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## Nine Lies

### About School Choice: Proving Critics Wrong

#### *Introduction*

When *Nine Lies* first joined the debate 11 years ago, barely any research covered school choice despite communities in Maine and Vermont already providing it for more than one hundred years with great results.<sup>1</sup> Today, however, with scholarship or voucher programs in 11 states and more than 75 privately-funded programs covering 39 states,<sup>2</sup> many of researchers have begun to examine the effects of choice. Now critics of school choice are not only being answered, but proven wrong. With every new program and rigorous piece of research, public support for school choice grows stronger.

Advocates for choice can now present empirical and anecdotal evidence showing that school choice is equitable, desired, and works. It is clear, for example, that the competition generated by school choice improves public schools; this is documented in studies conducted by prolific school choice researchers, such as Caroline Hoxby at Harvard University and Jay Greene at the Manhattan Institute. The evidence shows also, thanks to over a decade of research on the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, that choice leads to test score improvements.

Constitutional questions have definitively been answered by the country's highest court, and while some areas still face challenges, courts in states ranging from Wisconsin and Arizona to Pennsylvania and Florida have confirmed their support for choice as well. Experience with programs in Texas, Florida, and Wisconsin demonstrates that choice doesn't "cream" the best and brightest students, but instead attracts struggling students who have not done well in a traditional school.

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<sup>1</sup> Hammons, Christopher W., "The Effects of Town Tuitioning in Vermont and Maine," 2001, Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> Kafer, Krista, "School Choice 2003: How States are Providing Greater Opportunity in Education," 2003, The Heritage Foundation. Note: Colorado has recently adopted a voucher program and is in the process of starting it.



As *Nine Lies* goes to press, the District of Columbia is on the verge of enacting a path breaking scholarship program to help children trapped in failing schools. On December 2nd the High Court will consider *Locke v. Davey*. *Locke v. Davey* originates in Washington State on a challenge from Joshua Davey who was denied the use of his state scholarship when he chose to study pastoral ministries (i.e., theology) as his major. The funds that he was denied are available to all other students regardless of the schools they attend. In a brief to the Court, CER asked the Court to find unconstitutional the Blaine Amendment that allows for discrimination against use of public funds at schools that are religiously affiliated. There are 37 such laws on the books, which date back to 19th century prejudices against Catholics, in particular.

Now as the U.S. Supreme Court is poised to consider this case that could challenge fundamentally how the public supports its students in their pursuit of education, it is important to know and understand the facts.

Amendment in Washington State which was a publicly acknowledged crusade against Catholicism at the turn of the century.

The case against school choice is unraveling as critics are being forced to acknowledge the truth. Moreover, defenders of the status quo have yet to demonstrate that their idea of “reform” — more money, more staff, more time — has produced any positive results.<sup>3</sup> Per-pupil funding has increased 500 percent since 1950.<sup>4</sup> Of the ten states that increased per pupil expenditures the most over the past two decades, as well as the ten states that have experienced the greatest decreases in student-to-teacher ratios, none ranked in the top ten in academic achievement.<sup>5</sup> It has to be a little more than coincidence that the states ranking in the bottom half of the nation according to national achievement barometers include 8 of the 10 states with the lowest amount of school choice.<sup>6</sup> America’s children deserve better. Change is past due.

Overall achievement levels, as measured by National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), have remained largely stagnant; graduation rates have not improved; and employment prospects are no brighter, particularly for disadvantaged children. Even during budget crisis, the only rising indicator seems to be public school spending.

Every day over 100,000 children participate in choice programs around the U.S. Survey after survey, addressing how and why disadvantaged parents choose, shows that parents are gaining access to information enabling them to make school choices that will improve the

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<sup>3</sup> Kusters, Marvin H. and Mast, Brent D., “Closing the Education Achievement Gap: Is Title I Working,” May 2003, AEI Evaluative Studies, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research.

<sup>4</sup> Godwin, R. Kenneth and Kemerer, Frank R., *School Choice Tradeoffs: Liberty, Equity, and Diversity*, 2002, University of Texas Press, Austin, TX, p. 5. citing Eric Hanushek et al. al, “Making Schools Work: Improving Performance and Controlling Costs,” 1994, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, pp. 151-176.

<sup>5</sup> LeFevre, Andrew T. and Hederman Jr., Rea S., “Report Card on American Education: A State-by-State Analysis 1976-2001,” October 1, 2002, American Legislative Exchange Council.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*; Greene, Jay P., “2001 Education Freedom Index,” Civic Report No. 24, January 2002, Manhattan Institute. Note: ALEC’s Report Card ranks states according to a measure of achievement that is a composite of scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the American Board College Test (ACT) and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). The Education Freedom Index uses public, charter, private and home school choice to rank the overall “educational freedom” level of each state.

academic prospects of their children. In fact, the top reason cited for selecting a school is academic quality.<sup>7</sup> School choice promotes competition that compels schools to make information more accessible so parents can see why they should entrust a school with their child's future.<sup>8</sup> This shared information helps keep the competitive spirit alive as parents use the information to avoid failing schools. Even though some of the busiest parents may not have the time to closely examine the greater amounts of school information, research in places such as New Jersey and New York shows that it takes only a small subset of informed parents to sustain both competition and the increase in information.<sup>9</sup>

While the body of supporting evidence for school choice is growing exponentially, opposition remains strong among many special-interest groups, notably the teachers unions (such as the NEA and the AFT) as well as the National Schools Board Association, the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Their leaders consistently block efforts to expand or establish school choice programs, and so groups such as the NEA annually raise members' dues in order to fund aggressive campaigns against vouchers. Despite the sizable resources the opponents of choice possess, choice proponents are broadening support and beating back the special allegations against choice. What follows are the nine most prominent falsehoods – lies; a list that despite the evidence has changed little in ten years.

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<sup>7</sup> See Hoxby, Caroline M., "Chapter 11: The Effects of School Choice on Curriculum and Atmosphere," *The Effects of School Choice*, October 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Coulson, Andrew J., *Market Education: The Unknown History*, 1999, The Social Philosophy and Science Center, New Brunswick and London, p. 313.

<sup>9</sup> Howell, William G. and Peterson, Paul E. (with Wolf, Patrick J. and Campbell, David E.), *The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools*, 2002, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, p.18.

Lie #1  
The “Undermining-America”  
Argument:

Choice will destroy the American public school tradition, siphoning off needed funds and decreasing quality in public schools while leading to segregation and division.

The Reality:

Numerous examples show how competition created by choice can motivate public schools to improve, and how higher funding levels without systemic reforms leave only microscopic changes, if any at all.

The critics say...

