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THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION'S SHABBY ASSAULT ON SCHOOL CHOICE

INTRODUCTION

Just one week before the November 1992 elections, Americans awoke to newspaper headlines proclaiming "School Choice Said to Leave Parents Cold," "Where Available, School Choice is Embraced by Few," "Benefits of Choice a 'Myth,'" and "School Choice Programs Do Not Lead to Improved Education, Report Finds." The headlines were generated by a press release announcing a study conducted by the prestigious Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, a public policy research organization headed by Ernest Boyer, Jimmy Carter's Commissioner of Education.¹

Understandably, Americans were influenced by this seemingly authoritative study. And some education choice initiatives on the November ballot may have effectively been torpedoed by the Carnegie report.

Yet it appears that the Carnegie Foundation may have misused its good name in order to have a political impact. The Carnegie study which generated the attention-grabbing headlines was not formally released until January 1993. And despite the tone of the Foundation's press release, the final study offers no substantive evidence that school choice is not working, or that it has little support among parents.

Vigorous Discussion. Giving parents the right to choose the schools their children attend has emerged as the education reform idea most vigorously discussed in America. Thirteen states and many more school districts have adopted some kind of choice plan during the past five years. Legislation is pending in 34 states to allow parents to choose private as well as public schools for their children.² The issue was also featured in many state and federal elections last November.

¹ Boyer was Commissioner of Education from 1977 to 1979, when the current Department of Education was still part of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Boyer also was Chancellor of the State University of New York system from 1970 to 1977.

² See Angela Hulsey, "School Choice: What's Happening in the States," The Heritage Foundation, March 1993.

In its October press release, however, Carnegie made the surprising claim that parents of public school children have little enthusiasm for choice in education. Furthermore, Carnegie stated that claims about the benefits of school choice "greatly outdistance the evidence."³ The release went on to say that "evidence about the effectiveness of private school choice, limited as it is, suggests that such a policy does not improve student achievement or stimulate school renewal," and that parents who transfer their children do so primarily for non-academic reasons.⁴

Strong Reactions. Many scholars and educators familiar with the results of education choice experiments reacted strongly to the press release, and to a draft of the full study made available to a limited number of individuals. Terry Moe, a scholar at Stanford University and co-author with John Chubb of *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, called the Carnegie report "a real smear job," adding that "it's grossly unfair and basically an effort to forward their own agenda. They put the most negative possible interpretation on every aspect of the evidence."⁵ Joseph Nathan, Director of the Center for School Change at the University of Minnesota, claims that he found "64 significant misstatements of fact or distortions in one chapter."⁶ And James MacGuire, a fellow at the Center for Social Thought in New York City, castigated the Carnegie study as "the product of research and analysis so sloppy and tendentious as to seriously undermine the credibility of a institution that has up to now been an important voice in the debate over education reform."⁷

But choice proponents had little time or opportunity for rebuttal before crucial November initiatives—especially since Carnegie refused to release the actual study or demographics. Meanwhile choice opponents used the Carnegie press release to attack choice proposals throughout the country, among other things helping to defeat a comprehensive choice initiative in Colorado.

When the full Carnegie study was released this January, it became clear that the fall press release was a gross distortion of the Foundation's own study, and that the study's analysis was highly flawed. Among the most troubling problems:

- ✘ The study draws sweeping conclusions with little or no evidence and distorts the minimal evidence it does consider.
- ✘ The study discusses three forms of school choice—districtwide, statewide, and private school choice—but it does little to substantiate the conclusions about choice that were made in the press release (and quoted in newspapers throughout the country).
- ✘ In most cases, very different inferences can be drawn from the polling data presented by Carnegie.

3 Carnegie Foundation Press Release, October 26, 1992.

4 *Ibid.*

5 "Advocates React Angrily to Study Questioning," *Education Week*, November 4, 1992, p. 5.

6 *Ibid.*

7 "The Carnegie Assault on School Choice," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 25, 1992.

