

April 2011

## How Teachers in Texas Would Benefit from Expanding School Choice

By Joseph L. Bast, Herbert J. Walberg, Ph.D.  
and Bruno Behrend\*

### Introduction

Teacher unions often lead the opposition to legislation that would expand the ability of parents to choose the schools – whether public or private – their children attend.<sup>1</sup> Many observers assume individual teachers also oppose school choice initiatives and that they do so because school choice is somehow against their self-interest.<sup>2</sup> This *Policy Brief* challenges both assumptions.

There are strong theoretical arguments and considerable empirical evidence that professional educators would benefit personally from expanding school choice.

There are strong theoretical arguments and considerable empirical evidence that professional educators would benefit personally from expanding school choice. Assuming it is done in ways that recognize the legitimate interests and concerns of teachers, greater parental choice in education increases demand for good teachers, which in turn leads to higher compensation. More funds get spent in classrooms rather than on management and overhead. Opportunities are created to allow teachers to specialize and to become education entrepreneurs or change careers. More generally, better relations with parents are likely to come from parents choosing schools,

---

\* Joseph Bast is President of The Heartland Institute; Dr. Herbert Walberg is Distinguished Visiting Fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution and serves on the Koret Task Force on K-12 Education; and Bruno Behrend is Director of the Center for School Reform at The Heartland Institute. More complete biographies appear on page 25.

<sup>1</sup> Denis Doyle, "Lessons in Hypocrisy," *The Wall Street Journal*, June 13, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Gintis, "The Political Economy of School Choice," *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 96, No. 3 (Spring 1995), p. 508.

since the act of choosing gives parents a bigger emotional and often financial commitment to the schools their children attend. Students are more likely to be enrolled in schools that can meet their specific needs and interests, rather than in large and impersonal one-size-fits-all institutions.

Most teachers, in short, would benefit from a more open and competitive education industry.

Most teachers, in short, would benefit from a more open and competitive education industry. The teaching profession has as much to gain from increased choice and competition as students do. That is probably why the Association of American Educators

(AAE), the nation's largest non-union teacher organization, supports school choice.<sup>3</sup>

This *Policy Brief* goes beyond proving that public school teachers would benefit from school choice and contends that public school teachers *need* school choice to solve many of the problems that afflict their profession. Public school teachers often must perform under poor working conditions, are increasingly micro-managed by bureaucrats, and have limited job and career opportunities. By some measures, teacher pay has not kept up with the compensation of professionals such as lawyers, architects, and accountants.<sup>4</sup>

While innovation has flourished in other fields, the practice of teaching hasn't seen nearly as many changes. Colleges, for-profit tutoring services, and businesses providing online courses seem to be reaping the benefits of the Internet and other technological advances, leaving teachers behind. Expanding school choice would allow more teachers to take advantage of these new trends.<sup>5</sup>

Efforts to improve teaching careers by working within existing governance and funding traditions have failed, even while greatly driving up the per-pupil cost. The solution doesn't lie in paying consultants to "teach the teachers" new or different skills, or in "computer for every student" initiatives, or even in smaller class sizes. All these things have been tried and none consistently benefits teachers.<sup>6</sup>

Part 1 of this *Policy Brief* explains how school choice benefits public school teachers. Part 2 describes why teachers need school choice in order to solve the problems facing their profession. Part 3 shows how the current system traps teachers in schools that can't meet their needs and in a

---

<sup>3</sup> Gary Beckner, "AAE Is In For School Choice in 2011," Association of American Educators, press release, January 5, 2011, <http://www.aaeteachers.org/index.php/blog/311-aae-is-in-for-school-choice-in-2011>.

<sup>4</sup> Howard Nelson and Rachel Drown, "Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends 2002," American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Herbert Walberg, "Chapter 9, New Technologies" and "Chapter 10, Creative Destruction," in *Advancing Student Achievement* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Diane Ravich, *Left Back: A Century of Battles Over School Reform* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

profession that cannot take advantage of business and technology trends taking place outside of public education. Part 4 briefly describes how some teachers and principals have rebelled successfully against superintendents and school boards in order to do their jobs well. Part 5 reports on growing support among teachers for more school choice, and Part 6 presents a brief recap of the findings.

## 1. How School Choice Benefits Public School Teachers

Proposals to increase parental choice with school vouchers or tax credits would create a more competitive education industry, increasing the number of independent employers and teachers.<sup>7</sup> Schools would have to compete for the best teachers to attract students, and private schools would have the funding to be much more competitive in teacher labor markets than they are today. The result would be a cascade of effects on teachers now working for public schools. Four of the biggest effects on teachers would be higher and more performance-based compensation, better working conditions, more funds spent in the classroom rather than on bureaucracy, and better matching of teachers with students and parents.

Schools would have to compete for the best teachers to attract students.

### A. Higher Compensation Based on Performance

The current organization of public schools puts substantial political oversight and control at the state level and then allows districts to adopt personnel policies affecting all of the schools inside the district's borders. This arrangement eliminates most competition among schools for students (customers) and for personnel. In economics, this situation is called a monopsony (when there is only a single buyer of a good or service) or an oligopsony (only a few buyers).

The lack of competition among schools within districts takes negotiating power away from teachers and puts it in the hands of public school administrators. Districts can hire teachers for less, give them less choice of subjects to teach, workloads, and working conditions, and not worry that good teachers would seek work at schools that offer better terms. Teachers are especially vulnerable to this kind of treatment because they often are their household's second wage-earners, so they are not free to move to another city or state, and because their skills do not qualify them for better-paying employment in other fields.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> For background on the school choice movement, see Paul E. Peterson, ed., *The Future of School Choice* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2003) and Herbert J. Walberg and Joseph L. Bast, *Education and Capitalism* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> See the literature review in John Merrifield, "Monopsony Power in the Market for Teachers," *Journal of Labor Research*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Summer 1999), pp. 377–91.

If parents were genuinely free to choose the schools their children attend, public and private schools would have to compete for every child. Power would shift from district administration to school principals, who would want to recruit and retain the best teachers. They would immediately recognize the need to be more flexible regarding compensation, workload, and work conditions than is possible under current public school policies. School choice would give employers incentives to listen to teachers' needs and adopt policies to suit their needs. This is something no other kind of school reform has ever succeeded in doing.

School choice would give employers incentives to listen to teachers' needs and adopt policies to suit their needs.

How much would teacher compensation increase under a universal school choice system? No current teacher labor market in the United States is as competitive as the market would be under such a system. School systems in other countries, such as Sweden

and South Korea, offer some clues, but comparisons to those countries are of dubious value due to cultural differences.<sup>9</sup>

Private schools – which enroll 11 percent of K-12 students nationwide and less than 8 percent in Texas<sup>10</sup> – offer a very incomplete view of how teachers might fare. Private schools today are overwhelmingly nonprofit and most are affiliated with churches. The severe financial constraints under which they operate force them to offer salaries and benefits lower than those offered by most public schools. For example, in 2007–08, the average private school teacher was paid a base salary of \$36,300 compared to \$49,600 for a public school teacher.<sup>11</sup> (Still, private schools can tell us what work conditions might look like in a reformed public school system – the subject of the next section.)