*"Vouchers are an attempt to abandon our public schools where 90 percent of our students are educated. Vouchers draw critical financial resources away from public schools, where these resources are needed to address record high enrollments, teacher shortages, maintaining and modernizing school facilities, and improving air quality."<sup>10</sup>*

Donna McGuire, President of the Connecticut PTA

The truth is...

- A federal judge in Kansas City, Missouri, decided to test the hypothesis that unlimited funding could improve conditions in public schools. His orders spawned \$2 billion in government spending to improve Kansas City Public Schools and give a fair chance to all

students. “The student teacher ratio was reduced to 12 or 13 to 1, teacher pay was increased and workloads were reduced. Television and animation studios were added, as well as a robotics lab and field trips to Mexico and Senegal,” according to the National Center for Policy Analysis. At the end of this experiment, taxpayers had nothing to show for their money; the achievement gap between Black and White students stayed the same, with Black student achievement scores showing no improvement.<sup>11</sup>

- According to Harvard researcher Caroline Hoxby, isolating the effects of competition on public school achievement levels shows that public schools where choice occurs improve. Hoxby evaluated schools under three programs: the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program and the charter school programs in Michigan and Arizona. (Charter schools are a form of public school choice.) In the 32 Milwaukee schools that faced the most competition – with two-thirds or more students eligible for vouchers – fourth-grade math achievement test scores exhibited what amounted to an annual gain of 6.3 National Percentile Rank (NPR) points over a four-year period. The 66 Milwaukee schools facing less competition (with less than two thirds of voucher eligible students) saw an annual gain of 4.8 points.

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<sup>10</sup> Duncan, Therese (Contact), "CAPE Leaders Denounce Governor Rowland: Vouchers would Drain Dollars from Under-Funded Public Schools," March 1, 2002, Parent Teachers Association of Connecticut, Inc. as extracted from <<http://www.ctpta.org/news/press/pr-2002-03-01.html>> on July 25, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Goodman, John C. and Moore, Matt, "School Choice vs. School Choice," April 27, 2001, Policy Backgrounder No. 155, The National Center for Policy Analysis.

In contrast, the schools facing no competition saw an annual gain of only 3.5 points. The same declining pattern was shown for all subjects: science, social studies, language, and reading. Schools facing competition from charter school programs also showed greater gains, and calculations showed that charter schools in Arizona and Michigan could eliminate the achievement gap between urban and suburban families in ten to twenty years.<sup>12</sup>

Under well-designed programs of choice or charters, money follows the child to the school of his or her choice. Schools receive the funding that their enrollment merits. This is accountability in action.

Implicit in the criticism that school choice would drain the public schools of resources is the assumption that given a choice, students would flee the public schools in droves — a most damning indictment coming from the defenders of the current system. Such a scenario, however, is unlikely. Public schools educate 89 percent of American students, and by virtue of their current market share, they will continue to provide the majority of education — and receive the majority of education funding — even under a widespread system of school choice. In fact, evidence suggests that the per-pupil funding in public schools may actually increase under school choice with only one choice reform effort failing to show a rise in per-pupil spending after allowing students to leave schools.<sup>13</sup>

- In Milwaukee, both per-pupil and overall funding for the public schools increased significantly under school choice. Between 1990 and 2002 – the same time school choice was expanding – total inflation-adjusted Milwaukee Public Schools spending increased from \$784 million to \$1.1 billion. While MPS reaped this 32 percent increase in spending, enrollment grew by only 5.4 percent, and local residents saw their property tax burden decrease by over 30 percent.<sup>14</sup>
- In most cases, the charter or voucher amount is less than what the public school spends to educate a child, though the amounts should be equal. Under current programs, however, difference stays with the public school. For charter schools, all but a few states allow money to follow the child.

Hoxby also found under the existing monopolistic system, public schools have no incentive to undertake substantial reforms or make major improvements because no matter how badly they perform their budgets will not be cut, their enrollment will not decline, the school will not close down. Indeed, failure is generally rewarded with increased funding, but if parents were

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<sup>12</sup> Hoxby, Caroline M., "How School Choice Affects the Achievement of *Public School Students*," Paper prepared for Koret Task Force meeting on September 20-21, 2001 at the Hoover Institution in Stanford, California; Hoxby, Caroline M., "The Rising Tide," Winter 2001, *Education Next*.

<sup>13</sup> Hoxby, Caroline M., "How School Choice Affects the Achievement of *Public School Students*," Paper prepared for Koret Task Force meeting on September 20-21, 2001 at the Hoover Institution in Stanford, California, p.1.

<sup>14</sup> American Education Reform Council, "Fiscal and Enrollment Trends: Milwaukee Public Schools 1990-2003," June 2003; citing data gathered from MPS budgets and Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports. Note: All dollar amounts have been adjusted for inflation through 2003.

allowed to remove their children from failing schools — and the money that comes with them — public schools would be forced to respond.

Florida's *A-Plus Program*, offers Opportunity Scholarships to children in schools deemed failing, two times in a four-year period. Evaluators found that “F” schools earned the highest achievement *gains* of all public schools, and those gains were 60 to 75 percent higher than “D” schools (that had the second highest achievement gains).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Greene, Jay, “Evaluation of the Florida A-Plus Accountability and School Choice Program,” February 2001, Center for Civic Innovation at the Manhattan Institute in conjunction with the Program on Education Policy and Governance at Harvard University.

The critics say...

**On segregation and division**

*"Private elementary and secondary schools have been founded primarily by two types of entities: (1) Religious denominations seeking to teach academics interwoven with their religious doctrine, and (2) wealthier parents wanting to give their children an advantage over other children. Tax-funded vouchers for private schools would increase divisions between rich and poor and among different religious, threatening the future of our democracy."<sup>16</sup>*

Association of Texas Professional Educators

*"Under voucher programs, our educational system -- and our country -- would become even more Balkanized than it already is. With the help of taxpayers' dollars, private schools would be filled with well-to-do and middle-class students and a handful of the best, most motivated students from inner cities. Some public schools would be left with fewer dollars to teach the poorest of the poor and other students who, for one reason or another, were not private school material. Such a scenario can hardly benefit public education."<sup>17</sup>*

Anti-Defamation League

*"'Opportunity Scholarships' sounds terrific, until you understand its Orwellian meaning: Give up on public education in America; stop investing in it; siphon off as much of its funding as you can to enable a few 'deserving poor' to go to private (mostly religious) schools, and to hell with all the kids left behind."<sup>18</sup>*

Sandra Feldman, President, AFT

The truth is...

