

REQUEST FOR STUDENT RECORDS

Name of Student

Birthdate *Mo./Day/Yr.*

To: Administrator, _____ School District
 (Name of Resident)

In accordance with s. 118.51 (8), Wis. Stats., and s. PI 36.03 (1) (e), Wis. Adm. Code, I hereby request the following information related to the above-named student:

1. Information about whether the student has been referred for special education, but has not yet been evaluated.
2. Information about the student's special education program, including a copy of the student's individualized education program (IEP).
3. Information about any pending disciplinary proceeding that could lead to expulsion, including a written explanation of the reason(s) for the pending disciplinary proceeding and the possible outcomes of the disciplinary proceeding.
4. A copy of any expulsion order involving the pupil for the 1997-98, 1998-99, and/or 1999-2000 school year, including a written explanation of the reason(s) for the expulsion and the length of the term of the expulsion.

Nonresident School District

Name and Title of School Official	Telephone Area/No.
Signature of School Official	Date Signed

INSTRUCTIONS FOR RESIDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

1. The above information should be promptly provided to the nonresident school district. If the information cannot be provided within five working days, the nonresident school district should be notified of the date by which the information will be provided.
2. Do not provide any records or information that do not relate to the student's special education or expulsion or pending disciplinary proceeding prior to April 7, 2000, unless you have received notice that the nonresident school district has approved the application. This includes transcripts, behavior records other than expulsion records, section 504 plans, etc.

Questions may be directed to:

Mary Jo Cleaver
 Public School Open Enrollment Program
 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
 P.O. Box 7841
 Madison, WI 53707-7841
 608-267-9101 or toll free 1-888-245-2732
 maryjo.cleaver@dpi.state.wi.us
 www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dfm/sms/psctoc.html



**MARQUETTE
UNIVERSITY**

OFFICE OF RESEARCH

**THE SATURATION CAMPAIGN
OF LIES AND DISTORTIONS
ABOUT EDUCATIONAL VOUCHERS**

**PROFESSOR HOWARD L. FULLER, PH.D.
INSTITUTE FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF LEARNING
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY**

**PRESENTED AT THE SECOND ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM
ON EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS
MARCH 2 - 5, 2000 — MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN**

SUMMARY

Surveys show that a majority of low-income parents, mostly of color, support expanded educational options for their children. This reflects wide academic achievement gaps between children from low-income families and those in more affluent families.

Several types of expanded educational options are being studied and implemented. These include: charter schools; public-private ventures; school management by for-profit firms; educational vouchers; education tax credits and deductions; and home-schooling.

Education Week calls Milwaukee “ground zero” for several of these initiatives. This reflects substantial growth in:

- The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program;
- Charter schools authorized by the Common Council of the City of Milwaukee and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; and
- Charter schools authorized by the Milwaukee Public Schools.

Opponents of this movement want to end its growth. Their efforts include a campaign of distortion about several options under consideration. One target — not the only one — is tax-supported educational vouchers. This paper documents that campaign of distortion, a campaign that typifies the broader effort to discredit the movement for expanded educational options.

INTRODUCTION

This paper documents lies knowingly spread by opponents of expanded educational options for low-income parents. The number of examples presented, which are only a sample, shows how widespread the problem is.

Some who distribute misinformation do so unintentionally. They correct errors brought to their attention. They circulate drafts, in advance of formal release, so discrepancies can be identified.

Still, honest errors occur. They are an inevitable part of public discourse.

This paper is not about such errors. It is about known falsehoods, relentlessly circulated, long after evidence reveals them as either flat-out wrong or as misleading half-truths. It is about organizations with multi-million dollar budgets that know fact from fiction but ignore the distinction. It is about their use of misinformation to discredit reforms that would broaden educational options for low-income parents. This extent of the effort suggests a strategy is at work:

Lie. Lie often. It works.

The result is a saturation propaganda effort that has spanned the last several years, where falsehoods are issued and re-issued long after they are shown to be inaccurate or misleading. Why does this continue? Because it works.

A primary goal of this effort is to shape news reports, and thus influence elected officials, in the volatile debate about expanded parent choice. The campaign mostly has worked: when describing vouchers and related programs, news stories frequently report untrue statements in ways that suggest they instead are accurate; often, untrue claims are reported simply as accepted fact.

For the most part, the media have overlooked these untruths. Some exceptions stand out. In September 1999, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* chronicled anti-voucher falsehoods in a lengthy, page one article, "School choice attacks often fail accuracy test." The *Journal Sentinel* has published other stories and editorials questioning claims of voucher opponents. However meritorious, these stories reach a relatively limited audience. Compared with the national wave of distortions, a small dose of truth causes a modest stir.

On rare occasions, when perpetrators are called to account, they seem unfazed. The lying certainly doesn't stop. When it comes to depriving low-income parents of expanded educational options, the ends appear to justify the means. Those who spread falsehoods about vouchers — the focus of this paper — also distort other plans that would change the educational status quo. They target charter schools, public-private partnerships, for-profit ventures, home schooling — anything that expands traditional educational alternatives.

ORGANIZATION

This paper describes aspects of the voucher debate that are subject to frequent distortion, including:

- Overall admission practices in public and private schools.
- Admission practices for special education students in public and private schools.
- Other private school practices and issues.
- Racial segregation.
- Fiscal issues.
- Academic achievement.

I present verbatim quotes from opponents of tax-supported vouchers, along with information refuting each claim. The distortions I cite, while extensive, are **only a sample** of inaccuracies. Their breadth and repetitive use suggests a conscious effort to contaminate public debate. Most of the falsehoods I cite were issued in 1999 or 2000, usually long after evidence confirmed their inaccuracy.

In refuting these claims, I rely on facts **from actual programs of tax-supported vouchers for low-income parents**. Specifically, I reference the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP), the nation's oldest voucher program, and Cleveland's Pilot Project Scholarship Program. I do not cite the Florida's Opportunity Scholarship Program, now only in its first year.

Some voucher opponents openly misrepresent these existing programs. Others instead imply that their comments involve real programs, but in fact they describe imagined practices in non-existent programs, a further measure of deceit.

Discussions of actual programs are a particular problem for voucher opponents. Factual evidence from these programs refutes their lies. When that occurs, opponents are discredited in the eyes of elected policymakers.

The truth about existing programs shows that policymakers can design programs that achieve specific goals and avoid the bogus, alleged problems. The ability of public officials to exercise such control contradicts the myth, encouraged by voucher opponents, that elusive and harmful "private" interests direct such programs.

PRIVATE SCHOOL ADMISSION PRACTICES

Voucher opponents say or imply that private schools choose the voucher students they want. For example:

- “Choice promoters talk about choice leveling the playing field, but choice schools are still picking and choosing what children they want” (Wisconsin State Rep. Christine Sinicki, 1999).
- “Private schools normally screen applicants on a number of grounds, including, but not limited to: prior academic achievement; standardized test scores; prior disciplinary record; written application; interviews with applicants and their parents; and parents' willingness to volunteer at the school...” (American Federation of Teachers — AFT — 1999).
- “Parental choice is a misnomer. Private school[s] make the choice of which students to admit or reject. Private schools retain the right to reject or accept any student, regardless of whether the student holds a voucher...” (National Education Association — NEA — 1999).
- “The [private] schools can choose the best, a practice known as ‘cherry-picking’ or ‘cream skimming’” (Frederick C. Thayer, 2000).

None of these statements are true insofar as students in Milwaukee’s program are concerned. Nor are these alleged practices allowed in Cleveland’s voucher program.

Instead, private schools must use what amounts to an open admission, random selection policy for voucher-eligible students (Section 119.23, *Wisconsin Statutes*; Sections 3313.974-313.979, *Ohio Revised Code*).

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction cites no instance, in the Milwaukee program’s 10-year history, where an eligible student was subjected to the kind of admission criteria cited by choice opponents. To be sure, if such an isolated violation occurs, voucher opponents will portray it as the norm.

The claims cited above illustrate a pattern evident in the overall campaign of untruths and half-truths. Each of these four statements has an aura of plausibility. Each would be accurate if confined to **some** practices at **some** private schools involving **some** students who don’t use vouchers. But, these same claims are not true when it comes to voucher students and voucher schools in **existing** voucher programs. Such half-truths illustrate the insidious willingness of major voucher opponents to lie.

PUBLIC SCHOOL ADMISSION PRACTICES

In contrast to their bogus claim that private schools screen voucher students, voucher opponents say that the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), and public schools in general, “cannot turn away anyone who comes to their door” or “must admit all comers” (Sinicki, 1999, and Price, 1999).

Not true. In fact, the situation is the mirror opposite of these claims. MPS uses a wide range of criteria to screen admission at the elementary, middle, and high school level (Fuller and Mitchell, 2000). Examples are pervasive.

- Fully 37% of MPS high school students attend schools with selective admission criteria.
- MPS has 21 elementary and middle schools with “eligibility requirements,” including schools for “the Academically Talented” and “Gifted and Talented” students.

Where MPS schools use a wide range of such screening practices, Wisconsin’s voucher law prohibits private schools from doing so in the case of voucher-eligible students.

Screening criteria used by MPS include: prior academic achievement; test scores; disciplinary records; written applications; and interviews with students and their parents — the criteria that voucher opponents wrongly claim are used by private schools to screen voucher students.

As demonstrated below, MPS also uses many other screening criteria in denying students access to schools.

SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

Voucher opponents say or imply that private schools do not accept voucher students with special education needs. For example:

- "Private schools are not required to accept special education students" (AFT — Sandra Feldman —May 1998).
- "[D]isabled kids...kids with learning disabilities...kids who have behavioral problems, kids who have been involved in the juvenile criminal justice system. Those kids get left behind [by school vouchers] because...a lot of private schools...don't have to take them, so that leaves it for public education to deal with those children" (Tammy Johnson, Wisconsin Citizen Action, 1999).

