

DC Family Policy Seminar

Saving Our Schools: Would Vouchers Create New Solutions or New Problems?

Seminar Highlights

**Moderator: Donna Ruane Morrison, Ph.D., Assistant Professor
Georgetown Public Policy Institute, Georgetown University**

In recent years, a variety of initiatives have been explored to address concerns with the District of Columbia school system. One initiative that has gained attention is recent legislation introduced in Congress to provide publicly subsidized education vouchers for use in both public and private schools. Entitled the District of Columbia Scholarship Opportunity Act, the initiative provides subsidies of \$3,200 to approximately 2,000 students from low-income families. It also provides 2,000 students with tutoring assistance. This legislation has raised a number of debates as to the appropriateness of such a system and whether this is the best system for achieving the desired results.

The goals of this seminar were to provide (1) an overview of the voucher initiative, and (2) information on other reform initiatives throughout the country.

**Andrew Laperriere, Economic Policy Advisor
Office of Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-TX)**

Laperriere began his presentation by acknowledging the number of arguments that can be made for and against the initiative. He noted that the issue that receives the most criticism is the 2,000 scholarships of up to \$3,200 for low-income students to use in any school of their choice. The two issues to focus on within this framework are (1) Are the 2,000 children who receive the scholarship better or worse off than children who remain in the public schools? and (2) What are conditions like for the children who remain in the public schools? The goal of the voucher initiative, he argued, is to provide a good education for every child.

Competition

The pro-voucher argument is based on the notion that competition among schools is good and will spur innovation in the public school system. Laperriere believes that the legislation would effectively “light a fire under the school system so it can improve.”

Laperriere quoted William Raspberry: “The notion that competition will force the worse schools to improve drives most of the advocacy for vouchers and scholarship. Does it make sense? I don’t know. But surely opponents cannot believe the logic of their counterargument that if you can’t save everybody, whether from a burning house or sinking ship, or dreadful school system, it’s better not to save anybody.”

The Highlights represent the opinions of the presenters and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of the Georgetown Public Policy Institute or NCEMCH.

Congress is currently debating a number of initiatives that are all designed to spur competition, such as the deregulation of utilities, cable television, and telephone companies. While there may be disagreements about the details of these legislative proposals, Laperriere argued that no one disagrees with the idea that more competition brings improved service at lower prices. He believes that school choice will spur this competition among schools and result in improved education for all children.

Laperriere illustrated the competition argument with an analogy between fast food restaurants and the school system. He noted that no one expects McDonald's to sell a decent hamburger. However, McDonald's provides a decent hamburger at a competitive price because McDonald's fears that if it didn't consumers would switch to Burger King. He stated that with school choice, the school system would say, "I'm doing the very best by these children because if I don't, they'll go somewhere else."

Laperriere next cited Howard Fuller, the former superintendent of the Milwaukee Public School Systems:

So what I'm arguing is that we have to support changes that will make a difference for both students inside and outside of the existing system. But it is the existence of an option outside that will help you fight to make the improvements inside, because no matter what people say rhetoric wise, I can tell you that as a superintendent you can stand up and talk all you want about what needs to be done, but if people know this is the only game in town, there is absolutely nothing you can do other than run your mouth about what needs to happen. It is not going to happen for the majority of our kids. But if parents all of a sudden have the option to say, "Look, if you're not going to do well by my children not only am I leaving, but when I leave my dollars go with me"—if that is in the mix, you are going to have a different conversation about these parents' kids.

Laperriere referenced local cable companies as an additional example of the positive effects of competition. He noted that cable companies often operate as monopolies without competition. As a result, they often do not provide good customer service to their customers. For example, many cable companies simply do not answer their customer service telephones. In response to this, Congress passed a bill requiring companies to answer their phones. This is not to say that the companies did not have the best of intentions, but they lacked the competition to force them to improve customer service. Competition, Laperriere argued, has changed the conversation from providing one choice to a number of choices.

Laperriere asserted that competition provides a needed incentive to prompt public school systems to develop accountability and to give parents options. He believes that the ultimate form of accountability is when parents say, "If you do not do right by my child, I will go somewhere else."

Philanthropy

A number of individuals and privately funded organizations have entered the arena of school vouchers. Laperriere cited two examples, the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF) and Virginia Gilder.

President Clinton and Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton have both praised WSF, a privately funded organization founded to provide financial assistance to low-income children for attending private or parochial schools. As of April, 23, 1998, the fund provides 500 low-income students in the District with a scholarship of up to \$1,700.