If we want empirical evidence of how teacher compensation would fare under a system of universal school choice, we need to extrapolate from data on the effects of more limited types of public school choice. Competition among public school districts is usually weak because parents need to sell their homes and buy new ones in order to change the schools their children attend, but it is relatively stronger when districts are smaller. The presence of charter schools also can provide a small amount of school choice.

---

<sup>9</sup> F. Mikael Sandstrom and Fredrik Bergstrom, "School Vouchers in Practice: Competition Won't Hurt You!" *Working Paper* No. 578, Research Institute of Industrial Economics, Stockholm, April 30, 2002; Randall K. Filer and Daniel Munich, "Responses of Private and Public Schools to Voucher Funding: The Czech and Hungarian Experience," *Working Papers* from the Center for Economic Research and Graduate Education, Economics Institute, 2000; Herbert J. Walberg, *School Choice: The Findings* (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Bruce D. Baker, "Private Schooling in the U.S.: Expenditures, Supply, and Policy Implications," Education and the Public Interest Center, University of Colorado at Boulder, and Education Policy Research Unit, Arizona State University, July 2009, p. 16, Figure 2. The author cites "U.S. census and American Community survey Data from <http://www.ipums.org>."

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Characteristics of Public, Private, and Bureau of Indian Education Elementary and Secondary Teachers in the United States: Results from the 2007-08 Schools and Staffing Survey* (NCES 2009-324).

Scholars who studied the effects of monopsony and oligopsony on teacher compensation have found small but significant effects.<sup>12</sup> For example, Merrifield, in research published in the *Journal of Labor Research* in 1999, tested the hypothesis using data from 118 school districts in 48 counties in Texas.<sup>13</sup> He calculated each district's share of the teachers within a 25-mile radius, the share of the largest district within 25 miles, and three additional similar variables, and then used standard regression analysis to determine the degree to which these measures of competition correlated with differences in teacher compensation.

After controlling for other factors, Merrifield found a small but positive correlation between competition and teacher compensation: Average salaries fell by about a tenth of 1 percent for every 10 percent increase in a district's share of teachers in its county. This may sound like a very small effect, but adding even a single additional employment option in a monopoly school district drops a district's share by 50 percent and could raise teacher salaries by half a percent. Universal school choice, by directing public funds to individual schools rather than to school districts, would increase radically the number of employers competing to hire teachers. According to Merrifield, having 100 schools competing for teachers instead of three districts or a single district would raise a teacher's annual salary in 1990–91 by \$1,341 in the first case and \$1,754 in the second. In inflation-adjusted dollars, that would be pay raises of approximately \$2,173 and \$2,843 today.

Universal school choice, by directing public funds to individual schools rather than to school districts, would radically increase the number of employers competing to hire teachers.

Teachers living in rural areas and unwilling to relocate would have fewer than 100 schools competing to hire them, but those living in metropolitan areas would have even more choices. The Houston Independent School District, for example, has 298 public schools, and the Houston area has more than 300 private schools.<sup>14</sup> Teachers in Houston would have approximately 600 schools competing to hire them, and this is *before* news of the availability of vouchers attracted charter school management companies and other entrepreneurs to open new schools in the area. Universal school choice could lead to average pay raises for Houston public school teachers of \$12,000 or more.

---

<sup>12</sup> M.V. Borland and R.M. Howsen, "Student Achievement and the Degree of Market Concentration in Education," *Economics of Education Review*, Vol. 11 (1992), pp. 31–9; Richard Vedder and J. Hall, "Private School Competition and Public School Teacher Salaries," *Journal of Labor Research*, Vol. 21 (2000), pp. 162–8.

<sup>13</sup> Merrifield, *supra* note 8. It turns out that Texas is an ideal state to test the relationship between competition and public school teacher compensation because the state doesn't have collective bargaining for teachers, which results in greater variety in teacher pay among districts. The state also keeps detailed information about the age, education, and tenure of public school teachers, which allows these variables to be controlled in regression analysis.

<sup>14</sup> See HoustonAreaWeb.com, "Houston Private Schools," [http://www.houstonareaweb.com/private\\_schools/](http://www.houstonareaweb.com/private_schools/). Last visited February 16, 2011.

More recently, in a 2010 issue of *Economic Inquiry*, University of Texas A&M's Lori Taylor reported the results of her study of the effects of oligopoly power on teacher salaries in Texas.<sup>15</sup> Taylor used data from more than 335,000 Texas teachers and a market concentration index based on the sum of squared enrollment shares for all private schools and public school districts in the 67 Core Based Statistical Areas (CBSAs) that are considered distinct labor markets by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. She found "a significant – and nonlinear – relationship between market concentration and teacher salaries. Wages fall as market concentration rises – but only up to a point."

Universal school choice could lead to average pay raises for Houston public school teachers of \$12,000 or more.

Taylor found that at high levels of concentration, wages no longer fell and began to rise, evidence that teachers were benefiting from the public schools' near-monopoly position in those areas. However, she found that "more than 88% of the teachers with less

than 20 years of experience would benefit from increased competition. Seventy-nine percent of the highly experienced teachers would also benefit. Only 2% of beginning teachers, 5% of experienced teachers, and 6% of highly experienced teachers would expect increased competition to lower their pay."<sup>16</sup>

In conclusion, there is evidence that school choice would increase compensation levels for most teachers in Texas. This is dramatically at odds with what teacher unions and other anti-voucher advocates are telling teachers.

## **B. Better Working Conditions**

More competition among public and private schools also would produce better working conditions for teachers, since employers would have to improve working conditions to recruit and retain better teachers. Currently, public school teachers who run afoul of key administrators often have only unattractive alternatives. Termination usually is unlikely, but administrators can make teachers miserable. It may take a change of residence or a long commute to work in another school district. The only other choices are to take a private school position if one can be found, take a nonteaching job, or leave the labor force.

With broad-based school choice expansion, more teachers would apply directly to the campuses where they want to work, thereby increasing teacher mobility and location choice and reducing teacher vulnerability to arbitrary or personal administrative decisions. Teachers in regions with few school districts (including some single district, large urban areas) need such changes the most.

---

<sup>15</sup> Lori Taylor, "Competition and Teacher Pay," *Economic Inquiry*, Vol. 48 No. 3 (July 2010), pp. 603–20.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 619.

Evidence that competition and choice improve working conditions for teachers comes from the experience of teachers in private schools. As mentioned in the previous section, the small private school marketplace is starved for funding and unable to match the pay scales offered by public schools, but they compete with one another and with public schools for the best teachers, and this competition has had dramatic effects on the working conditions they offer.