Americans could be forgiven for thinking that the press release, apparently timed for maximum political impact, and the introduction to the study it supposedly summarized, refer to quite different publications. The press release suggests choice is an unpopular failure. But the introduction to the Carnegie study quotes heavily from publications by choice advocates, including Heritage Foundation scholars, John Chubb of Chris Whittle's Edison Project, Terry Moe, and Sy Fliegel of New York's Manhattan Institute. Moreover, the study never states that choice does not lead to reform. Boyer even notes that choice has worked well in the pilot projects the report examines: in New Jersey, Massachusetts, and East Harlem.⁸ Nowhere does the Carnegie Study suggest that the United States should not have choice in the schools. It merely argues that choice is not a panacea. It concludes that choice is only a catalyst, one factor in many leading to school improvement.

Sadly, the Carnegie Foundation appears to have used its good name to give credence to a flawed study, and then to misrepresent the findings of that study for political effect. It seems that scholars and policy makers in the future should treat pronouncements from Carnegie with much greater caution.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE CARNEGIE STUDY

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has been an influential and innovative voice in higher education for almost ninety years.

Established in 1905 by Andrew Carnegie to provide pensions for college faculty, the Carnegie Foundation has expanded through the years to include studies of learning at all levels. The Foundation played a central role through the 1900s in the struggles for excellence in colleges and schools, focusing attention on such critical factors as the quality of teaching, the centrality of language, and the coherence of the curriculum. Carnegie now conducts studies and publishes reports intended to shape public debate about education.

School Choice: A Special Report is one of a series of studies published by the Foundation designed to respond to current debates and focus the attention of educators and policy makers on themes considered important by the Foundation's Board.

Concentrating on Bureaucrats. The authors of the Carnegie study "contacted scores of parents, interviewed students, and talked with teachers and administrators in school districts and in states with comprehensive choice programs" and "gathered information from state chief school officers in all fifty states and the District of Columbia."⁹ Yet the study concentrates almost exclusively on the reports of education officials and school superintendents. Rather than offering a representative picture of the interviews, it devotes relatively little attention to the favorable opinions of the parents and students. The study also largely ignores the many published studies demonstrating the success of school choice.

The 113-page study is divided into six main chapters: "Freedom to Choose"; "School Choice Possibilities and Problems"; "Districtwide Choice: Montclair, Cambridge, East Harlem"; "Statewide Choice: Winners and Losers"; "Private School Choice: Milwaukee; and

⁸ Carnegie Press Release, p. 3.

⁹ *School Choice: A Special Report* (Princeton, N.J.: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1993), p. 7.

School Choice in Perspective.” There is also a chapter of recommendations and two appendices, “Survey Among Parents Attending Public School, 1992,” and “Survey of Chief State School Officers.”

PROBLEMS WITH THE STUDY’S POLLING

The Carnegie study contains two polls drafted by the Carnegie Foundation and conducted in July-August 1992 by the McLean, Virginia-based Wirthlin Group.¹⁰ The first poll asked 1,013 public school parents sixteen questions about their children’s schools, including:

- ◆ “How satisfied are you with the quality of the education your child got at this school last year?”
- ◆ “Some people think that parents should be given a voucher which they could use toward enrolling their child in a private school at public expense. Do you support or oppose this idea?”
- ◆ “Why would you like to enroll your child in this other school?”

Fifty-one percent of parents answered that they were “very satisfied” with their child’s school, some 62 percent stated that they opposed the idea of sending children to private schools at public expense, and almost every parent who wanted to send their child to a different school cited academic reasons.

The second poll, also drafted by Carnegie and conducted in September 1992 by the Wirthlin Group asked all respondents (not just public school parents) whether they would prefer a political candidate who would work to improve every school or one who would force schools to compete. Eighty-two percent of individuals polled answered that they wanted all schools to improve.

Problem #1:

The Carnegie questions appear worded to elicit negative responses.

Example: “Some people think that parents should be given a voucher which they could use toward enrolling their child in a private school at public expense. Do you support or oppose that idea?”

The very use of the term “a private school at public expense” carries the implication that children in public schools are not a drain on the public purse. The question also fails to note that choice would decrease rather than increase total public expenditures on education since the cost of the voucher would be less than the cost of educating the child in a public school.

Example: “Is there some other school to which you would like to send your child? This school could be private, inside or outside of your district.”

¹⁰ Some 75 percent to 85 percent of respondents were not included in the first survey because they did not have children in public school. The second poll was conducted on a random-digit-dialing basis, and all 1,005 respondents were accepted.