Laperriere stated that opponents of vouchers argue that children would not be better off academically with a voucher because either the “good” private schools would not accept them or the scholarship money would not cover the cost of tuition. He argues that WSF statistics demonstrate that this is not true. He cites the fact that through WSF, nearly 500 students are attending 74 area schools on scholarships of \$1,700 or less, which is equal to approximately half the amount offered in the District of Columbia Scholarship Opportunity Act. Laperriere further argued that students funded by WSF have enrolled in private schools. Therefore, according to WSF and independent research conducted by Representative Armeý’s office, a number of spots are available in private schools.

Laperriere described Virginia Gilder as another example of philanthropy in this field. Gilder identified one of the worst schools in Albany, NY, and offered to send every child in the school a scholarship of up to \$2,000 to attend the school of their family’s choice. The parents of one out of every six children accepted her offer.

Laperriere quoted *The Washington Post* article on Gilder: “It worked. The school board ousted the principal, brought in nine new teachers, added two assistant principals, and invested in books, equipment and teacher training after years of neglect.” Laperriere maintained that this demonstrates the parental interest in voucher programs and the positive effects that competition can have on public school systems.

Opposing Arguments

- “We Know What To Do”

Laperriere noted that one of several arguments often used to counter the voucher proposal includes “we know what to do.” He questioned why, if in fact school boards know what to do, it has not yet been done? He emphasized the need to try new approaches. Congressman Armeý stated, “Therapists say that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.” Thus, school districts must try different approaches to improve and spur innovation in the school system and to make it more accountable to parents.

Laperriere offered his and Congressman Armeý’s support to work with public school administrators to improve the public schools through school choice. He maintained that the issue does not merely involve the 2,000 children who receive scholarships, but also the children who do not. School choice, though not the ultimate and final solution, is part of the overall solution to improve education in America.

- Funding

According to Laperriere, opponents of school choice charge that scholarship supporters are simply trying to abandon or take money away from public schools. However, because the bill provides \$7 million in new money, it does not take money away from the school system. In fact, Laperriere argued that because the schools would receive the same funding amount and the number of students would decrease, the school system would in effect have more money per pupil than it did previously. It would be the equivalent of increasing funding to the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) by \$15 to \$20 million.

- Constitutional Considerations

Opponents also maintain that the initiative violates the Constitution because it violates the separation of church and state. Laperriere believes that the vouchers do not violate this

separation because they are similar to Pell grants. (The U.S. Supreme Court has upheld that as long as the money from Pell grants is sent to parents and students and not to the institution, Pell Grants neither establish religion nor create an entanglement.)

- **Creaming**

The “creaming” argument holds that private schools would only accept the best students, thereby taking the best students out of the public schools. Laperriere maintained that in school districts where choice already exists, such as Milwaukee or Cleveland, this has not happened. Laperriere asserted that the participants in those programs were students who were performing poorly. He believes that parents who are most concerned with their children are those who remove the students. Nevertheless, the proposed legislation would prevent creaming because scholarships would be awarded by random assignment if the number of applications exceeded the number of available spots.

**Bella Rosenberg, Assistant to the President
American Federation of Teachers (AFT)**

Rosenberg stated that vouchers place a number of values at stake. In her view, the voucher proposal is neither liberal nor conservative, but “something that is fundamentally radical and strikes to the root of all the ideals of our society.” In her opinion, the voucher concept essentially transforms public education, which is currently free and open equally to all, into a market commodity that is open to people based on the unequal ability to pay and an unequal opportunity to be chosen.

Rosenberg stated, “In a democratic society, more choice is certainly better than less choice.” However, in this case, choice means that students may choose a private school, but private schools do not have to choose the student. She maintained that no new experimentation with this concept is needed because empirical evidence from the Milwaukee and Cleveland studies already exists.

Need for Change

Rosenberg stipulated that she does not defend the status quo of the DCPS system because it must change in very profound ways. However, she suggested that Raspberry’s question, quoted by Laperriere, about saving children from a sinking boat or a burning building is the wrong question because the current discussion is not about a triage system where the only option available is to save a few children. That line of thinking represents an absolute abandonment of the overwhelming majority of children, who for now and in the foreseeable future, even if a national voucher system were adopted, would remain in public schools. She stated, “It is a cynical and ugly argument, turning something that is open to all on the basis of equal citizenship into a roll of the dice and the rest be damned.” She maintained that society does not need to choose between vouchers and the status quo because other proven alternatives exist.

Existing Voucher Programs

Two voucher programs operate in the United States, one in Milwaukee and one in Cleveland. Rosenberg commented that while the vouchers were legally restricted for low-income students, they present a “window on the soul of the theoretical argument about how markets work.” Rosenberg stated that, without social policy, free markets are the “law of the jungle because social policy is supposed to do that which the market will not do or cannot do.”

Milwaukee and Cleveland exemplify a market for schools, Rosenberg argued, even though they are low-income programs. Proponents have argued that creaming does not exist in

these markets because it is a random choice program for low-income children. But Rosenberg argued that creaming does actually occur.