Despite the fact that most private schools spend about half as much per student as public schools do,<sup>17</sup> they report smaller class sizes in elementary schools (18.1 students per class vs. 20.3).<sup>18</sup> Comparisons between public and private schools are sometimes criticized on grounds that private schools enroll smaller percentages of black and Hispanic students than do public schools, and those students are more difficult or more expensive to educate. However, the differences in enrollment have diminished over the years and many private schools have large or even entirely minority enrollments.<sup>19</sup>

Evidence that competition and choice improve working conditions for teachers comes from the experience of teachers in private schools.

Private school teachers consistently report higher levels of satisfaction with their working conditions. Greg Forster and Christian D’Andrea recently analyzed data from the 2007–2008 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS),<sup>20</sup> a national survey of teachers and principals conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, to compare what private and public school teachers say about their working conditions.<sup>21</sup> This is the most authoritative national survey of teacher opinions available, conducted by the U.S. government, and not merely anecdotal evidence or the authors’ opinions. Because their findings are so pertinent to this report, we quote Forster and D’Andrea at length below.

Concerning student discipline and violence in the classroom, Forster and D’Andrea found:

- “Public school teachers are much more likely to report that student misbehavior (37 percent v. 21 percent) or tardiness and class cutting (33 percent v. 17 percent) disrupt their classes,

---

<sup>17</sup> Jay P. Greene, *Education Myths: What Special-Interest Groups Want You to Believe About Our Schools and Why it Isn’t So* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Department of Education, *supra* note 11.

<sup>19</sup> “The racial and ethnic composition of students enrolled in public schools was 58 percent non-Hispanic White, 20 percent Hispanic (regardless of race), 16 percent non-Hispanic Black, 4 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent American Indian/Alaska Native. Among private schools, the racial and ethnic composition was 74 percent non-Hispanic White, 10 percent non-Hispanic Black, 9 percent Hispanic (regardless of race), 6 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent American Indian/Alaska Native.” *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, “Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS),” <http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/>, last visited February 16, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Greg Forster and Christian D’Andrea, *Free to Teach: What America’s Teachers Say About Teaching in Public and Private Schools* (Indianapolis, IN: The Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, 2009).

and are four times more likely to say student violence is a problem on at least a monthly basis (48 percent v. 12 percent).”

- “Nearly one in five public school teachers has been physically threatened by a student, compared to only one in twenty private school teachers (18 percent v. 5 percent). Nearly one in ten public school teachers has been physically attacked by a student, three times the rate in private schools (9 percent v. 3 percent).”

Teachers in private schools also report having much more authority over how and what they teach and more support to do their job well.

- “One in eight public school teachers reports that physical conflicts among students occur every day; only one in 50 private school teachers says the same (12 percent v. 2 percent).”

Teachers in private schools also report having much more authority over how and what they teach and more support to do their job well:

- “Private school teachers are much more likely to have a great deal of control over selection of textbooks and instructional materials (53 percent v. 32 percent) and content, topics, and skills to be taught (60 percent v. 36 percent).”
- “Private school teachers are much more likely to have a great deal of influence on performance standards for students (40 percent v. 18 percent), curriculum (47 percent v. 22 percent), and discipline policy (25 percent v. 13 percent).”
- “Private school teachers are much more likely to strongly agree that they have all the textbooks and supplies they need (67 percent v. 41 percent).”

In light of these differences in the experiences and opinions of public and private school teachers, it is hardly surprising that private school teachers are much happier with their teaching careers and plan to stay in the classroom longer than their public school counterparts. According to Forster and D’Andrea,

- “Public school teachers are twice as likely as private school teachers to agree that the stress and disappointments they experience at their schools are so great that teaching there isn’t really worth it (13 percent v. 6 percent), and private school teachers are much more likely to say they will continue teaching as long as they are able (62 percent v. 44 percent).”
- “Public school teachers are much more likely to say they’ll leave teaching as soon as they are eligible for retirement (33 percent v. 12 percent), and they would immediately leave teaching if a higher paying job were available (20 percent v. 12 percent).”

The lesson from private schools is very clear: Competition among schools dramatically improves working conditions for teachers.

### C. More Funding in the Classroom

One of the most effective ways to increase the number of teachers who are hired and their average compensation is to ensure that more of the tax dollars raised to support public education reach teachers in the classroom. Schools in a competitive environment cannot afford to waste money on bureaucracy and other things that don't make their way to classrooms. Administrators have a strong incentive to cut spending on bureaucracy and consultants in order to compete for students and the best teachers.

The current school funding system is responsible for diverting huge amounts of money away from teachers and the classroom. According to the U.S. Department of Education, Texas spent about \$47.8 billion on K-12 education in 2007–2008, but *less than half* that amount, \$23.3 billion, was spent on “instruction.”<sup>22</sup> The number of nonteaching personnel working for the Texas public schools, 316,392, is nearly equal to the number of teachers, 327,905.<sup>23</sup>

Schools in a competitive environment cannot afford to waste money on bureaucracy and other things that don't make their way to classrooms.

Everyone realizes that schools have to spend money on buildings, janitors, transporting students, cafeteria food, and more, but how many parents (or teachers) realize that less than half of the money spent on public schools goes to pay teachers? Or, that nonteaching personnel are coming close to out-numbering teachers? And if a group of teachers were to start a school, would they devote half of their personnel budget to nonteaching staff? Almost certainly not.

The Texas Education Agency's Division of Performance Reporting says the state of Texas spends about 64 percent of its money in the classroom and only 3.1 percent on “Central Administration.”<sup>24</sup> However, “Instructional-Related Services,” “Instructional Leadership,” “School Leadership,” and “Support Services–Student” seem to be categories created to make administrative expenses appear to be directed at the classroom, when in fact they are administrative overhead.

The overall Texas state average and the numbers for large districts indicate only about 60 percent of the budget goes directly to the classroom. The Houston school budget for 2010–2011, for example, allocates \$922,727,308 of its \$1,533,283,489 for “instruction,” representing about 60 percent of the budget.

---

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, “State Education Data Profiles,” <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/stateprofiles/sresult.asp?mode=short&s1=48>, last visited February 16, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Common Core of Data (CCD), State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education, 1986-87 v.1c, 2008-09 v.1c*.

<sup>24</sup> Texas Education Agency's Division of Performance Reporting, “Academic Excellence Indicator System, 2009-10 State Profile Report,” Section II, p. 3, <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/perfreport/aeis/2010/state.pdf>.

Once again, private schools offer a glimpse of how a universal school choice program would send more money to teachers and less to nonteaching staff and overhead. Seventy-two percent of employees of private schools in Arizona, for example, are teachers, whereas teachers make up fewer than half of the employees of public schools.<sup>25</sup> According to education analyst Andrew Coulson, “Arizona public schools would have to hire roughly 25,000 more teachers and dismiss 21,210 non-teaching employees” to rival the private sector.<sup>26</sup>

Unlike the current public school financing system, one school’s or one teacher’s gain would not come at the expense of a different school or teacher.

Another reason school choice would mean more money in classrooms is because schools in a competitive education industry would not have externally imposed budget caps. Classroom achievements that please parents would increase enrollments and budgets, thereby raising teachers’ market value.