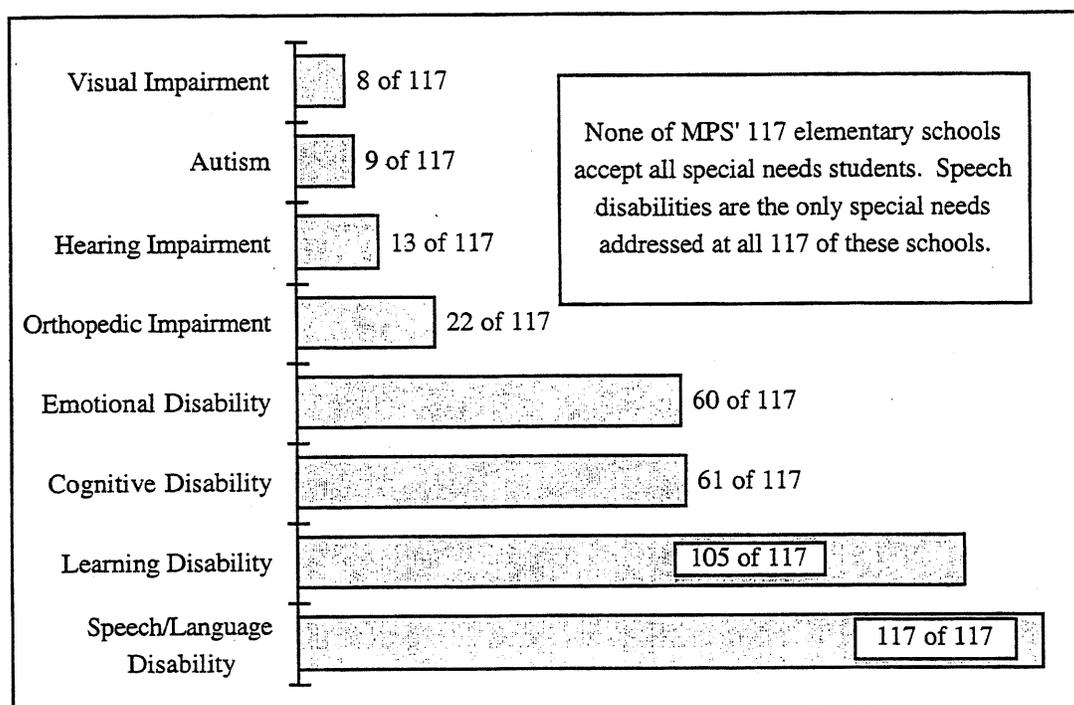
In Milwaukee, that's simply untrue. While my knowledge of the Cleveland situation is less complete, I am advised that circumstances there are similar to Milwaukee's.

The truth, in Milwaukee, is that private schools may not exclude any voucher-eligible student based on special education needs. I know of no actual case, cited by voucher opponents or any other source, where such a student has been denied admission to a private school. To the contrary, many MPCP schools offer a range of programs for special needs students, with or without vouchers.

All the while, voucher opponents repeatedly assert that “[p]ublic schools cannot turn away anyone who comes to their door” (Sinicki 1999) or that “...nearly all public schools offer [special education] services” (AFT, December 1998).

Such statements constitute more untruths and half-truths. MPS data show that **none** of its elementary, middle, or high school accepts all students with special education needs (Fuller and Mitchell, 2000). As the following chart shows, speech disabilities are the **only** special education need addressed at all MPS elementary schools.

MPS elementary schools accepting special needs students.



Reflecting this, the MPS school directory advises parents: "When children with special education needs select a school...where their individual needs cannot be appropriately met, parents will be contacted...to discuss options at other schools..."

In the end, MPS, **not the parent**, almost always has the final say in determining where a special needs student attends school.

Private voucher schools don't have this kind of discretion. When it comes to voucher-eligible students with special education needs, a private school may advise the student's parent about available programs, but the school may not turn the student away if the parent chooses that school.

Students with disciplinary problems. The same situation pertains to students with disciplinary problems. While voucher opponents wrongly claim that private schools exclude such students, **Wisconsin law does not allow private schools to consider disciplinary history in reviewing voucher applications.**

In contrast to such open admission requirements for voucher students, MPS has an extensive program of alternative and partnership schools **where it unilaterally may transfer** truants, adjudicated juveniles, or other "at risk" students. Many of these programs are in private, non-profit schools. The capacity of these programs, as of October 1999, was 3,579 students, or more than 3% of the MPS enrollment. The majority of this capacity was in private organizations (Fisher, 1999).

Fermin Burgos, a former director of MPS alternative programs, said those programs let "MPS...provide a whole range of different options...tailor-made programs for pregnant teens, chronic disrupters, or students coming from juvenile institutions. With [private] contracting, we can offer those programs. In some cases [private schools] are more effective than the traditional schools" (Beales and Bertonneau, 1997).

MPS is not alone among public schools in relying heavily on private schools to educate some of its most difficult students. The practice is widespread (Beales, et.al).

OTHER PRIVATE SCHOOL PRACTICES AND ISSUES

Voucher opponents promote several other falsehoods. For example:

- "Voucher programs siphon the best students from public schools, resulting in an overall decline in the quality of public school achievement" (People for the American Way — PFAW — April 1999).
- "Milwaukee is the demonstration project where all elements of the Right's strategy converge [including] bait-and-switch tactics that convert programs for the poor to subsidies for middle class private school students...How much increased tax subsidy of middle- and upper-income families will we allow to be diverted from ensuring strong public education for every child?" (PFAW, September 1999).
- "Vouchers aren't helping the children they were designed to help: students doing poorly in low-performing public schools..." (North Carolina Governor James Hunt, 1999).

None of these claims are true. Actual studies of programs in Milwaukee and Cleveland show that:

- "The demographic profile [of Milwaukee's program] was quite consistent...[S]tudents who ultimately enrolled...were from very low-income families, considerably below the average [Milwaukee Public Schools — MPS] family...Blacks and Hispanics were the primary applicants...Choice students were considerably less likely to come from a household in which parents were married..." (Witte, 1995).
- "As intended, the [Milwaukee program] appears to be serving children who meet statutory requirements related to low income...In addition, the program serves pupils

whose overall ethnic composition is similar to that of Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) pupils. In the 1998-99 school year, 62.4 percent of Choice pupils were African-American, and 61.4 percent of MPS pupils were African-American" (Legislative Audit Bureau — LAB — 2000).

- "Prior test scores of [Milwaukee] Choice students [showed they] were achieving considerably less than MPS students and somewhat less than low-income MPS students" (Witte, 1995).
- Cleveland "[s]cholarship families tend to be low-income, of color, and headed by a single mother. These characteristics are not surprising given the goals of the scholarship program and the parameters used in selecting children for the program. Preference was given to low-income families and the existing racial proportions of [the Cleveland public schools] were to be maintained. Of scholarship families...73.4% are non-white...70 percent are households headed by a single mother, and the mean family income is \$18,750...In general, the scholarship program seems to be serving the families for which it was intended...minority families of low income. Further, the program generally does not seem to support the private school enrollment of more advantaged (e.g., higher income) children" (Metcalf, 1999).

Regarding Governor Hunt's comments, I have written him several letters noting the errors in his widely reported comments. He has not responded, nor has his office provided any indication that it has issued corrections. Governor Hunt's decision not to correct his errors is surprising and disappointing.

On the other hand, the PFAW's failure to correct errors comes as no surprise. The many falsehoods that it distributes suggests a campaign of willful lies. Here are two more:

- "The very best private schools won't participate in voucher programs."
- "Few private schools are located in economically depressed areas."

Each of these statements is untrue.

Participating schools. Five private Milwaukee high schools accepting voucher students had graduation rates twice as large as in MPS. More than 80% of students at the five schools took college entrance exams, compared to less than 50% in MPS. The five schools had attendance rates exceeding 95%; in MPS it was less than 80%. Three of the five are regarded as among the city's "elite" private schools.

Location of schools. Most Milwaukee voucher students live three miles or less from their choice schools (LAB). In contrast, thousands of low-income MPS students travel between 1-2 hours a day to distant public schools. By contrast, at least 33 private schools in Milwaukee are in neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of MPCP-eligible families (Fuller and White, 1995).

RACIAL SEGREGATION

School choice opponents assert that giving parents vouchers will increase educational segregation. For example:

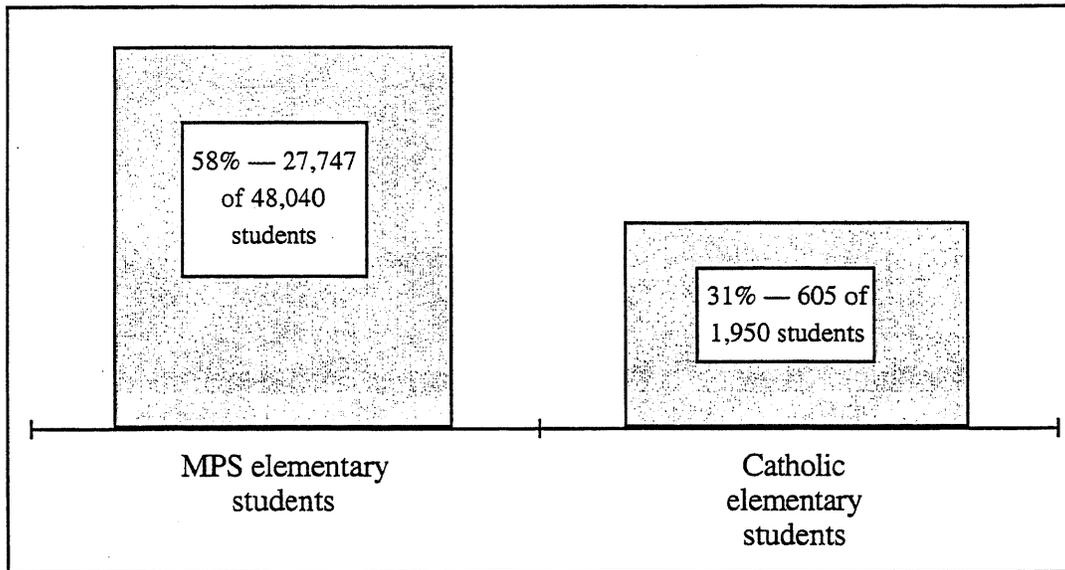
- “Those vouchers [in Milwaukee] actually hurt inner city African-American kids, helping suburban white kids who are either already in private school or whose parents want them there” (Hunt).
- The “natural and foreseeable consequence [of expanding the MPCP will be] further segregation of the [Milwaukee] schools...” (NAACP, 1996).
- “Voucher programs...allow for splintering along racial and ethnic lines...[They] could end up resembling the ethnic cleansing occurring in Kosovo” (*Albuquerque Journal* — David Berliner — 1999).
- “We can't allow our nation's schools to be divided once again [through vouchers] by skin color...” (Kweisi Mfume, 1999).

