

# Delivering Education

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*Our system of education . . . is to be contrasted with our highest ideas of perfection itself. . . . The love of excellence looks ever upward towards a higher standard; it is unimproving pride and arrogance only, that are satisfied with being superior to a lower [standard].—HORACE MANN*

Horace Mann, father of U.S. public schooling, campaigned for the kind of education system he believed would best serve our children and our society. He did not simply seek improvements in the status quo, he sought excellence. That standard of excellence is rarely seen today. In our contemporary debate over school choice, we have succumbed to precisely the unimproving pride and arrogance against which Mann railed. We no longer ask what is the best approach to educating our children, we ask only how we can minimize the flaws in our current approach. We talk always of “reform” and never of rebirth. But our children are no less worthy of a commitment to excellence than were the children of Mann’s time, and we cannot allow another generation to be sacrificed to our own complacency and lack of vision. We must throw off our blinders and strive to build the best education system we can.

The first step in that effort is to define the criteria by which the best systems can be identified. What, in other words, do we expect from our schools? Using polls, focus groups, and voting patterns as a guide,<sup>1</sup> it is possible to distinguish two categories of expectations: the individual and the social. In the first category are the things parents want for their own children, and in the second are the broader social effects we all want our educational system to produce. For parents, preparation for success in life and work is paramount, and specific goals include such things as mastery of basic academic and job skills, moral/religious education, a safe/studious educational setting, and the desire that these can be achieved affordably. There is considerable agreement among parents on the importance of job skills and basic academics, but preferences vary dramatically in other areas, especially with respect to religious instruction. To satisfy all families, an educational system must be able to cater to these differences. Our social goals, essentially the ideals of public education, include the following: that all children should have access to a good education regardless of income, that our schools should foster social harmony, that they should encourage parental involvement and responsibility, and that they should promote understanding of, and participation in, the democratic process.

The aforementioned goals provide a yardstick by which to measure educational systems, so our next step is to find alternative systems to measure. The two most common suggestions are to use analogies to other industries or to look at existing small-scale experiments with government-funded vouchers. These are both objects worthy of our attention, but they do have shortcomings. Arguments based on analogy are susceptible to many criticisms because of their theoretical nature. It is often contended, for instance, that educators and education are sufficiently different from other workers and industries that they do not bear comparison. Voucher experiments are usually so small that there are serious questions as to their generalizability. Also troubling is the fact that existing voucher programs do not actually represent the sort of model

that they are sometimes purported to test. Vouchers are often said to create freely competitive education markets, but in fact can be highly restrictive (for example, by excluding religious schools), and they separate payment from consumption through a single-payer system, grossly distorting normal market incentives. One such distortion is that voucher-redeeming schools can lobby the state to increase their profits, rather than being obliged to either offer better services to customers (for which they could charge more) or to deliver their services more efficiently.

Where else, then, can we look for alternatives to the status quo? One rarely followed avenue is to study how the educational systems of other nations are organized and how well they seem to be working. While most countries have state-run school systems fundamentally similar to our own, there are some remarkable exceptions. Another approach is to ask how the civilizations that preceded ours saw to the education of their children. Children are not a recent invention, and formal education has been widely practiced for 2,500 years. As it turns out, the educational systems of our ancestors have much to teach us.

In considering the international and historical evidence, however, we are faced with a problem: how do we make sense of and compare education systems operating in vastly different times and places? A careful strategy is needed for sifting through the precedents and separating meaningful trends from spurious aberrations. My own strategy has been to turn the great variations among cultures into an advantage by combining the results of the following three kinds of investigations:

- Observe how similar school systems operate across many different cultural, technological, and economic settings.
- Observe how different school systems operate in similar settings.
- Observe changes in outcomes that occur as a particular society moves from one educational system to another.

Distilled to its simplest, the argument is that systems that have consistently produced good results across many different times and places are likely to have inherent advantages over systems that have consistently produced bad results regardless of their settings. Of course, conclusions drawn using this strategy will still generate debate, but, unlike the current battles over school choice, that debate can be focused on hard evidence, allowing us to advance our understanding of the kinds of school systems that serve the public well, the kinds that don't, and the reasons for the discrepancies.

The education systems examined in this study were chosen to ensure coverage of a wide range of cultures and time periods. Schools from ancient Greece, to the early medieval Islamic empire, to the modern United States and Japan, among others, are all discussed. Of special interest are the cases for which strong claims have been made by previous historians and scholars of education. The rise of fully tax-funded public schooling in the nineteenth-century United States, for instance, is often credited with bringing literacy and learning to the masses who would not otherwise have enjoyed them. Similarly, the modern state school system of Japan is widely regarded as a model for other nations, due to the strong academic performance of its students on international tests. Also, note that some significant chapters of human history, such as medieval Europe, are omitted from consideration because formal education simply did not reach the masses of the people.<sup>2</sup>

What follows is a brief distillation of the study just described, which was published in its entirety as *Market Education: The Unknown History*. The findings are presented topically, based on the individual and social goals described earlier.

#### ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND JOB PREPARATION

Horace Mann and his successors predicted that centralizing decision-making in the hands of state-appointed experts would lead to great improvements in pedagogy and hence in

academic outcomes. This has not turned out to be the case. Public school systems have in fact tended to select teaching methods and materials arbitrarily, rather than relying on evidence of their effectiveness. More generally, government-run schools have not done as good a job of delivering the sort of academic instruction parents want as have free educational markets.

In the 1930s, the most time-tested technique for early reading instruction fell out of fashion<sup>3</sup>—not because it was ineffective, but because it was incompatible with the prevalent “progressive” education philosophy. Intensive phonics lessons, in which children had been taught to recognize words by sounding out their constituent parts, were felt to be too structured, confining, and teacher-directed. Leading educational theorists such as Francis Parker, G. Stanley Hall, and the still-famous John Dewey identified instead with the spirit-of-the-“word” method, in which children were expected to memorize whole words by sight. This memorization was to take place incidental to the reading process, however, and not through drill and repetition of words in isolation.

Progressive educators believed that children should be released from what they perceived as the straitjacket of traditional schooling and set free to explore learning in their own way. Organized and teacher-directed classes in letter-sound correspondences simply didn’t fit this bill, so the most influential voices in education came down squarely in favor of the word method, and public schools soon fell into line behind them.

What is most remarkable about this pedagogical sea change is that it had no grounding in empirical research. There were no rigorous classroom trials demonstrating that the word method did a better job than phonics in teaching young children how to read. More than that, some proponents of the word method seemed indifferent to the relative effectiveness of the two methods, placing far greater emphasis on the teaching process itself than on its results. The word

method was not preferred over phonics because it was believed to teach reading more quickly or successfully, but because it led to less structured, more pleasant-seeming lessons. For Stanley Hall, who advocated that reading and writing “should be neglected in our system before [age] eight<sup>4</sup>”, learning to read was itself greatly overrated:

Very many men have lived and died and been great, even the leaders of their age, without any acquaintance with letters. The knowledge which illiterates acquire is probably on the whole more personal, direct, environmental and probably a much larger proportion of it practical. Moreover, they escape much eyestrain and mental excitement.<sup>5</sup>

Hall even cited famous illiterates, such as the eighth-century emperor Charlemagne, to underscore his point. Ironically, Charlemagne was a vigorous proponent of spreading literacy to the masses, and tried hard to learn to read and write in what little spare time he could find.<sup>6</sup> These noisome historical details appear to have been lost on Hall.