**In the current system of public education the quality of public schooling varies according to the quality of the neighborhood and wealth of its residents. This is far from democratic.**

“What happens to the families who cannot afford to buy a house or don’t even own a car,” ask researchers at the National Center for Policy Analysis. “Unfortunately they’re out of luck. . . [I]t’s almost inevitable that the children of low-income families will end up in schools no one else wants to attend. These are the schools with the worst teachers, the worst principals and the lowest scores. . . It is no accident that the worst schools are consistently found in low-income neighborhoods, which lie predominantly in urban areas. Indeed, it could not be otherwise.<sup>19</sup>”

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<sup>16</sup> Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE), "Governmental Relations: 10 Reasons to Oppose Private School Vouchers," as extracted from <<http://www.atpe.org/governmentalrelations/vouchers10oppose.htm>> on July 28, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Anti-Defamation League (ADL), "School Vouchers: The Wrong Choice for Public Education" as extracted from <<http://www.adl.org/vouchers/print.asp>> on July 28, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Sandra Feldman, "Let's Tell the Truth," November 1997, American Federation of Teachers.

<sup>19</sup> Goodman, John C. and Moore, Matt, "School Choice vs. School Choice," April 27, 2001, Policy Backgrounder No. 155, The National Center for Policy Analysis.

“Out of luck” is certainly a polite understatement, particularly for Black Americans. When Hispanic and White family incomes grow, an increasing number of them choose to move to neighborhoods with good public schools. For both Hispanic and White parents, 40 percent of low-income families choose residences because of public school quality, as do 60 percent of high-income parents. But the percentage of Black families who choose their neighborhood because of its schools doesn’t increase with income. At both high and low income levels, only about one-quarter of African Americans said that they selected their neighborhood because of its public schools. “For many Black Americans, school choice by residential selection simply does not exist.”<sup>20</sup>

The 2002 scores of urban districts on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) present the raw evidence of neglect in some of the nation’s largest urban areas: Atlanta, Chicago, the District of Columbia, Houston, Los Angeles and New York. The city with the *smallest* percentage of 4<sup>th</sup> graders eligible for the free/reduced-priced school lunch program is New York with *seventy* percent. (Eligibility for this program is a national indicator of especially low-income populations.) Average scores in each of these cities were lower than the national average *and* lower than the average for cities across the nation.<sup>21</sup>

- The National Urban League reports that:

“the achievement gap. . . can be attributed to *systemic educational policies and practices.*” Examples of this are evident in Shaker Heights [OH] and other upscale communities, where, according to Patricia J. Martin of Education Trust, differences between affluent blacks and whites were directly attributable to the manner in which students were tracked in schools, including the fact that white students were tracked into advanced placement courses, while blacks were not. The Harvard University Civil Rights Project (2001) reported that blacks, especially males, were at a greater risk of being disproportionately labeled mentally retarded, and thus tracked into special education classes.<sup>22</sup>

- The U.S. Department of Education reported in May 2003 that the percentage of students attending public, assigned schools decreased from 80 percent in 1993 to 76 percent in 1999. Over this time period, 70 percent of students with household incomes of \$75,000 or above were in public, assigned schools, with only slight fluctuations between the years, but the proportion of students in public, assigned schools whose household income was \$10,000 or less declined from 83 percent to 74 percent over the same time period.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Howell, William G. and Peterson, Paul E. (with Wolf, Patrick J. and Campbell, David E.), *The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools*, 2002, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, p.25.

<sup>21</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, “National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2002 Trial Urban District Reading Assessment” and the writing assessment, July 2003, U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>22</sup> Institute for Opportunity and Equality, “Opportunity Agenda: A Blueprint for Success,” April 6, 2001, National Urban League. Note: Italics emphasis was added.

<sup>23</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, “Trends in the Use of School Choice 1993 to 1999: Statistical Analysis Report,” May 2003, U.S. Department of Education.



- Sixty-three percent of Black respondents in a recent poll said they would place their children in either private or charter schools if the option were available. In addition, 56 percent of Black respondents rated their schools a “C” or below.<sup>24</sup> While different surveys with different respondents often yield different results, other recent polls support this general finding, showing 57 to 72 percent of Black Americans support using vouchers to give their youth a better chance to succeed academically.<sup>25</sup>
- Among the general population, 63 percent of nonwhite respondents support allowing parents “to send their school-age children to any public, private, or church-related school they choose” even when “the government would pay for all or part of the tuition.”<sup>26</sup> Fifty-one percent of respondents would support “providing parents in low-income families with tax money in the form of school vouchers to help pay for their children to attend private or religious schools.”<sup>27</sup> Fifty percent of respondents support helping low-income parents pay private or religious school tuition with 57 percent of “low-income” groups supporting it.<sup>28</sup>
- Eight in ten African Americans live in neighborhoods where they are the majority, despite the fact that they constitute just 12 percent of the population nationwide,<sup>29</sup> and a great majority of charter schools and other school choice initiatives tend to be located in or near highly urban areas that differ substantially from national norms and averages.<sup>30</sup> This dramatic difference is a huge reason why these communities are clamoring for school choice.
- According to a recent study based on data from the U.S. Department of Education, private schools are more racially integrated than neighboring public schools.<sup>31</sup>
- Research on Cleveland Public Schools finds that third grade students are more integrated than in traditional schools. While a greater fraction of these students are White and fewer are Black relative to the public schools, the proportion of Hispanic and multiracial students was twice that of the district’s public schools. The result is a slightly more diverse cohort than the one in the Cleveland public school district. Students who accept their

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<sup>24</sup> BAMPAC 2002 *National Opinion Poll*, August 2002, Black America’s Political Action Committee.

<sup>25</sup> 2002 *National Opinion Poll: Education*, May 2003, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies; 2002 *National Survey of Attitudes Toward School Choice*, August 2002, Center for Education Reform/Zogby.

<sup>26</sup> *The 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Phi Delta Kappa/ Gallup Poll*, August 2002.

<sup>27</sup> *Associated Press Poll on School vouchers*, August 2002.

<sup>28</sup> *ABCNews.com Poll*, July 16, 2002.

<sup>29</sup> Howell, William G. and Peterson, Paul E. (with Wolf, Patrick J. and Campbell, David E.), *The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools*, 2002, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> For more detail on the demographic and achievement differences between highly urban areas and general and urban national averages, see the “National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2002 Trial Urban District Reading Assessment” and the writing assessment, July 2003 from the National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

scholarship before the start of the school year are nearly identical to their public school classmates with respect to household income and race, but the bulk of students starting in the middle of the year are less likely to be similar to those classmates.<sup>32</sup>

- Another study finds that vouchers may remove and even reverse the incentive for families to segregate themselves based on their incomes. This type of segregation occurs in the current system as wealthier parents seek great schools, choose a nearby home, and push neighborhood housing prices up in the process, shutting out lower income families.<sup>33</sup>
- The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program now serves over 11,000 students and includes 102 participating private schools, and an extensive state audit released in 2000 revealed that the racial composition of the choice program is almost identical to that of the Milwaukee Public Schools. The report found that 62.4 percent of choice students were African-American, compared with 61.4 percent in MPS.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Alt, Martha Naomi and Peter, Katharin, "Findings from the Condition of Education 2002: Private Schools, A Brief Portrait," August 2002, MPR Associates, Inc. in partnership with National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education.

