private schools. It is wrong for backers of private school choice to advocate one set of rules for public schools and another set of rules for private schools (Weinberg 1992).

Good teachers, adequate facilities, and professional standards become issues when discussing choice. Professional licensing and facility standards must be established, maintained and monitored with assurances that competent teachers and certified facilities are provided for children. Private schools

must be accredited and have a standard of practice gauged by a known criteria (Hill 1992).

Significant policy development and legal innovation will be necessary to ensure that constitutional and ethical standards are met. Standards must be written into law which will ensure that constitutional and ethical requirements, for separation of church and state are met. In addition, an administrative system of checks and balances will be necessary to ensure that established standards and objectives are met. This will require a significant investment of time, thought, and funds (Melendez and Shea 1992).

Regulation of a voucher program would be very costly and difficult. Even officials in private schools sometimes oppose voucher proposals because of the possibility that significant controls would accompany public funding. They value their independence and self-determination (Catterall 1984).

INFORMATION

To participate in a voucher program, parents must have access to detailed and accurate information about available opportunities in order to make an informed decision about the school to which they want to send their children. There has to be a provision in a voucher initiative for funding such a program. Depending on the target group, it is likely that this information will need to be provided in various languages and formats (Melendez 1992).

A voucher plan may be very expensive when considering the cost of information services. The success of information programs (such as providing standardized test scores and special program offerings) will be determined by the amount of capital invested. Complete implementation costs has never been estimated for any of the voucher plans that have been suggested (Catterall 1984).

Wealthier households might gain more from information programs likely to be available in a voucher system. These parents are likely to be more sophisticated shoppers who seek more detailed information about potential school choices and more access to private and/or public transportation. The range of school choices available to them is greatly increased (Catterall 1984).

CURRENT INVESTMENT

A voucher plan may eventually destroy the existing public schools system. A system that is the result of a very significant investment (Melendez and Shea 1992). There are millions of children currently targeted for assistance who may be denied a choice because voucher schools do not wish to serve them or lack appropriate facilities. Racial and ethnic integration and the flood of immigrants has increased the need for compensatory education, bilingual education, free and reduced nutrition programs, early childhood education, etc. Education of the handicapped has also been a major priority in public schools.

Years of progress in anti-discrimination could be lost with implementation of a voucher program (Hill 1992).

Many low-income and minority parents have expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of education their children receive, and would like an opportunity to send their children to another school. If large numbers of low-income and minority parents participate in a voucher program, schools that do not meet parental expectations could close. Efforts intended to improve schools may result in causing them to no longer exist (Melendez 1992).

Voucher advocates criticize the schools. They complain of their failure to deliver on promises. Yet essential requirement are being met in America's school systems. In addition to developing cognitive skills and social attitudes needed by functioning adults, schools strive to foster democratic ideals, develop an appreciation of a pluralistic society, and serve to promote overall bonding with a common national heritage. A decentralized system of voucher schools would lose these common directions. Even if regulations called for the maintenance of a core curriculum in voucher schools, their actual practices might be impossible to oversee (Catterall 1984).

In our current system, parents are able to decide the kind of education they want for their children. They do so by living in communities with people who are like themselves and share their views. The government's role is to allow this to happen, to guarantee this freedom (Nelson 1993).

Opponents of voucher proposals feel that the target groups would not benefit from a choice plan. Problems involving transportation, funding, regulation, and information facilitate the inability to reach low-income and minority families proliferate this proposal. The opponents believe that the implementation of a choice program could undermine the current educational establishment which is the result of great investment in time and money.

RESULTS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF A CHOICE SYSTEM

To complete an understanding of the voucher issue, research was obtained on the results of the implementation of such a program. The actual results of a voucher program in use is crucial to forming an opinion. A summary of the major aspects of the program that was established in Milwaukee, Wisconsin is presented here.

After developing an extensive school voucher system, legal challenges by professional educators and other interested groups were filed and heard in Wisconsin state court. It was determined that the plan was constitutional because it met two tests: it was in keeping with the aim of education to increase the common good of the public, and the plan did not foster segregation or inequality (Melendez and Shea 1992).

The Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Parental Choice Program was enacted in the spring of 1990. The program provides an opportunity for students who meet specific criteria to attend private, nonsectarian schools in Milwaukee. The Choice Program is a targeted private school subsidy program with characteristics which are divided into three sections: family qualifications, school qualifications, and program specifications (Witte, Bailey, and Thron 1993).