Unlike the current public school financing system, one school’s or one teacher’s gain would not come at the expense of a different school or teacher, provided that the school choice program allows parents to add to the value of the vouchers or scholarships they receive. The pie grows as parents are satisfied and are willing to invest more in a service they like.

Teachers, along with students, parents, and taxpayers, would benefit if a school choice program were to *change the incentives* of school administrators so that some of the money that now goes to bureaucracy and nonteaching personnel went to teachers instead. This is already happening in private schools, where money is scarce and competition is keen. Teachers should support school choice because they stand to reap big rewards from the efficiency gains that choice is likely to bring about.

#### **D. Better Matching of Teachers, Students, and Parents**

When parental choice, rather than geographic assignment, determines which school a child attends, the odds of good matches among teachers, students, and parents are greatly increased. Different parents are attracted to different schools for many reasons, including past experiences (good or bad), their special familiarity with their children’s learning strengths and weaknesses, knowledge of the neighborhood, and experiences of friends and relatives. Appealing features of a school might include test scores, curriculum, charismatic teachers and principals, and a host of other factors, some of them definable and measurable and many of them not.

Satisfied and engaged parents can make a big difference in a student’s academic achievement. Students spend about 92 percent of their time outside school, so even small changes in whether or how families support learning can easily outweigh changes that take place in classrooms. If

---

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Coulson, *Arizona Public and Private Schools: A Statistical Analysis*, *Goldwater Institute Policy Report #213*, October 17, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

school choice made parents feel good about their child's education and the child noticed it, and if this happened year after year over 12 years of schooling, the effect could easily outweigh many of the variables for which social scientists test in educational research.<sup>27</sup>

Much of the frustration felt by public school teachers today comes from attempting to teach classrooms filled with children with widely different levels of preparation, motivation, and ability. This is because the only thing the students have in common is *where they live*, which is educationally irrelevant. The current system of assigning students to schools based on the addresses of their homes comes to us from the pre-automobile and pre-Internet era, when getting a student to a school was a bigger concern than making sure that school was the best fit for the student's needs. In most areas and for most families, transportation is no longer the overriding concern.

Much of the frustration felt by public school teachers today comes from attempting to teach classrooms filled with children with different levels of preparation, motivation, and ability.

The best curriculum, teaching methods, and teachers differ depending on the background, interests, and skills of students. While this seems obvious, it means there is simply no way a public school system based on geographic assignment to neighborhood public schools can match students with the teachers who are best for them. Our understanding of how students learn has advanced as fast and as far as our means of travel and the resources we are willing to make available to educate children. Only the organization of our schools has remained frozen in time.

School choice allows for the grouping of students by their interest in subjects, learning styles, and aspirations as well as their parents' interests and concerns. This sorting process is what occurs in many other areas of our lives, determining everything from who attends movies and concerts to choices of spouses, homes, careers, and lifestyles. A competitive education system would look more like all the other institutions in our lives, and less like a remnant from a past era when freedom of choice and mobility were less common.

In a competitive education system, everyone in a classroom would be "on the same page," sharing interests, talents, and preparation, so the curriculum and pace of instruction wouldn't have to be "dumbed down" to the slowest or least-prepared student in the room. Some teachers would become education entrepreneurs, starting schools of their own that are smaller and more focused on the needs of students than the large and impersonal institutions where they now work.<sup>28</sup> Teachers would be free to specialize in teaching students with specific needs, and to the

---

<sup>27</sup> See Herbert Walberg, *Advancing Student Achievement* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2010), p. 44; Caroline Hoxby, "If Families Matter Most, Where Do Schools Come In?" in Terry M. Moe, ed., *A Primer on America's Schools* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2001). As Hoxby points out, 10 percent of 90 percent is nearly twice as much as 50 percent of 10 percent, so a 10 percent improvement in learning at home would be greater than even an improbable 50 percent increase in school effectiveness.

<sup>28</sup> Richard K. Vedder, "Can Teachers Own Their Own Schools," Independence Institute *Policy Report*, 2000.

extent they succeed, their classroom performance would improve.

A free-market education system seems likely to be populated by smaller schools appealing to parents who realize their children have specific needs and interests. No doubt this prospect raises questions about how much diversity in schools the public is prepared to accept and how or whether to require the teaching of a common core of knowledge. These problems can be overcome. Many cities and states that have school choice programs have addressed them successfully, allowing for more customization of services.<sup>29</sup>

Parents' freedom to choose among diverse offerings will free schools and teachers to specialize in what they are best at.

Parents' freedom to choose among diverse offerings will free schools and teachers to specialize in what they are best at. Schools of choice differ according to teaching styles, use of technology, governance structure, and subject emphasis. Some focus on students with specific special needs. Teachers enjoy

increased productivity because they work in the types of schools best suited to their particular skills and interests, and because they teach children matched to their interests and instructional style.

By enabling teachers to find the students and parents who share their educational philosophy and need their special skills, school choice can make teaching a pleasure instead of a chore for many teachers. As the SASS results cited earlier show, teachers in private schools that already provide some of this sorting are much more likely to enjoy their work, want to keep working, and aren't looking for other kinds of work. This may be the biggest of all the benefits that school choice gives teachers.

## 2. Why Teachers Need School Choice

Not only would teachers benefit from school choice, but they need it to solve the problems facing their profession. The status quo for teachers is unsustainable. Millions of teachers are unhappy in their current positions, and the financial and management model they find themselves in is increasingly dysfunctional. Something has to change, and soon.

Frederick M. Hess, a former teacher and currently director of education studies at the American Enterprise Institute, recently summarized the work conditions of most public school teachers:

Teachers are hired, essentially for life, through drawn-out recruiting processes that pay little attention to merit and alienate many highly qualified candidates. Little or nothing

---

<sup>29</sup> John Merrifield, "The Twelve Policy Approaches to Increased School Choice," *Journal of School Choice*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (2008), pp. 4–19; and Andrew Campanella, Malcom Glenn, and Lauren Perry, *Hope for America's Children, School Choice Yearbook 2010–11* (Washington, DC: Alliance for School Choice, 2011).

about teachers' or administrators' performance affects their career prospects or job security. Educators who propose new approaches or new efficiencies are treated with suspicion by district officials and must run a gauntlet of official and cultural resistance in order to try anything new. There is little systemic recognition for excellent educators, while pay, perks, and assignments are distributed primarily on the basis of longevity. The result is a culture of public schooling in which educators learn to keep their heads down, play defense, and avoid causing waves.<sup>30</sup>

Linda Darling-Hammond, a professor at Stanford University's School of Education, and Gary Sykes, a professor at Michigan State University's School of Education, described the challenges teachers face in similar terms. Hiring and retaining good teachers, they write, is handicapped by "disparities in pay and working conditions, interstate barriers to teachers' mobility, inadequate recruitment incentives, bureaucratic hiring systems that discourage qualified applicants, transfer policies that can slow hiring and allocate staff inequitably, and financial incentives to hire cheaper, less qualified teachers."<sup>31</sup>

Not only would teachers benefit from school choice, but they need it to solve the problems facing their profession.

