SCHOOL CHOICE AND THE COMPREHENSIVE IDEAL

WILLIAM G. WRAGA, Bernards Township (NJ) Public Schools

John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe's *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* received a remarkable amount of attention from the popular press for such a technical, academic work. This probably was due in part to the fact that Chubb and Moe's study unequivocally promised to supply the evidence demonstrating that a free-market choice scheme, imposed on the public schools, would be the panacea for the nation's educational ills. Educational researchers were quick to review the book and typically focused on Chubb and Moe's treatment and/or interpretation of their statistical data, or on their application of market theory to public schooling. Missing so far from the reviews of *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* has been any substantive examination of the book from the perspective of curriculum and instruction in general, and with respect to the purposes and curriculum functions of the comprehensive high school model in particular.

The history of the comprehensive high school in the United States is characterized by a steady decline of commitment and a concomitant rise of opposition to the model since midcentury. During the 1980s, the comprehensive high school became something of a nonissue in the educational reform arena. only one high profile reform effort paid any attention to it ³ Despite

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³For an analysis of these reports from the perspective of the comprehensive high school model, see William G. Wraga, 'The Comprehensive High School in the United States Since Midcentury (doctoral dissertation, Rutgers University, 1991). During the 1980s, only the project directed by Theodore R. Sizer called 'A Study of High Schools' examined the comprehensive model and summarily rejected it. See Theodore R Sizer, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), Arthur G Powell, Eleanor Farrar,
this general lack of explicit attention during the last decade, reform proposals of the 1980s implicitly threatened the comprehensive high school model. The most recent source of opposition is found in the increasing push for school "choice." Choice schemes typically reject the comprehensive ideal and raise doubts about schools' ability to foster any sense of social cooperation or cohesion. Before examining the particular ramifications of Chubb and Moe's school choice scheme for the comprehensive high school, a brief look at the purposes and curriculum organization inherent in the comprehensive model is useful.

THE AMERICAN COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOL

Historically, the comprehensive ideal comprises two complementary components—the specializing function and the unifying function. The specializing function serves the needs of a diverse student population, the unifying function unites youth with different backgrounds, abilities, and aspirations in common sympathies, understandings, and discourse. During the 20th century, a number of noted educators have advanced this comprehensive conception of curriculum organization. A summary of four representative discussions of the comprehensive model establishes the theoretical and practical contexts for examining Chubb and Moe's proposals for school choice.

Dewey, for one, envisioned the public schools as the primary institution for facilitating social unity while maintaining ethnic and individual uniqueness. In 1915 he conceded that "most of us have probably settled back in a conviction that the unity of the public school system is the best guarantee we possess of a unifying agency to deal successfully with the diversified heterogeneity of our population." To achieve this ideal, Dewey advocated a unified system of public schooling and opposed a dual system separating academic and vocational students, as was prevalent in Europe. He argued that a dual system would lead to "social predestination," and instead called for uniting students under the single roof of what he termed "the wider high school" through common experiences inside and outside the classroom. Indeed, the recom-
School Choice and the Comprehensive Ideal

Recommendations of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, which established the blueprint for the comprehensive model, resembled Dewey’s ideas in both wording and substance, although the debate continues over whether Dewey exerted direct influence on the Commission’s Cardinal Principles report.

The Cardinal Principles report, published in 1918, proposed two complementary functions for the comprehensive high school. Under the specializing function, "individuals and groups of individuals may become effective in the various vocations and other fields of human endeavor." Under the unifying function, "members of that democracy may obtain those common ideas, ideals, and common modes of thought, feeling, and action that make for cooperation, social cohesion, and social solidarity." The Cardinal Principles report accorded the curriculum the central role in achieving both the unifying and specializing functions. The curriculum was conceived of as providing three types of "studies": curriculum "constants" that would "be taken by all or nearly all pupils", curriculum "variables" that would "be determined for the most part by vocational needs, including, as they frequently do, preparation for advanced study in special fields", and "free electives" that would be taken by "pupils in accordance with individual aptitudes or special interests." The report explained that "the constants should contribute definitely to unification, the curriculum variables to specialization, and the free electives to either or both of these functions." With respect to the curriculum, the unifying function would also be served by the "assignment of projects and problems to groups of pupils for cooperative solution and the socialized recitation whereby the class as a whole develops a sense of collective responsibility.

The unifying function would also be achieved through recreation activities that involved both pupils and members of the larger community. The Cardinal Principles report explained that the comprehensive high school "has a unique opportunity in this field because it includes in its membership representatives from all classes of society and consequently is able through social relationships to establish bonds of friendship and common understanding that cannot be furnished by other agencies." The report summarized the social power of the unifying function as follows:

Through friendships formed with pupils pursuing other curriculums and having vocational and educational goals widely different from their own, the pupils realize that the interests which they hold in common with others are, after all, far more important than the differences that would tend to make them antagonistic to others. The report concluded that, in terms of its ability to fulfill both the unifying and specializing functions, "the comprehensive school is the prototype of a democracy in which various groups must have a degree of self-consciousness as groups and yet be federated into a larger whole through the recognition of common interests and ideals." The report noted that "it is the ideal of democracy that the individual and society may find fulfillment each in the other." The comprehensive high school would achieve this ideal.