The family qualifications state that: 1) Students must come from households with income at or below 1.75 times the poverty line; and, 2) Students may not have attended private schools or

school districts other than the Milwaukee Public School (MPS) District in the prior year. The school qualifications state that: 1) Eligible schools must be private, nonsectarian with no religious affiliation or training; 2) Schools may not discriminate in selection based on race, religion, gender, prior achievement, or prior behavioral records; 3) If classes are oversubscribed, selection is on a random basis; 4) Choice students can only make up 49% of the student body in a school. (This increased to 65% in 1994-1995.); and, 5) schools must meet at least one standard established for attendance, parental involvement, student achievement on standardized tests, or grade progress. The limitations outlined by program specifications are: 1) Private schools receive the Milwaukee Public School per-member, state-aid ($2,987 in 1993-1994) in lieu of tuition; and, 2) The total number of students in the Choice Program in any year is limited to 1.5% in 1994-1995 (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

The Milwaukee program intent was to provide alternative educational opportunities for families who could not exercise choice by residential selection or by purchasing private education. The circuit court denied challenges that the enactment violated the Wisconsin Constitution in August 1990. The Court also exempted the private schools from complying with the Wisconsin All Handicapped Children Act. This meant that the private schools were not required to admit learning disabled or emotionally disabled students. The circuit court ruling was

overturned by the appeals court in November 1991; but, on a four to three decision, the Wisconsin Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the statute in March 1992 (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Surveys were mailed in the fall of each year from 1990-93 to all parents who applied for enrollment in one of the choice schools. Similar surveys were sent in May and June of 1991 to a random sample of 5,474 parents of students in Milwaukee Public Schools. The surveys were intended to assess parental knowledge and evaluation of the Choice Program, prior educational experiences in MPS Schools, and the importance of education and the expectations that parents hold for their children. Demographic information on family members was also obtained (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Detailed case studies were completed in April 1991 in the four private schools that enrolled the majority of the choice students. An additional study was completed in 1992; six more case studies were done in the spring of 1993. Case studies of the K-8 schools involved approximately thirty person-days in the schools, including 56 hours of classroom observation and interviews with nearly all of the teachers and administrators in the schools. Also, researchers attended and observed parent and community group meetings and Board of Directors meetings for several schools. The research includes analysis of three years of outcome measures including data on achievement test scores, attendance, parental attitudes, parental involvement, and

attrition from the program. From the fall of 1992 into 1993, brief mail and phone surveys were completed with as many parents as could be located who chose not to have their children continue in the program to determine why they no longer participated in the program. Research on the Milwaukee plan provides evidence for addressing some of the issues in a choice plan, but it will not be able to provide all the necessary information. Enrollment in the Choice Program has increased from 341 in 1990 to 742 in 1993. The number of applicants exceed the number of students enrolled in every year. The number of applicants in 1990-91 was 577; the number of applicants in 1993-94 was 1049. The number of available seats in the participating choice schools (811 in 1993-94) does not yet match the current limit, which is 968 for 1993-94 (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Most of the information parents receive about Choice comes from friends and relatives, which means word-of-mouth. Additional monies were added by the Wisconsin legislature in 1993 to aid in advertising the program. Satisfaction of parents with the amount of information on the overall program is high in all years. Compared with the first year, all other measures of satisfaction improved in 1992-93. The biggest drop of satisfaction was in the accuracy of information on the private schools themselves. Because all the responses elicit 70% satisfaction or higher, this probably is not a critical issue (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

The two leading reasons given for participation in the Choice Program are the educational quality of the Choice Schools and the disciplinary environment parents associate with these schools. Frustration with prior public schools was not as important a reason for applying to the Choice Program as the attributes of the private schools. The Choice Program was specifically designed to provide an opportunity for poor parents to send their children to alternative schools that they could not otherwise afford. Three years of very consistent data indicate that, in this respect, it succeeds. In addition, there are numerous indications that these parents were frustrated and dissatisfied with the public schools their children had been attending. These are exactly the type of families who should have access to an alternative source of education (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Average reported family income of Choice participants was $11,625 in the first three years. There is a program cap of approximately $22,000 for the average family of three. Similar to MPS parents, approximately 60% are receiving AFDC or public assistance. For the combined three years, 36% of Choice mothers and 67% of Choice fathers were employed full time. Compare this to 44% of MPS mothers and 74% of MPS fathers. Racially, the program has had the greatest impact on African-American students who comprise 77.6% of those applying to Choice schools. Hispanics account for only 16.9% of Choice applicants (Milwaukee 5). Choice families were much more likely to be headed by a

single parent (77%) than the average MPS family (49%), and somewhat more likely than the low-income MPS parent (64%) (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