Darling-Hammond and Sykes go on to point out that more than 30 percent of new teachers leave the profession within five years, and that this churning "results in a constant influx of inexperienced teachers" caused by "insufficient preparation and support of new teachers, poor working conditions, and uncompetitive salaries."<sup>32</sup>

Teachers "are among the true culture heroes of our time," writes Parker Palmer in the foreword to the tenth anniversary edition of his classic book, *The Courage to Teach*.<sup>33</sup> "Daily they must deal with children who have been damaged by social pathologies that no one else has the will to cure. Daily they are berated by politicians, the public, and the press for their alleged inadequacies and failures. And daily they return to their classrooms, opening their hearts and minds in hopes of helping children do the same."<sup>34</sup>

Joseph F. Murphy, the associate dean at Peabody College, Vanderbilt University and a former public school administrator at the school, district, and state levels, writes: "Conditions of

---

<sup>30</sup> Frederick M. Hess, *Common Sense School Reform* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Linda Darling-Hammond and Gary Sykes, "A Teacher Supply Policy for Education: How to Meet the 'Highly Qualified Teacher' Challenge," Chapter 7 in Noel Epstein, ed., *Who's in Charge Here? The Tangled Web of School Governance and Policy* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press/Education Commission of the States, 2004), pp. 165–6.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Parker Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey-Bass, 1998, revised ed. 2007), p. xii.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

employment [within the current system] for teachers are unprofessional and stifling.”<sup>35</sup> These conditions are leading to an epidemic of teacher burnout. Anthony Dworkin at the University of Houston, a leading authority on this subject, writes:

School reform in the United States as it impacts teachers has followed three waves since 1983: legislated standardization and competency testing, decentralization and site-based decision-making, and high-stakes testing with accountability. Teacher burnout data collected during each of the waves is compared with data collected prior to the reforms. Each wave exacerbated teacher burnout.<sup>36</sup>

There is compelling empirical evidence that teacher dissatisfaction and burnout are mostly public school phenomena.

Dworkin notes elsewhere that most of the burned-out teachers stay in their jobs because they lack comparable career opportunities.<sup>37</sup> Dworkin concluded a recent assessment of burnout with this statement: “As a response to job stress and related to a sense of meaninglessness and powerlessness, burnout

is a malady of human service professionals who are denied professional autonomy, status, and respect.”<sup>38</sup>

The comparisons of public and private school teachers’ attitudes, presented earlier, showed compelling empirical evidence that teacher dissatisfaction and burnout are mostly public school phenomena. Forster and D’Andrea write:

Private school teachers consistently report having better working conditions than public school teachers across a wide variety of measurements. Most prominently, private schools provide teachers with more classroom autonomy, a more supportive school climate, and better student discipline. It appears that the dysfunctions of the government school system – long evident in mediocre educational outcomes – are a problem for teachers as well as for students.<sup>39</sup>

Even the SASS understates the depth and range of teacher dissatisfaction with school conditions because it cannot include the opinions of those teachers who quit during their first five years on

---

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Murphy, *The Privatization of Schooling* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 1996), p. 151.

<sup>36</sup> A. Gary Dworkin, “Perspectives on Teacher Burnout and School Reform,” *International Education Journal* Vol 2, No 2, 2001, p. 69, <http://ehlt.flinders.edu.au/education/iej/articles/v2n2/dworkin/paper.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup> Anthony Gary Dworkin, “Coping with Reform: The Intermix of Teacher Morale, Teacher Burnout, and Teacher Accountability,” in Bruce J. Biddle, Thomas L. Good, and Ivor F. Goodson, eds., *International Handbook of Teachers and Teaching*, Part One (Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), chapter 13.

<sup>38</sup> Dworkin, *supra* note 36, p. 76.

<sup>39</sup> Forster and D’Andrea, *supra* note 21.

the job. The survey-takers are those who remain public school teachers despite all the problems they face. Can you imagine how much worse the survey results would be if they included teachers who had quit in frustration?

Dale Ballou and Michael Podgursky, authors of numerous studies on teacher pay and working conditions, found that private schools had no difficulty filling openings despite paying lower wages.<sup>40</sup> Salary differentials for similar teachers are a good measure of a large number of teachers' willingness to sacrifice income for better working conditions. A teacher working at a charter school told Hugh Pearson, "I'd rather teach here than in the public schools because I have a lot more latitude in what I teach, and how I teach it."<sup>41</sup>

A survey of Indianapolis nonpublic school teachers found widespread awareness of the poor working conditions of the public schools.<sup>42</sup> Only about 20 percent, mostly younger teachers, said they would accept jobs in a suburban public school. Only 10 percent of the veteran teachers would take a higher-paying job in a "good" suburban public school.

"Teachers are in a virtual state of panic, caught between crushing district mandates and the need to raise standardized test scores," reported a letter-writer to *Education Week*.

A long-time Milwaukee teacher wrote in 1994, "Very common are teachers who at one time were good, but after years of bureaucratic nonsense and dwindling morale, do not much like their job anymore."<sup>43</sup> A 1997 San Antonio *Express-News* Sunday Insight section, titled "Schoolhouse Blues," described the same feelings among teachers and administrators in Texas.<sup>44</sup> The authors noted that constantly changing programs create panic, low morale, and burnout. "Teachers are in a virtual state of panic, caught between crushing district mandates and the need to raise standardized test scores," reported a letter-writer to *Education Week* in 1998.<sup>45</sup>

Note that these quotations are dated prior to 2001, the year the No Child Left Behind Act was passed, which increased the use of standardized tests. Lisa Singleton-Rickman reported in a 2009 article titled "Teacher Dropout Rate Higher Than Students" that "with stricter-than-ever accountability laws through the federal No Child Left Behind and significantly more paperwork,

---

<sup>40</sup> Dale Ballou and Michael Podgursky, *Teacher Pay and Teacher Quality* (Kalamazoo, MI: Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, 1997).

<sup>41</sup> Hugh Pearson, "An Urban Push for Self-Reliance," *The Wall Street Journal*, February 7, 1996.

<sup>42</sup> William Styring, "Teachers and School Choice," *American Outlook*, Spring 1998, pp. 49–51.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Fischer, "A Betrayal of Teachers by Their Union," *Wisconsin Interest*, Fall/Winter 1994, p. 35.

<sup>44</sup> Bill MacWhithey, "Good Teachers Tired of Battling the System," *San Antonio Express-News*, June 1, 1997, p. 1J.

<sup>45</sup> Denis Udall, Letter to the Editor, *Education Week*, July 8, 1998, pp. 41, 43.

teachers suffer burnout more quickly than they did 10 years ago.”<sup>46</sup>

Students sense that their teachers are not happy and are not respected. A growing number of young people are saying to themselves, “When I grow up, I don’t think I want to be a teacher.”<sup>47</sup> This, perhaps more than any of the survey data, is evidence that the current system is unsustainable.