Some 70 percent of respondents said they would not like to move their children to another school. Carnegie scholars mistakenly inferred that this response showed opposition among parents to the idea of being given the right to choose a school. But satisfaction with a current school actually says little about a decision to choose. If a person is satisfied with the car, it does not mean they do not value right to choose the car they drive. One reason for a lack of interest in changing schools is that, in many cases, parents already have made their choice of school when selecting the neighborhood in which they live. Anyone in the real estate business knows well that house buyers tend to place the quality of local public schools high among their criteria for picking a neighborhood. Thus, even many strong choice proponents would not choose to move their child to a different school if given the opportunity. Significantly, 80 percent of those polled live either in suburbs (43.5 percent) or rural areas (36.5 percent),¹¹ where the public schools generally are not as plagued with the academic and discipline problems common in large urban school systems.

Still, some 28 percent of public school parents answered that they would like to transfer their child to a different school. While this was downplayed in the Carnegie press release and study, the poll actually underscores the desire to exercise choice, if it were permitted, by almost one-third of parents with children in public schools.

The second poll, conducted in September 1992, asked all 1,005 respondents, not just public school parents, one question:

“Please imagine two people having a discussion on how to improve the public schools in this country.

Mr. Smith says: The best way to improve education is to focus directly on supporting neighborhood schools, giving every school the resources needed to achieve excellence.

Mr. Jones says: The best way to improve education is to let schools compete with each other for students. Quality schools would be further strengthened and weak schools would improve or close.

Who are you more likely to agree with, Mr. Smith who would support every neighborhood school or Mr. Jones who would let schools compete for students?”

Given this choice, it is hardly surprising that 82 percent of respondents answered: “Mr. Smith, support every school.” But the question effectively asks whether the public supports the idea of making every school excellent (whatever the cost) or just improving a few schools. In reality, of course, that is a false dichotomy. There simply is not the money to increase funding sufficiently in every neighborhood school to make it excel. Moreover, the question assumes that additional funding automatically leads to an improvement in quality—

11 Source: Mary Jane Whitelaw, Director of Data Management, and Jeanine Natriello, Special Assistant to the President, both of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

a notion shown to be incorrect. What proponents of choice argue is that many factors lead to excellence in schools. Allowing parents to choose will foster good schools, whatever the total level of district spending. Merely increasing funding for all schools means badly run schools are treated just as generously as well-run schools. Moreover, by using the loaded term "neighborhood schools" to distinguish assigned schools from schools chosen by parents, the Carnegie Foundation study muddies the fact that most schools of choice are also neighborhood schools.

Problem #2:

The Carnegie poll results differ markedly from other polls.

To the extent that they suggest that the American public is less than friendly to the concept of school choice, the Carnegie polls are out of line with other major surveys. In 1992 alone, five other reputable polls produced results that were dramatically different from Carnegie's.

Example: A Gallup poll, released September 17, shows that 78 percent of parents with children in school (70 percent of the public, 86 percent of blacks, and 84 percent of Hispanics) favor a voucher system.

Example: In a Harris poll, published in *Business Week* on September 14, 69 percent of Americans think that "Children should be able to attend any school they qualify for, including public, private or parochial schools, with government money going to poor or middle-income children attending private or parochial schools."

Example: A survey of African-Americans, published in July 1992, found overwhelming support for choice. The survey was commissioned by Home Box Office, Inc. and conducted by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a Washington-based research organization specializing in minority issues. The survey discovered that 83 percent of African-Americans who have heard about choice favor "choice programs in education, where parents can send their children to any public or private school that will accept them." Some 83 percent of African-Americans agree that "choice in education will help poor children gain access to a better education."

Example: An Associated Press survey, released in September 1992, shows that 63 percent of Americans are in favor of George Bush's "GI Bill for Children." The proposal from the Bush Administration would have given \$1,000 to low- and middle-income children to use at the school of their parents' choice, public, private, or parochial.

Example: A poll of those parents living within the Los Angeles Unified School District, with children under 16 years of age, who currently send their children to public schools, found strong support for choice. The poll was commissioned by the Reason Foundation, a California-based research organization, and conducted by the polling firm of Arnold Steinberg and Associates. Some 52 percent of respondents said that they would leave public schools for private schools if given the chance. Conducted in June, this Reason Foundation poll included the costs of attending religious and secular private schools, and then

asked parents if they would transfer their children to a private school if they could use a \$2,600 voucher to help pay for tuition. Significantly, over two-thirds of African-American parents said they would leave the public schools. Support for choice was greatest among households earning less than \$25,000 a year. A staggering 64 percent of parents with pre-school age children not yet attending school said that they would place their children in a private school if they could use a \$2,600 voucher.