The Cardinal Principles report usually receives credit for contributing to the expansion of the goals of secondary education beyond a traditional academic focus. This contention, too, remains problematic for some scholars and has garnered much attention in the literature of curriculum history. Often ignored, however, is the corresponding curriculum organization invented to achieve these new purposes. Significantly, the expansion of goals and the corresponding curriculum organization proposed in the Cardinal Principles report were prerequisite to making the high school experience meaningful to a larger portion of youth from a wider cross-section of society than secondary schools had previously accommodated. That is, broad purposes, a corresponding curriculum theory, and open access were interrelated elements of the new design for the American high school.

During the two decades following the Cardinal Principles report, the course offerings of American high schools became increasingly varied and diversified, welcoming a wider variety and larger proportion of adolescents through the schoolhouse door. In effect, the expansion of course offerings can be interpreted as a manifestation of the specializing function that complemented the unifying function insofar as students of different backgrounds, interests, and aspirations were gathered together under one roof. Unfortunately, however, the net effect of this trend was to exalt the specializing function at the expense of the unifying function, particularly as students were separated from each other through tracking—a practice inimical to the comprehensive model outlined in the Cardinal Principles report. The

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14Ibid., p 25
15Ibid., p 26
16Ibid., p 9
miseducative effects of tracking are now widely recognized, though often mistakenly attributed to the comprehensive model. Subsequent to the *Cardinal Principles* report, various educators advocated and elaborated the comprehensive high school model. Two examples are illustrative. The Educational Policies Commission (EPC), for example, proposed a secondary curriculum composed principally of "common" studies and "differential" studies, much as the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education had proposed curriculum "constants" and "variables" three decades earlier. The EPC advocated a wide range of vocational offerings, as well as conventional "academic" subjects and programs for the gifted and the handicapped to be offered under a single roof. Clearly, although the EPC's recommendations were rooted in the precedent of the *Cardinal Principles* report, they were prescient not only in calling for differentiated programs to serve the gifted, but also in including the handicapped in the mainstream of regular education. The unifying function of the comprehensive high school would be met chiefly, though not exclusively, through the "Common Learnings Course," taken each year by every student.

Of the numerous other reports supporting the model (most appearing around midcentury), none seems to have represented the spirit and intent of the comprehensive high school with greater fidelity than the Eighth Yearbook of the John Dewey Society, simply entitled, *The American High School Its Responsibility and Opportunity*. This book was prepared by a committee that included such notable curricularists as Will French, Gordon Mackenzie, and Hollis Caswell, the latter serving as editor of the volume. "The American tradition," the Yearbook Committee insisted, "is opposed to the early segregation of students according to intellectual, social or other quality." It concluded, "The public school is the only agency in most communities which brings people of all economic, social and religious backgrounds together."

The committee vigorously opposed separate vocational schools and anticipated the impending role of the public schools as mitigators of racial stereotyping and prejudice.

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20Ibid., pp. 309, 310, 224–239.


22Ibid., pp. 135, 136–137.
The American High School prescribed particular curriculum components to provide for both general and specialized education—in line, again, with the curriculum organization proposed in the Cardinal Principles report. These components included, briefly, "a basic core offering to provide a body of common, integrating experiences," "special interest offerings to provide for the optimum development of individual interests and aptitudes and to prepare youth for work," and "organized student life to afford an opportunity for active participation in democratic group processes which foster understanding of social and political procedures." 25

In summary, the work of Dewey, the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, the Eighth Yearbook Committee of the John Dewey Society, and the EPC are representative of the curriculum theory that proponents of the comprehensive high school model typically advocated. For these educators, the comprehensive high school model proffered a powerful curriculum theory that sought to achieve the democratic ideal that society and the individual each find fulfillment in the other.