Since the 1930s, a large body of evidence has developed showing the superiority of reading instruction that begins with structured phonics lessons over instruction that omits such lessons, and even showing particular subcategories of phonics instruction to be significantly better than others. Nevertheless, the word method, redubbed “whole language,” is still the dominant approach to early reading instruction in public schools. When phonics is used, it is usually cobbled onto the curriculum in an ad hoc way, rather than being part of an empirically tested and proven reading instruction curriculum.<sup>7</sup>

Even in mathematics, where the concept of proof is central, pedagogical methods have been chosen for their philosophical pedigrees rather than their demonstrated effectiveness. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics recently complained that math instruction in the United States has typically not been based on sound experimental evidence, but its own curriculum guidelines are guilty of the same failing—citing the musings of philosophers rather than the evidence of

successful classroom trials. Despite that fact, their unproven guidelines have been shaping mathematics instruction in many states for a decade. A 1998 study conducted by Stanford mathematics professor James Milgram found that students from one of the nation's top high schools, who were taught for four years using a curriculum closely based on the NCTM guidelines, failed to match, let alone surpass, a control group of students on any of the four achievement measures used in the study. The control group was taught using a traditional mathematics curriculum currently out of favor in most public school districts (it included Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, Trigonometry, and Pre-Calculus).

The preceding discussion might well leave the impression that the pedagogical error of public schooling is purely one of omission: that it has wrongly failed to empirically test instructional techniques before implementing them in classrooms. That impression would be mistaken. During the 1960s and 1970s, the federal government undertook what became a multibillion-dollar experiment called "Follow Through," comparing the effectiveness of twenty-two different pedagogical methods. Regrettably, the nation's public schools failed to follow through on this experiment, ignoring its findings and actually allowing some of the least effective methods to become the most firmly entrenched.

To this day, students in colleges of education are either taught nothing about the results of Follow Through, or they are taught the grossly misleading generalization that no one category of pedagogical methods proved consistently and significantly superior to any other. For convenience, the twenty-two participating methods had been grouped into four categories, but while the average outcomes of the four categories did not differ significantly, one individual method (Direct Instruction) actually excelled all the others.

[Direct Instruction] not only placed first in teaching basic skills as a whole, but came out first in all four [component skills] (reading, arithmetic, spelling, and language) individually. Students taught by Direct Instruction placed a close second in advanced conceptual

skills . . . and even scored highest on tests of self-esteem and responsibility toward their work.<sup>8</sup>

It is truly shocking that Direct Instruction's remarkable success has been glossed over by public schools, colleges of education, and even leading education historians. Respected historian Maris Vinovskis, for example, dedicates an entire chapter to Follow Through in his recent book *History and Educational Policymaking*, but his only reference to Direct Instruction is a passing mention that it "may have been somewhat more effective than other [approaches]".<sup>9</sup> Though he cites the official study of Follow Through conducted by Abt Associates, he does not report their findings on a method-by-method basis, emphasizing instead the meaningless generalization that "no type of model was notably more successful than the others."<sup>10</sup> As I have written elsewhere,

In any industry subject to the demands of its customers, the clear superiority of a method like Direct Instruction would soon have displaced competing practices. Public schooling, however, is not one of those industries. Not only did Distar fail to catch on, many school systems that had used the method so successfully during Follow Through abandoned it shortly after the Abt study was released. Predictably, their students' scores began to fall off. Though disadvantaged former Distar students continued to outperform the disadvantaged non-Distar control group after the program was terminated, their gains with respect to the national average began to erode as soon as they were returned to regular classrooms.<sup>11</sup>

U.S. public schooling's rejection of empirical testing of new methods has contributed to a dismal record of stagnation and decline in achievement over the past 100 years. Reading achievement for students of a given age stagnated for the first seventy years of the twentieth century, despite a significant increase in the length of the school year over that period.<sup>12</sup> Since 1970, achievement in most subjects has either continued to stagnate or has actually declined. The rosier trend data come from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), which tests representative samples of fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders on a variety of subjects. Overall, these tests



show no significant improvement from their introduction in the late 1960s and early 1970s to the mid 1990s.<sup>13</sup> A grimmer picture is painted by the International Evaluation of Education Achievement (IEA), which has tested reading, mathematics, and science achievement around the world over the past three decades. A comparison of the 1970 and 1990 IEA reading tests reveals that the average score of U.S. fourteen-year-olds dropped from 602 to 541 (roughly 8 percent on the 800-point scale).<sup>14</sup> That was the second worst decline among the seven countries for which data were available.

Further evidence of a decline in reading achievement comes from the National Adult Literacy Survey of 1992 and the Young Adult Literacy Survey of 1985. These surveys, designed specifically to allow the measurement of changes in student performance over time, show a drop in the score of young adults from 293 to 280 on the 500-point scale.<sup>15</sup> The most damning verdict on American literacy has been handed down by the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), released in 1995. According to the IALS, one quarter of all sixteen-to-twenty-five-year-olds scored at or below the lowest level of literacy measured by the test, meaning that they would be unable to perform the sorts of reading and writing tasks required to hold, or even to apply for, most jobs.<sup>16</sup> That is the state of U.S. literacy after one hundred and fifty years of nearly universal government schooling.

Students' mathematics and science proficiency has not fared much better. In its First and Second International Mathematics Studies (FIMS and SIMS), the IEA tested the skills of both thirteen- and seventeen-year-olds. Between the mid 1960s and the mid 1980s, when the tests were conducted, scores for the younger students declined somewhat, while those of the older students rose. Unfortunately, the author of the study comparing the results of the two tests has indicated that the results for seventeen-year-olds are in doubt.<sup>17</sup>

Science scores are available for ten- and fourteen-year-olds in 1970–71 and 1983–84. IEA researchers comparing the results of these tests found that scores for U.S. ten-year-olds

fell by 16 points while those of fourteen-year-olds dropped 47 points.<sup>18</sup> No nation suffered a worse decline over this period than the United States. In 1997, the results of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) were released, but unfortunately no effort was made to allow comparisons between TIMSS results and those of earlier IEA math or science studies.

In short, while most fields of human endeavor have seen astonishing growth and improvement over the past century-and-a-half, while whole new industries have been created and general intelligence has steadily increased,<sup>19</sup> educational achievement alone has stagnated.

But what about Japan? Though Japanese public schools have not enjoyed the dramatic gains in effectiveness and efficiency of some other industries, their students frequently outscore their international peers academically. As it turns out, several of the most important reasons for Japan's academic success lie outside its government school system, and even though its public schools do outshine those of other countries in certain respects, they nevertheless suffer from the flaws endemic to all state-education monopolies.

Much has been written on the causes of Japan's academic success. The consensus among experts in the field points to a combination of four factors: the motivating effects of high-stakes entrance exams, cultural factors such as intense parental involvement (usually by mothers), sound pedagogy in the public schools, and perhaps most importantly, the widespread patronage of private, for-profit supplementary schools.

Because of the rigid credentialism of Japanese employers, graduates of "A-level" universities have by far the best career prospects. Acceptance by a university is, in turn, decided almost entirely as a result of written tests. The pressure to score highly on these tests is thus tremendous, and it has a trickle-down effect even on fairly early stages of formal education.

The involvement of mothers in the education of their children is also more intense in Japan than in many other nations, and it is not uncommon for mothers to take private

lessons in how to coach their children to higher performance. Schools offering such instruction are known colloquially as *mama-juku*.

One aspect of Japanese academic success that can be directly attributed to public schools is their generally well-chosen pedagogical approach. In comparing methods and materials used in U.S. and Japanese schools, researchers such as Harold Stevenson and others have noted the greater effectiveness of Japanese instruction—particularly in mathematics and science.<sup>20</sup> Still, there is nothing in the public schools' procedure for selecting pedagogical methods that will ensure the continued use of effective approaches, that will tailor existing approaches to meet changing demand, or that will spur successful innovation and the development of new methods. For these factors, one must look at Japan's for-profit market of after-school schools, called *juku*.