Evaluate these statements in light of the actual evidence.

Milwaukee. Governor Hunt is wrong. There are no suburban students in Milwaukee's voucher program. All voucher students are Milwaukee residents (*Wisconsin Statutes*). Most are African American and Hispanic (LAB). Additional evidence disproves the other characterizations and predictions:

- Prior to vouchers including religious schools, “[t]he racial composition of choice students by school [was] mixed. Four...schools...were almost all African American. Four others [were] predominantly African American (above 70%). One school [was] 93% Hispanic, and the remaining three schools are more evenly integrated. This...is partly the result of conscious specialization on the part of the schools (for example, African American cultural schools and a bilingual school); and partly the result of location. One well-integrated school has a formal policy of insuring that its student body matches its carefully defined community area in terms of race, ethnicity, gender and economic class. Several...schools with relatively high tuition expressly entered the Choice Program to provide some cultural diversity in their student body” (Witte, 1994).
- Racial balance has increased since the voucher program added religious schools: “...[A] year after the expansion of choice to religious schools...the critics are wrong. The program *has* enhanced racial diversity...” (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 1999).
- Vouchers have improved racial balance on a school-by-school basis: “To...compare racial and ethnic isolation in choice schools and MPS schools, we identified [racially isolated] MPS and Catholic elementary schools...[N]early twice as many MPS elementary students were in racially isolated schools” (Fuller and Mitchell, 1999).

Per cent of non-Caucasian MPS and Catholic elementary students in racially isolated schools, 1998-99.



Cleveland. “Nearly a fifth...of recipients of a voucher in Cleveland attend private schools that have a racial composition that resembles the average racial composition of the Cleveland...Only 5.2 percent of public school students in the Cleveland metropolitan area are in comparably integrated schools” (Greene, 1999; also see Metcalf, 1999).

FISCAL IMPACT

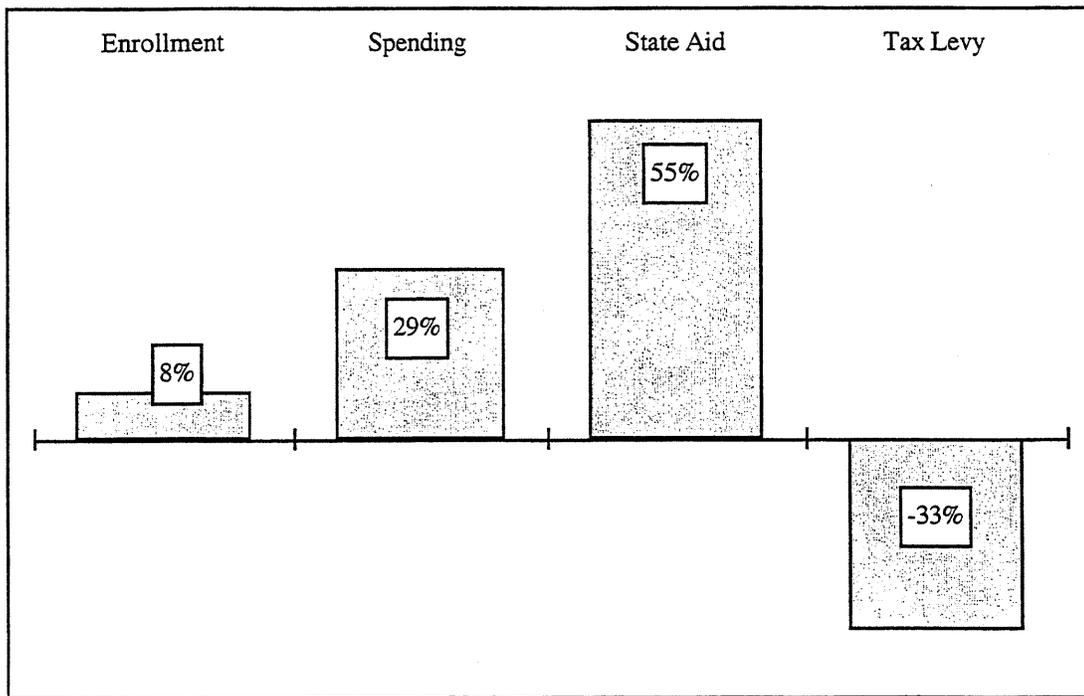
Voucher opponents repeatedly offer versions of the following claim: “In areas where vouchers have been introduced, public schools have had their funds drastically cut” (NEA, November 1999).

Again, consider the evidence.

Milwaukee. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) is in its tenth year. Predictions of severe fiscal impact have not been realized. To the contrary, in the program’s first nine years (1990-91 to 1998-99):

- Real MPS spending grew more than three times faster than the enrollment.
- State aid to MPS grew nearly seven times faster than enrollment.
- MPS property taxes declined 33%.

Per cent change in enrollment and real spending, state aid, and property taxes, MPS, 1990 – 1999 (Fuller and Mitchell, 1999).



Even some MPS officials doubted the grim and unrealized fiscal predictions of voucher opponents. As the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported, in 1995:

“Expanded school choice could result in substantial overall savings for Milwaukee Public Schools and allow the district to ease classroom overcrowding, three reports presented Wednesday night to the School Board show. A June 28 report...distributed to school officials Wednesday night by [Director John] Gardner said MPS would find savings in its educational programs ‘because [voucher] students would no longer be educated by MPS and thus, costs in the district should be reduced’...In addition, board members said the district would not be required to build new classroom space...resulting in substantial long-term savings.”

Cleveland. While I have not independently studied the fiscal situation in Cleveland, I quote below from two studies by groups that are favorable to vouchers.

- “In Cleveland, the public schools still receive per-capita funds for students enrolled in the voucher program. In 1997, for example, the net revenue received by Cleveland Public Schools exceeded voucher program costs by \$118,473” (The Buckeye Institute, 1997).
- “The president of the Ohio Federation of Teachers said the \$5.25 million spent...on voucher students (about \$3,300 per student when other costs are considered) was

money being denied to public schools. But state officials pointed out that the public schools, which spent \$6,506 per student in 1996-97, came out ahead because the state funding formula still counted the voucher students in Cleveland's enrollment" (Cordell, 1998).

ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Voucher opponents have made some of their most misleading claims in the area of academic achievement. Here is one of their staples, emphasis added: "There is **no evidence** that vouchers improve student learning. **Every serious study** of voucher plans concludes that **vouchers don't improve student achievement**" (NEA, 1999).

These claims are demonstrably untrue.

Milwaukee. Here is the most cautious of three peer-reviewed studies:

- While "there is no substantial [test score] difference...between the Choice and MPS students...[o]n a positive note, estimates for the overall samples, while always below national norms, do not substantially decline as the students enter higher grades. This is not the normal pattern in that usually urban student average scores decline relative to national norms in higher grades..." (Witte, 1995).

Meanwhile, the other studies found clearly positive results:

- A Princeton University economist, writing in Harvard's Quarterly Journal of Economics, said that ". . .being selected to participate in the choice program appears to have increased the math achievement of low-income, minority students by 1.5-2.3 percentile points per year" (Rouse, 1998).
- Scholars at Harvard University and the University of Texas-Austin also found positive Milwaukee results. Released in 1998 in a book from The Brookings Institution, the findings also were published in *Education and Urban Society*. The authors found statistically significant gains in math (6.8 percentile points) and reading (4.9 percentile points) scores for students in the choice program three and four years (Greene, Peterson, and Du, 1998 and 1999).

Cleveland. According to Cleveland's official program evaluator: "[A]fter two years, and for students who attended public school prior to entering the scholarship program, there appear to be [statistically significant] positive, but limited effects on achievement. What remains to be determined is whether the [gains] that appeared at the end of year two represent the beginning of a trend toward increased achievement in future years" (Metcalf).

Now, consider again the claim of voucher opponents: "There is **no evidence** that vouchers improve student learning. **Every serious study** of voucher plans concludes that vouchers **don't improve student achievement**."

This claim clearly is a lie.

CHARACTER ASSASSINATION

Not surprisingly, those who lie about vouchers are threatened by influential scholars with opposing views. Consistent with their overall strategy, the predictable response is to lie about the scholars.

Voucher opponents have drawn a bulls-eye on Harvard's Paul Peterson, one of academia's most distinguished political scientists. Consider this description of the study, noted above, that he co-authored on academic achievement of Milwaukee voucher students.