Rosenberg stated that in Milwaukee and Cleveland the population who applied and who ultimately received vouchers was in fact a creamed population of low-income parents. These parents had higher education levels on average than parents of other children in the public schools and, in Milwaukee, a majority of these parents were public school activists advocating for their children.

In Cleveland, the legislature reserved 50 percent of the voucher places for low-income children already in private schools, which was later changed to 25 percent. According to Rosenberg, a program that was billed as an opportunity for poor children to escape failing public schools served only a handful of children in the public schools. Twenty-five percent of the children who received vouchers were already in private schools, and close to 50 percent were kindergartners. Rosenberg maintained that the private schools were primarily interested in kindergartners because, among other reasons, they were less likely than older children to have developed behavioral, academic, or social problems. The remaining handful of children from public schools came from a creamed population of low-income families. She further asserted that some independent audits question whether these parents had low incomes. Income verification was unavailable and other irregularities were discovered. Rosenberg noted that Americans do not support an unrestricted voucher program in which the ultimate goal would be to subsidize children already in private schools.

The Cleveland voucher program, like the District proposal, offered tutoring grants for children in public schools. In Cleveland, 1,925 students applied for tutoring grants, but only 245 students received tutoring. The leftover money was redirected to private school vouchers. Rosenberg argues that the tutoring assistance was simply a “scrap” offered to ease the burden of vouchers.

Finally, both the District proposal and the Cleveland program allow parents to use vouchers for private, religious, and suburban schools. However, few independent schools and no suburban schools in Cleveland participated in the program. Rosenberg attributed this primarily to costs, commenting that vouchers did not come close to covering the education expenses of a suburban public school.

Achievement Results

In Milwaukee, three evaluations were conducted.

- In an independent state evaluation, John Witte examined 4 years of data and found no achievement differences between voucher children and comparable children in the Milwaukee public school system.
- Paul Peterson performed the second evaluation, which re-analyzed Witte’s data. This work, according to Rosenberg, was roundly criticized by many social scientists and has not appeared in a peer-reviewed journal. Also Peterson is an avid proponent of vouchers and his work was funded by a pro-voucher group. This study found that the “voucher miracle” does not take place until the third or fourth year of the program. Peterson found a huge advantage in math for voucher children and a smaller advantage in reading. Rosenberg pointed out that in the third or fourth year of the study, only 26 children remained in the sample. These 26 children were concentrated in only three private schools, and the small comparison sample of children that were not accepted into the voucher program and remained in the public schools did not form a comparable sample.

- The third study, conducted by Cecilia Rouse of Princeton University, reported results similar to the Witte study. Rouse found no difference in achievement between voucher students and public school children in reading and a slight advantage for voucher children in mathematics.

Rouse conducted further analysis into the achievement of regular public school children, magnet school children, children in the voucher schools, and very-low-income children who were participating in a state-run program known as the P5 program. Among other things, the P5 program substantially lowered class size in the early grades. Comparing all these children, Rouse found that the very-low-income children in the P5 public school program outscored everyone, even the voucher children. The P5 classes were a bit larger than the average class size in the voucher program, but these public school students still did better.

Efficiency

Rosenberg concluded that the results from Milwaukee and Cleveland revealed essentially no difference in achievement. Yet, proponents maintain that, even without higher results, voucher programs cost less than public schools. However, Rosenberg noted that if one compares comparable service mixes between public and private schools, accounting for the fact that private schools do not offer such costly programs as special education, English as a Second Language, or bilingual education, there is in fact no difference in cost. Rosenberg cautioned against mistaking private school tuition for private school cost.

Path for the Future

Rosenberg reiterated that she is not defending the DCPS status quo. Instead, she argued that, with the same money spent for vouchers in Milwaukee or Cleveland, states could have instituted a program such as Success for All (which has 10 years of longitudinal evidence) in every elementary school in Milwaukee and Cleveland, with money remaining to reduce class size in the lower grades. She noted that society should not expect an overnight turnaround in student achievement because “education, unlike making hamburgers, is a very difficult business. It is a laborious business. It is a human interaction.”

Rosenberg argued that the United States must “give poor children at least the same kinds of things we give advantaged children: a rich curriculum; well-prepared, qualified teachers; smaller class size; and good books and materials that arrive on time.” Rosenberg ended by stating that we should not suggest, as Raspberry did, that we have no choice but to save a handful because we, in fact, can help all children through proven programs. Instead, she stated, “We have a choice and we better make the right one.”

