

schools of preference. And, second, the interests of the community are advanced because racial and socioeconomic diversity is guaranteed, since all groups have genuine proportional access to all schools within a zone.

Moreover, in a controlled choice plan, the school system is obliged to make all of the relatively large zones that embrace multiple schools equivalent in range and quality of services offered so that no one is harmed by reason of residence. And so that the total system is continuously upgraded, such a plan requires a district to use community resources disproportionately in those schools that are least chosen.

Further, controlled choice does not cater to any racial population or social class but, rather, treats all fairly. However, spaces in schools are reserved

for bilingual and special education students first so that they as well as others may choose good schools and be mainstreamed in the same school when remedial programs are completed. Magnet schools are accepted as schools with special offerings that should be available to all interested students, regardless of aptitude. But the ultimate goal of controlled choice is to magnetize all schools.

Because it accomplishes all of these things and achieves them simultaneously, controlled choice truly promotes excellence without compromising equity. □

¹Inabeth Miller and I tried to put this issue in perspective in our book, *Social Goals and Educational Reform*, (1988), (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press), pp. 3-10.

References

- Alves, M.J., and C.V. Willie. (1987). "Controlled Choice—An Approach to Effective School Desegregation." *The Urban Review* 19, 2: 67-88.
- Chubb, J. (May 1989). "Making Schools Better: Choice and Educational Improvement." *Equity and Choice* 5: 5-10.
- Chubb, J., and T. Moe. (1990). *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.
- Olson, L. (June 6, 1990). "'Open Market' of Schools Needed, New Book Argues." *Education Week* 9: 1, 12-15.
- Schumacher, E.F. (1973). *Small Is Beautiful*. New York: Harper and Row.

Charles V. Willie is Professor of Education and Urban Studies, Harvard University, Graduate School of Education, Cambridge, MA 02138.

BELLA ROSENBERG

Not a Case for Market Control

Response to John Chubb and Terry Moe

The evidence does not support the conclusion that current methods of school governance are responsible for poor student achievement.

Seven years into the education reform movement, John Chubb and Terry Moe's argument that our public schools are overly bureaucratic and overly regulated is hardly earth-shattering. What is jolting and worth thinking about is their contention that these features are an inevitable consequence of democratic control of schools. But what is astonishing is their claim to have *proved* empirically that democratic control of

schools is primarily responsible for poor student achievement and, therefore, that market control is the answer to our education problems. Have they proved this?

Not by a long shot. Chubb and Moe's empirical case for market control is based on their attempt to explain what accounts for the difference in the number of correct answers to 116 questions used in the High School and Beyond survey, which tested the verbal and

quantitative skills of a large sample of high school students in both their sophomore and senior years. Sophomores averaged 62 correct answers to the 116 questions on the 63-minute test. By their senior year, these students answered, on average, 6.6 more questions correctly—a very small gain. But the lowest quartile of students answered, on average, 4.66 fewer questions correctly, while the top quartile answered 18.13 more questions cor-

rectly, which means that the achievement gap between the bottom and top groups widened by 22.79 questions or 6.33 years—a substantial chasm.

What explains this? According to Chubb and Moe's own models, many things—student ability, family background, the school's socioeconomic status (SES), and the like. But the authors say a major explanation is school organization, which means such things as clear school goals, the principal's instructional leadership, teacher professionalism, and school autonomy—in short, all the variables now familiar to us through the effective schools literature, and all the conditions made problematic, if not impossible, by bureaucratization and over-regulation.

This is strong stuff. After all, we can't do much about students' family backgrounds, but we can do something about school organization. And Chubb and Moe tell us that the "influence of the school [on student achievement] through its organization is comparable in size to the influence of each student's own family," and that "school

organization is twice as strong as the influence of the school SES."

Unfortunately, on closer inspection, it turns out that the "strong" influence of school organization is very weak indeed. In fact, the influence of each of the variables used by Chubb and Moe is very, very small: All the variables *taken together* don't explain more than 5 percent of the variation in student achievement.

Therefore, saying that the influence of school organization is as great as—or twice as important as—that of some other variable is not saying much at all. And indeed, even if you employ the radical technique used by Chubb and Moe and move the average student from the 12.5th percentile of school organization to the 87.5th percentile, the achievement gap of 6.33 years or 22.79 questions gets closed by only half a year, which is only one or two more correct answers to 116 questions. Add this rather nonspectacular result to the fact that Chubb and Moe do not describe their data set, fail to control for selection bias, enter private schools into their models in a "now-you-see-them-now-you-don't" way, use the effective schools research—which primarily involved elementary schools—to construct models for data drawn from high schools, and employ a variety of unconventional technical procedures—and the empirical case for market control of schools withers away.

Of course, not proving the case for market control is no more reason to abandon the idea than "proving" it should cause us to embrace it; public policy needs to engage questions of values as well as evidence. And what are the values of the marketplace? Competition, which can be healthy, and choice, which our democratic traditions and world events indicate is morally and instrumentally superior to coercion.

But there are some other features of markets that, when brought into a fundamental social and political institution like public education, can have disastrous consequences—an indifference to questions of equality and, often, of quality, as well as a drive to segregate consumers along various di-

Rather than proving the merits of school choice—and some plans have considerable merit—this book warns us that transforming our public education system into a shopping mall is a dangerous idea.

mensions, to name but a few. Models and statistics aside, to the extent that Chubb and Moe's particular choice proposal embodies these problems—and that is to a considerable extent—it ought to be rejected.

Chubb and Moe have made an important contribution to the education reform discussion by forcing us to confront the issue of school governance more seriously and analytically than ever before. But rather than proving the merits of school choice—and some plans have considerable merit—this book warns us that transforming our public education system into a shopping mall is a dangerous idea. □

Author's note: I am indebted to Howard Nelson of the AFT's Department of Research for his insights into the quantitative portion of Chubb and Moe's book.

Bella Rosenberg is Assistant to the President, American Federation of Teachers, 555 New Jersey Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20001.

On closer inspection, it turns out that the "strong" influence of school organization is very weak indeed.

Copyright © 1990 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.