<sup>32</sup> Metcalf, Kim K., Boone, William J., et al., "Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship and Tutoring Program: Summary Report 1998 – 2001," March 2003, Indiana Center for Evaluation.

<sup>33</sup> Nechyba, Thomas, "The Unintended Benefits of Private School Choice," June 2002, *The School Choice Advocate*, Newsletter of the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation.

<sup>34</sup> Williams, Joe, "Audit Dispels School Choice Myths," February 2, 2000, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

Lie #2  
The “Creaming”  
Argument:

Choice will leave the poor  
behind in the worst schools.

The Reality:

Public schools are not as  
open and accommodating –  
and private schools not as  
selective – as critics suggest.

The critics say...

*“When education is left to the marketplace, the losers will be students considered ‘ineducable’ or too expensive to teach.”<sup>35</sup>*

People for the American Way

*“The illusion of choice provided to parents and students by voucher programs often overshadows [that] parents will have little newfound choice regarding where their children attend school as the decision whether or not to admit a child will remain firmly in the hands of participating private schools.”<sup>36</sup>*

Laura W. Murphy and Terri A. Schroeder,  
ACLU Director and Legislative Representative

*“Vouchers...could siphon off your most motivated families, leaving behind the neediest kids, whose families don’t have enough motivation to go after the money and spend it properly.”<sup>37</sup>*

Sharon Ambrose, D.C. Council Member (D-Ward 6)

The truth is...

Public schools turn away many children with severe disabilities or behavioral programs, out-placing them to private schools at public expense. More than 4,300 private schools in the U.S. enroll students with special education needs and over 4,700 of them service students' medical health care needs.<sup>38</sup> Six thousand private schools serve Title I students and over 10,000 of them serve more than 160,000 students eligible for the federal free and reduced lunch program.<sup>39</sup> Far from being enclaves of privilege, private schools extend opportunity to some of America’s most disadvantaged students.

- Private schools offer an array of specialized alternatives serving just about every kind of student, from teen mothers, to recovering alcoholics, to chronic truants. In fact, school

<sup>35</sup> People for the American Way Foundation. “The Voucher Veneer: The Deeper Agenda to Privatize Public Education,” Special Report, July 2003.

<sup>36</sup> ACLU Letter to the House Urging Opposition to School Voucher Program for the District of Columbia, dated May 8, 2003, and signed by Director Laura W. Murphy and Legislative Representative Terri A. Schroeder.

<sup>37</sup> Education Leaders Council, *The Status Quote Weekly*, February 17, 2003. This statement was made on February 4, 2003 in *The Washington Post*.

<sup>38</sup> Gruber, Kerry J. and Strizek, Gregory A., "Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000: Overview of the Data for Public, Private, Public Charter, and Bureau of Indian Affairs Elementary and Secondary Schools," May 2002, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Tables 2.04 - 2.05, pp. 50 - 51.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, Table 2.06, p. 52.

districts in over a dozen states contract with private alternative schools to educate at-risk youth.<sup>40</sup>

- Florida's McKay Scholarship Program for students with disabilities has the largest eligible pool of voucher recipients in the country, with approximately 375,000 eligible special education students throughout the state. In the first empirical evaluation of the program's performance, 93 percent of McKay participants are either satisfied or very satisfied with their McKay schools, only 33 percent were similarly satisfied with public schools. Participating students were victimized far less by classmates because of their disabilities in McKay schools; forty-seven percent were bothered often, and 25 percent were physically assaulted in public schools, while only 5 percent were similarly bothered in McKay schools. Most impressive, *more than 90 percent* of parents who *left* the program believe that it should continue to be available to those who wish to use it – evidence that this program is filling a need in a way that parents greatly appreciate, and that private schools are serving as havens for many disabled youngsters.<sup>41</sup>
- Research shows that nearly 37 percent of Milwaukee's public schools employ measures private schools in the choice program are prohibited to use.<sup>42</sup> Rather than skimming off the best students, the program seems to provide an alternative education environment for students who are not doing particularly well in the public school system.<sup>43</sup>

Annual evaluations of the Milwaukee program show that it is not the “best” students who exercise choice, but rather struggling students that are most likely to switch to a different school. The state-sponsored evaluation found that students applying to the choice program performed *below* their public school peers on tests of academic achievement.<sup>44</sup> In other words, it was not the “A” and “B” students who opted for choice, but the “C” and “D” students. Researchers could find no strong evidence that program participants had higher levels of unmeasured characteristics, such as motivation.<sup>45</sup>

- In a three-year assessment of charter schools in New York, the State University of New York found that the burgeoning number of parents who opted out of their traditional public schools did so because their children were among the most at risk. Seventeen of the 22 charter schools evaluated had student bodies where more than seventy percent of the students were eligible for the federal free and reduced lunch program for children from

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<sup>40</sup> Beales, Janet R., *Meeting the Challenge: How the Private Sector Serves Difficult to Educate Students*, 1996, Reason Foundation.

<sup>41</sup> Greene, Jay P. and Forster, Greg, "Vouchers for Special Education Students: An Evaluation of Florida's McKay Scholarship Program," Civic Report No. 38, June 2003, The Manhattan Institute.

<sup>42</sup> Clowes, George A., "Who Chooses? Voucher critics overlook selectivity of public schools," August 2000, *School Reform News*.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in *Voucher Wars: Strategy and Tactics as School Choice Advocates Battle the Labor Leviathan*, Daniel McGroarty, Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation, April 1998, p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> Witte, John F. et al., *Fifth Year Report, Milwaukee Parental Choice Program*, University of Wisconsin, Madison, December 1997.

<sup>45</sup> Goldhaber, Dan D., Brewer, Dominic J., Eide, Eric R. and Rees, Daniel I., "Testing for Sample Selection in the Milwaukee School Choice Experiment," 1999, *Economics of Education Review*, pp. 259 – 267.

low-income families. Several of these schools had more than 98 percent of their students from this same group.<sup>46</sup>

- A study by the Escambia County School District in Florida found that more than two thirds of the students participating in the first year of the state's choice program scored *below* district and national averages on standardized tests of math and reading. The district study concluded, "departure of these students will have no significant impact upon the average scores of the remaining students (in the public schools)."<sup>47</sup>
- Studies conducted in 1999 of school choice programs in San Antonio, Texas and Escambia, Florida found that students applying for choice programs performed no better academically than students staying behind in the public schools.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Charter School Institute, State University of New York, "Charter Schools in New York: A New Choice in Public Education, The First Three Years 1999 – 2002."