J. Arthur Jones, Ph.D., Senior Associate Quality Education for Minorities (QEM) Network

Jones stated that the United States has a number of options to reform the school system. He suggested focusing not on the 2,000 children who may benefit from the voucher program, but instead on the 80,000 DC students who need a good education. Jones observed that the United States already faces competition, and not just on a local level. For example, results from the Third International Mathematical and Science study showed that U.S. students are not up to par with the rest of the world. He argued that the United States needs to provide a quality education for all children, to compete effectively in a global society.

Jones recommended creating a vision, among all sectors of society, in which DCPS would become a model school system for the United States. Jones argued that America must make a moral commitment to children, which means finding comprehensive solutions to solve some of the larger problems facing our schools.

Building Blocks of Excellence

Jones noted several building blocks of excellence that are the keys to successful academic achievement.

- *Hard work:* Jones created an analogy between students and players in the National Basketball Association (NBA), 79 percent of whom are African American. Jones maintained that school systems have institutionalized a support system that helps African Americans achieve in basketball. The success is based on hard work at all levels and by all people, including both coaches and players. Thus, in both academics and athletics, students and teachers or players and coaches must work hard to achieve success. Unfortunately, a push for hard work and challenging activities is often lacking in our public schools.
- *Positive role models:* Many children view athletes as positive role models, but they do not perceive academicians in the same way. For example, many African American children see Michael Jordan as a role model, but few have an African American scientist or engineer as a role model.
- *High expectations:* High levels of expectations must be established. For example, many believe that Title I students must spend time in remediation. Instead of primarily focusing on remedial programs, Jones argued, Title I students at high levels should be offered places in gifted and talented programs.
- *Rewards and recognition:* In many ways, society places greater value on sports than on education. Dr. Jones compared the lapel pin his high school gave him for being on the honor roll to the trophies and photographs in the newspaper that star athletes received. Everyone applauded the athletes, which encouraged them to accomplish more. Athletes received systemic support. “There is no booster club for the guy who does mathematics,” said Jones.
- *Early positive experiences and early achievement goals:* For students to succeed, early positive experiences as well as early achievement goals must be established.
- *Supportive environments:* Supportive environments produce excellence. A supportive environment can be a quiet place to study both in and out of school, or the availability of mentors or tutors.

Moral and Financial Commitment

Jones noted that 79 percent of NBA players are African American; 66 percent of players in the National Football League are African American; and more than 40 percent of professional baseball players are African American or Hispanic. He juxtaposed these figures against those provided by the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, which reveal that 41 percent of the inmates are African-American males. Jones commented, “The costs for inmates are far greater than the cost of Michael Jordan’s salary. So if you want to know where the big money is spent for African American males, look at the Federal Bureau of Prisons and the State Bureau of Prisons.” He stated that in California, \$6 billion was spent annually on the prison system, primarily for African American and Hispanic males. In addition, the average cost per person in prison is about \$30,000 a year—about the same cost of attending Harvard. Jones stressed that this is not a good use of taxpayers’ money.

Jones maintained that the major issue is not money, but moral commitment. The District should work to establish DCPS as a model school system, one in which all children can succeed. If only a few succeed, the country will not be competitive and will not remain a world leader. The country's economic survival depends on the future of the children we educate. Putting more money into a prison system is not productive.

Publications

Finally, Jones mentioned that plans for improving the education of minorities are included in publications of The Quality Education for Minorities (QEM) Network, such as *Education That Works* and *Together, We Can Make It Work*.

Mark Robertson, Assistant Superintendent DC Public Schools

Mark Robertson premised his presentation on his passion to help children. In his short time in the District, he has observed (1) an extreme lack of commitment to children and (2) some adults' belief that children cannot learn. Moreover, he believes that in the District the best interests of children do not come first.

Robertson previously worked in a large urban school system in Seattle, WA, which implemented changes to create a strong school system. The school system in Seattle exhibited 3 years of statistical growth at all achievement levels, especially among the low-achievement levels. These results were based on three different tests: the Iowa Test for Basic Skills, the California Achievement Test, and the FAT test.

District in Crisis

Currently, the DCPS administration has taken no stance on the voucher issue. Clearly, the District is in crisis and cannot afford to continue doing business as usual. Schools are dilapidated and teachers lack basic supplies and textbooks.

Current Reform Efforts

Robertson commented that parents hold their hopes, aspirations, and dreams in their children and they do not leave their best children at home and send their worst children to school. Robertson believes that "it is incumbent upon us to teach and value every child." Therefore, the current dialogue must not focus solely on transforming the educational system, but also on how we love children. Robertson noted that among the many children he has met over the years, all of them need adults to provide high levels of expectation and high levels of support. Thus, children cannot be expected to move from one level to another unless support is provided to them.

Current reform efforts in the District are based on proven approaches that have worked in Seattle. Robertson stated that standards, performance measures, accountability, and support systems are key components of reform.