Though they receive scant attention in the foreign press, Japan's *juku* constitute an annual (U.S.) \$5 billion private education industry.<sup>21</sup> Attendance begins as early as the first grade and becomes more and more common as children approach senior high school. By the fifth grade, one child in three is enrolled in a *juku*. Over one half of eighth graders were found to be enrolled in *juku* in 1991, and estimates for ninth graders are as high as 70 percent. A Tokyo survey found that nine out of ten students had attended a *juku* by the time they reached the ninth grade.<sup>22</sup>

Within Japan, the key role *juku* play in raising the nation's students to academic preeminence is widely recognized. The following views are typical: "The quality of the Japanese primary and secondary educational system cannot be maintained without the support of a [supplemental] educational system, such as *juku*, which compensates for the inflexibility of the formal system."<sup>23</sup> "Without [*juku*], the success of Japan in the area of education would be unthinkable."<sup>24</sup>

Where Japan's public schools offer a rigid curriculum that leaves some children behind and others bored, *juku* tailor their instruction to the specific needs of each child. Students

are grouped based on their performance in each subject and promoted to the next level as soon as they have mastered the material, rather than being arbitrarily promoted because of their age, as in the state system. *Juku* administer tests to determine areas where children need extra help, and target those areas with particular vigor. Though many *juku* focus on test preparation, that is only one element in an astonishingly diverse range of course offerings, including remedial and advanced academic lessons, music, swimming, and calligraphy. Fierce competition among *juku* keeps tuition costs under control, while economies of scale in the development of curricula allow larger *juku* to offer vastly higher salaries to their top teachers than is possible within any of the world's state-run education systems.

If Japan has a lesson in school governance to teach the rest of the world, it is that markets are far more responsive to the needs of the individual children they serve, and better able to cater to a wide range of demand, than the monolithic and bureaucratically calcified state monopoly.

Historical evidence on the academic effects of market versus monopoly provision is consistent with the trends observed above. Between the late 1700s and the mid 1800s, both England and the United States had steadily growing rates of literacy, and by the 1860s a significant majority of the citizens in both countries could read and write. This growth in literacy can be ascribed almost entirely to increasing public demand for basic academic skills and the ability of private and semi-public schools to meet that demand. Not only did the state play little role in fostering the spread of literacy during this period, in England it actively fought the process, fearful that the ability to read and write would lead its economic underclass to insurrection. Even after the English government eased its policies against the spread of literacy and began to provide a small education subsidy, the schools it subsidized were generally more expensive to operate than their entirely private counterparts and appear to have done an inferior job of teaching reading and writing.<sup>25</sup>

Reaching further back through the centuries, the civilizations regarded as having the highest literacy rates of their ages were parent-driven educational marketplaces. The ability to read and write was far more widely enjoyed in the early medieval Islamic empire and in fourth-century-B.C.E. Athens than in any other cultures of their times. In neither case did the state supply or even systematically subsidize educational services. The Muslim world's eventual introduction of state funding under Nizam al-Mulk in the eleventh century was quickly followed by partisan religious squabbling over education and the gradual fall of Islam from its place of cultural and scientific preeminence.<sup>26</sup>

Preparation for the workforce is another area in which state schooling has failed to show itself superior to competitive educational markets. The U.S. business community has so little confidence in the value of a high school education that grades and other school factors are given less consideration in hiring decisions than any other qualifications. Candidates' previous work experience, general disposition, and communication skills are all given more weight.<sup>27</sup> This skepticism is amply justified, given the dismal statistics regarding the skills of entry-level job candidates and the increasing need for businesses to teach their new employees basic academic skills. Though 90 percent of high school seniors polled in 1997 believed themselves prepared for immediate entry into the workforce, only half of all employers agreed. While 92 percent of the seniors thought their written communication skills were sufficient for the workplace, only 45 percent of employers concurred with that assessment.<sup>28</sup> *Training* magazine reports that while 18 percent of American businesses provided basic remedial instruction for their employees in 1984, the figure had leapt to 43 percent by 1995.<sup>29</sup> Across the country, one-third of American businesses report that their employees' poor learning skills are preventing them from reorganizing work responsibilities.<sup>30</sup>

While the United States currently lacks a competitive educational market against which to compare these poor public

schooling results, the historical evidence suggests independent and competing schools have had more success in conveying practical employment skills than contemporary government systems. In the wake of the Reformation, for example, Martin Luther and his friend Melancthon entreated the leaders of the German states to introduce state schools that would produce classically trained graduates fluent in Latin. That goal did not generally coincide with the will of the common people, who sought more career-oriented training for their children. The municipality of Heidenheim was a fairly typical case, in which merchants and community leaders objected when their local German school was summarily closed and replaced with a tax-supported Latin one. In a letter to their Duke, they wrote: “Our young people, most of whom have no aptitude for Latin and are growing up to be artisans, are better served by a German teacher than a Latin master, for they need to learn writing and reading, which is of great help to them in their work and livelihood.”<sup>31</sup>

It would be incorrect, however, to jump to the conclusion that private ownership is a guarantee that schools will more effectively meet parents’ demands for career preparation. The privately endowed grammar schools of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England are a case in point. Because these schools were funded predominantly or wholly by wealthy benefactors rather than through fees, they tended to teach the things that the donors stipulated, regardless of the demands of families. Since the donors were very often landed gentry who had themselves received a classical Latin education devoid of science, modern languages, and job training, they insisted on the same for students of the schools they endowed.

Parents would have none of it. Enrollment in endowed grammar schools dropped steadily from the late 1700s onward, as new fee-charging independent schools sprang up to offer lessons more in keeping with parents’ demands.

Subjects long ignored by the grammar schools began to appear, and soon entirely new ones were added. Arithmetic and geography were among the first, and these were joined by anatomy, biology,

bookkeeping, economics, surveying, naval studies, and many others. While sometimes maintaining vestiges of the traditional curriculum, private institutions usually allotted them less time and importance than the new subjects. . . . In keeping with the applied scientific nature of many of the [new] courses, experiments using telescopes, microscopes and other devices complemented familiar teaching methods.<sup>32</sup>

Even as far back as classical Athens, apprenticeships were practiced alongside formal schooling, ensuring that students would have a marketable skill by the end of their education. This combination of academic instruction and practical training helped to make Athens the economic superpower of its time. By the fourth century B.C.E., Athens' booming economy could boast joint-stock corporations and a thriving insurance industry many centuries before these became common in the rest of the world. The public school system of ancient Sparta, focusing as it did solely on military training, taught no career skills at all and thus stunted the city-state's economic development.

Today, career-focused higher education is one of the fastest-growing sectors of the education industry, with institutions such as the for-profit University of Phoenix opening branch campuses all over the United States, demonstrating an ability to meet growing demand that far exceeds the norm among public and non-profit private universities.

#### SERVING DIVERSE COMMUNITIES AND FOSTERING SOCIAL HARMONY

As noted in the Introduction, there are areas of both consensus and of disagreement among parents regarding the things they want their children to learn. Though academic training and career preparation garner nearly universal support, there are wide disparities in areas such as the teaching of history and social studies, sex education, and religion. Even people of the same faith sometimes disagree about the role of religion in schooling, with some feeling that the two can, or should, be kept separate, and others believing that they must be fully integrated.

Fortunately, these differences of opinion need not lead to conflict. Though it is common for people to wish that others would share their views on controversial issues, few people actually want to compel their fellow citizens to adopt their own values through the force of law. Consider the public school prayer issue in the United States. A majority of U.S. citizens favor prayer at their local schools—unless some parents strongly object. In cases where there are objections, support for school prayer drops to a minority.<sup>33</sup> For an educational system to serve the public's aims, therefore, it must be able to cater to a wide range of demands without forcing the views of one group on any other.