<sup>47</sup> "Voucher Opponents Proven Wrong Again," Institute for Justice, September 14, 1999.

<sup>48</sup> "Study: San Antonio Voucher Schools Aren't Creaming," *Education Daily*, September 20, 1999. "Voucher Opponents Proven Wrong Yet Again," Institute for Justice, September 15, 1999.

Lie #3  
The “Radical Schools”  
Scare:

Extremists such as the Ku Klux Klan, religious cults, or other radical groups will start schools.

The Reality:

Existing federal and state laws prohibit all institutions from discrimination and illegal activities.

The critics say...

*"Under a system of vouchers, it may be difficult to prevent schools run by extremist groups like the Nation of Islam or the Ku Klux Klan from receiving public funds to subsidize their racist and anti-Semitic agendas."<sup>49</sup>*

Anti-Defamation League

*"The voucher movement will fractionalize society... We don't need to be a Northern Ireland. We don't need to be a Bosnia. We don't need people to divide into groups. One thing that keeps them from doing that now is a strong public school system."<sup>50</sup>*

Bob Harris, Spokesman for the Michigan Education Association

The truth is...

- An extensive state audit of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, the nation's oldest government funded voucher program of its kind, found that 71.1 percent of parents chose their private school because it provided higher educational standards. Other top reasons for choosing included good teachers (70.4 percent) and safe and orderly classrooms (67.8 percent).<sup>51</sup>
- Data from the National Household Education survey was used to gather responses related to civic objectives of schools. Researchers found that private schools often have different requirements that promote a higher level of civic engagement. Even controlling for demographic characteristics, private school students often become more active citizens. The conclusion that democracy will not be threatened simply because more young people attend private schools.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Anti-Defamation League (ADL), "School Vouchers: The Wrong Choice for Public Education" as extracted from <<http://www.adl.org/vouchers/print.asp>> on July 28, 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted in "California, Michigan Voters To Decide Voucher Debates," Stateline.org, By Jason White, July 28, 2000.

<sup>51</sup> Williams, Joe, "Audit Dispels School Choice Myths," Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, February 2, 2000.

<sup>52</sup> Campbell, David E., "Making Democratic Education Work: Schools, Social Capital and Civic Education," *Charters, Vouchers, and Public Education*, Brookings Institution Press, 2001, co-edited by Paul E. Peterson and David E. Campbell.

- Over 89 percent of private schools are accredited or evaluated by external agencies such as national, regional or state private school organizations.<sup>53</sup> These organizations maintain standards that have been accepted or recognized by federal, state and local education agencies, as well as by foundations and corporations.<sup>54</sup> Those schools that are not accredited are typically affiliated with an established institution, such as Catholic or Protestant churches. Even the few private schools that are entirely independent of both accreditation and other established entities have one main and very important degree of accountability — to parents, whose hard-earned money funds the tuition.<sup>55</sup>
- As Head of The Key School in Annapolis, Maryland, Marcella Yedid comments, “The state does not have a monopoly on the accreditation process. Independent schools belong to accrediting bodies that serve in this role with zeal equal to that of the state.”<sup>56</sup>

The Radical Schools Scare needlessly distracts from the real issues.

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<sup>53</sup> National Center for Education Statistics - Elementary, Secondary and Library Studies Division, Draft Table 1.5 from the "Schools and Staffing Survey" as received via fax from the U.S. Department of Education on July 30, 2003.

<sup>54</sup> O'Malley, Charles, "Who says private schools are not accountable?" prepared for Temple University and Manhattan Institute, presented at the Western Regional Science Association conference, February 21, 1993.

<sup>55</sup> See <<http://www.ncpsa.org>> for more information from the National Council for Private School Accreditation.

<sup>56</sup> Yedid, Marcella M., Letter to the Editor: "Smear Jobs: Defend Public Education – But Not by Tarring Independent Schools," October 16, 2002, *Education Week*.

Lie #4  
The “Church-State”  
Argument:

Allowing public funds to be used for tuition at religious schools is unconstitutional.

The Reality:

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in June 2002, that a school choice program must not have the “purpose” or “effect” of advancing or inhibiting religion. Thus, it ruled that the Cleveland, Ohio program is constitutional because public money can flow to religious schools as a result of a person’s independent choice.

The critics say...

*"Private school voucher plans force Americans to pay taxes to support religious indoctrination..."<sup>57</sup>*

Americans United for Separation of Church and State

*"[T]he religious schools now receiving vouchers...describe their goal as instilling in children the tenets of their Faith. Though this goal is entirely appropriate for a private religious school, it is entirely inappropriate for government to support this goal with taxpayer dollars."<sup>58</sup>*

Ralph G. Neas, President, People For the American Way Foundation

The truth is...

- Since the federal government clearly indicated in the 2002 Cleveland decision thus it ruled that the Cleveland Ohio program is constitutional because Public money can flow to religious schools as a result of a person's independent choice.
- Federal and state governments already provide billions of dollars in support to religiously affiliated organizations such as hospitals, universities, and social service providers. Government vouchers for low-income parents exist to help fund day care at private and parochial facilities. Thousands of students in higher education use federally funded Pell grants and GI Bill benefits to attend religious colleges and universities. In Florida alone, where the Opportunity Scholarships program was being fiercely litigated in courts, the Florida Department of Children and Family Services will spend millions this year for services contracted out to various faith-based organizations to support communities with social work and juvenile justice programs. And in 2002, over 30 percent of the faith based organizations in 15 states performed public community services using federal grants of \$100,000 or more, with 10 percent fulfilling contracts worth over half a million dollars.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Americans United for Separation of Church and State, "Vouchers Require Taxpayer Funding for Religious Indoctrination, Says Americans United," February 20, 2002, press release as extracted from <http://www.au.org/press/022002.htm> on July 28, 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Rosen, Gary, Chase, Bob, Feldman, Sandra, Neas, Ralph G., et al, "Are School Vouchers the Answer?" *Commentary Online*, June 1, 2000.

<sup>59</sup> Green, John C. and Sherman, Amy L., "Fruitful: A Survey of Government-Funded Faith-Based Programs in 15 States," 2002, Hudson Institute.