Standards and Performance Measures

The new DCPS leadership, headed by Arlene Ackerman, established a vision along with specific targets for the DCPS. Robertson noted that the leadership is establishing standards and promotion guidelines. Promotion guidelines set standards levels at which children must

perform in order to graduate and move from one grade level to the next. In addition, the DCPS has a number of assessment tools to measure performance, including the Stanford 9.

The Stanford 9 has two sections: a norm-referenced section and a criterion-referenced section. The norm-referenced test results show a bell-shaped curve and indicate the number of high achievers on one side, low achievers on the other, and the bulk in the middle of the curve. This section allows students to compare themselves to one another.

The criterion-referenced section provides information on problem areas specific to each student. The criterion-based section of the test will be used by the school district to begin to define areas of the curriculum in which each student is achieving or not achieving goals. DCPS will also institute teacher observations and student portfolios as additional assessment tools.

Accountability

Robertson stated that the DCPS administration has established a system of accountability because “as public educators, we have not done a very good job at being held accountable.” To create a system of accountability in DCPS, 50 percent of every principal’s evaluation is tied to the students’ achievement at that school. The administration’s evaluation is also linked to how children perform overall in school. The school district is currently negotiating with teachers’ unions to tie teacher evaluations to student achievement. Thus, the administration is attempting to align accountability systems, which, Robertson asserted, represents a radical change for public schools.

Support Systems

In addition to these reform efforts, Robertson maintained that DCPS must establish support systems. In addition, DCPS will provide training opportunities to teachers, such as the four free, 1-week, teacher-training institutes that have been established in the District. Each training provides a number of classes and staff development opportunities to teachers. The unions and DCPS are currently negotiating these voluntary institutes, and Robertson noted that the unions and management are enjoying stronger relationships than in the past.

Also, throughout the next school year, DCPS will conduct a number of strategic trainings for teachers. Finally, schools that score below basic on the Stanford 9 and schools that are two to three grade levels below standard are receiving additional staffing to support their efforts. Those schools must also show a 10 percent increase in achievement based on the Stanford 9. Results from these tests will be available in June.

Robertson noted that these improvements all center around the vision that DCPS can become exemplary by the year 2000, when Congress will essentially give power back to the District’s elected officials.

Conclusion

Reforms are in place to address the problems of DCPS. Robertson believes very strongly that the reforms will work due to the strong leadership assembled in the District. The responsibility for strengthening the school system rests on everyone. Above all, Robertson believes that children must be loved first. He concluded, “If you don’t love them, you can’t teach them.”

Question and Answers

Federal Funding

Question: Mr. Laperriere, in your presentation you stated that if children left the DCPS through vouchers, that public school funding would remain the same. However, aren't the federal dollars based on how many children you have in your school?

William Wilson, Volunteer, Education Working Committee of the Marshall Height Community Collaborative

Answer: The District has a unique relationship with the federal government that is different from the states. The District of Columbia's funding will not decrease if these 2,000 children were to take the scholarships and leave the public schools. This would not necessarily be true for a state contribution or a federal contribution in some other localities, but in the District it would not change the overall level of funding for the education budget.

Andrew Laperriere

Q: I disagree, but I am not going to debate you on the federal funding issues. A private foundation has assembled certain parents from low-income areas to meet at private schools to enter a lottery system that will provide 1,000 scholarships to private schools. These parents brought their W-2 forms and the children had to take tests. Why wasn't the entire community informed? I question whether these parents are low-income, and I know that many of these parents are activists and are privy to this type of information. So the information only circulated to a certain group of individuals within the low-income area.

William Wilson

A: The private foundation is the Washington Scholarship Fund (WSF). WSF is not a Republican group. In fact, the people that support it include Senator Norton, who is a staunch opponent of the scholarship bill, and President Clinton. As I previously mentioned, WSF currently funds 5,000 scholarships. In October 1997, WSF announced that two private individuals had donated \$6 million, which will provide another 1,000 scholarships to the community. They plan to award the new scholarships next week. Five hundred seventy-three children applied for the 1,000 new slots created by the \$6 million donation. This means that one out of every six children who are eligible applied for a slot, which speaks volumes about the fact that people in the District want scholarships. In terms of outreach, WSF spent a couple hundred thousand dollars on advertising to let people know that these scholarships are available. They asked families to bring their W-2 forms to demonstrate eligibility and they tested the children so that later they can evaluate whether the program has been successful. This is a worthy endeavor.

Andrew Laperriere

Q: Have all of the children who have applied to WSF been accepted into private schools? Is there, in fact, room for all of them based on private school size?

Mina Veazie, Public Education Network and a Parent of Children in DC Public Schools

A: WSF has not yet awarded the scholarships to the additional 1,000 children. Therefore, they do not know yet where the children have applied.