Public schooling has not done a good job of fulfilling that goal, either in modern times or historically. On issues ranging from the founding of our nation to the origin of our species, public schools have tended to formally entrench one view at the expense of others. In 1992, for example, Florida enacted a statute requiring that public school children be made to “understand that a specific culture is not intrinsically superior or inferior to another.” This was not a self-evident principle with which all the state's residents agreed. In fact, it was so contrary to the views of some Floridian parents that the Lake County School Board passed its own requirement that the public schools teach “our republican form of government, capitalism, a free enterprise system, patriotism, strong family values, freedom of religion, and other basic values that are superior to other foreign or historic cultures.” Whatever one's views on the relative merits of the two positions, it is clear that they were at odds with one another. In the end, the courts upheld the state's power to impose its will on the public schools, regardless of the dissent voiced by local communities.

The most pervasive and intractable case of public schools failing to serve the demands of all families is their inability to offer devotional religious instruction. This is extraordinarily frustrating to parents who wish to provide their children with a thoroughly religious educational environment,



particularly because those parents are obliged to pay for the very schools that cannot cater to their needs. Many orthodox Protestant families also have beliefs about the origins of man that conflict with the scientific consensus on evolution. Contrary to these parents' wishes, the public schools have not, and in fact cannot, pass their beliefs on to their children. To minimize the offense given to orthodox Protestant families, many public school districts have watered down their presentation of the theory of evolution, in some cases omitting it entirely.<sup>34</sup> Not only has this failed to fully satisfy believers in the Biblical creation story, it has angered parents who wish to see the theory of evolution presented with depth and clarity. No group has been well-served on the issue.

Ironically, the modern problem of public schooling's inability to deliver devotional religious instruction is a reversal of the problem that existed prior to the mid twentieth century, when Protestant religious activities were common in public schools. Irish Catholics were singled out for attack by early public schools, with one nineteenth-century textbook claiming that America was becoming "the common sewer of Ireland." The New York City school board did offer at one point to "remove any particular instances of religious slander from its textbooks that the Catholic Bishop cared to list, but there was no question of removing the Protestant Bible altogether," or of letting Catholics use their own Bible in the public schools. It was not uncommon for Catholic children to be whipped or beaten for refusing to read from the Protestant Bible, and the Supreme Courts of several states upheld the right of school districts to do so.<sup>35</sup>

The inability of U.S. state-run schools to serve the moral and religious educational demands of its diverse population is not an aberration. The same has been true of governmental school systems throughout history. In post-revolutionary France, Protestant republicans and Catholic royalists treaded equally heavily on the prerogatives of families, alternately foisting the Catholic Bible on students and tearing it from their hands. In the early sixteenth century, the German

state schools championed by Luther and his fellow reformers trampled the people's growing interest in practical studies, imposing instead a classical Latin program (particularly at the secondary level of education). In the Islamic empire of the eleventh century, the introduction of state education funding and subsequent state control over schools greatly curtailed the freedom of families to obtain the kind of education they wanted for their children. The list of similar cases is long.<sup>36</sup>

The record of independent schools in serving the needs of diverse communities is considerably better. Competitive markets have tended to offer a broader range of educational options to parents, and have done a superior job of identifying changes in demand over time. In contrast to the homogeneous and homogenizing public schools of classical Sparta, the free educational market of Athens embraced a vastly wider range of subjects and treated them from a variety of different viewpoints. Parents and their children were free to choose from among the available options as they saw fit. The same was true in the early part of the medieval Muslim empire (from the eighth through the eleventh century).

Today, independent schools cater to people of many different faiths, from Catholics and Jews to Protestants and Muslims. Curricula focus on the arts or the sciences, on international languages and cultures, or on the history and traditions of particular groups. All this diversity, which clearly exceeds that found within the government sector, has been achieved despite the fact that independent schools enroll roughly one-tenth as many students as the state schools.

Few advocates of state schooling have seriously argued that government schools are better able to cater to a diverse clientele. More commonly, they argue that it is precisely the market's ability to cater to diversity that makes it dangerous. They fear that if parents could really get what they want for their children, it would balkanize our society into warring factions. This apprehension is not only unsupported by the evidence, it is exactly backward.

It is not the patrons of private Atheist Academies and Evangelical Elementaries who tear into one another on the subject of evolution versus creation. It is not the private Afrocentric school, or Orthodox Jewish school, or Classical Western Culture school that sows dissension among the families in its neighborhood. It was not the private Catholic primary school of nineteenth-century America that drove its community into a frenzy by foisting its version of the Bible on all the local children. It was, however, the state schools of post-revolutionary France that set citizen against citizen by favoring republican or royalist views according to the whim of despots; and it is the modern U.S. public school system that factionalizes the population on issues of curriculum and religion, eating away at the fabric of the nation year after year like the relentless action of waves eroding what could be a peaceful shore.<sup>37</sup>

The reason why state school systems have produced so much more confrontation than educational markets is that compulsion, not diversity, is the chief culprit in creating educational conflict. When parents have been able to obtain the particular educational services they have wanted for their children without having to force their preferences on their neighbors, frustrations and antagonisms have been kept to a minimum. Apart from the exceptional trial of Socrates, the classical Athenian education market was not a source of conflict. The only notable competition was between teachers, as they tried to enroll new students by arguing that their own knowledge and methods were superior to those of their competitors.

One of the most dramatic examples of how education markets have permitted the peaceful coexistence of disparate groups is the case of early medieval Islam. Skeptics and agnostics coexisted with orthodox Muslims, and both in turn were generally tolerant of Hebrews and Christians. Historian Abraham Blinderman observes that: “Perhaps few other periods in the tragic history of the Jewish people have been as meaningful to them as this period of Judaeo-Arabic communion. The renaissance of Jewish letters and science in Arab lands is a glorious testimonial to the cultural cosmopolitanism of the Arabs at a time when Jews in Europe were being burned as witches, plague-begetters, and ritualistic murderers.”<sup>38</sup>

In the eleventh century, however, state funding and control of education was introduced to the Muslim world, and the tolerance that had been enjoyed under the educational marketplace was lost. Not only were different religions thrown into conflict by the government schools, but the two principal branches of Islam were turned against one another as well.

We are all losers when our differing views become declarations of war; when, instead of allowing many distinct communities of ideas to coexist harmoniously, our schools force us to battle one another in a needless and destructive fight for ideological supremacy. If U.S. churches were run by the state as schools have been, we would have had as many religious wars in this nation as we have had school wars. We can learn a lesson from the peaceful coexistence of our private mosques, cathedrals, synagogues, and shrines: it is possible to celebrate both our varied traditions and the common ideals on which our nation is based. The totalitarian notion that schools should sanction one set of views at the expense of all others is surely not among those American ideals.

#### A SAFE AND STUDIOUS ENVIRONMENT

“School Crime Is Declining,”<sup>39</sup> assures a recent booklet published by the Center on Education Policy. The Center, and many other public school advocacy groups, base this assurance on a statistic included in the government publication *Indicators of School Crime and Safety 1999*.<sup>40</sup> That statistic is the percentage of students who were criminally victimized at school during the previous six months, and it declined from 15.5 percent in 1993 to 10.2 percent in 1997. There are several serious problems with this statistic and with the broad implications that are imputed to it. Before addressing the problems with the statistic itself, however, it is worth mentioning that the original table in the *Indicators* study reports data for years 1992 through 1997 and that the crime rate reported for 1992 (14.4 percent) was lower than that for 1993.<sup>41</sup> The Center on Education Policy’s decision to

choose the higher 1993 figure as its initial benchmark instead of the lower 1992 figure is left curiously unexplained.

