

From ASCD's Perspective

Diane Berreth

ASCD has responded to the choice debate with a recent comprehensive member book, *Public Schools of Choice*.¹ This analysis was intended to address the needs of members who are being affected by state or local choice policies, in keeping with our values of curriculum balance, self-direction, equity, and cultural pluralism.

ASCD's approach is to analyze policy issues related to our values, but not to take a position for or against specific issues. This process, developed several years ago, is aimed at providing our members with information they can use to form their own decisions, given their particular local and state contexts.

To begin our analysis of choice, we convened a distinguished panel representing a broad spectrum of views on choice (see list below). The panel discussed the history of choice, current educational problems that it might solve, the research base for choice, implementation issues, and other approaches besides choice that could address the pressing problems that face educators today.

Based on our issues analysis process, these discussions were focused by President Bush's and Education Secretary Cavasos' recent statement that "choice works." This riveting unilateral statement led the panel to contemplate such questions as what the evidence shows about the results of choice policies, how to decide whether to implement choice, and what implications choice has for curriculum development, parent involvement, fiscal policies, and the roles of administrators and board members.

Our concerns often centered on the shift in emphasis during the past decade, from schools as instruments of the public good to schools as purveyors of private good. Educators and policymakers are charged with maintaining a balance between the two—a balance that supports the common goals of democratic societies and meets the needs of individual students and their families. In the face of increasing diversity, this is a difficult challenge.

Our panel concluded that choice as a strategy to meet the challenges facing us is still largely unproven. However, in light of its current popularity, choice may likely be an element of our educational systems for a long time. Therefore, district and state policymakers contemplating choice should carefully consider the concerns raised by choice critics.

Choice may be one factor in achieving our broad educational goals, but it alone does not guarantee quality schools for all students. Educators must base their actions upon the full set of conditions that promote excellence for both individual students and for the broad democratic interests of society as a whole. □

¹ *Public Schools of Choice* (Stock No. 611-90083) is available for \$6.50 from ASCD, Order Processing, 1250 N. Pitt St., Alexandria, VA 22314; (703) 549-9110, ext. 223.

Diane Berreth is ASCD's Deputy Executive Director. She served as project director for ASCD's issues analysis panel on public schools of choice.

ASCD
Issues
Analysis

Public
Schools
of
Choice

Issues Analysis Panel for *Public Schools of Choice*

- Paul E. Heckman (Chair), Assistant Dean, College of Education, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona.
- Diane Berreth (Project Director), Deputy Executive Director, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Virginia.
- Stephen Bing, Executive Director, Massachusetts Advocacy Center, Boston, Massachusetts.
- Paula Delo, Manager of Public Information, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Virginia.
- Richard F. Elmore, Professor of Education, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Asa Hilliard, III, Professor, Department of Educational Foundations, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia.
- Barbara T. Jackson, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent, District of Columbia Public Schools, Washington, D.C.
- Anne Meek (Project Editor), Managing Editor, *Educational Leadership*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria, Virginia.
- Douglas Pearson, Superintendent, Asheville City Schools, Asheville, North Carolina.
- Gil Valdez, Manager, Instructional Design Section, Minnesota Department of Education, St. Paul Minnesota.

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