The data clearly indicate that choice can be targeted toward poor families who attempt to find an alternative for what they view as a poor educational environment for their children. Choice come students from poor, often single-parent households. Choice families are smaller than those in the comparison groups; this provides an opportunity for parents to focus more on a single child. In addition, the parents (especially mothers) are more educated and appear to have somewhat higher educational expectations for their children. Finally, the choice parents participated in their children's prior schools at higher rates than the average parent (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

The factors of MPS with which parents are most satisfied have little to do with the operation or outcomes of the school (textbooks, school location). On the other hand, the greatest dissatisfaction is with the amount the child learned and the discipline in the school. The attitudes of parents toward their children's prior public school within MPS may be a reflection on the fact that their children were not doing well in those schools. In all three years, scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills that were taken in prior public schools by students applying to the Choice Program were significantly below that of the average MPS student taking the same test and below the low-income MPS cohorts in each year. The absolute level of the

scores indicates the difficulty these students were having prior to entering the Choice program. The median national percentile for Choice students ranges from 26 to 31, compared with the national median of 50. In short, the students who enter the Choice program enter very near the bottom in terms of academic achievement (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

The biggest limitation of the Choice program is the number of seats available in the participating schools. The number of schools participating has increased from seven in 1990 to 12 in 1993. Potentially, 11 more schools could be eligible. Unless new schools participate (and there are not that many more secular schools left that are eligible), the program may not even enroll the number of students permitted (1% of the MPS enrollment or approximately 1500 next year) (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Choice parents also express considerable dissatisfaction with prior public schools. Based on prior test scores, there is clear evidence that these children were not doing well in those schools. Students in the Choice Program range in age from 4-9 years old. Most of the students are in four K-8 schools. In 1993, this number was 612 of 742 (82%). Eighty students were in two alternative high school programs in 1993-94. The remaining students were in the four Montessori and the one Waldorf school. Schools that participate have student bodies that vary from almost all one minority race, to racially integrated schools, to schools that have used the Choice Program to diversify their almost all White student bodies (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

The most serious institutional problems noted in 1990-91 involved high staff turnover and having to deal with recent changes in location and affiliation for several of the schools. These problems continued into the second year, but appeared to be less serious in the third and fourth years. Schools have generally remained in their 1990 locations and staff turnover declined and then stabilized at 18%. With a few exceptions, staff turnover was not connected with dissatisfaction, but with pay and benefits. During case studies, teachers and administrators went out of their way to describe how they enjoyed the small classes they taught, the autonomy they had in the classroom, the usually congenial atmosphere in the schools, and the administrative support they received in disciplinary matters (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

The most important conclusion to be drawn about the schools in the Choice Program is that they are diverse. They serve different student populations; their approach to education is different; their classroom and staff organization is not uniform; and, their systems of governance are unique. In other words, these independent schools represent a range of different choices for parents and students (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Choice schools often coordinate with MPS to determine the best educational course for the student, and MPS has for many years contracted with private, nonsectarian schools to provide services for specific student populations. In accordance with state law, these contracts are limited to services for either

preschoolers or at-risk students. In 1993-94, five of the twelve schools had contracts with MPS (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

There is also evidence in the second and third years of the program that the teaching staffs at Choice schools were more diverse in terms of gender and race than they were in the first year. In the fourth year, however, with the addition of new schools, the percentage of white teachers (77%) is higher than it was initially (75%). There were more male teachers in the 12 schools in 1993 (23%) than there were in the five schools reported in 1990 (11%) (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Tuition and fees, which have increased since the Choice Program began, vary from slightly over $1,000 to approximately $4,000. With the exception of one school which went bankrupt in the first year, the Choice schools are better off financially than they were when the program began. There have also been improvements in facilities; one school opened a new facility in the fall of 1994 (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Outcomes after three years of the Choice Program remain mixed. Achievement change scores have varied considerably in the first three years of the program. Choice students' reading scores increased the first year, but fell in the second and third years. Because sample size was very small in the first year, the gain in reading was not statistically significant, but the declines in years two and three were. In math, Choice students were essentially the same in the first two years, but recorded a

significant increase in the third year (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