More importantly, the statistic in question only includes students from twelve to eighteen years of age (excluding older high school seniors), and it fails to disaggregate the data for public versus private school students. As it happens, the *Indicators of School Crime and Safety 1999* study provides other statistics that do distinguish between public and private schools and that include students from twelve to nineteen years old. The period covered is also somewhat broader, reaching from 1989 to 1995. Over that time span, the percentage of public school students reporting criminal victimization rose slightly from 14.7 to 14.8 percent, whereas the figure for private school students fell from 12.8 percent to 12.4 percent.<sup>42</sup> Public school crime thus does not appear to have declined since the 1980s, although private school crime does. The absolute crime rate is also lower in private than in public schools.

This picture is repeated in numerous other statistics included in the *Indicators* study. Public school students, for example, are twice as likely to be violently assaulted as private school students, are four-and-a-half times as likely to report gang activity at school,<sup>43</sup> and are four times more likely to avoid certain places at school out of fear.<sup>44</sup> These differences, moreover, exist whether the public and private schools in question are rural, suburban, or urban. In central city schools, the differences between the public and private sector are generally as large as, or even larger than, those just described. Even teachers cannot escape these differences, with public school teachers being twice as likely as private school teachers to report having been physically attacked or threatened with injury in the past twelve months.

In many cases these situations are worsening over time. Between 1989 and 1995, the percentage of students reporting gang activity in public schools nearly doubled from 16.5 percent to 30.6 percent. Such reports also increased in the private sector, but far more modestly: from 4.4 percent to

6.8 percent. In 1995 and 1997, “almost one-third of all students in grades 9 through 12 . . . reported that someone had offered, sold, or given them an illegal drug on school property,”<sup>45</sup> a significant increase from the 24 percent figure reported in 1993. A poll of teachers reveals how different the public and independent school environments are:

The private sector suffers only one-fifth the rate of student absenteeism, half the rate of teacher absenteeism, and one-sixth the rate of physical conflicts between students as the public sector. Vandalism, crime, drug abuse, student disrespect for teachers, all are vastly lower among independent schools. Student apathy, viewed as a serious problem by a fifth of all public school teachers, concerns only one out of every twenty-five private school teachers. . . . Critics would claim that these advantages result [entirely] from the kinds of families who opt for independent schooling, rather than from the schools themselves. . . . They would be wrong. An extensive study of Catholic independent schools has revealed that even adjusting for a host of socioeconomic and demographic factors, [independent] schools exert a significant positive effect on the behavior and morale of both students and teachers.<sup>46</sup>

#### AFFORDABILITY AND EFFICIENCY

Parents and the public at large have only so much income they are willing and able to spend on education, and so both affordability and efficiency are prime goals. It is important to note, therefore, that one of the chief arguments made by public schooling’s nineteenth-century advocates was that the large centralized system they proposed would be more efficient than the seemingly disorganized market of small schools that existed at the time. In keeping with their proposed strategy, schools and districts have been getting bigger for more than a century. Between 1929–30 and 1993–1994, the number of one-room schoolhouses fell from roughly 150,000 to 442. Today, the majority of public high school children attend institutions enrolling over a thousand students. In 1932, after years of consolidation, there were still 127,531 school districts nationwide. By 1962, the number

had dropped to 35,676, and it has continued to decline until, in the 1993–1994 school year, only 14,881 districts remained.

This relentless process of centralization has not produced the windfall in efficiency that was promised. At roughly \$7,000 per student, annual public school expenditures are now more than double the average tuition charged by private schools. Even after taking into account parish subsidies and other sources of funding available to religious schools, the government sector still spends vastly more per student than its private counterpart. Moreover, public schools spent fourteen times as much per pupil in 1996 as they did in 1920, after adjusting for inflation.

These dismal national statistics are echoed at the level of individual schools and districts. During the 1980s, several investigators analyzed the effect of public school spending on student achievement by surveying the results of many small-scale studies. The best known of these investigators was economist Eric Hanushek, who found that there was generally no significant relationship between spending and achievement. He concluded, in other words, that higher per-pupil spending in the public school system usually had little effect on student performance.

Hanushek's findings were roundly attacked, and both his raw data and his conclusions were called into question. One of the most frequently heard criticisms was that the studies Hanushek analyzed were of varying quality and that some were out of date, coming from as far back as the 1920s. This criticism was addressed, however, in a separate investigation conducted by professors Stephen Childs and Charol Shakeshaft. With some disappointment, Childs and Shakeshaft also conceded that "the relationship between student achievement and level of educational expenditures is minimal." Furthermore, they found that public schools have actually been getting less efficient over time. The older studies for which Hanushek had been criticized actually showed greater public school efficiency than the more recent ones.

Other research has led to similarly disappointing conclusions, such as the fact that large public schools and districts make worse, not better, use of their resources than the smaller institutions they supplanted. We should not be surprised by these findings when the public school systems of major metropolitan areas employ five, ten, or even fifty times as many central administrators per student as the private Catholic school systems in those same metropolitan areas. Worse yet, large schools tend to introduce many negative side-effects along the way. Professor Alan Ornstein's one-sentence summary of the literature is particularly damning: "Current consensus correlates small schools with school effectiveness, community and school identity, and individual fulfillment and participation, and large schools with school inefficiency, institutional bureaucracy, and personal loneliness."

The history of free educational markets exhibits a different trend. As mentioned in the section on academic achievement, the state-subsidized schools of nineteenth-century England appear to have been both more expensive to operate and less effective at spreading literacy than their entirely independent, fee-charging competitors. Though cost comparisons are difficult when we go further back in history, it seems clear that a vigorous competition among schools kept tuition fees low in the educational market of classical Athens. That same effect can be found today in the Japanese market for the for-profit after-school schools known as *juku*. Competition among *juku* has kept prices sufficiently low, so that 90 percent of children attend these schools for some period of time.

Market education's higher efficiency does not necessarily translate into greater affordability for all parents, however. Though independent schools can generally educate students for much less than their public sector counterparts with equal or better results, parents do not pay tuition directly to public schools. Poor families can thus avail themselves of a system that will spend roughly \$84,000 on twelve years of schooling for each of their children, but they may not be able



to spend more than a small fraction of that amount out of their own pockets. Since one of the public's most deeply and widely held goals is to ensure that all children have access to a good education regardless of income, this is a serious dilemma, and it is taken up again below.

### SERVING THE DISADVANTAGED

One of Horace Mann's noblest promises was that the public schools would do an excellent job of serving the needs of the disadvantaged. It is a promise that public schools have not been able to keep. Though most inner city districts serving poor populations spend six to ten thousand dollars per pupil every year, they have proven themselves incapable of such basic tasks as providing stall doors and toilet paper for their bathrooms. They have often neglected even the most routine maintenance of plumbing, heating, and roofing systems, resulting in costly damage to school buildings and the demoralization of both students and teachers. Metal detectors, drug-sniffing dogs, and armed police have become commonplace. These schools have lost their ability to provide a safe and studious environment for many urban children.<sup>47</sup>

While racial integration has been a stated goal of U.S. public schools for forty years, those schools are little more integrated today than they were before the first mandatory busing plan was introduced. Independent schools, by contrast, have become vastly more integrated during the past four decades, and, according to recent research, now offer a more genuinely integrated environment than do public schools.

