

Education *Matters*

January 2008

A publication of the Association of American Educators

Agents OF Change

Why so many teachers
are quitting, and how to
win them back

By Vicki Murray, Ph.D.



More than six million California children returned to school this fall, but about 25,000 of their teachers likely will not return next year if recent attrition trends hold.

Nearly every U.S. president since Harry Truman has proposed teacher recruitment plans. State leaders have introduced countless programs as well, including California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who recently proposed spending \$130 million on teacher recruitment. Yet those efforts largely miss the mark because the core problem isn't teacher recruitment. It's teacher retention.

Little has changed since 1983 when the National Commission on Excellence in Education concluded in its landmark report *A Nation at Risk* that "the professional working life of teachers is, on the whole, unacceptable." No wonder the American schoolhouse has become a revolving door for teachers. Average annual national nonretirement teacher turnover rates exceed 14 percent, meaning around a third of the teaching workforce (more than 1 million instructors) are in transition each year.

The price tag of this turnover to California taxpayers is \$455 million—\$5 billion to taxpayers nationwide. Better employment opportunities like those offered at charter schools could help.

Among nonretiring California teachers at schools run by local districts, more than half who leave blame job dissatisfaction,

compared with one in three of their peers nationwide. Inadequate support, excessive bureaucracy, a lack of collegiality, and insufficient input under the current district-managed schooling system are leading reasons why California teachers quit.

In contrast, overall satisfaction rates among charter school teachers nationwide, at 82 percent, are more than three times higher than for their district-managed counterparts. Also, more than one in four charter school teachers across the country said they would do something else entirely if they could not teach at a charter school. They cite as key elements of job satisfaction their influence over curricula, student discipline, and professional development, as well as school safety, collaboration with colleagues, and their schools' learning environments.

Three of four former California educators would consider returning to teaching if working conditions were better. Less-bureaucratic, independent charter schools have great potential for winning them back. In Los Angeles, for example, 8 percent of teachers came out of retirement specifically to teach at local charter schools.

A district-run schooling system, in which students are typically assigned to schools based on where their families live, is an increasingly unattractive prospect for teachers. It is the relic of a bygone era that held few employment opportunities for women,

who historically make up three-quarters of the teaching workforce. The times, and employment opportunities, have changed, but California and the nation's district-managed schooling monopoly founders in a time warp.

An unassigned, diversified education system with a variety of schools founded and run by educators would foster strong teacher-school and teacher-student matches, and offer teachers the same wide range of employment options other professionals currently enjoy. To attract quality teachers, schools would have to offer competitive salaries, flexible schedules, and professional working environments in which teachers have autonomy to innovate and are rewarded for their success in educating students.

Such a system exists in Japan, and teachers there have strong parental support, motivated students, and salaries that rival Japanese baseball pros. A diversified education system also gets results since Japanese students consistently score at or near the top on international exams across a variety of subjects.

As a reform model, schools founded by educators, like charter schools, hold great promise for filling the void left by decades of disappointing state and national efforts to improve the teaching profession. ■



Vicki E. Murray, Ph.D., is the Education Studies Senior Policy Fellow at the Pacific Research Institute in Sacramento. She is also a Visiting Fellow at the Independent Women's Forum (IWF) in Washington, D.C., and author of the new IWF study Empowering Teachers with Choice: How a Diversified Education System Benefits, Teachers, Students, and America (www.iwf.org)

Seeing Teachers as Change Agents Rather than in Need of Change

Excerpted from *Empowering Teachers with Choice* by Dr. Vicki E. Murray

Most states and the federal government have policies regulating teacher preparation and certification. Still, three out of four teachers on average report new colleagues are inadequately prepared in their subject areas.

Most teachers favor competitive salaries based on the amount of time and effort devoted to teaching and students' academic progress. In districts with diversified performance pay programs, teacher bonuses are significantly higher, collegiality and teacher retention is higher, and student achievement is improved. Yet, less than 1 percent of all teacher pay is currently based on performance, the same as in 1982.

Most states offer financial incentives, alternative certification, and other programs to remedy teacher shortages. Yet those practices have not improved working conditions because they do not give teachers or schools more autonomy over salary, hiring, and curriculum practices. Consequently, many of the highest paid teachers still earn less than the lowest paid administrators, teacher shortages in areas of critical need persist, and about half of all teachers leave the profession within five years.