Court cases establishing the constitutionality of choice:

- In *Bush v. Holmes*, the Florida First District Court of Appeals upheld Florida's Opportunity Scholarship Program to provide vouchers to families in consistently failing schools.
- In *Jackson v. Benson*, the Wisconsin Supreme Court in 1998 upheld the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program, which provides publicly funded vouchers to low-income families to use in private or religious schools.
- In *Kotterman v. Killian*, the Arizona Supreme Court sustained a state income tax credit for donations to private scholarship funds.
- In a related case, the Vermont Supreme Court upheld, then five years later invalidated a portion of a tuition program that included religious schools. It is true that some state constitutions, such as Vermont's, contain language – called "Blaine" or "compelled support" laws – that may be interpreted as being more restrictive than the U.S. Constitution on matters of public funding for religious organizations.

The next legal battleground involves these Blaine amendments and compelled support clauses that are found in 47 states. These amendments can be found in state constitutions – including Vermont's – and include language meant to stop public dollars from reaching religious institutions.

- The case of *Davey v. Locke* from Washington State will be addressed by the US Supreme Court on December 2, 2003. It covers a dispute in which a student was not able to use his state-granted scholarship because he wanted to use it to study theology. Until this Blaine amendment issue is resolved, states with this type of clause must be interpreted on a state-by-state basis.

Lie #5  
The “Lack of Accountability”  
Argument:

Private schools are largely  
unregulated and therefore not  
accountable to the public.

The Reality:

Schools of choice are directly  
accountable to parents who can  
individually decide whether their  
school is accountable for results.  
Private schools must comply with  
existing state and federal laws  
regarding nondiscrimination and  
financial reporting. Most are  
accredited by recognized  
institutions, a third layer of  
accountability.

The critics say...

*“Voucher proponents suggest that choice programs improve public education by introducing competition. Fair competition, however, requires a level playing field, and public and private schools operate under a different set of regulations.”<sup>60</sup>*

Dianne Sargent, National PTA

*“Voucher programs lack accountability. Public schools are required to meet basic accountability standards, including making meetings and records such as test scores, dropout rates and other information open and available to the public. Public schools must also comply with all federal, state, and local civil rights, health and safety requirements.”*

<sup>61</sup> Statement by several organizations, including the ACLU, Anti-Defamation League, National PTA, and NEA

*“Voucher schools are not accountable to the public. The voucher schools argue that because they are private, they get to play by different rules than the public schools.”<sup>62</sup>*

Barbara Miner, *The Nation*

The truth is...

Regulation does not equal accountability. Charter schools are a good example of this because they are accountable directly to parents, who voluntarily choose whether or not to enroll their children in them. Charter schools mean increased accountability in exchange for

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<sup>60</sup> Testimony of Dianne Sargent representing the Virginia PTA and the National PTA submitted to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce Education Reform Subcommittee regarding Flexibility and School Choice, March 14, 2001.

<sup>61</sup> Open letter to U.S. Senators dated May 2, 2001 and signed by: American Association of School Administrators, American Association of University Women, American Civil Liberties Union, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Americans for Democratic Action, American Federation of Teachers, American Jewish Committee, American s United for Separation of Church and State, Anti-Defamation League, Association of Education Service Agencies, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, Council for Exceptional Children, Hadassah the Women’s Zionist Organization of America, International Reading Association, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, National Alliance of Black School Educators, National Association for Bilingual Education, National Association of Federal Education Program Administrators, National Association of School Psychologists, National Black Child Development Institute, National Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty, National Council of Jewish Women, National Education Association, National PTA, National Rural Education Association, New York State Education Department, People for the American Way, Service Employees International Union AFL-CIO, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, United Automobile Workers of America, United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries, United Methodist Church General Board of Church & Society, and Women of Reform Judaism.

<sup>62</sup> Miner, Barbara, “No One Really Knows How Children in Milwaukee’s Voucher Schools Are Faring,” *The Nation*, June 5, 2000.

fewer regulations. As Chester Finn Jr. notes, “at least the charter movement – as opposed to traditional public school systems – buries its dead rather than keeping them permanently on life support.”<sup>63</sup> When allowed to create their own measures of accountability, private schools and charter schools generally set high standards for themselves.

- Private schools do, in fact, have to comply with many regulations. Private schools meet anti-discrimination laws and health and safety requirements. Like any other business they must adhere to laws pertaining to tax reporting, accounting, truth in advertising, employment, zoning, and the like. Furthermore, to support their rulings to regulate private schools, federal and state courts generally cite the state’s interest in an informed and self-sufficient citizenry capable of participating in a democratic society.<sup>64</sup> Some school choice programs, such as Milwaukee’s, protect the integrity of the program by requiring that voucher schools promise to not tolerate discrimination as a condition of their participation in the program.<sup>65</sup>
- A state audit of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program found that most private schools participating used some form of standardized testing or are independently accredited. The audit found that 76 of the 86 schools participating at the time enrolled 93 percent of the students in the choice program and either administered a standardized test and/or earned accreditation from an independent accrediting authority. Accreditation requires schools to have a valid curriculum and materials, and a qualified teaching staff.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Finn Jr., Chester, “D.C.’s Charter Schools,” July 21, 2003, *The Washington Times*.

<sup>64</sup> As extracted from the online manual to state regulation of private schools as published by the U.S. Department of Education at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/RegPrivSchl/> on July 22, 2003.

<sup>65</sup> Kava, Russ, “Milwaukee Parental Choice Program,” Informational Paper 29, January 2003, Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau. Note: Federal law already prohibits discrimination in the admission policies of nonsectarian schools, 42 U.S.C. § 1981; *Runyon v. McCrary*, 427 U.S. 160 (1976) [as cited and discussed in the manual of state regulation of private schools as produced by the U.S. Department of Education and available online at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/RegPrivSchl/>].

<sup>66</sup> Williams, Joe, “Audit Dispels School Choice Myths,” February 2, 2000, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

Lie #6  
The “Big Brother” Argument:  
Accepting public funds would make private schools vulnerable to intrusive government regulation.

The Reality:

This is a legitimate concern often raised by free-market advocates and private schools (opponents raise it too, though not necessarily with the same sincerity). Fears about excessive regulation, however, may be allayed by well-designed choice programs that protect private schools from intrusive regulations and by a thoughtful review of the facts.

The critics say...

*“Private school vouchers would make parochial schools less parochial and private schools less private, subjecting them to public supervision and compromising their independence.”<sup>67</sup>*

Richard Riley, Former U.S. Secretary of Education

*“Yes, competition is desperately needed to improve public schools by eroding the monolithic control of government and unions. Yes, inner-city youths desperately need educational options. But the full price for these solutions, if private schools are included, is the virtual abolition of private education through government or judicial control.”<sup>68</sup>*

Ronald Trowbridge, Vice President for External Programs and Communications at Hillsdale College

The truth is...