A "study funded by pro-voucher foundations found that voucher students outperform public school counterparts, but experts have discredited this research — commonly known as the 'Peterson study' — because of shoddy analysis...Unlike other studies of the Milwaukee...program, the Peterson team never submitted its work for peer review but instead released their findings directly to the media — in one instance, to the op-ed pages of the *Wall Street Journal*" (PFAW, 1999).

These half-truths, distortions, and lies show how much misinformation can be spread in only sixty-six words.

Foremost is the lie that the work of Peterson and his colleagues has not been peer reviewed. In fact, it appears both in a peer-reviewed book from The Brookings Institution and in a peer-reviewed, scholarly journal.

And, what about the unnamed "experts"? In 1997, I asked the NEA, the AFT, and others making such claims who the "experts" were (Fuller, 1997). I was directed to NEA and AFT staff members and to Alex Molnar, of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee education faculty. Where has Molnar "discredited" Peterson? Not in Molnar's 1996 Wisconsin court testimony, where Molnar misrepresents Peterson's study and acknowledges the limits of his own statistical expertise. Not in *Education Week*, where Molnar mischaracterized the conclusions not only of Peterson, but also of Rouse.

The People for the American Way is a curious group to suggest that published ideas are best evaluated by sources of financial support. Its budget includes contributions from the NEA, AFT, and numerous other voucher opponents (PFAW, 1999).

PFAW also suggests that providing information to the news media is questionable. If so, PFAW's own information mill is a sham.

But, rather than judge information by how it is released, or who provides financial support, a better method is to focus on its content. It is by that standard that PFAW and others who lie about educational vouchers are best evaluated.

CONCLUSION

There are more than 50 million American children in K-12 education. While fewer than 12,000 use tax-supported education vouchers, some of America's strongest and best financed political organizations have made a major commitment to suffocating that option. Groups such as the NEA, AFT, and PFAW have committed tens of millions of dollars a year to lobbying and organizational efforts aimed at blocking vouchers.

As this report demonstrates, a key part of their effort is a campaign of lies. This campaign seeks to distort and manipulate the public debate. The obvious, willful nature of the campaign is repugnant.

Unfortunately, the campaign has had an impact.

Two groups must accept responsibility for calling attention to these lies and for repudiating them. One is the news media. The second are citizens on all sides of these important issues. The media and general citizenry should hold accountable the perpetrators of lies documented in this paper. They should urge elected policymakers to reject the distortions and falsehoods advanced to block a fair debate of issues such as educational vouchers.

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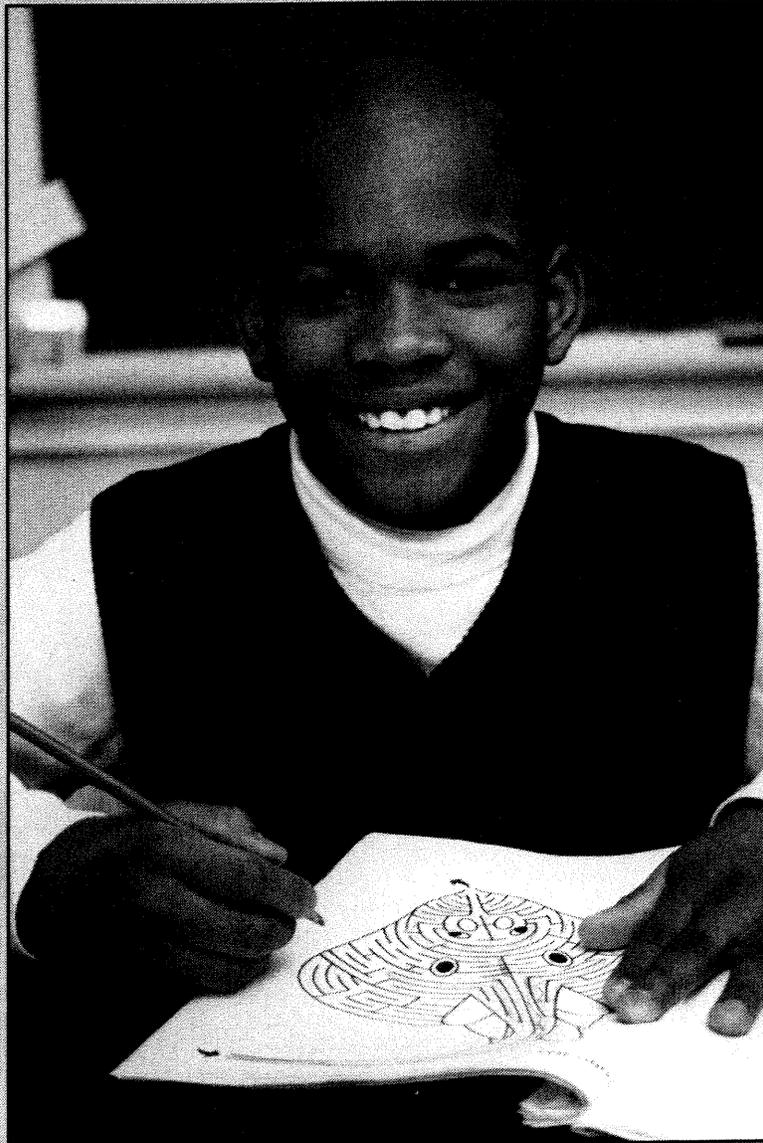
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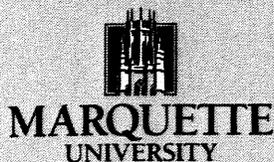
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**THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE OF AFRICAN AMERICANS
FOR THE POWER TO MAKE
REAL EDUCATIONAL CHOICES**



**PROFESSOR HOWARD L. FULLER, PH.D.
FOUNDER & DIRECTOR
INSTITUTE FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF LEARNING
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY**



**PRESENTED AT SECOND ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM
ON EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS
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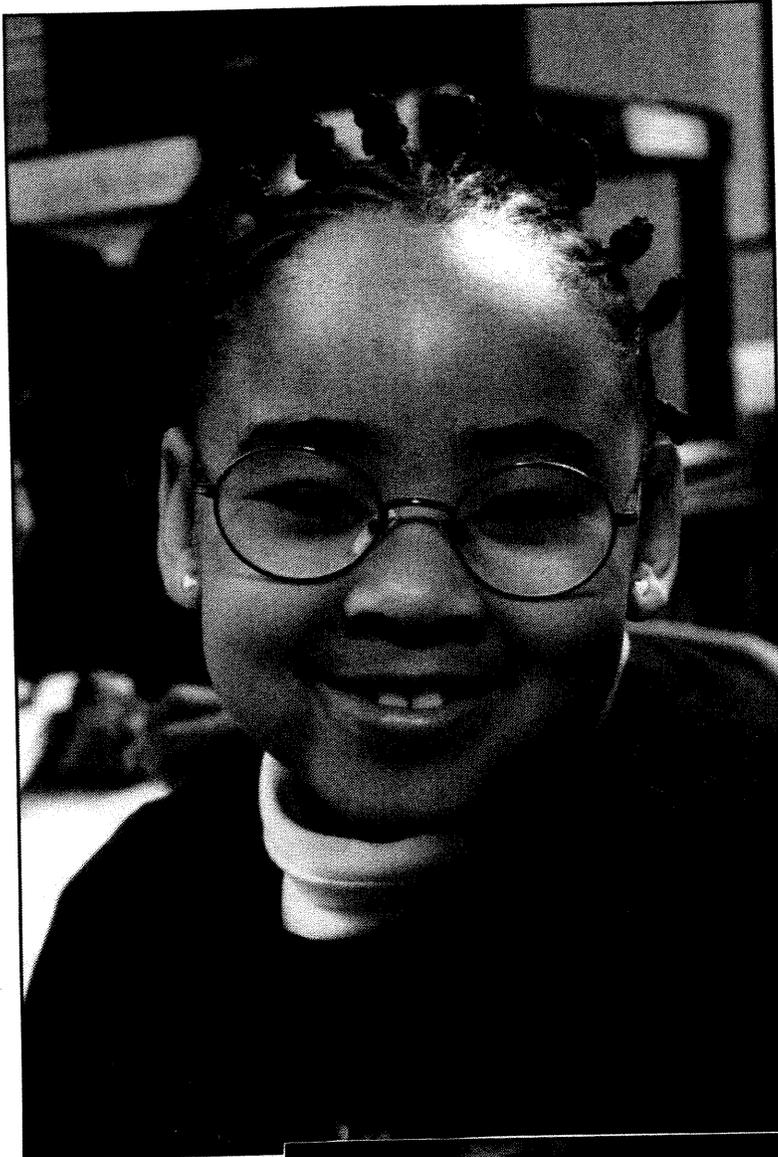
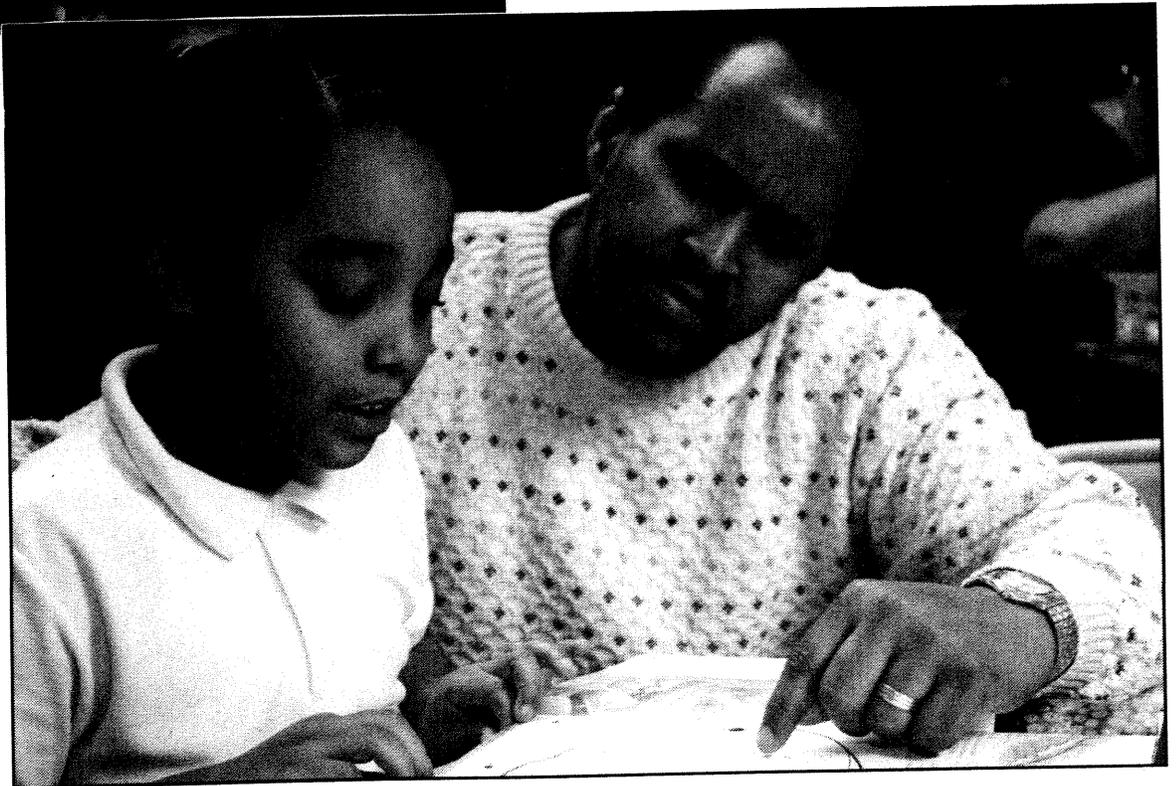