All of these professional opinions, survey data, and anecdotes point to the fact that the current system of recruiting, paying, and managing teachers is deeply flawed. It is frustrating countless good teachers, forcing principals to tolerate poor performance by mediocre teachers, and damaging millions of children. Expanding school choice wouldn’t only *benefit* teachers, it would *rescue them* from a system that makes success in the classroom almost impossible.

### 3. Why Teachers Are Trapped

Some advocates for teachers say the current system can be changed, that teachers have influence and power to make improvements, and that school choice isn’t necessary to rescue them from an admittedly bad situation. Such advocates may be sincere, but they are wrong.

The present public education system fails to provide teachers with the tools and freedom they need to do their jobs well.

Today’s public school teachers, satisfied or not, are trapped in a bureaucracy-based system with layers of dysfunctional and cross-purposed mandates that make the system beyond the reach of reform. Attempts at change are eventually absorbed by the entrenched interests and processes of the

existing system. School choice is their only way out.

The present public education system fails to provide teachers with the tools and freedom they need to do their jobs well. They lack opportunities to specialize in what they do best and move easily into different careers. Teaching credentials have little value outside teaching, so teachers forfeit much of their investment in their professional skills if they leave teaching.

Except in areas like math and science, the significant investments in teaching skills that most teachers have made have little value outside of teaching. So teachers find it difficult to leave the schools they hate, but staying isn’t very fulfilling, either. Most principals aren’t able to hire the teachers they want or to fire under-performing teachers without going through long and expensive legal procedures, but they can make life miserable for those teachers on their staffs

---

<sup>46</sup> Lisa Singleton-Rickman, “Teacher dropout rate higher than students,” TimesDaily.com, February 22, 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Paula M. Evans, “When I Grow Up, I Don’t Think I Want to Be a Teacher,” *Education Week*, June 2, 1999, p. 31.

who they want to see gone. When the teacher is under-performing, the result is the infamous “dance of the lemons,” which Peter Schweizer, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and former consultant to NBC News, described in a 1999 essay:

Often, as a way to save time and money, an administrator will cut a deal with the union in which he agrees to give a bad teacher a satisfactory rating in return for union help in transferring the teacher to another district. The problem teacher gets quietly passed along to someone else. Administrators call it “the dance of the lemons” or “passing the trash.”<sup>48</sup>

School choice would allow teachers and principals to choose or not choose each other, to work together as a team or admit it can’t be done and go their separate ways. This choice, which would be robust and mutually rewarding in a competitive education system, is impossible in current public school systems. Teachers have nowhere else to go, and principals have no choices either. Both are trapped.

Principals can make life miserable for those teachers on their staffs who they want to see gone.

What about compensation? Ambitious, fairness-conscious teachers resent that they earn no more than the least competent and laziest member of the faculty. Ballou and Podgursky say there is “no other profession where compensation and contract renewal are so largely divorced from evaluations of performance as they are in public school teaching.”<sup>49</sup> A single salary schedule determines how much most school employees, both teachers and educational support personnel, are paid. The salary schedule is based on two criteria: experience and training.

In the current system, even the rare teacher salary incentives when they exist are a mixed blessing. They can motivate innovation and spur creativity, but they also can create tension among teachers.<sup>50</sup> Increased productivity doesn’t raise a public school’s merit pay funding or total budget. More money for one teacher can mean less for others. Since someone else’s good evaluation can be bad for them, teachers become more reluctant to share ideas and materials, praise their colleagues, or work in teams.

Nor can public school teachers find peace and happiness in their own classrooms. Political and administrative processes distort textbook content and micro-manage teaching methods and the curriculum, often through insulting “teacher-proof” materials.<sup>51</sup> The public school teacher is the

---

<sup>48</sup> Peter Schweizer, “The Dance of the Lemons,” *Hoover Digest*, Hoover Institution, January 30, 1999.

<sup>49</sup> Ballou and Podgursky, *supra* note 40, p. 81.

<sup>50</sup> Anthony Gary Dworkin and Merrill Townsend, “Teacher Burnout in the Face of Reform: Some Caveats in Breaking the Mold,” chapter 6 in Bruce A. Jones and Kathryn M. Borman, eds., *Investing in U.S. Schools: Directions for Educational Policy* (New York, NY: Ablex Publishing Company, 1994).

<sup>51</sup> Anthony Gary Dworkin, *Teacher Burnout in the Public Schools* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1987), p. 15; Diane Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1983), p. 233; Robert Chase, “Changing the Way Schools Do Business,” *Vital Speeches*, May 1, 1998, p. 444.

“victim of job reduction and job simplification, prescriptive laws, the growing specter of legal liability and malpractice suits, and seniority rules,” says Dworkin.<sup>52</sup>

G. Carl Ball and Steven Goldman, writing in *Phi Delta Kappan*, lament that teachers have no control over policies that determine textbooks, course content, and even the style by which information is delivered.<sup>53</sup> Longtime AFT President Albert Shanker agreed that teachers had little say in policies, books, standards, or curriculum.<sup>54</sup>

Teachers have no control over policies that determine textbooks, course content, and even the style by which information is delivered.

Recent reforms haven't given teachers more power over their working conditions or careers. The trend has been in the opposite direction. “Ever since *A Nation at Risk* appeared in the early 1980s, schools have responded by evolving ... into institutions that prescribe top down management control of

every aspect of the teaching process,” read an unsigned letter to the editor of *Teacher Magazine* in 1995.<sup>55</sup>

In 2004, Tiffany Parker, a principal in the Rockford, Illinois school system, continued to use a proven curriculum rather than use a newer one chosen by the district bureaucracy. Despite clear evidence of the superiority of her approach, she was relieved of her duties as principal.<sup>56</sup>

William S. King, writing in *Phi Delta Kappan* in 1996, wrote: “While reformers lip-sync homilies about creativity, empowerment, and involvement, they institute reforms that empower bureaucracies, reduce teachers to paraprofessionals, and marginalize parents.”<sup>57</sup>

Policymakers, Paula Evans wrote in 1997, “want teachers to become technicians who will be able to follow directions very well.”<sup>58</sup> In almost every state, she writes, “education reform has had the effect of removing management of the classroom to the highest state levels. In most instances, the legislatures have micro-managed the school districts, campuses and classrooms.”<sup>59</sup> Each so-called reform increased teachers' paperwork and frustration.

---

<sup>52</sup> Dworkin, *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> G. Carl Ball and Steven Goldman, “Improving Education's Productivity,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, November 1997, p. 230; also Dworkin, *supra* note 51, p. 69.

<sup>54</sup> Albert Shanker on *Jim Lehrer News Hour*, August 22, 1996.

<sup>55</sup> *Teacher Magazine*, unsigned letter to the editor, November/December 1995.

<sup>56</sup> Carrie Watters, “Approach to Reading Argued,” *Rockford Register Star*, January 16, 2005.

<sup>57</sup> William S. King, “A Simpler Conclusion,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, Vol. 78, No. 2 (October 1996), p. 180.