CARNEGIE SHOWS PARENTAL SATISFACTION, NOT CRITICISM

The Carnegie study found parental, teacher, and student satisfaction with education choice programs—only the administrators said that choice did not lead to dramatic improvement. The Carnegie study concluded that “parents and students who do participate in school choice tend to feel good about their decisions and like the programs in which their children are enrolled.”¹² The study continues:

School choice, it is argued, will not only energize schools but also empower parents. We found that those who do select their own schools are generally pleased with their decisions. In rural Minnesota, parents told us they welcomed the opportunity to move their children from small schools to larger ones that offered richer programs of study. In East Harlem, students said the teachers in their schools of choice “really cared about them.” They also liked working on themes of special interest, having smaller classes, and engaging in hands-on projects, all typical of the offerings in that district’s specialized schools.

We met a troubled, angry boy named Jason who had been lost in a large, impersonal city school but found a caring friend in the principal of East Harlem’s Bridge School. We remember 13-year-old Jennifer, who said her safe, orderly alternative school “makes you feel respectable.” And a seventh-grade girl we met spoke positively about the safer environment at her chosen Milwaukee school.

Teachers also expressed to us their satisfaction. Indeed, the success of choice programs often seems to have as much or more to do with teacher empowerment as with school selection. Science teacher Kathy Brown at the Peabody School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, told us that the choice plan in that district has made her feel “entrepreneurial” and helped inspire her to devise creative new programs for her children. All of this suggests that, whatever the motivations behind choice, the process tends to bring with it a sense of satisfaction shared by many parents, students, and teachers, too—an outcome that should surely be applauded.

A high level of satisfaction was found among parents participating in the Milwaukee program. . . . Parents were asked how satisfied they were with the private schools their children were attending. On every measure—from parental involvement to school discipline—their satisfaction level was high.¹³

¹² *School Choice: A Special Report*, p. 22.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

CARNEGIE'S FAULTY ANALYSIS OF EXISTING SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAMS

The Carnegie study analyzes three types of choice: districtwide choice, statewide choice, and private school choice. It reviews districtwide school choice programs, in which parents can choose any public school within a school district, in Montclair (New Jersey), East Harlem (New York City), and Cambridge (Massachusetts). The Carnegie study gives districtwide choice programs generally a favorable rating. Carnegie is more critical of statewide school choice programs. In its scrutiny of statewide choice programs,¹⁴ where parents can choose any school within a state for their child, Carnegie examines Minnesota and Massachusetts, while mentioning choice programs in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. Finally, Carnegie delivers a scathing analysis of the Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Parental Choice Program, the only government-sponsored choice program to include private schools. The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program gives parents with an income of less than 175 percent of the poverty level (less than \$24,412 in 1992 for a family of four) the option of using a \$2,739 voucher to enroll their children in one of eleven non-sectarian private schools participating in the program. The cost of each voucher is less than one-half of the \$6,500 the Milwaukee public schools currently spend per child.

Carnegie makes numerous misleading assertions in its analysis of these choice programs. It turns out that most of the assertions are based on information Carnegie obtained through its many interviews with school superintendents—the individuals with the most to lose if school choice succeeds. For example:

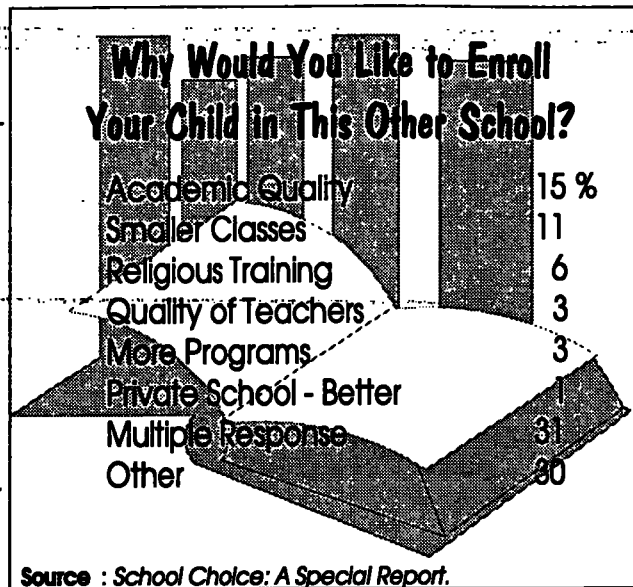
Carnegie Assertion: “Many parents who do decide to send their children to another school decide to do so for nonacademic reasons.”