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INTRODUCTION

Amidst a multitude of claims and counterclaims, Milwaukee mother Valerie Johnson cuts to the heart of the national school choice debate in less than half a minute:

"The main aspirations I have for my children have always been that they would do the best that they could do and be whatever they wanted.

"I've tried to instill into them that education is really, really important.

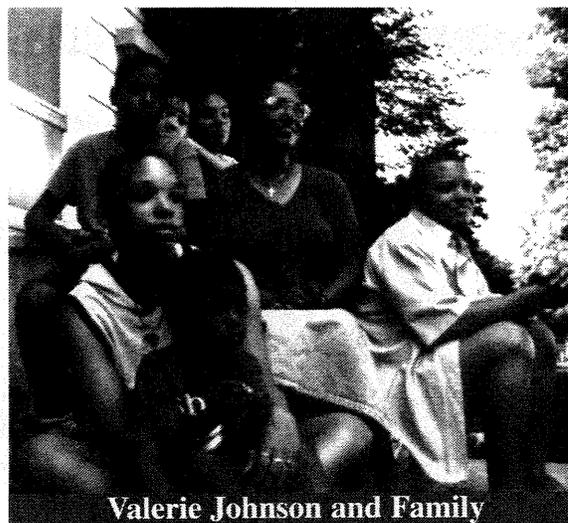
"The school choice issue is not about public versus private. It's about choice. It's about me knowing what works well for my family and me being able to make that choice for them."

"If you take away our choice I believe you're taking away the children's chance.

"I think I know what's best for my children. Yes, I do."

Despite the unambiguous power and clarity of her words, a deep canyon divides America when it comes to educational choice. On one side, with a narrow range of options, are low-income parents, mostly of color. On the other side, with a much broader array of choices, are middle- and upper-income, mostly white parents.

While this paper is about the struggle of African Americans for more educational options, other racial and ethnic groups are waging the same fight. The shared experience of African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, and others explains the growing national push to give low-income parents more educational options. These include tax-supported education vouchers, tax credits and deductions, charter schools, public-private partnerships, and other educational options that are more accountable to low-income, historically disenfranchised parents.



Valerie Johnson and Family

Vouchers are clearly among the most controversial options. Currently, they let some low-income, mostly African American parents in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Florida send their children to private schools, including religious schools. According to Indiana University Professor Martha M. McCarthy, "No [education] topic is generating more volatile debate...than voucher systems to fund schooling" (2000).

For many, the voucher debate is highly nuanced, often featuring arcane discussion of scholarly methodology. But, with all respect, that is not what this debate **really** is about.

This is a debate about power. This is about who should have the primary power to determine where low-income, mostly African American children attend school. This is about whether parents of low-income African American children should obtain a power that many critics of the choice movement exercise every day **on behalf of their own children.** This is about a fundamental issue confronting African Americans and therefore all Americans: parents without the power to make educational choices lack an indispensable tool for helping their children secure an effective education.

Momentous political and legal developments will determine the direction this debate takes.

- This year and in years to come, elections at the local, state, and national level will feature candidates with very different views on whether low-income parents should have real power in choosing schools for their children.
- Eventually, the U.S. Supreme Court will decide if vouchers are available to low-income parents in their enduring quest to realize the educational aspirations that they have for their children.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS PAPER

This paper reviews the struggle of African Americans for expanded educational opportunity.

- It defines the educational crisis facing African Americans, who increasingly see **the existing system of public schools** as failing their children.

- It explains the unconscionable double standard of those who value **their own power** to make educational choices, but diminish its importance for low-income, mostly African American parents.
- Using Milwaukee's experience since 1976 with "forced choice" and, since 1990, with real choice, it describes:
 - how programs supposedly meant to expand choices for African Americans in fact denied them real choice; and
 - how tax-supported education vouchers have given real choice to thousands of low-income families, most of whom are African American.
- It summarizes distortions that voucher opponents use to discredit this option. Milwaukee's experience shows how dishonesty is a hallmark of the historical and current effort to deny expanded educational choices to these parents.

THE CORE ISSUE

Here is the central question confronting elected officials, the Supreme Court, and, indeed, the citizens of America:

SHOULD LOW-INCOME, MOSTLY AFRICAN AMERICAN PARENTS RECEIVE VOUCHERS THAT WILL EMPOWER THEM TO MAKE EDUCATIONAL CHOICES THAT A MAJORITY OF AMERICANS BOTH CHERISH AND TAKE FOR GRANTED? ¹

While any answer but "YES" is unacceptable, powerful forces want the Supreme Court to say "NO." These forces now have key roles in deciding where large numbers of low-income, mostly African American children attend school. They do not want to surrender that power. They have committed substantial energy and resources to keep it. The status quo is very important to them.

For example, the two largest teachers' unions — the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) — strongly oppose giving African American parents more power to choose their children's schools.

The NEA draws a clear line in the sand. Asked if there was "any circumstance" where he could support vouchers linked to higher public school spending, NEA President Robert Chase told writer Matthew Miller: "No." Miller asked: "Double school spending in inner cities?" Chase: "No." Miller, again: "Triple it, but give them a voucher?" Chase: "No." (Miller, 1999). Confirming this, the NEA's Office of Public Education Advocacy declares: "**On some issues, like vouchers, there's no room for compromise.**" (Steffens, 1999).

For African Americans, the stakes are huge. If opponents of providing low-income, mostly African American parents with more educational power prevail, historical obstacles to advancement will be even more entrenched. *This current struggle is one we cannot lose.*

THE CRISIS

Critical problems in urban America will worsen unless young African American men and women gain a quality education. This is not happening now. Reflecting a pattern evident in many cities, **most African American high school freshmen in Milwaukee do not graduate four years later.** This staggering fact is reinforced by national data showing that African Americans as a group perform well below national norms. Professor Lawrence Stedman described the distressing situation at a Brookings Institution conference:

"...[Twelfth] grade black students are performing at the level of middle school white students. These students are about to graduate, yet they lag four or more years behind in every area [including] reading, math, science, writing, history, and geography. Latino seniors do somewhat better...in math and writing but, in the other areas, are also four years behind white 12th graders...[R]acial gaps in achievement...are as large or larger than they were a decade ago...The conclusion is distressing but unavoidable...[A] generation has passed and the achievement of educational equality remains an elusive dream. Schools and society remain divided into two different worlds, one black and one white, separate and unequal." (Stedman, 1997)

More recent data, from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), confirm the continuing achievement gap between white students and African Americans. In reading, math, and science, whites are much more likely than African Americans to score at "proficient" or "advanced" levels. Just consider that in math, where

the percentile gap between African Americans and whites is **closest**, 18% of whites scored proficient, while only 4% of African Americans did. This 14-point gap compares to a 23-point gap in reading and a 20-point gap in science (The College Board, 1999).

This crisis is all too apparent to African Americans, many of whom believe public schools are failing their children. According to a recent authoritative survey, "black respondents...rated their local public schools more negatively [in 1999 than in 1998], and a larger percentage...believe their local public schools are getting worse." The same survey found that "whites reported fairly high levels of satisfaction with their local public schools, and they are more likely to think the schools are improving than regressing" (Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, 1999).

The disparity in African American and white opinion arises, in part, because more African Americans are disenfranchised when it comes to the power to choose the best educational options for their children. The *unacceptable conditions* described by Stedman and The College Board will not change unless African Americans seek and get the power to make educational choices, a power taken for granted by most white parents. Without that power, African Americans are disarmed when it comes to holding educators accountable for providing an effective education to their children.