In the 1968–69 school year, 93 percent of all independent school students were non-Hispanic whites, 3.6 percent African-Americans, and 3.3 percent of other racial or ethnic groups. Thirty years later, the percentage of African-Americans in independent schools has almost tripled to 9.1 percent, approaching the (12.6 percent) proportion of African-Americans in the population at large. The overall percentage of minority students in independent schools has leapt from 6.9 percent to 22 percent during the same period. Even after this rapid rise, the rate of growth in black independent school

enrollment continues to outpace that of total independent school enrollment or white independent school enrollment.<sup>48</sup>

Far more minority children are now attending independent schools than was previously the case, but how well integrated are those schools? To find out, Sociologist James Coleman compared integration figures<sup>49</sup> for public schools, Catholic schools, and non-Catholic private schools during the 1980s. Of the three sectors, non-Catholic independent schools had the least African-American/white segregation, followed by the Catholic schools. Coleman found public schools to be the most segregated—a stunning finding given that public school systems across the country were under legal orders to integrate their student populations.<sup>50</sup>

But how much do students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds really interact with one another even when they attend the same schools? Does the level of such interaction differ between the public and private sectors? Professor Jay Greene and his colleague Nicole Mellow cleverly addressed that question in 1998, by observing the voluntary seating choices of students in school lunchrooms. This, they reasoned, was a far more meaningful measure of integration than overall district or even school-level enrollment figures. What they found is that students in private (particularly religious) schools were much more likely to choose lunch partners of other races than were students in public schools.<sup>51</sup>

Advocates for state schooling often counter such evidence by referring back to the ideal that public schools must accept all comers, while independent schools can pick and chose their students, and may simply refuse to serve some children. Whatever the ideal of state schooling, the reality is quite different. The public schools in just twenty-two states send 100,000 of their most difficult-to-educate students to the private sector, according to a recent study by the Mackinac Center in Michigan.<sup>52</sup> The Washington D.C. public school district alone sends more than a thousand special education students to private schools every year because it is unable to serve those students.<sup>53</sup>

There is no dispute that the quality of education provided by central city districts is generally inferior to that provided by their suburban counterparts. In fact, the evidence shows that economic and racial achievement gaps are larger within the public school system than they are within the private sector. Poor inner city children who attend private Catholic schools do better academically and are far more likely to graduate from high school and to go on to college than public school students from similar backgrounds, and racial and economic achievement gaps are smaller in Catholic schools than in government schools.<sup>54</sup>

This evidence flies in the face of the widespread belief that children from low-income families would be left uneducated if it were not for the existence of fully tax-funded government schools. As history shows, poor parents not only saw to their children's education before the state intervened, they often chose to assume the financial burden of private fee-charging schools because they preferred the services of those schools to the offerings of state-subsidized institutions. In mid-nineteenth-century England, one key difference between the two sorts of institutions was that teachers in subsidized schools were appointed by the school operators, not selected by parents. Because the people running subsidized schools rarely had children attending them, there was little personal incentive for them to ensure the teachers' competency. Sometimes sound selections were made, but in the worst cases, instructors were appointed who would never have been able to draw paying students. It was also not uncommon for schools subsidized by the government and/or by religious societies to omit the teaching of writing, on the grounds that "Reading will help to mend people's morals, but writing is not necessary [for the lower classes]."<sup>55</sup> Fee-charging private-venture schools, by contrast, taught whatever parents paid them to teach. As a result, the appeal of subsidized schools was limited. "The subsidized, endowed and charity schools of Manchester attracted only 8 percent of all those attending schools and there were empty places available."<sup>56</sup> It took many decades

and a significant increase in education taxes and state education spending before the majority of low-income families were lured away from their private-venture schools.

This, however, brings us back to the problem outlined earlier: while low-income families generally receive better quality services from competitive markets than from state monopolies, they cannot necessarily afford to purchase the quantity of services that they and the public believe their children should enjoy. A proposed solution to this problem is described in the section titled Understanding Excellence.

#### FOSTERING PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY

The importance of ensuring that parents are actively involved in their children's education is universally recognized. What is not so widely known is that the very nature of government-run, tax-funded schooling discourages that involvement. Before the introduction of state schooling, parents were obliged to make all the major decisions regarding their children's education: where they would go to school, who would teach them, what they would study, for how long they would attend, and how much that schooling was worth. Over the years, the state school system has usurped the right to make virtually all of those decisions, leaving to parents little more than the task of waking their children in the morning and pointing them toward the school bus. By wresting away parents' rights and responsibilities, public schools have consigned them to the role of spectators in their own children's education. Parents who do try to take an active role are so often ignored or rebuffed that frustration and eventual surrender are the all-too-frequent outcomes. When parents held the educational purse strings, they held the reins of educational power. Today, the schools have a new and fickle master—a vast bureaucratic empire putatively accountable to everyone but in reality accountable to no one.

The need for parental financial responsibility is not a new insight. Consider the case of a successful lawyer born in the

early sixties. After discovering that the small town where he grew up was still without its own high school, he decided to found one himself—but, though he could have fully endowed the school, he chose to pay only one-third of the necessary costs. He explained this decision in a letter to a friend, writing that he had seen grave problems wherever teachers' salaries were paid from public funds and that parents could be encouraged to choose teachers wisely through their obligation to contribute to the cost of the school. That lawyer's name was Pliny the Younger. He was a citizen of the Roman Empire, born in the early sixties of the first century C.E.

During the mid nineteenth century, as fully tax-funded schooling was taking hold in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere, a few prophetic individuals once again voiced the need for direct financial responsibility for parents. In 1847, the Honorable Robert Spence of Canada “was certain that the granting of free schools would undermine parental responsibility in educational matters. Once the parent ceased to pay for the schooling of his children, the crucial link between himself and the teachers was severed, and a gradual decline in family interest in the schools would take place.”<sup>57</sup>

The truth of Pliny's and Spence's observations can still be seen today in the differences between tuition-charging schools and tax-funded schools. According to U.S. Department of Education statistics, public school teachers are seven times more likely to complain about parent apathy than private school teachers. While the problem has been getting worse over time in public schools, it has been improving in private ones,<sup>58</sup> and this difference is not a symptom of self-selection. When a random sample of poor Milwaukee parents received private school vouchers, their involvement in their children's education increased significantly with respect to that of a control group that did not receive vouchers and had to remain in the public schools.

Parents are so often apathetic toward government schools because they have little meaningful power or responsibility over them. When asked how much control they felt parents

had over six different aspects of their children's public school education, a significant majority of Gallup poll respondents said "very little" or "almost none" on every issue from curriculum and textbooks to teacher selection and salaries. As any parent knows, responsibilities breed responsibility. Unless parents have the power to make the important decisions regarding their children's education, they will inevitably become marginalized. Historically, the only way that parents consistently retained that power was by directly paying for their children's education.

#### EDUCATION FOR, AND ABOUT, DEMOCRACY

Most citizens want their schools to not only prepare children for successful private lives, but also to equip them for their duties as citizens. By this measure, public schooling is falling short of expectations. During the 1980s, philosopher and constitutional scholar Mortimer Adler conducted innumerable high school discussions on the key political texts of the United States. In discussing the Declaration of Independence, he was dismayed to find that, almost without exception, students had never before read that document. Time and again he found that high school students did not understand the meaning of the Declaration's principal terms and that their lack of understanding extended to the Constitution and Gettysburg Address. He concluded that the students' grasp of these documents failed to approach even the minimum level required for intelligent citizenship.

Adler's findings are sadly consistent with those of the U.S. history portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Results on these nationwide tests are expected to fall into one of three score ranges: basic, proficient, or advanced. Remarkably, the majority of high school seniors actually scored below the lowest ("basic") level in 1994 (the most recent year for which test results are available). Their grasp of this nation's history was so poor as to place them off the charts. Is the achievement standard set too high? When

asked in 1988 to identify the half-century during which the Constitution was drafted, 40 percent of high school seniors answered incorrectly. Two-thirds did not know that the Civil War took place during the second half of the nineteenth century. Only two students in five could correctly identify the purpose of *The Federalist* papers, and one out of every three students did not know that the Declaration of Independence marked the formal severance of the colonies from Britain.