The most compelling evidence comes from the Milwaukee experience. The longest running school choice program of its kind, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program has not led to excessive or intrusive regulations on private schools. In fact, with every passing year, more private schools have opted to participate in the program (from seven to 102 as of January 2003) — proof that the private schools like what they see.<sup>69</sup> New private schools have been founded directly in response to the demand generated by choice. For the five-year period from the 1995-1996 to the 1999-2000 school years, the county including Cleveland saw a 13 percent growth in its number of private schools compared to a 9 percent decline statewide, and Milwaukee's county grew by 4 percent compared to 3 percent growth statewide.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Riley, Richard W., "Is Meaningful School Choice Possible within the Public School System," July 18, 1997, *The Congressional Quarterly Researcher*.

<sup>68</sup> Trowbridge, Ronald, "Devil's Deal: Vouchers Offer an Opportunity for the Government to Seize Control of Private Education," *National Review*, September 15, 1997, <<http://nationalreview.com/15sept97/trowbridge091597.html>>, visited June 23, 2000.

<sup>69</sup> Milwaukee Public Schools, "Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP): MPCP Facts and Figures for 2002-2003 as of February 2003," as extracted from <<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dfm/sms/doc/mpc02fnf.doc>> on July 28, 2003.

<sup>70</sup> CER requested numbers generated in August 2003 by the National Educational Data Resource Center (NEDRC) as outside contractors of the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) at the U.S. Department of Education compared and contrasted with figures from Private School Universe Survey: 1995-1996, Table 17 and Private School Universe Survey: 1999-2000, Table 22 as published by NCES.

Private school participation is optional. As free-market economist and school-choice proponent Milton Friedman points out, there will always be a group of fiercely independent private schools which for philosophical reasons will not participate in government school choice programs.

However, even the most stalwart defenders of free markets must concede that the libertarian utopia of private schooling simply doesn't exist. Private schools are already subject to basic regulations concerning health and safety, nondiscrimination, etc. In some states, regulations also pertain to curriculum content, length of the school year, and teacher qualifications. If anything, school choice would bolster the number and strength of private schools making them more effective in resisting excessive regulation.

Lie #7  
The “Choice is Expensive” Argument:

Vouchers don’t cover the cost of private schools. Poor families will be left behind.

The Reality:

The issue is not whether or not Private schools cost more, but whether voucher amounts are on par with what is spent on public schools. Of the three programs enacted in the 90s, all spent half or less than the per pupil cost.

The critics say...

*"Voucher programs do not cover the full tuition costs of many schools, thus preventing true choice for many parents and students."*<sup>71</sup>

The National Association of Secondary School Principals

*"A voucher rarely covers the cost of tuition. The losers will be the minorities and the low-income students."*<sup>72</sup>

Representative Robert Scott, D-Virginia

The truth is...

Specifically, privately sponsored choice programs provide scholarships ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000 to low-income families who are also required to contribute toward the cost of tuition.<sup>73</sup> All of these programs have a waiting list. Obviously there are plenty of low-income families who are finding affordable private schools with the help of scholarships.

- In 1999, roughly 74,000 low-income children used vouchers (from 3 publicly funded programs and 79 privately funded programs) to attend private schools.<sup>74</sup> In 2002, roughly

37,000 students participated in the publicly funded private school voucher programs currently running in five states.<sup>75</sup> These students are in addition to the 60,000 children currently using vouchers from over 100 privately funded programs to attend private schools.<sup>76</sup>

- Most private schools are affordable, though a few do charge high tuition. As the U.S. Department of Education reported in June 2003, 29 percent of all private schools charge tuitions that are less than \$2,500 and 76 percent of them cost less than \$5,000. The average private school tuition is \$4,689, while the average public school expenditure per pupil was \$7,392, more than 50 percent higher than average private school tuition costs.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> The National Association of Secondary School Principals, "Statement of the National Association of Secondary School Principals on Nonpublic School Vouchers," as extracted from [http://www.principals.org/advocacy/ps\\_vouchers.cfm](http://www.principals.org/advocacy/ps_vouchers.cfm) on July 18, 2003.

<sup>72</sup> "Vouchers Don't Prove Private is Better, Researcher Says," *Education Daily*, September 14, 1998.

<sup>73</sup> Kafer, Krista. "School Choice 2003: How States are Providing Greater Opportunity in Education," 2003, The Heritage Foundation.

<sup>74</sup> Miller, Matthew, "A Bold Experiment to Fix City Schools," July 1999, *The Atlantic Monthly*.

<sup>75</sup> Kafer, Krista. "School Choice 2003: How States are Providing Greater Opportunity in Education," 2003, The Heritage Foundation. Note: Separate figures for parents who chose to use their vouchers in private schools vs. public schools were not available for the 7,147 students who used vouchers in the State of Vermont. Without this separation, the total tally of students using publicly funded vouchers to attend private schools is 37,294.

<sup>76</sup> See Children First America, "Backgrounder/Overview," at [www.childrenfirstamerica.org/about/backgroundunder.htm](http://www.childrenfirstamerica.org/about/backgroundunder.htm).

<sup>77</sup> Snyder, Thomas D. And Hoffman, Charlene M., *Digest of Education Statistics 2002*, Table 61, June 2003, U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.

Lie #8  
The “Choice Is Limited” Argument:

There are neither enough tuition scholarships nor enough seats in private schools for more students.

The Reality:

The supply of private schools is elastic and responds to demand.

The Critics say...

*"Vouchers detract from the goal of finding ways to give all students a high quality education by offering a small number an opportunity to leave public schools. Ninety percent of American children attend public schools. Reform efforts must focus on helping everyone, not just a handful."*<sup>78</sup>

Americans United for the Separation of Church and State

*"In Chicago, for example, there're 500,000 students in the school system. Suppose 10 percent got vouchers. That would be 50,000... and there's no place for them to go. But even if there were, what about the 450,000 who are left behind?...It seems to me that vouchers become a cop-out for a few at the expense of the masses."*<sup>79</sup>

Jesse Jackson, President Rainbow/Push Coalition

The truth is...

Such statements simply reveal an ignorance of basic economic principles. The supply of private schools is not fixed. As demand for private schools increases, so too will their supply. Entrepreneurial firms, philanthropic individuals, and even existing schools will establish new schools and many existing private schools will expand.

- We need only look to the experience of charter schools to see the large number of schools that have been created in response to demand for more and better choices in schooling. As of December 2003, almost 3,000 charter schools were open in the U.S., all of which have been started in just the past 11 years, (Minnesota passed the first charter school law in 1991). Of that number, about 94 percent are “start-ups”—entirely new schools with added capacity.<sup>80</sup>
- In the cities with large-scale choice programs, new private schools have been founded directly in response to the demand generated by choice. This is not to say the process is easy — but the number of new schools is growing. School choice turns the static education monopoly into a marketplace that is responsive to consumer demand.