THE DOUBLE STANDARD

A misleading and repugnant double standard contaminates the public debate about parent school choice. This double standard reflects the false idea that parental choice is a new or untested concept. **It is not. The power to make educational choices is widespread, long-standing, and highly valued — by those who have it.**

Here are three examples of the double standard (emphasis added). The Education Commission of the States calls school choice "one of the fastest-growing **innovations** in public education" (ECS, 1999). Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) says that while "[e]nthusiasm [for choice] continues to grow...little is known empirically about the effects of [this] **policy experiment...**" (Fuller, B., et.al., 1998). A PACE newsletter says "...the school choice movement has blossomed [and] in many communities parents **now** can choose from one or more alternatives to traditional public schools..." (1999).

The implication is that the "newness" of parental choice requires that it be pursued cautiously. It must be "studied." It must be "carefully evaluated." And on, and on.

There is nothing wrong with thorough studies. More information is better than less. But these studies must not proceed on the false assumption that the power to make educational choices is new. **All** that's new is that a small number of low-income parents **finally** have won power that middle- and upper-income parents long have taken for granted.



It is thus outrageous to use "newness" as an excuse for denying low-income parents an opportunity so widely used and valued by others. **Doing so forces low-income parents to claw and scrape for the basic right to make decisions about what school their children attend.** At each step, they confront opponents who say "more studies" are needed to see if choice "really works." Others say tax-supported choice for low-income parents should only be allowed if schools they select follow a barrage of new rules, to assure "accountability." The singular importance of *accountability to parents*, so valued by more affluent families, is condescendingly dismissed when it comes to low-income African American parents.

THE MILWAUKEE EXPERIENCE

Milwaukee's experience illustrates the struggle of African Americans for power in making educational choices.

In January 1976, a federal judge said that Milwaukee's African American children were unlawfully confined in segregated schools. The Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) responded with a plan that has since governed pupil assignment for most African Americans. It **consciously** gave the best choices primarily to middle- and upper-income, mostly white parents. It **consciously** uprooted a disproportionate number of low-income, mostly African American children and assigned them to distant schools (Fuller, 1985).

To its proponents, this forced busing, i.e., forced choice, plan "worked." Most MPS schools became racially desegregated (Mitchell, 1989). Milwaukee's political and civic leaders binged on self-congratulation. The media celebrated the "peacefulness" of the process, trumpeting MPS claims (later identified as false, see below) that most students were "at or above average" in test scores. Opponents were marginalized as racists and/or racial separatists. That charge, while true for some, became a means for dismissing any criticism.

There was widespread denial about how the process actually worked. To this day, much of the public has been shielded from a full understanding of how forced busing operates. Figure 1, next page, depicts busing in 1987-88 from Milwaukee's largely African American Auer Avenue School neighborhood. *It is representative of how two generations of African American children have been forced to travel between one and two hours a day to schools outside their neighborhood.* In the Auer Avenue example, 1,071 students — two-thirds of all elementary age children in that area — were transported to 97 different schools in 1987-88.

While such **forced** "choices" were advanced in the name of helping African Americans, multiple studies document the transportation burden placed on these students and their failure to attain satisfactory levels of academic achievement (Fuller, 1985; Study Commission on the Quality of Education in the Metropolitan Milwaukee Public Schools, 1985; Murphy, 1986; Norquist, 1988; Mitchell, 1989). Fuller, Murphy, Norquist, and Mitchell documented that the desegregation plan:

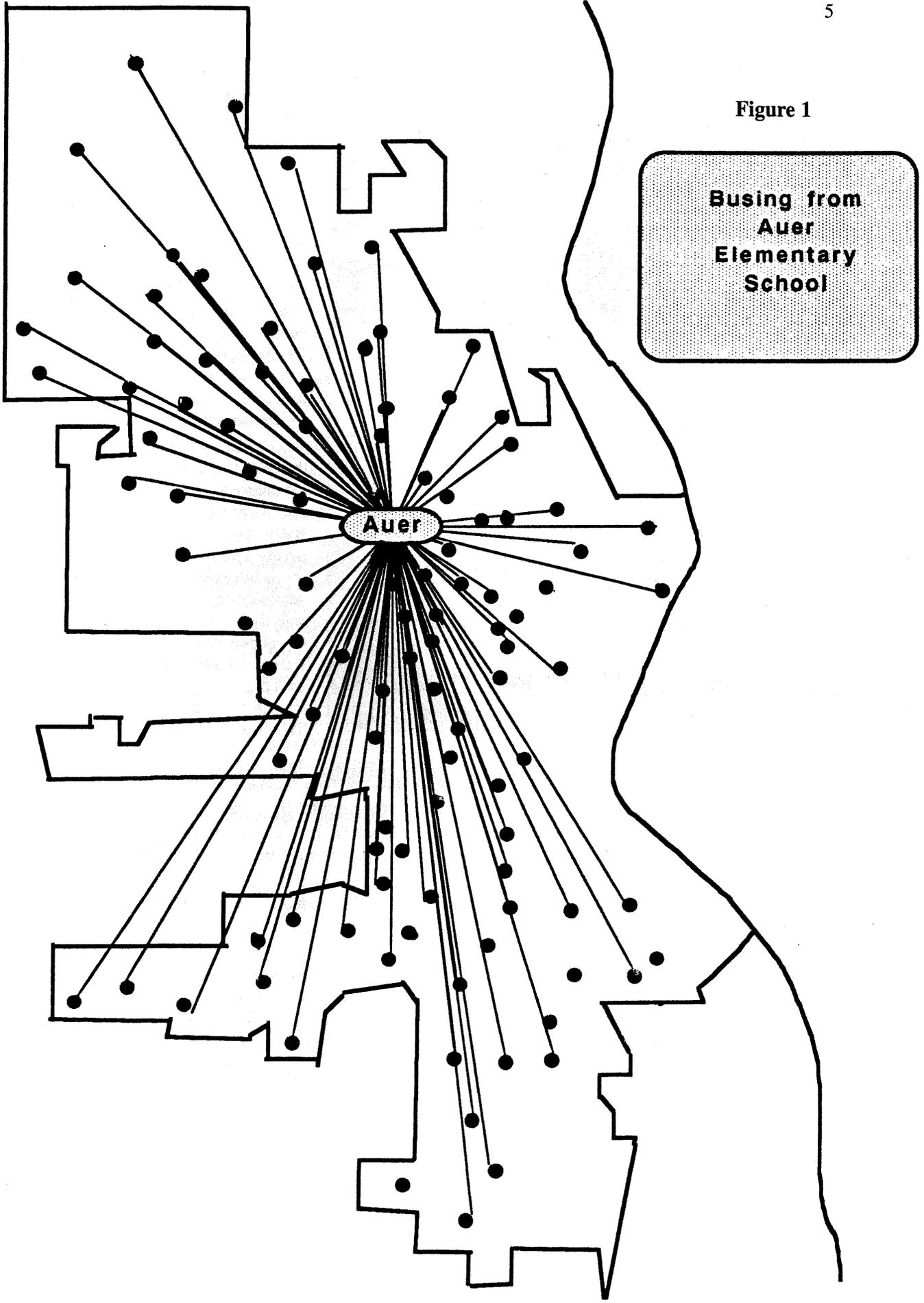
- **Intentionally** gave white parents more and better alternatives than African Americans;
- **Intentionally** limited the number of whites who were bused involuntarily; and
- **Intentionally** placed the greatest burden of busing on African Americans.

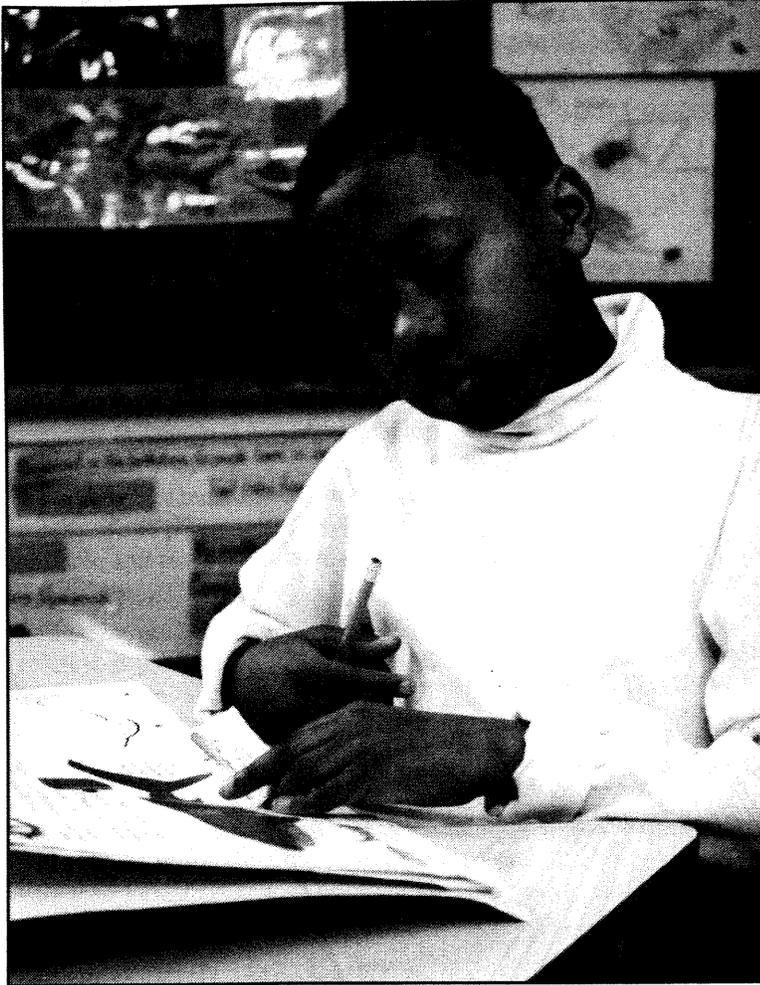
An ironic aspect is that about 19 schools were excluded from this plan, and thus were allowed to remain virtually 100% African American. By the logic of the overall plan, that was the educational equivalent of throwing these children overboard.