A Problem

A fundamental shortcoming of those programs is they treat teachers as objects of change, not agents of change. Educators are driving emerging reforms by starting schools where they want to work and parents want their children to learn. The Holmes Group's conclusion encapsulates the spirit of recent efforts:

"We think it's time for educators to help reshape a reform movement that

... often has bypassed the education profession ... we can begin shaping the contexts in which we work. We are the ones to start building tomorrow's schools—today."

The express goal of emerging reform efforts led by teachers is diversifying the education system to foster a variety of schools where innovation and experimentation can flourish.

A Solution

As a reform model, charter schools founded by educators hold great promise for filling the void left by prior state and national reform efforts to improve the teaching profession and working conditions for educators.

Representing 3 percent of all American schools today, they help create an instructive microcosm of the benefits of a fully diversified educational system for teachers.

At 82 percent, overall satisfaction rates among charter teachers are twice as high as their private counterparts and more than three times as high as their district counterparts. An average of two-thirds of charter-school teachers report high levels of satisfaction with the influence they have over curricula, student discipline, and professional development, as well as school safety, collaboration with colleagues, and their schools' learning environment. On those same measures, slightly more than half of private-school teachers and slightly more than one-third of public-school teachers reported high levels of satisfaction.

These results suggest the ability of teachers and students to choose their schools positively affects both. Unlike an assigned schooling sys-

tem, a diversified system would foster good teacher-student matches and offer teachers the same wide range of employment options other professionals currently enjoy. To attract quality teachers, schools would have to offer competitive salaries, flexible schedules, and a professional working environment in which they have autonomy to innovate and are rewarded for their success in educating students.

Had U.S. student performance simply remained comparable to that of their international peers throughout the 1980s instead of declining, the GDP would have been 4 percent higher than realized in 2002, or \$450 billion—more than the annual national K-12 education expenditure. Given the pressing and persistent need for quality teachers, there is no good reason a diversified education system should not exist in America as it does for postsecondary educators.





Professional Learning Communities

What they are, why they work

Professional learning communities are becoming popular ways for teachers to work together toward stronger student outcomes.

Scott Martindale, writing for the *Orange County Register*, recently reported on the kind of interaction that occurs among teachers in a professional learning community.

“The third-grade teachers sit in a circle at a child-size desk, mulling over how to evaluate oral reading proficiency,” writes Martindale. “By the end of the discussion, the five teachers from Chaparral Elementary School in Ladera Ranch, California, must agree on a common grading standard, based on a scale of 1 to 4. But first, they must debate what constitutes a mastery of reading in the third grade.”

“The teachers’ conversation is more than just an informal chat,” Martindale observes. “The goal of a professional learning community is for teachers to look at what students are actually learning, as opposed to what teachers are teaching, and to refine lesson plans and grading standards through a collaborative process.”

Chaparral is the best performing elementary school in the school district as measured by California’s school accountability system.

Martindale reports, “Although professional learning communities are intended to draw on intuition and best practices, they are not easy to implement in schools. Teachers traditionally are given complete autonomy over their lesson plans and their students, making it difficult to ask faculty to design a curriculum together and agree upon how to teach it.”

More than just agreeing on an approach to teaching, professional learning communities foster accountability. They are focused on results. Teachers review test scores each week and look for ways to improve them.

Five Factors

According to Shirley M. Hord of Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, there are five main characteristics to professional learning communities: supportive and shared leadership, collective creativity, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice.

Shared Leadership

For professional learning communities to flourish, school principals must foster an environment of shared leadership. In such schools, principals and teachers work together toward com-

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(continued from page 3)

mon learning goals, and teachers are given freedom to make decisions.

Collective Creativity

Educators and administrators see themselves as learners and visionaries. They work together to develop new ideas for achieving shared goals.

Shared Values and Vision

Teachers within professional learning communities share a common vision for educational outcomes. They also share common values in achieving them. Personal ambitions work within and complement shared goals in order for the team to succeed in helping students reach higher levels. Open communication and trust are important components.

Supportive Conditions

Professional learning communities must have time to meet. They work best in smaller schools and staff must have access to one another. It is also important for teachers to have the power to make academic decisions and even have input in selecting teachers and administrators for the school. Teachers must foster a sense of community and be willing to receive feedback from their colleagues and make adjustments.

Shared Personal Practice

Teachers in professional learning communities regularly review each other's behavior in the classroom. This isn't about evaluations, but coaching. They observe each other's classrooms, make notes, and discuss their observations. It can happen when the teachers maintain a mutual respect and trust. Teachers share successes and failures with an eye toward mutual improvement. When teachers participate in the hiring process, they are invested in the success of their new colleague.