Fact: Carnegie makes this assertion despite the fact that its own poll reveals precisely the opposite. To be sure, when Carnegie asked, “Why would you like to enroll your child in this other school?” only fifteen percent of parents answered “academic quality” But another 11 percent answered “smaller classes,” 3 percent answered “quality of teachers,” 3 percent answered “more programs,” 1 percent answered “private school—better,” and another 31 percent answered several of these above options. So 64 percent of parents actually told Carnegie that they transferred their child for an academic reason. Furthermore, 30 percent of those polled cited “other” factors in making their decision, but the Carnegie data do not disclose the nature of these other responses, and whether some of these, too, were academic reasons. The only “nonacademic” response listed by Carnegie was “Religious Training.” As is evidenced by the following table, this sole nonacademic reason received a mere six percent of responses.¹⁵

14 Some states, such as Massachusetts, Arkansas, Idaho, and Utah, allow districts to decide whether or not they wish to accept choice students from other districts. The school districts cannot, however, keep their students from transferring out of their district.

15 This table was printed on page 104 of the draft of Carnegie's study which was disseminated to select individuals with the press release. This table was omitted from the January report. Of fifteen tables from the poll questions, it

Arguing in contradiction to its own poll, that parents switch schools for primarily non-academic reasons, Carnegie cites a 1990 study by Minnesota's House of Representatives which concluded that families who participated in the state's open enrollment program in 1989-1990 selected schools on the basis on convenience, rather than academics. But the study questioned school administrators—not parents and students. Two other studies, one conducted by the Washington, D.C.-based Policy Studies Associates, Inc., and a second conducted for the American Education Research Association, actually asked parents and students why they switched schools. These found that students transferred primarily for academic reasons.¹⁶



Carnegie Assertion: "Not all families have multiple school options available to them, and even when options are available the choice process tends to work much better for those who are most advantaged economically and educationally."

Fact: Far from being discriminatory, school choice actually turns out to be an equalizer. It offers all students, regardless of race or social status, the opportunity and financial means to pursue the education that they and their parents deem appropriate. School choice programs help physically and mentally disabled children, as well as at-risk students, whose education today is effectively limited to whatever the public school system provides. The value of vouchers can reflect the higher cost of their education, so choice enables these children to attend professionally run schools tailored to meet their special needs. Several states, including Minnesota and Washington, already pay private schools to educate children with special needs.

Today's education system is very unequal. Families with the resources to pay for private schools already have choice. The less advantaged are trapped in failing school systems which, despite heavy spending, do not provide a quality education. The statistics, including the polls summarized above, indicate that

was the only one omitted.

¹⁶ James Tenbusch, "Parent Choice Behavior Under Minnesota's Open Enrollment Program," American Education Research Association, Washington, D.C., June 1992; Michael Rubenstein, Rosalind Hamar, and Nancy Adelman, "Minnesota's Open Enrollment Option," Policy Studies Associates, Inc., Washington, D.C., 1992.

the vast majority of low-income and minority families support school choice and the evidence shows that in areas like Montclair, East Harlem, and Cambridge, school choice has led to desegregation, not increased segregation.¹⁷

The evidence also demonstrates that poor and disadvantaged parents are just as capable as better-educated and higher-income parents of distinguishing between good and bad schools.¹⁸ The problem today is that poor parents are rarely given the opportunity to do so. The results in Milwaukee, East Harlem, Montclair, and Cambridge (each described by Carnegie), show that when parents have the opportunity and are given full information about the choices open to them, they choose well. The existing choice programs also demonstrate that low-income and minority parents and children are overwhelmingly satisfied with the schools they choose. And the children's test scores, attitudes towards education, and behavior improve dramatically with choice.

CARNEGIE ASSERTION: "Evidence about the effectiveness of private school choice, limited as it is, suggests that such a policy does not improve student achievement or stimulate school renewal."