<sup>78</sup> Americans United for Separation of Church and State, "Vouchers Require Taxpayer Funding for Religious Indoctrination, Says Americans United," February 20, 2002, press release as extracted from <<http://www.au.org/press/022002.htm>> on July 28, 2003.

<sup>79</sup> Excerpted from the transcript of George Will's interview of Mr. Jackson on ABC's *This Week*, September 3, 2000.

<sup>80</sup> The Center for Education Reform (CER), *Charter Schools Today: Changing the Face of American Education*, 2000, CER, Washington, D.C., p. 116. (See also <[www.edreform.com](http://www.edreform.com)>); CER, 2003 Charter Schools Directory, January 2003.

Private schools don't have a lot of empty seats because they have to be efficient; they maintain enough seats for the number of students they believe will enroll. With 89 percent of all students now enrolled in public schools, it would be ridiculous for private schools to run classrooms with nine empty desks for every one occupied desk. No school could afford to operate that way.

Moreover, surveys of families participating in school choice programs show high levels of parental satisfaction with both the choice program and the schools they choose for their children. As observed in *A Survey of Results from Voucher Experiments: Where We Are and What We Know*, by Jay Greene:

[T]he evidence in support of school choice is unambiguous and overwhelmingly positive. One of the evaluators in Milwaukee, John Witte, reported that 'satisfaction of Choice parents with private schools was just as dramatic as dissatisfaction was with prior public schools.' ... Also in Cleveland, Paul Peterson, William Howell, and I found that after two years of the program choice parents were significantly more satisfied with almost all aspects of their children's education than were the parents of a random sample of Cleveland public school parents... Very similar results were obtained from the privately funded school choice programs in Washington, D.C., Dayton, New York, and San Antonio.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Greene, Jay P., "A Survey of Results from Voucher Experiments: Where We Are and What We Know," March 3, 2000, Manhattan Institute. Prepared for the Conference on Charter Schools, Vouchers, and Public Education, Sponsored by the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance and the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, March 8-10, 2000, Cambridge, MA. Later published as Manhattan Institute Civic Report No. 11, July 2000.



Lie #9  
The “Failed Experiment”  
Argument:

There is no evidence that school choice works.

The Reality:

School choice gives more students access to private schools, charter schools and access to a better education. Numerous studies confirm that students enrolled in private schools, either through choice programs or independently do better academically compared to their peers in the public schools.

The critics say...

*"[The proponents'] most misleading claim is that vouchers will benefit inner-city schools. There's no evidence that vouchers make any academic difference, and plenty of evidence that at-risk kids have better programs that could be funded right in their own public schools."*<sup>82</sup>

Barry W. Lynn, Executive Director, Americans United for Separation of Church and State

*"Vouchers do not necessarily foster improved academic achievement. While vouchers have been presented as a way to help provide educational opportunities for African-Americans, the reality is that no one really knows how students in the private voucher schools are performing academically."*<sup>83</sup>

Barbara Miner, *The Nation*

The truth is...

- Black students participating in privately funded voucher programs in Dayton, Ohio, New York City, and Washington, DC performed significantly better on tests after two years in private school than did the students who remained in public school. In addition, the participating students narrowed the gap between their scores and those of white students by one-third.<sup>84</sup>
- New York City outscored their peers on the combined reading and math sections of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills by 6.1, 4.2, and 8.4 National Percentile Rank (NPR) points at the end of their first, second and third years, respectively.
- Since 1998, the Edgewood School district in San Antonio, Texas has had a privately-funded voucher program offering a scholarship to every student so students can choose to attend private schools or public schools in another district. Students in this community performed equal to or better than 85 percent of the other school districts in Texas (separating out the characteristics of family income, race and local spending using the

<sup>82</sup> Lynn, Barry W., "Barry Lynn on Vouchers," From the 2000-2001 New Member CD for the NEA, as extracted from <http://www.nea.org/bt/4-community/barrylyn.pdf> on July 28, 2003.

<sup>83</sup> Barbara Miner "No One Really Knows How Children in Milwaukee's Voucher Schools Are Faring," *The Nation*, June 5, 2000.

<sup>84</sup> Howell, William G., Wolf, Patrick J. and Peterson, Paul E., "Test-Score Effects of School Vouchers in Dayton, Ohio, New York City, and Washington, D.C.: "Evidence from Randomized Field Trials," August 2000, Paper prepared for the annual meetings of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., September 2000.

statistical controlling process). And low-income students performed at or above 75 percent of the other districts statewide.<sup>85</sup>

- Children from low-income families who participated in the privately funded Children's Scholarship Fund in Charlotte, NC improved their performance on standardized math tests significantly. The children in the private schools were almost three times more likely to want to go to school and feel safe in school than their public school peers.<sup>86</sup>
- After a decade in operation, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program showed that low-income students in the program made significant gains in math and reading after three years.
- Research studies consistently find that private schools, even after adjusting for the socioeconomic backgrounds of their students, do a better job overall of educating students than the public schools.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Greene, Jay P. and Forster, Greg, "Rising to the Challenge: The Effect of School Choice on Public Schools in Milwaukee and San Antonio," Civic Bulletin No. 27, October 2002, The Manhattan Institute.

<sup>86</sup> Greene, Jay P., "The Effects of School Choice: an Evaluation of the Charlotte Children's Scholarship Fund." Manhattan Institute Civic Report, No. 12, August 2000.

<sup>87</sup> "Better Schools, Better Kids: The Case for Parental Choice in Education," *Focus on the Family*, 1997 p. 10. (Coleman, Hoffer, and Kilgore, 1982; Greeley, 1982; Jenks, 1985; Chubb and Moe, 1990; Bryk et al., 1993; Evans and Schwab, 1995; Sander and Krautman, 1995; Neal, 1997; Figlio and Stone, 1997; Ray, 1997) Note, the later studies cited may include some homeschoolers.

*Conclusion*

School choice has united a majority of Americans with leaders across the political and racial spectrums: Democrat Senator Dianne Feinstein of California says,

“I have never before supported a voucher program. For over 30 years, I have advocated strongly for our public schools, because I believe that they are the cornerstone of our educational system. In my view, we must continue to do everything we can to strengthen and improve our nation’s public schools . . . based on the substantial amount of money pumped into the schools and the resultant test scores, I do not believe that money alone is going to solve the problem . . . ultimately this issue is not about ideology or political correctness. It is about providing a new opportunity for good education, which is the key to success.”