A Word of Caution

Richard DuFour, writing in *Educational Leadership* (May 2004) suggests three ways professional learning communities can avoid being just another educational fad: 1) ensure that students actually learn; 2) build communities that truly collaborate; 3) maintain a clear focus on results (and don't excuse unfavorable results).

DuFour concludes, "Even the grandest design eventually translates into hard work. The professional learning community model is a grand design—a powerful new way of working together that profoundly affects the practices of schooling. But initiating and sustaining the concept requires hard work. It requires the school staff to focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively on matters related to learning, and hold itself accountable for the kind of results that fuel continual improvement." ■



Northwest Professional Educators received special recognition from Idaho Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter. Shown here (from left to right): Dr. Bill Proser, Sandi Long, First Lady Lori Otter, and NWPE president, Cindy Omlin.

AAE Affiliate Receives High Honor from Governor

Recognized for advancing professionalism

Northwest Professional Educators (NWPE) was formally honored by the Governor of Idaho, C.L. "Butch" Otter, in a proclamation administered by First Lady Lori Otter.

The proclamation made by Governor Otter recognizes NWPE's mission to focus on students as teachers' highest priority and advance the professionalism of educators so that they receive the respect, recognition, and reward they deserve.

"It is an extreme honor to be recognized like this by the state of Idaho," said Cindy Omlin, Executive Director of NWPE. "We are very proud of the work we do for the teachers of Idaho, and we are glad for the opportunity to spread our message of support for academic professionals."

NWPE, an independent professional educators' association, is a regional affiliate of the Association of American Educators, the largest national non-union, independent teachers' organization. NWPE represents teachers in Washington and Oregon, in addition to Idaho.

"Our members are teachers by calling, and professionals by choice," said Omlin. "We allow their voices to be heard by providing an open forum for a respectful exchange of ideas."

NWPE board members Sandi Long, Eagle Middle School teacher, and Dr. Bill Proser, founder and teacher at the Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy, joined Omlin at the proclamation ceremony with the First Lady. Proser commented, "The professional support and protection that Northwest Professional Educators provides teachers is exceptional. I'm proud to be a member of an association of this caliber that promotes quality education, teacher choices, and services I can trust." ■

Source—Slate, a publication of Idaho School Boards Association, Inc.

Letters

Indigestion

I am writing to you about Carl Junior's latest television commercials (also aired under the Hardee's brand).

As a proud educator of thirty-three years, I encourage the AAE to publicly state that we are outraged after viewing Carl Junior's anti-education commercials.

I find it very disturbing that their advertising team has targeted women educators, depicting them in such a vile and lewd way. In addition, I find it outrageous that they have chosen to depict our youth as a bunch of lusty, hormonally raged animals.

Shame on them for their latest television commercial portraying a sexualized high school teacher doing a stripper-style dance on top of her desk, while her students do a rap song about her "flat buns."

My wife and I have taught for over thirty-three years, and I take personal offense at this vitriolic direct attack on our profession. There is no justification to demean and offend teachers and the youth of our country.

*Serge M. Ainsa
Prescott, AZ*

AAE Responds to Ad



AAE spokesman Tracey Bailey condemned the offensive commercial on Fox News' *The O'Reilly Factor*.

Thank You

It is with great pleasure that I write expressing my gratitude to the Association of American Educators, who became my legal counsel and support when I first received a letter with very damaging allegations from a former college student.

It is difficult to begin to tell all that AAE provides. The AAE staff seemed to instinctively know when I needed support and would routinely send informative communication either through email or with a phone call. Additionally, they seemed available for me even at unusual hours of the day. Due to the stress of the situation, I wasn't sleeping well. I distinctly remember several times when my emails (or phone calls) were responded to immediately. Needless to say, the allegations were extremely stressful and AAE helped to calm my fears.

I distinctly remember being impressed with not only the prompt and effective service AAE provided but also their active concern.

When matters escalated, AAE provided contact information for excellent local representation as well. I am so thankful for the legal network that AAE provides for its clients. AAE's long-standing relationship with national attorneys was most beneficial in helping me locate what was best for my needs. Such service was beyond my expectations.

Over and above the qualities I have thus far enumerated, I want to emphasize AAE's level of understanding.

In short, I highly recommend AAE. It is easy to see why so many teachers join, and I intend on telling everyone I know.