Based on a recent nationwide study of Latino Americans, it appears that nongovernmental schools do a better job than governmental schools of promoting participation in civic life, even after adjusting for differences in student socioeconomic status and the educational background of their parents. Latinos educated in independent schools are more likely to vote, are more tolerant of other groups, and participate more often in charitable, social, and business organizations, than Latinos educated in public schools.<sup>59</sup> Certainly the independent Catholic schools attended by much of the Kennedy family, and the home-schooling and private tutoring received by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, do not appear to have impeded their interest or success in public service.

#### UNDERSTANDING EXCELLENCE

There is certainly considerable variation in outcomes among the education systems discussed above. Some of that variation can be explained by differences in culture, by economic factors, or simply by chance. But when we apply the three-pronged analysis described in the Introduction to this paper, a trend does emerge: markets of independent and competing schools generally do a better job of meeting the public's needs than uncompetitive state-run systems.

While it is true, for example, that the modern Japanese public school system is more effective in some areas than U.S. public schooling, such differences pale in comparison to the consistent historical superiority of market over monopoly provision. Even today, to continue with the same example,

much of Japan's success on international tests can be attributed to its vast and dynamic market of for-profit *juku* schools.

But what is responsible for the greater effectiveness of education markets? A tentative answer to that question can be found by looking at the strengths and weaknesses of the several market-based educational systems we have explored. My own conclusion is that the following five factors are the necessary and sufficient ingredients for a viable educational market:

- parental choice
- direct financial responsibility for parents
- freedom for educators
- competition between schools
- the profit motive for schools

Over the centuries, the choices made by parents in the educational marketplace have been consistently better than those imposed upon them by government-appointed experts. Parents have by no means been perfect, but they have usually steered away from pedagogical fads and have focused on more useful skills. The societies and economies that have grown up around parent-driven educational markets have been among the most productive and cohesive in history.

Parental choice, however, is not distributed to any and all who ask for it. It has to be fought for, and defended, as with all other human freedoms. Schools that have not charged tuition have typically not taken the needs of families as their guiding principle. Many have ignored those needs completely, preferring to deliver the sort of education favored by those who were footing the bill. Parents who try to take an active role in schools for which they are not paying tuition are often rebuffed as nuisances, because they have no direct power over the institution and frequently have few alternatives.

Worse yet, "free" government schools tend eventually to be taken for granted by parents who have many other im-



portant concerns to attend to. Government schooling whispers a dangerous siren song: “We’re experts,” it says. “We have your children’s education well in hand.” Burdened by so many other responsibilities, parents want to believe these overweening promises and gradually find themselves disenfranchised spectators to their own children’s education.

Public school teachers cite the lack of participation by parents as one of their most pressing problems, but public schooling itself is one of the key causes of that problem. Private school teachers report parent apathy to be far less common. The responsibility of directly paying all or part of their children’s tuition forces parents to take a more active role and gives them considerably more power over the content and direction of the instruction their children receive. Difficulties of course arise in the case of very poor families, and I’ll return to those difficulties in a moment.

Just as parents need to be free to choose their children’s schools, educators need to be free to innovate. They must be able to cater to specific audiences, to leverage their particular talents, and to pursue missions and philosophies of their own choosing. The absence of these freedoms leads to frustration and low morale among teachers, to inefficiency, and to pedagogical stagnation.

The freedom of schools needs to be balanced, however, to prevent abuses. Schools that are not directly answerable to families can, and do, go off on their own educational tangents that diverge wildly from the goals of the students and parents. The way to ensure that schools are free to do whatever they want so long as they are effectively serving their customers is to force them to compete with one another to attract and keep those customers.

By themselves, the four factors thus far described (choice and financial responsibility for parents, and freedom and competition for schools) are enough to prevent the worst educational abuses, but they are not enough to promote educational excellence on a long-term, widespread basis. For that, it is necessary to introduce the incentive of profit making. The

absence of the profit motive in any business leads to stagnation, and the nonprofit private school industry is a case in point. The virtual absence of significant progress in pedagogy and educational technology over the past one hundred years is absolutely unprecedented in other fields, and even the best nonprofit private schools have failed to substantially expand their enrollments over the past century. Every other area of human endeavor, from agriculture to the service sector to athletics, has registered significant gains during the twentieth century—gains that have been conspicuously absent from both public and nonprofit private schools. The only proven way of spurring that same tremendous progress in education is by encouraging innovation through the lure of potential profits.

But what about low-income families? How can we ensure that they are fully able to participate in the education marketplace? For the past few years, the most common answer to that question has been government funded vouchers. When viewed in the context of the preceding discussion, however, the following serious problems emerge:

1. Vouchers for the full cost of a child's education eliminate direct parental financial responsibility, greatly increasing the likelihood that parents will lose control over their children's education and eventually become disenfranchised.
2. By separating payment from consumption, vouchers create an incentive structure conducive to fraud, corruption, and mismanagement.
3. Under a single-payer voucher system, the main avenue for schools to increase their incomes would be to lobby the state, rather than to improve the services they offer to families.
4. Universal government funding of all schools, including formerly independent schools, would spread the suffocating pall of regulation over the entire education industry, as a host of special interest groups lobbied to control the sort of education that voucher-redeeming schools could legally deliver.

5. Government vouchers leave open the possibility that citizens would be obliged by the force of law to pay for the support of religious institutions. Whether or not such a voucher program were found to be constitutional, this would be a serious problem in a free society.

It would be possible to design a government program that would somewhat abate these problems, but even if that were done, there would be little to prevent that program from being degraded by subsequent legislatures.

Fortunately, there is an alternative: finance scholarships privately and provide them on the basis of need. Those families who, without the current heavy burden of education taxes, could afford to educate their own children would do so, whereas their less financially well-off fellow citizens would receive nongovernmental subsidies. These subsidies, moreover, could be allocated on a sliding scale, ensuring that families who could afford to pay for at least part of their children's education were encouraged to do so, thereby promoting their interest and involvement in that education.

There are already roughly forty private K–12 scholarship programs in the United States. Government is not involved in any way, and the satisfaction ratings of participating families are as high as, or higher than, any other group of parents with school-aged children.<sup>60</sup> Currently, because public schools are still thought of as the official providers of education, these private scholarship-granting agencies raise relatively small amounts of money and educate only a few hundred or a few thousand students each. This need not be the case. If the public becomes convinced of the superiority of private scholarships in competitive markets over state-schooling monopolies, and especially if they are encouraged to donate to these philanthropic programs through tax credits, private scholarships could provide a practical and efficient system for subsidizing the education of all low-income families. Arizona already has a very small tax credit for those who donate to private scholarship programs, the

Michigan-based Mackinac Center has drafted a proposal for a much more potent law, and a pair of promising education-tax-credit proposals is currently being floated in New Jersey.

Parents have already registered their own views on private scholarship programs: when the Children's Scholarship Fund held a lottery to distribute 40,000 scholarships to low-income families in 1999, it received one-and-a-quarter million applications. Even more remarkably, the means-tested CSF scholarships required a co-payment of roughly \$1,000 from participants, to ensure that they would have a vested interest in their children's schools and education. Given the income cut-off for program participants, this co-payment represents a significant financial sacrifice.

A more comprehensive discussion of the risks associated with government voucher programs and the private scholarship alternative can be found in *Market Education: The Unknown History*. The discussion of these issues in professor James Tooley's recent book *Reclaiming Education* is also very highly recommended.

#### CONCLUSION: IDEALS OVER INSTITUTIONS

The U.S. Declaration of Independence proclaims that governments are instituted by and among the people to secure certain fundamental ends and that "whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its Foundation on such Principles, and organizing its Powers in such Form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

These principles remain true today and apply to individual institutions as well as to entire governments. State-run schooling was instituted in this nation to fulfill the public's educational goals and ideals. It has not only fallen short of that aim, but has in fact run counter to it in many respects. After one-hundred-and-fifty years of trying vainly to make

state schooling live up to our personal expectations and our shared ideals, is it not time we considered alternatives?