"Whatever else may be said of it, Milwaukee's plan has failed to demonstrate that vouchers can, in and of themselves, spark school improvement. A small number of students have been enabled to leave the city's public schools, and they feel pleased with the decision they have made. But no evidence can be found that the participating students made significant academic advances or that either the public or private schools have been revitalized by the transfers. Further, Milwaukee simply does not have enough non-sectarian private schools willing or able to participate in the voucher plan to make much difference to the vast majority of children."

FACT: Despite Carnegie's assertions, based on a controversial evaluation of the program by John Witte, a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, the Milwaukee program has produced good academic results. According to Professor Paul Peterson, Director of the Center for American Political Studies at Harvard University:

Choice students gained more on a standardized reading test than did public school students, parents reported extraordinarily high satisfaction with the choice schools, some four hundred new students entered the second year of the program, and even an evaluation biased against finding success urged continuation of the program.¹⁹

17 Beatriz Chu Clewell and Myra Ficklin Joy, *Evaluation of the Montclair Magnet School System* (Princeton, N.J.: Educational Testing Service, 1987); George A. Mitchell, "The Milwaukee Parental Choice Program," *Wisconsin Policy Research Institute Report*, Volume 5, No. 5, November 1992; Norma Tan, "The Cambridge Controlled Choice Program: Improving Education Equity and Integration," *Education Policy Paper* Number 4, The Manhattan Institute Center for Educational Innovation, October 1990; "Model for Choice: A Report on Manhattan's District 4," *Education Policy Paper* Number 1, The Manhattan Institute Center for Educational Innovation, June 1989.

18 *Ibid.*

19 Paul Peterson, *Seeds of Crisis: A History of the Milwaukee Public Schools, 1920-1986* (Milwaukee: University of

The program is also popular. Enrollment in 1992 was up 81 percent from 1990, the first year of the program, and early gains in reading scores are significant.²⁰ The program has also focuses on low-income children having difficulty in the public schools: All participating students are from low-income families and 96 percent are from minority groups. Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson, working with a broad-based coalition and strong public support, has announced that he hopes to expand the program in 1993.

In citing the Milwaukee voucher as evidence that choice has failed to improve education, Carnegie ignores the legislative restrictions that hamper choice in that city. Children in Milwaukee may redeem their vouchers only at non-sectarian schools and these schools can accept vouchers for only 49 percent of the students. This means there are fewer than 1,000 available spaces in non-sectarian private schools in the city of Milwaukee.

Just as available spaces in the schools are limited, so are the number of children who fill them. Only families with incomes less than 175 percent of the poverty level are eligible for vouchers, and the program is limited by statute to 1 percent of all public school children. With such severe limitations, only 632 students exercise choice in a district of 97,000 students. So it is hardly surprising that the Milwaukee public schools have not been "revitalized" through the program.

CARNEGIE ASSERTION: "The educational impact of school choice is ambiguous at best. In some district-wide programs, a correlation may exist between choice and the improvement of students' academic performance. In statewide programs, no such connection could be found."

FACT: Choice has clearly improved student achievement. In Montclair, New Jersey, for example, test scores have risen since the introduction of the school choice program. In 1987, the Educational Testing Service (ETS), in its Iowa Test of Basic Skills, found that in 1976-1977, the year before implementation of the choice program, some 72 percent of minority and 29 percent of white eighth grade children scored below grade level. Similarly, 74 percent of minority and 27 percent of white seventh graders in Montclair performed below grade level. By 1986, however, only 52 percent of minority and 15 percent of white eighth grade students performed below grade level.²¹

Scores on the New Jersey High School Proficiency Test (HSPT) rose from 81.8 in reading and 66.8 in math in 1984 to 87.3 in reading and 76.0 in math in 1986, the year of ETS report.²² Some 80 percent of Montclair's high school graduates now go on to four year colleges. Their average college board scores

Wisconsin, 1992), p. 305. Dr. Peterson has written and published eleven books and 44 articles dealing largely with educational issues. He has also served as a reviewer for fifteen different scholarly journals.