*Kristi DeRoncney Julian
Trussville, AL*

"Relational Aggression" Misses the Mark

Historically the columns appearing in the AAE newsletter, *Education Matters*, have been a breath of fresh air. I have kept many of them for future reference. Unfortunately, the August 2007 issue of the newsletter included an article which, I believe, is not consistent with the historical mind set of the Association of American Educators. I am speaking specifically about the piece by Amanda Davis on page five entitled "Fighting Words: Relational Aggression Poses Risk to Students."

What some are terming as relational aggression is being blamed for every societal ill one can imagine—absenteeism, low self-esteem, sexual promiscuity, etc. Should we not add global warming and the Iraq war? My simple question is—where is the supporting research for such assertions? I can think of several explanations for teenage problems that would have nothing to do with social rejection.

Davis tells us RA covers incivilities such as exclusion. Exclusion? Is this counsel or suggesting that people do not have the right to pick and choose their friends (for whatever reason they deem fit)? Is Davis telling us we can (and should) construct a society where children will never have to deal with individuals that are going to dislike them?

Davis seems to think we can (and should) construct a society where children will never have to deal with individuals who are going to be difficult. To take such an approach will result in failure and do nothing to aid in the teaching of our youth on how to get along with difficult people, which is perhaps the greatest problem in the workforce, let alone the family.

I suggest a return to the old-fashioned ideas of character education and common courtesy and civility.

*Ed Quirley
Fremont, CA*



We welcome your letters. To send a comment, visit www.aateachers.org. Click on "contact us."

Members of Congress Practice School Choice



The Heritage Foundation conducted a 2007 survey of Members of Congress to determine the percentage that practice private school choice. The survey found that while only 11.5 percent of American students attend private schools:

Over 37 percent of Representatives and 45 percent of Senators responded that they had sent their children to private school;

Over 23 percent of House Education and Labor Committee members, and 33 percent of Senate Health, Education,

Labor, and Pensions Committee members exercised private school choice.

Exactly 52 percent of Congressional Black Caucus members and 38 percent of Congressional Hispanic Caucus members sent at least one child to private school.

Based on the survey results, if all of the Members who exercised school choice for their own children had supported school choice in policy, every major legislative effort in recent years to give parents school choice would have passed. ■

How the Best Performing School Systems Around the World Come Out On Top

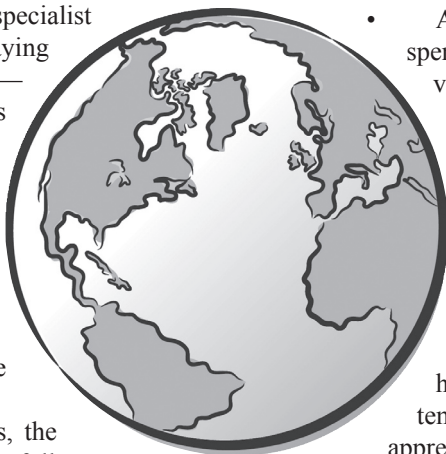
A new report by the McKinsey consulting group takes on the daunting task of figuring out why some educational systems—including other countries and unusual American school districts—consistently outperform others.

Led by Sir Michael Barber—who once served as Prime Minister Tony Blair's turnaround specialist for England's decaying education system—McKinsey analysts identify just three factors separating the strong (including South Korea, Singapore, Finland, Canada, New Zealand, Belgium, Australia), from the weak.

Among its findings, the report highlights the following:

- Average academic caliber of people who become teachers: Among the top 10 performance.
- View of teaching by university students and recent graduates: Among the top three career choices.
- Rigor of selection processes into teacher training: Rigorous checks designed to assess teaching potential (e.g., teaching practice, literacy and numeracy tests)

- Ratio of acceptances into teacher preparation with applications: 1 out of 10
- Comparison of starting compensation with other starting salaries: In line with other graduate salaries
- Amount of coaching a new teacher receives: At least 20 weeks



- Amount of teacher time spent in professional development: 10 percent
- System budget dedicated to improving instructional practices: \$50 per student per year.

When it comes to teacher recruitment, high performing systems are more likely to appreciate the value of raw academic talent. It's an approach that many here in the United States reject, with our view that an open-door approach into the profession shows off our democratic virtues (even when it's only the adults that get to benefit, not the children they teach). Americans assume that just about anyone—regardless of their own performance as a student—can be trained to be an effective teacher. ■

Source—TQ Bulletin, a publication of the National Council on Teacher Quality. For more information, visit www.nctq.org.