"WHITE BENEFIT"

As for placing the disproportionate burden of desegregation on African Americans, the plan's rationale was explicit. According to MPS, "**...the psychological guarantee of not having to attend a school that is predominantly minority will tend to stabilize the population in the city**" (Fuller, 1985). Describing the plan, William Kritek discussed the "optimum percentage of minority students in a desegregated school." He said: "[Fifteen] per cent is a minimum if the minority group is...to exert pressure without constituting a power threat to the majority." He quoted another educator: "[A]s long as the proportion of black pupils is small...and expected to remain so, there is no reason for white pupils to experience stigma, relative deprivation, social threat, marginality, or a change in norms, standards, or...expectations of their significant others" (1977).

Figure 1





This was the offensive racial prism through which "equal educational opportunity" for African American children was viewed. The supposed era of racial integration in Milwaukee instead became a period of forced busing and cover-up of the lack of academic achievement by African American children. While some African Americans truly received more power to choose, they were outnumbered by those forced to "choose," based mainly on their race, from a small number of distant schools. All the while, a larger proportion of white students either stayed in neighborhood schools or transferred to "magnet" schools, many of which had selective admission practices.

It was not until 1999 that one of this plan's architects acknowledged that the unequal outcome was **not accidental**. The occasion was a forum at The Helen Bader Foundation, part of a series of events aimed at discussing race relations in Milwaukee. A former senior MPS administrator said that "**white benefit**" was a central consideration in the plan's development. After this news circulated in the community for a few days, it prompted a page one story ("White benefit' was driving force of busing") in the October 19, 1999 *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

"AT OR ABOVE AVERAGE"

The long-submerged "white benefit" story shows how truth has been a casualty in the struggle of Milwaukee African Americans for expanded educational opportunity and improved educational achievement for their children.

Another example involves claims about academic achievement of African American students. In the early 1980s, MPS lulled a gullible media into believing that a majority of its students scored "at or above average" on standardized tests. This reinforced the idea that forced busing was having a positive impact, including on African American students.

In 1984, Governor Anthony Earl and Herbert Grover, elected superintendent of the Department of Public Instruction, created an independent task force to study the issue. Countering the rosy scenario portrayed by MPS, after an 18-month study, the task force identified an "unacceptable disparity in educational opportunity and achievement between poor and minority children...and non-poor and white children..." It determined that MPS classified students "at or above average" even if they scored substantially below the 50th percentile. African American test scores were *well below* the 50th percentile in almost all grades and almost all subjects (Study Commission, 1985).

TAX-SUPPORTED SCHOOL VOUCHERS

Such findings contributed to an emerging view in Milwaukee that mandatory busing had left many low-income, African American students behind. This focused attention on the meager educational alternatives actually available to most low-income, mostly African American parents.

This broadened awareness of the educational crisis among African American students was far from news within the African American community. Beginning in the 1960s, Mikel Holt traces growing discontent among African Americans with unacceptable educational achievement of African American students. Discontent grew in the late 1970s, once it was clear that the court-ordered integration plan placed a disproportionate, involuntary burden on African American students (2000).

In the 1980s, disaffected African American parents sought and found new allies in their quest for real power, power that would enable them to be more effective in the fight for their children's education (Susan Mitchell, 1999). A broader coalition supported enactment, in 1990, of a voucher program enabling a limited number of low-income Milwaukee parents to enroll their children in non religious private schools. Sponsored by Representative Polly Williams and Governor Tommy Thompson, this program — the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP) — sought **more options for poor parents, better achievement for their children, and improved performance in MPS.**

The MPCP gave low-income parents an inkling of the broader power long valued by more affluent parents. First in Milwaukee, and later in Cleveland and Florida, the result has been more educational options for a small but growing number of low-income, mostly African American parents. In other locations, privately financed scholarships provide still more educational choices for many additional parents, including a significant number of low-income African Americans.

African American support for vouchers has grown in tandem with their concern about the failure of public schools. For example, "[a]mong African Americans, support for school vouchers in the 1999 survey shows a 25 percent increase...from last year....A substantial majority of the black respondents (60 percent) supported school vouchers, while only a third...rejected them" (Joint Center, 1999).

When the Supreme Court decides whether low-income African Americans and other eligible parents may choose from non religious and religious schools as part of such programs, its decision initially will affect thousands of children in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Florida. But, the real impact will be on millions of similarly situated students and families throughout the country. It is no understatement to say that the decision will influence the direction of urban education reform throughout America. If the Supreme Court says "YES," the movement can shift into forward gear. If the answer is "NO," we will face even more formidable obstacles than is now the case.

To grasp the potential of vouchers for low-income parents, consider that the initial MPCP limited participation to only 1% — about 1,000 students — of MPS enrollment. **Yet, according to the 1990 census, an estimated 64,000 children in Milwaukee lived in families that met the program's low-income eligibility guidelines** (Fuller and White, 1995). Viewed in a national context, these census data suggest that millions of low-income, mostly African American families have a stake in the decision that is eventually handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court.

EXPANSION OF SCHOOL CHOICE IN MILWAUKEE

During Wisconsin's 1994 elections, a bipartisan coalition of parents, employers, and civic leaders urged candidates to expand the MPCP. They said more students should be allowed to participate and that parents should be able to choose both non religious and religious schools.² The urgency of their cause was demonstrated the following year, when an in-depth report called MPS a system where the "status quo, not kids, comes first." It said "the district's distressing overall performance" was evident from an overall high school grade point average of 1.64 and a large "disparity in academic performance between white and black students..." (*The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 1995) Thus, a full decade after the 1984-85 study commission, another generation of students had come and gone and there was little progress to show.

In early 1995, Governor Thompson proposed a major expansion of the MPCP. He recommended that all low-income children in MPS be allowed to participate and to choose religious as well as non religious schools. The legislature passed many elements of his plan, though it capped participation at 15% of MPS enrollment, or nearly 16,000 students.

OPPOSITION

Immediately after Thompson signed the 1995 expansion, teachers unions and others sued. A Wisconsin court injunction blocked the expansion, placing thousands of children in limbo until a private fundraising drive, under the auspices of Partners Advancing Values in Education (PAVE), came to the rescue.

The injunction and three-year court battle typifies the environment of hostility and uncertainty for expanded school choice in Milwaukee that opponents have generated. Beginning in 1990, with an unsuccessful teachers union lawsuit, they have pursued multiple legislative, regulatory, and legal strategies to keep low-income parents from having the power to make educational choices for their children. In the case of the 1995 lawsuit, it was not until 1998 that the Wisconsin Supreme Court upheld all aspects of the new law. In the intervening period, the private PAVE program became the educational lifeboat for thousands of children who otherwise would have been stranded by the injunction.

Despite repeated obstacles that voucher opponents have attempted to erect, and resulting uncertainty about the MPCP's future, parent interest has grown steadily. MPCP participation has increased from 300 in 1990-91 to 7,996 in 1999-00 (Legislative Audit Bureau — LAB — 2000). Eighty-one percent of participating families are from minority groups (62% African American, 19% Hispanic, Asian, and other).

LIES

In addition to pursuing legislative, regulatory, and legal obstacles, voucher opponents routinely make false claims about how the Milwaukee program operates and claim that research on it shows no favorable impact. For example, against such claims, consider the following findings from peer-reviewed research.

- "The demographic profile [of MPCP students] was quite consistent over each of the [first] five years...[S]tudents who ultimately enrolled...were from very low-income families, considerably below the average [Milwaukee Public Schools — MPS] family and about \$500 below the low-income (free-lunch-eligible) MPS family...Blacks and Hispanics were the primary applicants...both being over represented compared with [MPS]...Choice students were considerably less likely to come from a household in which parents were married...Prior test scores of Choice students [showed they] were achieving considerably less than MPS students and somewhat less than low-income MPS students" (Witte, 1995).³
- "...[T]here was evidence that Choice parents were very dissatisfied with their former (MPS) schools; there may have been good reason for it, as indicated by test scores taken in MPS prior to students enrolling in Choice...[The] judgment of Choice parents of their child's prior public school was especially harsh in contrast with the MPS control groups...Satisfaction of Choice parents with private schools was just as dramatic as dissatisfaction was with prior public schools...The results were a dramatic reversal — high levels of dissatisfaction with prior public schools, but considerable satisfaction with private schools...There was also, in each year, overwhelming support among participants that the Choice program should continue...Finally, parental involvement, which was clearly very high for Choice parents before they enrolled in the program, increased while their children were in private schools" (Witte, 1995).
- "The general conclusion is that there is no substantial difference over the life of the program between the Choice and MPS students...On a positive note, estimates for the overall samples, while always below national norms, do not substantially decline as the students enter higher grades. This is not the normal pattern in that usually urban student average scores decline relative to national norms in higher grades..." (Witte, 1995).

Two other teams analyzed Witte's data and found more positive results.

- Princeton economist Cecilia Elena Rouse, in Harvard's *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, said that "...being selected to participate in the choice program appears to have increased the math achievement of low-income, minority students by 1.5-2.3 percentile points per year" (1998).
- Separately, scholars at Harvard and the University of Texas found statistically significant gains in math and reading for children in the Milwaukee choice program at least three years. First released in a book published by The Brookings Institution, the findings were later published in *Education and Urban Society* (Greene, et.al., 1998 and 1999).