Andrew Laperriere

Commentary: The application deadline for private schools within the metropolitan area passed three months ago. Therefore, if a student has not been accepted by now, he or she is not going to a private school unless there happens to be a leftover spot. Usually the available openings are in the smaller religious schools. At this juncture, families know whether or not their children are going to a private school and now they are working out the financial details.

In addition, The Washington Post reported an overwhelming increase of applications to private schools. This already provides public schools with competition. There is a critical gap here between what people are being urged to seek through vouchers and what is available in the private school market. Yet at the same time, much of the charter school effort, which would still maintain public capabilities for full access to education, has been stymied in the District. The charter schools face a lack of funds and have limited access to resources because they have been shifted over to the private sector.

Mina Veazie

A: WSF will assure you that there are a thousand spots within the District. In addition, currently private schools within a very narrow surround have 3,000 spots. I am personally aware of a Catholic school that fit low-income children into its program shortly before the school year began last August. These children averaged between one half to three or four grade levels behind, so the notion that these schools are not interested in these children is not true. Furthermore, in Cleveland a majority of the children now attend schools that did not exist prior to the introduction of vouchers.

Andrew Laperriere

Q: So in Cleveland a private school business sprang up to meet the private school demand that vouchers created?

Mina Veazie

A: You can call it a business, but the children and the parents in Cleveland are happy. We should admire those that establish schools to help children learn. A lot of schools and people, including Mr. Arney and myself, have a mission to help these children. These schools want to improve the lives of these children and it is happening.

Andrew Laperriere

Q: Mr. Robertson, if you had 7 million new dollars for DCPS, how would you spend it? Is there a need for an additional \$7 million? Has DCPS asked for it?

Mina Veazie

A: Seven million dollars is just a smidgen when it comes to the needs of the DCPS. First, to name a few general needs: (1) Bringing the school facilities up to code is estimated to cost \$2 million. (2) The schools have a weak technology infrastructure, which prevents DCPS from publishing reports and other things. As a result, DCPS cannot count exactly how many children are enrolled or how many people DCPS employs. (3) We invested in books and supplies earlier this year, so we are comfortable with their supply level right now. (4) Why are we busing special education children all over the area to provide them with services when these children should be in the least restrictive environment and closer to home? We need to resolve that issue.

However, if I personally was given \$7 million and I could make the spending decision in my own vacuum world, I would do two things. First, I would like to champion students that increased their Scholastic Aptitude Test scores. We need to have a chance to say, "You've done well, great job, and DCPS will continue to support you." We could give each student who increased the standardized score a little less than \$100, which is not a lot

of money, but it would reward them. Second, I would fund the technology infrastructure in our schools so that our students would have the capability to access technology.

Mark Robertson

Q: Mr. Laperriere, my first question refers to the data from Milwaukee and Cleveland. How do the students in these voucher programs fare compared to a control group? Overall, was there an increase in achievement? Second, if you are saying that federal dollars to the DCPS will not decrease, how will that spur competition, the essential tenet of the HR 1797 bill?

Shelley Stark, Center for Law and Social Policy

A: Paul Peterson's study compared students who applied and received vouchers with students who applied and did not receive vouchers. Although he did not find a difference in the first year, he found a difference in achievement between these two groups over time. This follows intuitively as one would expect gains in math to come before gains in reading. In answer to your second question, I think that the current DCPS administration is doing a great job and that we are going to see improvement in DCPS. However, you asked if the voucher programs do not take away any federal money, what incentive will the school system have? The threat that more people are going to want this opportunity to attend a private school will light the fire under the school system. For example, when Virginia Gilder gave the money to children in Albany, she did not take any money out of the school system, but the school system turned around because they realized that someone would hold them accountable. If the program starts with 2,000 children and they improve, then families in the District will say, "I want my kid in that program." Eventually the system will respond to the fact that a competitive force is holding it accountable.

As a personal example, my wife and I just bought a house. Real estate agents give potential homeowners one sheet of paper that summarizes key information about the town and it includes a list of schools in that area. Thus, middle-class neighborhoods have competition because people move out of neighborhoods with bad school systems. Middle- to upper-income people in the District have removed their children from the public schools. We are trying to give low-income children the same kind of opportunities that those middle- and upper-income children have.

Andrew Laperriere

A: The District and a number of other urban school systems have been losing children to suburban public school districts and to private schools for 20 years. First, the upper-middle-class, predominantly white families fled from these areas, and then middle-class minorities followed. Thus, the message of competition was sent to public schools. However, I have not noticed that the public schools in cities have improved as a result. So this Orwellian opportunity scholarship essentially proposes to take the most motivated children of activist-motivated parents, who are in the upper strata of the low-income group, and drain them out of public schools as well. I really do not understand the argument that this will help public schools improve.