New Study: Some High Schools are “Dropout Factories”

A new study published recently by Johns Hopkins University found that 1,700 regular or vocational high schools nationwide can be categorized with the grim label “dropout factory.”

A dropout factory is a high school that graduates no more than 60 percent of the incoming freshman. Data was studied for three years to take into account changes in the communities such as plant closures. Large cities or high-poverty rural areas in the South and Southwest had the highest concentration of “dropout factories.”

Many of these schools have high proportions of minority students who face challenges such as needing to work or the need for social services.

South Carolina had the highest concentration of “dropout factories” while Utah was the only state not to have a school receive the label. “Part of the problem we’ve had here is, we live in a state that culturally and traditionally has not valued a high school education,” stated Jim Foster, a spokesman for the South Carolina Department of Education.

The dropout crisis has caught the attention of lawmakers, and as a result, funds are earmarked in the Miller-McKeon discussion draft for the Graduation Promise Fund, which would help schools identify and help students that are at risk of dropping out. ■



All States Now Eligible to Use Growth Models to Assess Progress



The U.S. Department of Education recently announced that the “growth model” pilot program will be expanded to all states.

Previously only nine states—North Carolina, Tennessee, Delaware, Arkansas, Florida, Iowa, Ohio, Alaska, and Arizona—had been permitted to use the growth model when assessing student achievement. When using a growth model, states track individual students and give schools credit for progress the students make, even if they fail to meet benchmarks.

“It will allow states another effective way of measuring adequate yearly progress (AYP) by measuring individual student growth over time, and it will continue to expand the flexibility available to states under No Child Left Behind,” said Education Secretary Margaret Spellings.

All states that wish to incorporate the use of a growth model in their schools should send their proposed plans to the U.S. Department of Education by February 1, 2008. Before the states can implement the plans, they will need to go through a rigorous peer review process.

To be eligible to participate in the growth model pilot program, states applying will need to incorporate the following components:

- Ensure that all students are proficient by 2014 and make certain that the achievement gap is closing for all students groups.
- Include assessments that allow for comparable results from year to year.
- Track students using a state data system.
- Ensure that student participation rates and student achievement are indicated separately on state accountability systems.

For more information about the expansion

of the growth model pilot, visit www.ed.gov.

Scores Rise Among Perspective Teachers



According to a recent report by the Educational Testing Service, the teaching profession is attracting higher qualified candidates. From 2002 to 2005 students who took state licensing exams had higher SAT scores and high school GPAs than their counterparts in the mid-1990s.

The college GPAs of prospective teachers also rose from the 1990s. About 40 percent of prospective teachers had a GPA of 3.5 or above on 4.0 scale. This is a tremendous gain from the 1990s when only 26 percent of the candidates scored 3.5 or higher.

Many countries with top performing schools, such as Finland and Singapore, recruit teachers from the top third of their college graduates. Some studies have shown, however, that the United States recruits from the bottom third.

Richelle Patterson of the American Federation of Teachers was heartened to see the results of the study. “When you’re used to hearing bad news about the profession, any time you hear some good news ... it’s always a good thing.”

Math and Science PISA Scores Released



The math and science scores for the 2006 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) were recently released and the results were not positive for the United States. The tests assessed 15-year-old students on math and science skills that are learned in the classroom and out as well as assessing the students’ abilities to apply the knowledge.

In science the United States had a score of 489, 11 points below the average. Fin-

land had the top score of 563, while Canada, Japan, and New Zealand followed. The United States had lower scores than 16 other countries. Thirty countries participated in the assessments.

On the math assessment the United States received a score of 474. This was 24 points below the international average of 498. The United States did worse than 23 other nations, and was equal to Spain and Portugal. Only Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Mexico had lower scores than the United States.

Elected officials and policymakers have argued for years that the United States will not be economically competitive in the years to come if student’s math and science scores do not improve. “How are our children going to be able to compete with the children of the world? The answer is, not well,” said former Colorado governor Roy Romer, chairman of Strong American Schools, a nonpartisan group seeking to make education a primary issue in the 2008 presidential election.

“Why are we surprised?” Gerald F. Wheeler, president of the National Science Teachers Association, said of the scores. “It’s a sad state to be in.” “The policymakers do get it,” Mr. Wheeler said. The challenge, he said, is presenting the issue so that “the public gets it.”