MPS students as a whole gained in reading in the first two years, with a relatively small gain in the first year being statistically significant. There were small, and not significant, declines in the third year. Low-income MPS students followed approximately the same pattern, with none of the changes approaching significance (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Parental involvement, which was more frequent than for the average MPS parent in prior schools, was even greater for most activities in the Choice schools. In all years, parents expressed approval of the program. On open-ended questions concerning what they liked and disliked about the program, there were many more favorable comments than negative ones. Overwhelmingly, they believed the program should continue (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Attrition appears to be high, although it is declining. Attrition in the first year was 53%. Attrition in the second and third years was 35% and 31%. Estimates of attrition in MPS are uncertain, but the attrition from the Choice Program during the year appears smaller, but during the summer, higher. By any measure, the private schools are having difficulty retaining students. Based on follow-up surveys and interviews, we know that approximately one half of the students appear to be returning to MPS schools and most of the rest go to other private schools (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

The reasons given for leaving the Choice schools include complaints about the Choice Program, especially the limitation on religious instruction and problems with transportation. They also include complaints about staff, general educational quality, and the lack of specialized programs in the private schools. According to the surveyors, the number of students who left for family purposes, such as moving was probably underestimated (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Parental attitudes toward Choice schools, opinions of the Choice Program, and parental involvement were very positive over the first three years. Parental attitudes towards their schools and education of their children were much more positive than their evaluations of their prior public schools. This shift occurred in every category (teachers, principles, instruction, discipline, etc) (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Math scores for MPS students were extremely varied. In the first year there were significant gains for both the total MPS group and the low-income sub-group. In the second year, the scores were essentially flat, but in the third year, they declined significantly (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993). There is no explanation available for this inconsistency.

It is not possible to reach a firm conclusion on achievement differences based on test score results. Scores for both the Choice students and MPS students have fluctuated. For 1993, Choice reading scores declined more than MPS reading scores. In math, Choice students improved for the first time while MPS

students did not. The effect of being in a Choice school was insignificant. Choice and MPS students have not differed in any predictable way on achievement tests over the first three years of the Choice Program (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Overall attendance was satisfactory and, on the average, not a problem in Choice schools. Parental involvement is stressed in most of the Choice schools and, in fact, is required in the contracts signed by parents in several of the schools. School contact of Choice parents was higher than the average MPS parent in their prior school. Parents also contacted their schools more often concerning their child's classes and academic performance and volunteering in the school, and participating in fundraising. Every category of parental involvement was higher in the Choice schools than in prior public schools. The findings on parental choice are consistent across the three years: they have high parental involvement coming into the schools and even higher involvement once there (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

In all three years, parental satisfaction with Choice schools increased significantly over satisfaction with prior public schools. Reported satisfaction with the Choice schools surpasses the MPS level and is considerably higher than with their prior schools. Parents found that the Choice schools were what they professed they were looking for when they entered the program; increased learning and discipline. Parents of Choice students almost unanimously agreed the program should continue

(99% in 1991; and 97% in the respective years) (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Seventy percent of the responses to the open-ended questions mentioned qualities of the school, with most referring to the educational qualities provided in the Choice schools. A consistent number also referred to a personal desire for a private education and their inability to afford it without the Choice Program (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

In the first year, the majority of negative comments were references involving uncertainty over the program. In later years, there were fears about not qualifying for the program while wanting a private education, transportation, and logistical programs (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

Approximately one half of the students who left the Choice Program enrolled in MPS. Some of the reasons they gave for leaving included family reasons (25%), such as moving; the program lacked religious training; transportation problems; and, some left for within-school problems (staff, program, quality of education, etc.) (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

The Choice Program is clearly successful in providing some families with an opportunity to allow their children alternative schools that they would be hard pressed to afford otherwise. The students come from poor families and they have not done well in their prior public schools. To the extent that the purpose of the program was to create these opportunities, the program is a success. Test scores vary considerably and it appears that

Choice students do no better than an randomly selected control group from MPS (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program was premised on the theory that parents can best exercise accountability and determine the adequacy of educational outcomes by making free choices among schools (Witte, Bailey, and Thorn 1993).