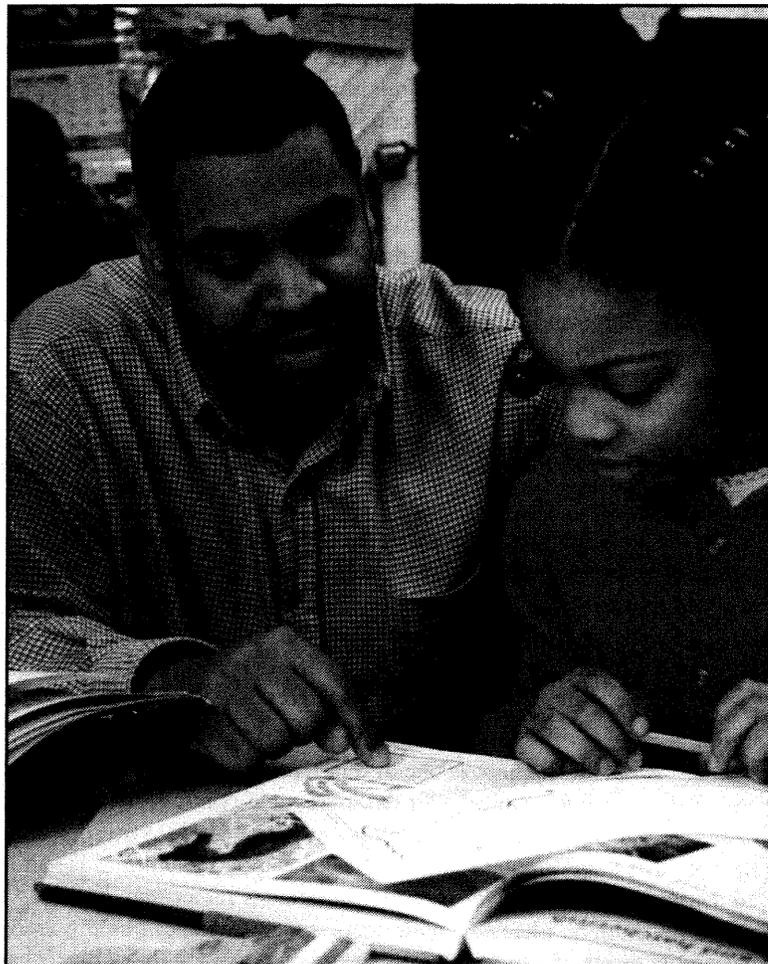
Opponents of choice have used differences in test score estimates to cloud the school choice debate and obscure positive results: Yet, there is no dispute that:

- The MPCP has successfully encouraged and empowered urban parents to make major decisions about their children's education.
- It substantially increased the involvement and satisfaction of these parents in their children's schooling. For example, *Education Week* reported that:

"...the Milwaukee choice plan has...deeply involved long-alienated parents in their children's schooling. This is of crucial importance, standing as a powerful retort to educators who have long suggested that parents burdened by social and economic problems could devote but minimal attention to educational issues...If choice parents were largely invisible in their old public schools, they are visible everywhere in their new schools — in the corridors, in the office, and even in the classroom, where they sometimes work as aides" (Ruenzel, 1995).

- At a minimum, students did not experience a decline in achievement, something that usually occurs as minority students "progress" to higher grades.

A range of other distortions and falsehoods continue to permeate the debate about school choice. Three common claims, as applied to Milwaukee's program, are that choice has "drastically cut" public school spending, worsened racial segregation, and excluded children with special education needs. The new LAB audit refuted such assertions, justifying a *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* headline: "Audit Dispels Choice Myths." Three earlier studies that I co-authored with George Mitchell also detail errors in such claims (Fuller and Mitchell, 1999 and 2000).



THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE

Critical events are occurring now, outside legislative and judicial halls, in the court of public opinion. Opponents of expanded choice are trying energetically to shape public opinion and news media coverage in a way that will influence legislators and judges alike. Many use a hardball, win-at-any-cost campaign premised on lies and misinformation. Unless it is countered, it might succeed. Thus, the coming months could be one of the most important periods ever in the African American struggle for equal educational opportunity. If we stand by silently as our opponents misrepresent the issue and misinform the public, the defeat that could follow will be deserved.

While the nation's African American community does not need to be of one mind, the future of our children requires **an open discussion, focusing on the core issue: the urgent need to expand the educational power of low-income, African American parents.**

The history described in this paper shows how our community and its children suffer when we lack the power to make educational choices, and when the range of those choices is controlled by anyone other than parents.

When some public school educators and their supporters argue that choice will hurt African American children, it is important to recognize how many of these same educators feel about the systems in which they work. It is also important to see how they use their power to decide where their own children go to school. For example, consider the findings in a 1987 University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee survey, described as follows by the May 12, 1987 edition of *The Milwaukee Sentinel*:

"Fewer than 40% of Milwaukee Public School teachers responding to a poll question said they would be satisfied to have their own children attend the school where they teach. In response to another question, 38%...of MPS teachers said they would be hard-pressed to give the city school system a grade any higher than 'D' or 'F'."

More recently, Fuller and White showed that while a third of teachers in Milwaukee choose private schools for their children, the lower income in many African American families explains why only six percent of African American parents chose private schools (1995).

This Milwaukee story is not unique. Millions of American parents of all political persuasions — Republicans, Democrats, and independents — beginning with those at the very top of our government, benefit from the power of educational alternatives. While 14% of school age children are in private school, that rate is 34% and 50%, respectively, for the children of Congressmen and Senators (Shokraii, 1997). I support the decision these parents have made to exercise **their rightful power** to select the school they feel is best for their children. For example, President Clinton and Vice President Gore attended private school and enrolled their children in private schools. **Why is this power, so highly valued and widely used by many of our government's top leaders, so controversial when applied to low-income, mostly African American parents?**

CONCLUSION — POWERFUL GUIDANCE

Sara Lightfoot (1980) said that "a critically important ingredient of educational success...lies in the power relationship between communities and schools, rather than in the nature of the student population." She continued, in comments that would apply well to the history of educational options in Milwaukee: "Mixing black and white bodies...in the same school and preserving the same relationships and perceptions between the schools and the families they serve is unlikely to substantially change...the quality of the educational process." In words that speak directly to the need for expanded educational alternatives, she said: "The nature and distribution of power among schools, families and communities is a crucial piece of the complex puzzle leading toward educational success of all children."

Kenneth B. Clark is one of this century's most distinguished African American leaders. Three decades ago, long before "school choice" was the trendy and controversial topic it has become today, he wrote forcefully of the need for expanded educational alternatives. Clark (1968) said such alternatives would only arise if "competitive public school systems" replaced the public "education monopoly." He added that "truly effective competition [i.e., more educational alternatives for parents] strengthens rather than weakens that which deserves to survive...[P]ublic education need not be identified with the present system...of public schools. [It] can be more broadly and pragmatically defined in terms of...an educational system which is in the public interest."

The words of Lightfoot and Clark provide powerful guidance. African Americans must continue to organize and act decisively to attain the power to make educational choices that are best for our children. They must be inspired by — and never forget — the clear and powerful words of Milwaukee's Val Johnson:

"I think I know what's best for my children. Yes, I do."

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NOTES

1. For decades there has been a myriad of tax-supported and privately endowed programs for students attending public and private colleges. In addition, middle and upper income parents have always had the resources to exercise K-12 choice. What has changed is the more recent development of K-12 choice as a meaningful option for low-income parents. While state supreme courts in Wisconsin, Ohio, and Arizona have upheld the constitutionality of programs involving private and religious schools, a federal court in Ohio has disagreed with the Ohio Supreme Court and struck down Cleveland's voucher program as unconstitutional. This decision is being appealed. At some point in the near future, the U. S. Supreme Court will have to resolve this conflict. The Court in recent cases has suggested that educational assistance programs are constitutional if they treat religious and non religious options neutrally and if funds are directed by the private choices of individual parents.
2. The coalition included:
 - Parents for School Choice, an organization of low-income, mostly minority Milwaukee parents. A survey of black Milwaukeeans showed 71% supported the right to choose religious as well as non-sectarian schools (White, 1995).
 - The Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC), a business organization of about 2,500 employers. A 1994 member survey of found that 76% favored school choice.
 - Democratic Mayor John Norquist, who believes that school choice leads to the high quality education critical to the life of a city. In a 1988 campaign position paper, Norquist had documented the unequal impact on African Americans of the MPS race-based assignment system. A later article in *Reader's Digest* had helped bring national attention to the pioneering choice effort (Norquist and McGroarty, 1993).
 - Business and civic leaders, who had founded a private scholarship program called PAVE (Partners Advancing Values in Education). PAVE became the largest program of its kind in the United States, providing a critical bridge of support for low-income students while opponents tried to kill choice in court.
 - Other community activists such as John Gardner, a former labor organizer who has twice been elected, on a pro-school choice platform, to the citywide seat on the MPS school board.
3. John Witte is a University of Wisconsin political scientist who evaluated Milwaukee's program from 1991 to 1995. In a new book, he endorses targeted voucher programs such as the MPCP (Witte, 2000). Witte urges observers of this debate "to read [his] original reports" — see References.



ABOUT THE INSTITUTE AND ITS DIRECTOR

The Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University was founded in 1995. It is supported by a wide range of foundations and individuals with a common interest in achieving major educational reform. The Institute's particular focus is on improving academic achievement in urban America. Its research activity concentrates on issues affecting the expansion of educational options for parents. The Institute actively works with public and private educators and institutions to increase the quality of educational options available in Milwaukee, in hopes that this will improve educational achievement there and serve as a model for similar efforts in other cities.

Howard Fuller, Ph.D., is a Distinguished Professor of Education at Marquette University, where he founded and directs the Institute. Fuller joined the Marquette faculty in 1995 after serving four years as Superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools. His career includes cabinet-level administrative positions for the State of Wisconsin and Milwaukee County. He earned a bachelor of science degree in sociology from Carroll College, a master's degree in social administration from Western Reserve University, and a doctorate in the sociological foundations of education from Marquette University.