I understand competition when it comes to Colgate and Crest or Burger King and McDonald's because private businesses raise capital. Chief executive officers (CEOs) make decisions about market share, advertising, placement on a shelf, and stepping up production. Democratic society does not make these decisions. Therefore, I do not understand the comparison between private schools, where there is a board of directors and nothing is public, and a democratically controlled system where you have to beg before Congress before you get a nickel or in most systems you have to pass a bond issue. Democratic society dictates that public schools have to go to the voters, not to a CEO. I do not understand this analogy.

To answer the question regarding overall increase in achievement in Milwaukee and Cleveland: basically there was no difference in achievement between voucher children and the comparable public schools' children, which is not a surprise. Thirty years of research starting with the Coleman Report explains that on average there is no difference between public and private school achievement once you take into account family background and, at the secondary level, academic coursetaking.

So let me submit to you something that private schools do better than public schools. In private schools and most of the better religious schools, there is no choice, all students study an academic curriculum. Whereas in public schools, students can choose all their own courses because the belief was that by virtue of choosing their studies, the topics would be relevant to the students. As a result, children would engage and raise their achievement level. This did not succeed. So, to increase student achievement let us return to rigorous academic coursetaking. When it comes to SAT and ACT scores, academic coursetaking trumps family background, race, and class.

Lastly, I have the deepest respect for the social mission of Catholic schools in urban areas and I would be at the barricades if anyone ever challenged the right of private and religious schools to exist. These schools perform a social mission for a handful of children and they will be the first to admit that they have admission criteria. However, one does not have to choose between individual responsibility and social responsibility. I imagine that everyone in this room does something charitable, but that doth not a society make. We must have some collective responsibility to get to the point of individual responsibility. As much as I believe in charity, whatever happened to the notion of rights? This is a democratic society and I do not want education on the basis of charity. I want it on the basis of rights, based on equal citizenship because that is what is at stake with voucher programs. Public schools will mean charity schools—schools for the children that no one else wants or can deal with. We must have some notion of public responsibility for education.

Bella Rosenberg

Q: Everyone has mentioned accountability and achievement. The District of Columbia Committee on Public Education (COPE) supports the school system's effort to reform, but we are also concerned about the year 2000 and what changes that will bring. I am wondering, where in this congressional proposal is the accountability to the taxpayers? Will the students in voucher programs take the same standardized tests as public school children? Will their results be compared student-to-student as well as to students in the public schools? Accountability to the taxpayers is important as well as accountability to students and parents because taxpayers support the public schools.

Shirley Monastra, District of Columbia Committee on Public Education (COPE)

A: Parents are the best form of accountability that exists because they are going to choose the school that fits their children best. The same accountability exists for student loans and it works for the universities.

Andrew Laperriere

Q: It is not just the parents, but all taxpayers that fund education. We want to know that students who attend private schools are in fact accomplishing something. It is not enough to look at a report card and say you got a 3.0 average. We need those achievement scores to know what is happening to those students and if there is a system that is better. Charter schools, for example, have to be accountable, they have standards and consequences. Will the students be pulled out of private schools if there is not student achievement?

Shirley Monastra

A: The presumption that the children who receive these scholarships and leave the public schools will get a worse education than they are getting today presumes that the parent who makes that decision is totally inept. I do not believe that argument is true.

Andrew Laperriere

C: Did you know that in a parochial school in Washington, DC, there was a recent scandal involving fourth- and sixth-grade students in a closet together engaging in sexual relations? This never made the papers and the community does not know about it. However, when a similar incident happened last year at a public school in the District, it was talked about. So yes, parents have the best intentions. They believe that these schools are better, and I am not saying that they are not. I am not implying that parents are inept, but that they have a certain sense of trust in a religious school or a private school. However, we all know that there are no guarantees.

Shirley Monastra

A: There is no guarantee, but in two high schools in Washington, DC, 100 percent of the students are testing below basic, which means they are two to three grades behind. I think to argue that those children could be in a worse circumstance is almost incomprehensible.

Andrew Laperriere

A: It is not a question of preferences. There are rigorous admissions requirements at the secondary level. Even though it is a low-income lottery, the school gets to choose the students. The private schools will not give up that right.

Bella Rosenberg

A: It is true that students do not have the right to get in. However, this bill gives low-income people the same rights and resources that upper-income people have.

Andrew Laperriere

A: The proposed voucher does not cover a fraction of the cost of Sidwell Friends, the Cathedral School, or the best Catholic schools. Also, there are strict admissions requirements. Tell me how a voucher program that covers 2,000 children is going to increase the choices of poor parents and increase the life opportunities of poor children. How will doing something with a handful help the rest? How is this accountable to taxpayers?