#### NOTES

1. Andrew J. Coulson, *Market Education: The Unknown History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1999), Chapter 1.
2. In economically undeveloped societies, each family is generally forced to provide for most of its own basic needs. The division of labor and the specialization it allows are thus rare, leading to inefficient production. Because of this inefficiency, most people (including children) are forced to spend the bulk of their days working, having little time or resources left over for other pursuits. Under such circumstances, mass demand for formal education is nonexistent. It is only after economies are sufficiently advanced to allow considerable leisure time for children, and enjoy greater efficiency and the division of labor, that the population at large can and does demand organized schooling. Because of this reality, the present study is concerned only with societies that have passed the aforementioned economic threshold.  
 A corollary of the previous observation is that the absence of a state-run school system does not imply the existence of a free education market. The European “Dark Ages” had neither educational markets nor state-run educational systems for the masses. Indeed, state-run schooling for the general public has rarely appeared, except where education markets were already well established. For a description of the process by which education markets generally arise, see Andrew J. Coulson, “Can Markets Work?” a paper presented to the Harvard Conference On Rethinking School Governance, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, June 13, 1997.
3. Nila B. Smith, *American Reading Instruction: Its Development and Its Significance in Gaining a Perspective on Current Practices in Reading* (New York: Silver, Burdett, 1934): 222.
4. Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum* (New York: Routledge, 1995): 41.
5. Mitford Mathews, *Teaching to Read, Historically Considered* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966): 136.
6. Charlemagne tried desperately to learn to read and write, by some accounts sleeping with a writing tablet under his pillow, so that he could practice in his few free moments.
7. Coulson, *Market Education*, *op. cit.*, 160–68.
8. Coulson, *op. cit.*, 154–57.

9. Maris A. Vinovskis, *History and Educational Policymaking* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999): 112.
10. Vinovskis, 98. Emphasis added.
11. Coulson, *Market Education*, 154–57. And Engelmann 1992, 5–6.
12. Coulson, *Market Education*, 178. See also Lawrence C. Stedman and Carl F. Kaestle, “Literacy and Reading Performance in the United States from 1880 to the Present,” in *Literacy in the United States: Readers and Reading Since 1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991): 127.
13. Coulson, *Market Education*, 179–81.
14. Petra Lietz, *Changes in Reading Comprehension Across Cultures and Over Time* (Münster: Waxmann, 1996).
15. I. S. Kirsch, L. Jenkins, A. Jungeblut, and A. Kolstad, *Adult Literacy in America* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 1993). Though the racial and/or ethnic composition of the test-taking population changed somewhat in the intervening years, a breakdown of the data shows that both white and Hispanic scores suffered real declines on all three subtests although the scores of blacks were mixed. White scores declined by 9 points on all three subtests. Hispanic scores declined by 20, 10, and 14 points, respectively. And scores for blacks rose by 8 points and 6 points, on the first two tests, respectively, although dropping by 7 points on the last test. The racial and /or ethnic breakdown was 76 percent white, 7 percent Hispanic, and 13 percent black in 1985, and 70 percent white, 15 percent Hispanic, and 11 percent black in 1992. No other racial and/or ethnic breakdowns were provided.
16. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development & Statistics Canada, *Literacy, Economy and Society* (Paris: OECD, 1995): 152–54.
17. David F. Robitaille, “Achievement Comparisons between the First and Second IEA Studies of Mathematics,” *Educational Studies in Mathematics* 21 (1990): 395–414.
18. John P. Keeves and A. Schleicher, “Changes in Science Achievement: 1970–1984,” in *The IEA Study of Science III: Changes in Science Education and Achievement: 1970 to 1984* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1991): 278.
19. Coulson, *Market Education*, 189–90.
20. Harold W. Stevenson and Karen Bartsch, “An Analysis of Japanese and American Textbooks in Mathematics,” in *Japanese Educational Productivity* (Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies of the University of Michigan, 1992): 103–33. Harold W. Stevenson and James W. Stigler, *The Learning Gap* (New York: Touchstone,

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  22. Harnisch, 325, 332–33. Similar figures can be found in Dolly, 2.
  23. K. Kitamura, paraphrased in Harnisch, 323.
  24. T. Sawada and S. Kobayashi, paraphrased in Harnisch, 330. See also Dolly, 18.
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  27. The National Center on the Educational Quality of the Workforce, *The EQW National Employer Survey: First Findings* (Philadelphia: EQW, 1995).
  28. Marisa Katz, “Many High School Grads Lack Job Skills,” *USA Today*, May 28, 1997, D5.
  29. Cited in “Reaching the Next Step,” a paper jointly published by the Human Resources Development Institute of the AFL-CIO and the American Federation of Teachers. Available on the Internet at <http://www.stw.ed.gov/products/600/600.htm>.
  30. Charles J. Sykes, *Dumbing Down Our Kids: Why American Children Feel Good About Themselves but Can’t Read, Write or Add* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995): 22–23.
  31. Gerald Strauss, “Techniques of Indoctrination: The German Reformation,” in *Literacy and Social Development in the West: A Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981): 98.
  32. Coulson, *Market Education*, 86–88.
  33. Stanley M. Elam and Lowell C. Rose, “The 27th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes toward the Public Schools,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, Sept., 1995, 41–56.
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35. Coulson, *Market Education*, 81–82.
36. See Coulson, *Market Education*, Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 7.
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38. Abraham Blinderman, “Medieval Correspondence Education: The Responsa of the Gaonate,” *History of Education Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1969): 471–74.
39. Nancy Kober and Diane Stark Rentner, *Do You Know the Good News about American Education?* (Washington, D.C.: Center on Education Policy and the American Youth Policy Forum, 2000).
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41. Kaufman et al., *Indicators of School Crime*, 44.
42. Kaufman et al., *Indicators of School Crime*, 50.
43. Kaufman et al., *Indicators of School Crime*, 73.
44. Kaufman et al., *Indicators of School Crime*, 30, 72.
45. Kaufman et al., *Indicators of School Crime*, ix.
46. Coulson, *Market Education*, 268.
47. Coulson, *Market Education*, Chapter 6.
48. Coulson, *Market Education*, 276.
49. Coleman considered school systems to be highly segregated if nearly all the students of a given race or ethnicity were concentrated in a few schools, and he considered them integrated if the different races and ethnicities were evenly distributed among all the schools in a given system.
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51. Jay P. Greene, “Integration Where It Counts: A Study of Racial Integration in Public and Private Schools,” paper presented to the American Political Science Association, Boston, September 1998.
52. Janet R. Beales and Thomas F. Bertonneau, “Do Private Schools Serve Difficult-to-Educate Students?” Mackinac Center for Public Policy, 1997.
53. Coulson, *Market Education*, 334.
54. See Bryk, Lee, and Holland, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*. Also, Coulson, *Market Education*, Chapter 8.
55. Frank Smith, *A History of English Elementary Education 1760–1902* (London: University of London Press, 1931): 53.



56. Edward Royle, *Modern Britain, a Social History 1750–1985* (Kent: Edward Arnold, 1990): 351.
57. Alison Prentice, *The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988): 178.
58. Coulson, *Market Education*, Chapter 8.
59. Jay P. Greene, Joseph Giammo, and Nicole Mellow, “The Effect of Private Education on Political Participation, Social Capital, and Tolerance: An Examination of the Latino National Political Survey,” working paper, University of Texas at Austin, 1998, available on-line at [http://www.la.utexas.edu/research/ppc/lmps11\\_4.html](http://www.la.utexas.edu/research/ppc/lmps11_4.html).
60. See Coulson, *Market Education*, Chapter 8.