To complete the understanding of voucher programs, results of the implementation of a program were researched and presented. The voucher system in Milwaukee has been thoroughly examined. This concludes the research and allows for the formation of an opinion.

CONCLUSION

Through the completion of an analysis of current problems in public education, an examination of the evolution of the voucher system as an alternative to the status quo, the opposing views of the voucher system, and the results of districts where vouchers are in use, certain conclusions have been drawn. Extensive research and careful evaluation has led the author to form an opinion which is expressed in this section of the paper. The arguments against a voucher proposal convinced the author of the impracticality of such a program. The findings from the Milwaukee Choice Plan are still in the early stages and the author determined that there is no recognizable advantage of implementing a voucher program.

A voucher system is not a viable solution to improve the educational system in the United States. Through the research presented in this paper, it has been determined that a voucher program is not workable. The arguments against such a system have effectively persuaded the author to believe that a voucher program is not the quick fix or simple solution that it is often presented to be.

The basic idea of a voucher system applies a democratic market theory to public education. In a democratic market, businesses compete with each other for a consumer's patronage. The company that offers the better deal to the consumer will be successful. That company will sell its product, make money, and

stay in business. The company that does not offer as good a deal will either: 1) change its price, product, or package, or, 2) go out of business. This works beautifully in the market place, but is this what our founding fathers had in mind when they began our public educational system?

The public educational system is not the place for a democratic market theory. The idea that schools will improve if they are forced to compete for "business" makes it sound simple, but it is anything but simple.

In the consumer market place, businesses promote products, goods, and services. In the public educational system, schools are educating children who will be tomorrow's leaders. Comparing children to goods and services is like comparing apples to oranges. The two are on totally different spectrums.

Another issue in the application the market theory involves the consumer. When buying a product, consumers are usually able to make a well informed decision based on information made available to them. Bureaus exist whose sole function is to inform consumers of a company's product and its reputation. Ads on television, in the newspaper, on the radio, etc. inform consumers of available products.

The problem of the market theory in education is how parents can become well-informed of their options. A system would have to be established to keep up with the available spaces in participating schools. Some sort of evaluation data would also have to be available so parents could choose between different

schools. Since the target group of a voucher program is low-income and minority families. Information would have to be available in different forms, possibly different languages.

One complaint of voucher advocates is that there is too much bureaucratic control over education. They allege that the government has taken over the role of parents, not allowing them any freedom or control over their children's education. The proper implementation of a voucher system with the necessary programs established will require more, not less, bureaucracy.

More government agencies that involve education will have to be formed. These agencies will be required to distribute, to accept, and to evaluate applications. A level of bureaucracy must be developed to distribute and account for the monies involved in the transfer of vouchers. An agency must be established that will inform parents of the voucher program, the availability of vouchers, and the evaluations of participating schools. Too, the target group may have special needs that must be met to ensure equality of participation in the voucher program.

One major problem with a voucher system is transportation. The current system provides transportation for every child who lives outside a certain radius from the school to be picked up and taken to and from school. For a voucher system to guarantee the equality it suggests, it would have to ensure transportation provisions. Not only would this be costly, but another level of

bureaucracy would be required to organize and oversee this function.

The motivation of voucher advocates is to equalize opportunities available to children from low-income and minority families with those of the upper classes. Research did not prove that this was accomplished, nor did it suggest it would be possible in the future.

Only a selected number of families were able to participate in voucher programs. Many more applied to take part in the Milwaukee choice plan than there were positions available. In the Ravenswood study, low-income and minority families chose not to participate. They were intimidated by the schools that their children would be attending. In addition, they did not have the needed resources to participate in the program. This leads one to believe that the intended purpose of a voucher plan is not accomplished.

Proponents of a voucher system make implementation seem relatively easy. Research has proved otherwise. A significant amount of time, effort, and capital is required to establish such a system. Why not channel this energy to improve the current system?

A voucher system is not necessary. The public educational establishment has existed for nearly one hundred of years. No legitimate reasons exist to create a new system. A very well-established system is already in place; however, it does need

improvement. Parents, educators, and legislators need to work together to offer viable solutions.

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