<sup>58</sup> Evans, *supra* note 47, p. 31.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

Once again, Texas has not escaped these inflictions. According to Dworkin and Merrill Townsend, “Texas is implementing site-based management, but the mandate involves micro-management of this implementation at higher levels. The effect has been a greater sense of powerlessness among teachers.”<sup>60</sup>

All this means teachers are not able to rescue themselves or their profession from what the public school monopoly is doing to them. The inability of parents to choose, and the resulting inability of school administrators to exercise real management authority or teachers to act as true professionals, creates the bars of a cage that traps all three groups. This situation is widely and correctly blamed for much of the teacher burnout phenomenon.<sup>61</sup>

Can’t parents and teachers work together to solve this problem? Many teachers say they would forgo substantial raises if it meant they’d never have to speak to a parent again.<sup>62</sup> And yet, among the flood of people leaving teaching, many cite lack of support from parents as a major cause for their decision.<sup>63</sup> How can they expect the support of people they never want to speak to again?

The incentives created by the current public education funding and management system make it impossible for teachers to improve their condition. Many things have been tried, but teachers continue to lose power, respect, and the support they need. School choice would reach deeply into the roots of the problems teachers face. It would end the tension between teachers and principals, teachers and other teachers, and teachers and parents. It would literally set teachers free. And it is the only reform that can accomplish this.

The incentives created by the current public education funding and management system make it impossible for teachers to improve their condition.

#### 4. Teachers and Principals Who Rebel

This section may be a slight (but brief) detour or digression, but we want to acknowledge those teachers and principals who have succeeded in breaking out of the cage of the education status quo. They are genuine heroes who are overcoming enormous odds and deserve our thanks.

David Kearns and Denis Doyle found, “superb teachers share a trait not widely talked about:

---

<sup>60</sup> Dworkin and Townsend, *supra* note 50, p. 77.

<sup>61</sup> J. Stoeber and D. Rennert, “Perfectionism in school teachers: Relations with stress appraisals, coping styles, and burnout,” *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping*, 2008.

<sup>62</sup> S.B. Sarason, *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform - Can We Change Course Before It's Too Late?* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey Bass, 1990), pp 25–6.

<sup>63</sup> Jameelah Abdallah, “Lowering Teacher Attrition Rates through Collegiality,” *Academic Leadership Live Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Winter 2009).

they are canny outlaws, system beaters, and creative and responsible rule benders. They have to be because to succeed in most districts – especially the large ones – the deck is stacked against the creative, imaginative, and entrepreneurial teacher.”<sup>64</sup>

They are genuine heroes who are overcoming enormous odds and deserve our thanks.

Teachers often have to break the rules to exploit readily apparent opportunities to better educate the diverse, random sample of same-age neighborhood children they find sitting in their classrooms. They must endure fear of exposure and punishment and expend

time and energy to hide their efforts and misrepresent their work. G. Carl Ball and Steven Goldman, education productivity research analysts, found that “an excellent teacher who rocks the boat can receive poorer evaluations than less competent but ‘safe’ teachers.”<sup>65</sup>

“A majority of public school teachers responding to a series of surveys conducted in Houston between 1977 and 1991 agreed or strongly agreed that school rules are so rigid and absurd that good teachers have to break them or ignore them,” writes Dworkin.<sup>66</sup> New York State teacher of the year John Gatto said he had to become “an active saboteur” in order to be effective.<sup>67</sup>

Principals are often in the same situation. Tom Luce, an education reform activist and former candidate for Texas governor, said a “principal must be an academic leader who knows how to get around the system.”<sup>68</sup> A Heritage Foundation study described by Samuel Carter said effective principals are “mavericks who buck the system.”<sup>69</sup> The same study found that effective principals “found a way to free themselves from many of the personnel regulations, line-by-line budget requirements, and curricular mandates that hamstring most public school principals.”

We are grateful for exceptional teachers such as Jaime Escalante, Marva Collins, John Gatto, and many others who get less attention and fewer awards but who make a difference in the lives of their students every single day in schools all across America. But at the same time, we must recognize that any system that relies on such exceptional people is broken and needs to be fixed.

---

<sup>64</sup> David T. Kearns and Denis P. Doyle, *Winning the Brain Race: A Bold Plan to Make Our Schools Competitive* (Richmond, CA: ICS Press, 1991), p. 64.

<sup>65</sup> G. Carl Ball and Steven Goldman, “Improving Education’s Productivity,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, November 1997, p. 230.

<sup>66</sup> Dworkin, *supra* note 37, p. 463.

<sup>67</sup> John T. Gatto, *Confederacy of Dunces: The Tyranny of Compulsory Schooling*, self-published, 1992, p. 9.

<sup>68</sup> Tom Luce, speaker at School Choice Conference sponsored by the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, October 17, 1997.

<sup>69</sup> Samuel C. Carter, *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2000).

While reports of teachers and principals willing to rebel against senseless rules and bureaucracies are heartening, they reveal a dysfunctional system where extraordinary individuals and noble efforts are required to achieve what, in a well-organized system, would be intended and rewarded outputs. School choice, we say again, is the only reform that can deliver this kind of transformation.

## 5. Teacher Support for School Choice

Teacher union opposition to school choice expansion is probably inevitable, but *teacher* opposition is not. Broad competition-inducing versions of parental choice, such as universal (as opposed to means-tested) vouchers, have the most to offer teachers and fewer reasons for them to fear it. Much less attractive to teachers are the narrowly targeted, restriction-laden programs that currently exist in the U.S.

Broad competition-inducing versions of parental choice, such as universal vouchers, have the most to offer teachers and fewer reasons for them to fear it.

The largest non-union teacher organization in the country, the Association of American Educators (AAE), has been a longtime supporter of school choice expansions. AAE Executive Director Gary Beckner, in a January 2011 statement endorsing National School Choice Week, said, “AAE recognizes that not all of our members agree with all school choice options. Our surveys indicate, however, that our members agree that the status quo is not working and changes must be made for the sake of our children. Our surveys further show that AAE members support many of the educational reforms embraced by this coalition.”<sup>70</sup>

Public school teachers are not the “suppliers of a monopoly product.”<sup>71</sup> They just work for a system with a monopoly on public funding, and thus are largely insulated from competitive pressures. Monopolies don’t appreciate competition, but their employees would probably appreciate more competitive labor markets, as well as an inflow of private funds to supplement public funding of K-12 education.

Some teachers already speak out against the status quo and advocate major reform,<sup>72</sup> often even parental choice. Were it not for fear of reprisals from their colleagues and employers, more probably would. Prominent teachers advocating school choice include John Gatto, a New York

---

<sup>70</sup> Beckner, *supra* note 3.

<sup>71</sup> William Allen and Eugenia Toma, *A New Framework for Public Education*, Michigan Governor's Office, November 1996.

<sup>72</sup> “A Letter to the American People: From the Participants of the National Summit of Teachers for Education Reform,” Mackinac Center for Public Policy, [www.mackinac.org](http://www.mackinac.org); also described in *School Reform News*, December 1998, p. 3.