Bella Rosenberg

A: The reason that we have an excellent university system is that we have competition. People have resources, which they can take to any school. Let me read from Howard Fuller again:

If you are in a system, as I was as a superintendent, demanding change, but everyone there is clear that, whether a single child learns or not, everyone there is going to get paid. As everyone is clear that in schools that have never educated children, each year you will throw more children in there and there is not one single thing that I can do about it. All the rhetoric in the world is not going to change that. What I am saying is this: I think you've got to have a series of options for parents. I support charter schools, site-based management. I support anything that changes the options for parents. But I am here to say that if one of those options is not choice that gives poor parents a way to leave, the kind of pressure that you need internally is simply not going to occur.

The \$3,200 is chosen because that is the number that we think can get the most votes in Congress. We would be happy to increase it. We wrote a letter to Barbara Bullock, who is president of the local teachers' union, because she went on television and said that \$3,200 is not enough. The letter to her read, "We take your concerns seriously Therefore, we want you to know that we are willing to enter into a discussion with you about whether to increase the \$3,200 figure. Please be assured that if we can count on your support for our legislation we would be willing to consider raising the amount of the scholarship. We look forward to working with you on this important piece of legislation."

We sent that letter June 13, 1997, and we have not heard back yet. The amount of the scholarship is not the issue. It is not why the teachers' union is against the legislation.
Andrew Laperriere

Q: This is a moral investment that everyone needs to make in education. Mr. Robertson said that 50 percent of principals' evaluations are based on student performance. What does DCPS have in place for parents to be accountable?
Joyce Fourth, Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington

A: Right now DCPS does not have a measure in place per se for parents to be accountable. We do have an opportunity for parents to be involved through surveys of parents that come back to the principal and assistant superintendent in charge of that school. There is some legislation regarding the issue of choice for children that holds parents accountable for children being in school, but as a school district specifically we do not have a measure right now that allows parents to hold us directly accountable. We have created a corporate and community affairs office. Anu Greenly is in that office and it is her job to reconnect the parenting community and the school because there is a big disconnect. This is just one way of helping to bring parents back on board. We value their perspectives and input in educating their children.
Mark Robertson

A: First, I would like to address the funding question raised earlier. Title I funds are based on the number of poor children in your school system. According to the formula, if a system loses poor children, it loses federal funds. This formula applies to DC and all the states. Therefore, it is not accurate to say that funds will not be lost.

I am sorry that there is a focus, particularly among Congress, on a narrow piece of the action, because this is a difficult problem. It is politically easier to take a piece of the problem—vouchers, which may have benefits—but that does not solve the problem, which remains for a majority of the children. The District has all the major organizations and agencies such as the National Science Foundation, the Department of Education, NASA, and Quality Education for Minorities, but we all give up and decide there is no way we can do anything about this. We need to change that attitude and make a commitment, a moral and economic investment that sets the tone for what education ought to be in this country.

Let's take an example of society's investments. More than 52 percent of individuals that get Ph.D.s in mathematics in this country are not United States citizens. So they may leave or stay after their studies, yet we subsidize their education. At the same time, we are paying for the incarceration of African Americans.

So, the issue is commitment and what the United States is committed to do. We need to think about the big picture—this may be a piece of the solution, but we need to think about

the other children that do not win the lottery. Maybe we need them to play the DC lottery, and if they get rich they can go to Sidwell Friends. Maybe that is the best idea.

J. Arthur Jones

Q: In addition to my work in the Education Working Group in Ward 7, I am the proud parent of eight children that went to DCPS in Ward 7, so our schools are all right with me. On Monday, the Education Working Group met with Mr. Keyes to address technology. I am concerned that if DCPS is going to downsize the teaching staff and is aiming to wire all DC Public Schools for the Internet by June 30, 1998, how is DCPS going to keep our caliber of teachers?

In Ward 7 we have built a relationship with all of our students. For example, the Education Working Group had a meeting on Monday with 15 of 24 schools in Ward 7 represented, so we have built a community relationship with the schools that is working. Mr. Robertson, this may be one way that you can get more parents involved.

Sylvia Butler, Education Working Group, Ward 7

A: In regards to the current budget deficit, which is 60 plus million dollars, we are looking at trying not to adversely affect classroom teachers. Therefore, we are pulling staff from the administrative level first. There may be an opportunity for the control board to give us some dollars to help us with the deficit. The school board's budget has been cut for the last 4 years. So there has been a drastic change in operating dollars, while other functions and agencies in the city have increased their budgets. Nevertheless, DCPS is trying to keep all of the teaching staff because the victories are not in the administration, where I work, but in the classroom with the children. We are going to try to keep that whole as much as possible.

Mark Robertson