²⁰ Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

²¹ Clewell and Joy, *op. cit.* pp. 46-47.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 50. Clewell and Joy do not provide HSPT scores prior to 1984.

increased steadily since 1976 and rose 18 points in the 1990-1991 school year alone.²³

Likewise in **East Harlem**. In 1974, before the choice program, only 15 percent of the students could read at or above grade level, and East Harlem ranked 31 out of 32 New York City districts in reading and math scores. By 1988, the proportion of students reading at or above grade level quadrupled to 62.5 percent, East Harlem ranked sixteenth, and two-thirds of the students were reading at or above grade level.²⁴

While the **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, school choice plan has never focused solely on test scores as the measure of quality of education, the data show that overall achievement has risen since the choice plan was put in place. A school-by-school comparison of student performance in 1981-1982, when choice was first instituted, and 1985-1986, the last year that Cambridge used the same tests it used in the 1981-1982 year, showed definite improvement. The average percentage of children passing Cambridge's Basic Skills Test rose from 72.8 percent to 87.0 percent in the five-year period.²⁵ Significantly, the scores increased most rapidly at the schools with the previously lowest scores. The gap between the percentage of students passing the Basic Skills Test at the lowest and highest individual schools narrowed from 39.5 percentage points in 1981-1982 to only 13.1 percentage points in 1985-86.²⁶

At the high school level, between 1980-1981 and 1985-1986, the Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) scores of Cambridge public high school students increased 61 points, compared with the national increase of 16 points over the same five-year period. And between 1981-1988, high school SAT scores increased by 89 points.²⁷ Finally, according to district records, almost two-thirds of Cambridge's high school graduates (62.7 percent) were accepted to college.²⁸

Minnesota launched the first statewide school choice program in 1987. Iowa, Nebraska, and Arkansas followed in 1989; Idaho, Utah, and Washington in 1990; and Massachusetts in 1991. Since these programs have been in operation for only a few years, there is little information available to suggest whether choice has led to improved student achievement in these states. What is clear is that both parents and students are happy with their schools of choice. In Minnesota, for example, a survey by the state education department and the University of Minnesota's Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs discovered that students who participated in Minnesota's school choice program reported increased educational aspirations, greater satisfaction with school, and

23 "Montclair School Chief Lauds "Choice" Program," *The Star-Ledger*, May 22, 1991.

24 John Chubb and Terry Moe, *Politics, Markets and America's Schools* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1990), pp. 212 and 214.

25 Tan, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

28 *Ibid.*

greater success in school. The proportion of students reporting that they expected to graduate from high school and attend college or a vocational training program more than doubled after they participated in the Minnesota choice program.

A November 1992 study by Policy Studies Associates, Inc., a Washington, D.C.-based research organization, also discovered that Minnesota's open enrollment choice program is having a positive effect on education in that state. The study, funded by the federal and state education departments, found that parents switched their children primarily for academic reasons. The study also found that two-thirds of the students participating in the program were very satisfied with their new schools, and that over 90 percent of students reported some level of satisfaction. Close to 90 percent of students claimed that they were doing better academically.²⁹

CARNEGIE ASSERTION: "School choice, to be successful, requires significant administrative and financial support. It is not a cheap path to educational reform."

FACT: If implemented properly, school choice actually saves taxpayers money. Average state spending on education is over \$5,000 per child. Most voucher proposals advocate spending less than half this amount. In Milwaukee, for example, the \$2,739 vouchers constitute only 41 percent of the amount that the state of Wisconsin allocates per pupil in public schools. The other 59 percent of the money allocated for a child who goes to a private school remains in the coffers of the public education system. So choice gives the government more money, not less, to spend on the remaining children. Indeed, a study conducted by the Reason Foundation concludes that, with a voucher system in place for K-12 children, the state of California could save over \$3 billion.

The majority of private schools already are offering children a superior education at a fraction of the amount of money that the public schools spend per pupil. One reason for the lower cost is the large bureaucracy which burdens public schools. This bureaucracy absorbs over half the money that the states spend on education—leaving less than 50 percent for the teachers, principals, school buildings, and supplies.³⁰

²⁹ Lynn Olson, "Open-Enrollment Survey Finds Modest Effects in Minnesota," *Education Week*, November 13, 1992.

