

# 'Choice' Voucher Fight Not Over Yet

By B.A. Ells, Jr.

Parents generally prefer better — not inferior — education. Therefore, parents who have the means, or are located in the districts that have them, choose to send their offspring to schools that produce better students, regardless of the school's classification (i.e., public, private or parochial).

Given a choice, parents will choose better schools.

The problem faced by parents and the public is how to choose good schools under the current system.

Parents' ability to choose enhances the quantity and quality of education that their sons and daughters receive. Efficient, high-performing schools will be in high demand, whether public, private or parochial, and poorly performing schools will lose students and funding.

Administrators and teachers of poorly performing schools will be forced to improve their ability to manage and teach, or face the possibility of losing their jobs. That is, under educational choice, these schools will lose their captive student body.

Under public (monopolized) education systems parents are confronted with a single supplier of subsidized education. Therefore, for most parents the only choice is to consume monopolized education or no education at all.

And consumption of no education by parents of school-age children is prohibited by law. The public and parents can only consume good schools if there is a choice.

Choice is essential for the establishment of a good, efficient educational system and, conversely, for the improvement or dissolution of poor schools.

It is a well known fact that when consumers are confronted with a single supplier of a good or service, the quantity supplied will be less and the price demanded will be higher than if that good or service was competitively supplied.

In the case of public education, the service provided is education, and thus far, especially in the inner cities, enough quality education is not being provided. Moreover, the subsidized cost of public education

is, on the average, higher than the cost of private or parochial education.

On the surface, there is not a great difference between a subsidy and a voucher; both are used by governments to increase consumption of a particular commodity, in this case, education.

The subsidy acts as a general reduction in price and the voucher as an increase in income. The key difference, however, is that the voucher is very effective in increasing consumption for someone who was not consuming that good (education) or who was consuming less than the voucher amount. It is noteworthy to mention that the current voucher is far less than the current government subsidy per pupil.

Choice opponents, however, have raised the argument of cost in their favor. They claim that under choice, taxpayers' outlays will increase.

Since, as they see it, choice is more expensive than the current subsidized public education, and furthermore, they do not believe that it is fair for the taxpaying public to pay for private education.

Their argument, at first glance, appears to be logical. Nevertheless, it is quite possible that under choice, or competitive education, taxpayers' educational liabilities will substantially decrease.

For example, if a currently subsidized (public) school loses one-half of its student body once choice is enacted, then public funding in the form of a \$900 voucher follows each student to a more efficient private or parochial school.

The government subsidy that was paid to maintain these students in public schools is no longer necessary. The often quoted subsidy per student is \$6,000 per school year. Therefore, in the long run, taxpayers' savings are ensured, since future payments per student will be a \$900 voucher as opposed to the \$6,000 subsidy. Choice appears to be beneficial to the taxpayer.

The notion that competitive education is detrimental to poorly performing schools, particularly inner-city schools (i.e. bureaucrats and teachers), is fundamentally true.

But, on the other hand, poorly

performing schools have been, and continue to be, detrimental to inner-city students and society.

Therefore, to advocate a continuation of monopolized education is  
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not in the best interest of inner-city students.

Furthermore, to contend that choice will be more beneficial to pupils already attending private or parochial schools is spurious. Under choice, will private or parochial students receive a different education than they are receiving now? Not likely. However, the probability of inner-city students improving their ability to obtain higher quantity and quality of education is increased.

Opposition to competitive education from public educators and bureaucrats is understandable and expected. However, it is appalling to see Black politicians, Black clergy and the NAACP opposed to free market education and the opportunity that it offers. Under a voucher system, Blacks, particularly Black churches, can set up schools similar to existing parochial schools, and educate the pupils under their membership and the surrounding communities. They could elicit support from interested parties, such as Black politicians, the NAACP and other Black organizations.

Clearly, choice would allow Blacks to control their own school system. And the opportunity to inculcate good morals, respect for human and property rights, and most of all to ensure a quality curriculum and to stress the value of education.

It is obvious, therefore, if the Black clergy, Black politicians and the NAACP are genuinely interested in the welfare of inner-city students they would be on the side of competitive education.

They would be pushing for greater vouchers, at least one-half of the present subsidy per pupil, and negotiating for existing school

facilities that are bound to become underutilized.

However, it could well be that these individuals and organizations do not want such a responsibility, because if they are now responsible for educating their own, they will have no one to blame for the educational shortcomings of the inner cities but themselves.

Old established paradigms must be set aside, even for a moment, so new unconventional solutions can be envisioned. Ownership of educational institution is the beginning of power.

B.A. Ells, Jr., is a Philadelphia resident.

## Fire hall houses new post office

ROCKY RIDGE, Md. (AP) — Northern Frederick County's Rocky Ridge post office has reopened in the fire hall just in time for the Christmas rush.

The fire company first offered space in its building for free, said Robert Mumma, fire company chief and chairman of a citizens committee instrumental in getting the post office reopened in the community of 500.

"But it being the federal government, they couldn't take it so we're charging \$1 a year," Mumma said.

The old post office closed in March, partly because it didn't have a restroom. Postal workers had to walk to the firehouse to use facilities there.

The postal service paid for renovations in what once was the fire company's meeting room. Boxes were installed for 45 walk-in customers and 343 rural patrons.

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