City and state teacher of the year;<sup>73</sup> Tracey Bailey, the 1993 national teacher of the year;<sup>74</sup> and Kevin Irvine, a Colorado state teacher of the year.<sup>75</sup>

Public school teachers who choose to send their own children to private schools are a natural constituency for school choice. When a Republican state senator in California in 2001 introduced a bill that would have required public school teachers to send their children to public schools, the California Teachers Association (CTA) came out strongly in opposition. According to the union, one of three California teachers sends one or more of their own children to private schools, a much higher ratio than for the general public. “People have a right to put their children in [private schools],” said Mike Myslinski, a CTA spokesperson.<sup>76</sup>

Teachers stand to earn more – perhaps \$12,000 a year or more in a city such as Houston – if more schools were made to compete for their services.

Teachers increasingly realize they are well-positioned to reap the benefits of rapidly advancing technologies that make customized and distance learning much more feasible and inexpensive. Using these tools, a good teacher can expand the number of students or reduce the amount of time he or she devotes

to teaching, just as all other good tools do. Automating functions such as test-taking and scoring, and being able to pin-point a student’s knowledge gaps and problems, open the door to dramatic increases in teacher productivity. In all other professions, increases in productivity lead to increases in pay.

Coached by union leaders, many teachers see “choice” as a means for forcing them to give up benefits or to earn as little as teachers at existing private schools. “Teacher unions oppose choice in part because the private schools that exist in places with restriction-laden choice policies are at a major per-pupil funding disadvantage, and thus generally pay much lower salaries than the public systems,” writes Richard Lacayo in a *Time* magazine piece.<sup>77</sup>

As we’ve documented in this report, lower salaries for public school teachers are *not* the most likely outcome of expanding school choice. Teachers in fact stand to earn more – perhaps \$12,000 a year or more in a city such as Houston – if more schools were made to compete for their services. School choice would mean *additional demand* for good school teachers, which would lead to increased salaries for most deserving teachers. Furthermore, this would not require additional tax dollars, as it merely requires the re-allocation of resources from administration.

---

<sup>73</sup> John Taylor Gatto, *Dumbing Us Down* (Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers, 1992).

<sup>74</sup> Drew Lindsay, “Turncoat, Part I,” *Education Week*, May 7, 1997.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Quoted by Jennifer Garrett in “Look Who’s Supporting School Choice Now!,” *Capitalism Magazine*, April 30, 2001, <http://www.capitalismmagazine.com/culture/education/512-look-who-s-supporting-school-choice-now.html>.

<sup>77</sup> Richard Lacayo, “They’ll Vouch for That,” *Time*, October 27, 1997, p. 74.

The current distorted image of school choice expansion as a vehicle for lowering teacher pay helps union leaders rally teacher opposition. But a version of parental choice that greatly increases competition by reducing the funding disadvantages of private schools would not spread the lower pay of existing private schools. It would improve the salaries and the already superior working conditions of private schools.

As more teachers learn about the real effects of school choice, they will get behind the national campaign for expanding school choice. It's already happening in many states. We think it is starting to happen in Texas.

As more teachers learn about the real effects of school choice, they will get behind the national campaign for expanding school choice.

## 6. Conclusion

Advocates on both sides of the national school reform debate are mistaken when they assume public school teachers selfishly oppose major expansions of school choice. This report has presented four ways teachers would personally benefit from school choice: higher and more performance-based pay, better working conditions, more funding reaching the classroom, and the opportunity to teach students who are more likely to share interests, talents, and preparation.

We have made the case that teachers need school choice in order to solve the problems facing their profession. Those problems are daunting. Here again is the litany presented by Linda Darling-Hammond and Gary Sykes, and it is by no means complete: “disparities in pay and working conditions, interstate barriers to teachers’ mobility, inadequate recruitment incentives, bureaucratic hiring systems that discourage qualified applicants, transfer policies that can slow hiring and allocate staff inequitably, and financial incentives to hire cheaper, less qualified teachers.”

Teachers cannot escape the trap created by the public school monopoly without something similar to universal school choice. They cannot leave without experiencing significant personal losses, yet superiors can make staying in those schools miserable. The system often pits teacher against principal, teacher against teacher, and teacher against parent, conflicts that prevent the three groups from coming together to fix the problems. Only school choice reaches the roots of the problem by solving these conflicts.

Public school teachers do not oppose school choice. In fact, they are more likely to enroll their children in private schools than the average parent. Many outstanding teachers support more school choice.

Adoption of a statewide school choice policy would push Texas to the front of a host of states looking to make major market-freeing reforms in public education. Current political and financial realities seem to make a faster national movement toward increased school choice inevitable. The change is overdue, and Texas teachers stand to gain significantly.

## About the Authors

**Joseph Bast** is president of The Heartland Institute and coauthor or editor of 14 books, including *Rebuilding America's Schools* (1990), *Why We Spend Too Much on Health Care* (1992), *Eco-Sanity: A Common-Sense Guide to Environmentalism* (1994), *Education & Capitalism* (2003), and *Climate Change Reconsidered* (2009). His writing has appeared in *Phi Delta Kappan*, *Economics of Education Review*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Investor's Business Daily*, *Cato Journal*, *USA Today*, and many of the country's largest-circulation newspapers. He is publisher of *School Reform News*.

**Herbert J. Walberg, Ph.D.**, distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution and a member of the Koret Task Force on K-12 Education, taught for 35 years at Harvard and the University of Illinois at Chicago. Author or editor of more than 60 books, he has written extensively for educational and psychological scholarly journals on measuring and raising student achievement and human accomplishments. His most recent book is *Advancing Student Achievement* (Hoover Institution Press, 2010). He was appointed as a member of the National Assessment Governing Board and the National Board for Educational Sciences, and as a fellow of several scholarly groups, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the International Academy of Education, and the Royal Statistical Society. He has lectured to scholars and policy makers in eight countries and chairs the Beck Foundation, which supports charities advancing children's literacy.

**Bruno Behrend, J.D.**, is director of the Center for School Choice at The Heartland Institute. In 2008, Behrend co-authored *Illinois Deserves Better - The Ironclad Case for an Illinois Constitutional Convention*, which coincided with a campaign to pass a referendum calling for a Constitutional Convention. In 2009, he served as the policy director/strategist to a gubernatorial candidate in the Illinois primary election. From 2006 through 2008, he hosted a radio show in the Northern Chicago metropolitan area that showcased various authors and policy specialists. He has a degree in finance from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana and a J.D. from IIT-Kent College of Law and is licensed to practice law in the state of Illinois.

© 2011 The Heartland Institute. Distributed by **The Heartland Institute**, a nonprofit and nonpartisan public policy research organization. Nothing in this report should be construed as reflecting the views of The Heartland Institute, nor as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of legislation. Additional copies of this Policy Brief are available for \$5.95 from The Heartland Institute, 19 South LaSalle Street #903, Chicago, IL 60603; phone 312/377-4000; fax 312/377-5000; email [think@heartland.org](mailto:think@heartland.org); Web <http://www.heartland.org>.