³⁰ Robert Genetski, "Private Schools, Public Savings," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 8, 1992, editorial page; William Styring, "How Much Does It Take to Get Less Than \$2 Billion Into the Classroom? Answer: More Than \$5 Billion," Indiana Policy Review Foundation, Fall 1992; Michael Tanner, "The Education Gap: How Georgia Education Dollars Are Spent," Georgia Public Policy Foundation, February 1992; Dana Joel, *Education Choice: Closing the Gap in Student Performance*, Virginia Citizens for a Sound Economy, October 1991, pp. 9-11.

CARNEGIE ASSERTION: "Few students have taken advantage of their new-found right to switch schools."

FACT: Open enrollment is gaining rapidly in popularity among parents and students in every state in which it has been implemented. In Massachusetts, the number of students participating in the school choice program has tripled since last academic year, from 921 to more than 2,800 this year. In Iowa, more than 7,500 students have opted to attend public schools outside their home district, up almost 50 percent over the previous. Nebraska has seen a 75 percent increase this fall, and in Minnesota, the state which pioneered the open enrollment concept in 1987, the number of students participating has risen steadily, from 140 students in 1987 to more than 8,314 in 1991-1992.³¹ Officials of public school choice programs say the increases result from more parents and students learning the details and potential benefits of the programs. "It takes a while for people to become knowledgeable about school choice and become comfortable with it," says Don Helvick, a consultant on open enrollment to the Iowa education department.

THE BENEFITS OF CHOICE

To be sure, school choice is not a panacea. But school choice activists have never claimed that choice will solve all education problems. Choice is, however, a catalyst that will lead to true education reform and innovation. Among the benefits, choice leads to:

- ✓ **Better Schools.** According to Mary Anne Raywind, Professor of Education at Hofstra University: "There is abundant evidence that public school parents want school choice; that they are more satisfied with and have more confidence in schools that provide it; that parent choice increases the commitment and cohesion within schools extending it; and that these attributes combine to improve school quality and make schools more effective."³²
- ✓ **Improved Student Performance.** Ninety percent of private schools, chosen freely by parents, spend under \$2,500 to educate each child. This is less than one half of the \$6,600 that the average public school spends. The success of private schools indicates how student achievement would improve under a choice program. James Coleman, of the University of Chicago, has found that private school students achieve at significantly higher levels than students attending public schools. These differences persist even when socioeconomic variables (including income, occupation, education, religion, and race of parents) are statistically controlled. Coleman's research suggests that minority and disadvantaged students benefit even more from enrollment in private schools than other students³³ and his conclusions are supported by the achievements of the Milwaukee Parental Choice Plan.

31 Mark Walsh, "Three States See Dramatic Rise in Open-Enrollment Participation," *Education Week*, October 28, 1992, p. 12.

32. *Intellectual Ammunition*, Volume 1, Number 2 (July/August 1992), The Heartland Foundation, Chicago, Illinois, p. 1.

- ✓ **Cost Savings.** Choice programs save money. By offering publicly funded scholarships or "vouchers," students can attend less-expensive public schools or private schools that choose to opt out of the expensive public school bureaucracy. Since private school tuition is often less than half the annual public school per-pupil expenditure, every child receiving a scholarship saves taxpayers money. Private school choice programs have set the value of the scholarship at between \$1,000 and \$2,500—substantially less than the average expenditure per child and yet enough to attend the vast majority of private schools. Often the difference between the amount of the voucher and the state and local government's per-pupil expenditure remains in the public school the child has left—leaving more money for the government school to educate fewer children.
- ✓ **Innovation.** Choice will lead to decentralization and free the unlimited potential of students, parents, teachers, principals and entire communities from expensive, burdensome bureaucracies. Choice makes schools accountable and regulations unnecessary—when parents have the opportunity to choose what is best for their individual child the public can rest assured that schools will be safe and effective. As James MacGuire from the Center for Social Thought states, "When parents choose, schools become more responsive to their constituencies and more autonomous from the often strangling supervision of central boards."³⁴

CONCLUSION

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has a reputation as a leader in the area of education research. It is thus puzzling, after almost ninety distinguished years, that Carnegie would now decide to use its good name to advance a political agenda. It is disturbing that the Carnegie Foundation would first distribute a politically explosive and inaccurate press release one week before a general election and then, months later, publish a study which does not back up its own thesis. The Carnegie study on school choice seriously undermines the Carnegie Foundation's fine reputation.

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³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ "The Carnegie Assault on School Choice," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 25, 1992.