President to Declare Jan. 16 “Religious Freedom Day”

Each year since 1993, the President has declared January 16th as Religious Freedom Day, and calls Americans to celebrate their freedom. It marks the anniversary of the passage of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom in 1786.

This is a good opportunity for an important civics lesson for students. For more information, visit www.Religious-FreedomDay.com.



Read AAE press releases at www.aaeteachers.org. Click on “press room.”

Choice Seventeen Years Later

Milwaukee proving vouchers, charters, and choice work

By David W. Kirkpatrick

Editor's note: The views expressed in this article are not necessarily endorsed by the Association of American Educators. They are provided here for your awareness.

In a recent interview program on television, one of the participants said there is no evidence that proponents of school vouchers are correct when they claim that a number of positive results would occur with vouchers including advantages for students, development of effective alternative schools and programs, and improvements in the local school system.

Obviously he has not heard of Vermont where more than 90 of the state's 240 or so local communities lack an elementary school, a secondary school, or both. Instead, they engage in what they call "tuitioning" whereby, as decided by local voters, the towns elect to provide financial support for students to go to a school of their choice. Not only that, the schools may be in or out of state or even, in rare instances, in other nations, with financial aid for tuition but not for travel to and from, or residency expenses.

St. Johnsbury Academy

For school success you may find hard to believe, see the November 9, 2006 commentary about the St. Johnsbury Academy in what is called the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. Alternatively, a Google

search for "St. Johnsbury Academy" will give you thousands of hits, including the Academy's website.

Exhibit A

But what is probably Exhibit A of more recently inaugurated programs, began in March 1990 when the Wisconsin legislature, at the urging of Rep. Polly Williams, a Representative whose district involved part of Milwaukee, passed a school voucher program initiating an ongoing chain of events.

The program to date could justify a book, or several, but snapshots of then and now are illustrative.

The original program authorized a limited voucher for a maximum of 1 percent of the district's students. The educational establishment, of course, vehemently opposed the legislation, tried to limit its implementation, or have the legislation repealed. Initial and subsequent successes, however, were such that over the years both the amount and number of vouchers were periodically increased. Milwaukee's mayor and some members of the school board became among the program's strongest advocates. Today the voucher is worth about \$6,500, and there is no enrollment cap (it was lifted two years ago).

In March 1990, the district enrolled 93,000 students. It was reported that 60 percent of the students who managed to reach 9th grade failed to graduate and, of the 40 percent who did graduate, only one-fourth—10 percent of the entire student body—could read at a minimally acceptable level. The situation was so bad that it was claimed that 62 percent of the district's teachers and administrators would not send their own children to the city's public schools.

The current picture may be summarized from a recent article by Alan J. Borsuk in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.

Today, more than 30 percent of Milwaukee students receive public funding assistance to attend schools other than the normal Milwaukee Public School (MPS) offerings. MPA enrollment is now slightly less than 82,000. Another 19,000 are using vouchers to attend 122 private schools within the city. This is up more than 20 percent just since the enrollment cap was eliminated two years ago. If these students constituted a single unit, they would comprise the sixth largest district in the state.

The addition of charter schools also enters the picture. More than 5,000 students are in charter schools authorized by either the city of Milwaukee or the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. So much for the argument that new alternatives would not be created by choice programs.

Another 3,000 students are in charter schools authorized by the school district but not staffed by district teachers. Nearly 2,600 are in schools that contract with the district. More than 9,200 students attend charter schools authorized and staffed by the district. So much for the argument that choice will not improve local public schools.

Finally, 6,600 city students attend suburban schools as the result of a voluntary racial integration program and an open enrollment law.

Perfection has not been achieved but, as Borsuk wrote, "it is clear...parents like the idea of having choices and are using the new avenues for school selection widely." ■



David W. Kirkpatrick is Senior Education Fellow, U.S. Freedom Foundation, Washington, D.C., and Senior Education Fellow, Buckeye Institute, Columbus, OH. He is former President of NEA-affiliate Pennsylvania State Education Association.

association of
american educators

Education Matters is a publication of the
Association of American Educators (AAE)
27405 Puerta Real, Suite 230
Mission Viejo, CA 92691-6388

www.aateachers.org; (800) 704-7799

E-mail: info@aateachers.org

Gary Beckner, Managing Editor

Kelley Autry, Associate Editor & Researcher

Diane Meyer, Editorial Assistant

Bobette Craycraft, Editorial Assistant

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