By midcentury, the comprehensive high school model, offering diverse programs of study under a single roof, dominated the organization of the secondary school in the United States. Significantly, the International Assessment for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) revealed that the comprehensive system of secondary education in the United States had gone a long way toward providing universal education for a democratic society. Husen demonstrated that the top 5% to 10% at the end of secondary education (i.e., the elite) tended to perform at nearly the same level in both comprehensive and selective systems of secondary education. Thus the elite among U.S. high school seniors did not differ considerably in their performance from their age-mates in France, England, or Germany. The comprehensive systems, where the net is cast more widely, result in a bigger "talent catch." In addition, those who are less able get a better opportunity to develop their potential than in the selective systems of the traditional European type. 24

Analyzing the same IEA data, Tyler concluded that the United States educational system "has reached a larger proportion of its young people than almost all other nations, while its top 5% have attained the same high scores reached by nations that attempt to teach only a small fraction of their 18-year-olds." 25

These are the kinds of results the Cardinal Principles report envisioned for the comprehensive high school. As noted at the outset, however, support for the comprehensive high school, ironically, has declined since midcentury to the extent that in the 1980s the model virtually was a nonissue in educational reform discourse and policy. Nevertheless, 1980s reform proposals implicitly

25Ibid., pp 142-143.
"Torsten Husen, "Are Standards in U.S. Schools Really Lagging Behind Those in Other Countries?" Phi Delta Kappan 64 (March 1983). 456
School Choice and the Comprehensive Ideal

militated against the continuing integrity of the model. Particularly, recent proposals for school choice pose a serious threat to the comprehensive model and to efforts to achieve its ideals.

POLITICS, MARKETS, AND SCHOOL CHOICE

The ramifications of "choice" for the comprehensive ideal are nowhere more evident than in the agenda that Chubb and Moe advance in Politics, Markets, and America's Schools.26 Chubb and Moe offer a "new" analytical slant on public education by examining school effectiveness from an "institutional perspective." They conclude that public schools can improve only if a market system of educational choice replaces the existing form of democratic control.

Chubb and Moe base their study on data collected in the High School and Beyond Survey and in a follow-up survey, the Administrator and Teacher Survey, both conducted during the early 1980s. They define the success of a school according to student performance on five academic achievement tests in reading comprehension, writing, vocabulary, science, and mathematics. They omit a civics test "because the test was relatively unreliable." They go on to explain, "Although the tests are somewhat short—together the five tests include 116 items to be answered in sixty-three minutes—each test is a reliable measure of the academic achievement it was intended to gauge.27 Although they recognize the difficulty of measuring "good" education and the reality that no single factor adequately represents total school performance, Chubb and Moe nevertheless rely on academic achievement as measured by these tests as their only criterion for school success. They base their conclusions on correlations between high achievement scores—and a gain in achievement test scores over two years of high school study—and survey data pertaining to graduation requirements, percentage of students in academic courses, teacher and administrator attitudes toward school organization, and the like.

In short, Chubb and Moe found that the more successful schools are usually the least bureaucratic, and the least successful schools tend to be the most bureaucratic. By "bureaucratic" they mean, essentially, hierarchical "imposition of formal control" that sacrifices the integrity of individuals and intimate groups to rigid formalization.28 In successful schools, "goals are clearer and more academically ambitious, their principals are stronger educational leaders, their teachers are more professional and harmonious, their course work is more academically rigorous, and their classrooms are more orderly and less bureaucratic."29 Unsuccessful schools generally demonstrate the opposite characteristics. While Chubb and Moe issue the caveat that they

27 Ibid., p. 71.
28 Ibid., p. 45 passim.
29 Ibid., p. 99.
do not intend to advocate private schools over public schools, the successful schools in their study are by and large private. The reason these schools are more likely to be successful, according to the authors, is that they operate in a market setting, while public schools operate in a system of democratic control.  

Chubb and Moe maintain that entrenched bureaucracy is endemic to a system of democratic control. They assert that institutions of direct democratic control promote ineffective school organizations. These bureaucracies encourage the bureaucratization and centralization of school control and discourage the emergence of coherent, strongly led, academically ambitious, professionally grounded, teamlike organizations.

Thus the existing institutional arrangement of public education inherently prevents substantive educational progress. "When public schools happen to be effectively organized," they assert, "it is in spite of their system—they are the lucky ones with peculiarly nice environments." Because bureaucracy inhibits school effectiveness, and because public schools are terminally bureaucratic, the only acceptable solution to the contemporary educational crisis is to convert to a market system of educational choice. "Clear academic goals, strong educational leadership, professionalized teaching, ambitious academic programs, teamlike organizations—these effective school characteristics are promoted much more successfully by market control than by direct democratic control," Chubb and Moe maintain. In a market system, "the authority to make educational choices is radically decentralized to those most immediately involved. ... Schools compete for the support of parents and students, and parents and students are free to choose among schools. The system is built around decentralization, competition, and choice." The autonomy granted individual schools in a market setting makes effective organization possible.

Chubb and Moe see both the first wave of 1980s reform and restructuring as failures. They embrace choice as the single best hope for educational reform. "Without being too literal about it, we think reformers would do well to entertain the notion that choice is a panacea. ... Choice is a self-contained reform with its own rationale and justification. It has the capacity all by itself to bring about the kind of transformation that, for years, reformers have been seeking to engineer in myriad other ways." Chubb and Moe insist that "as far as possible, all higher-level authority must be eliminated," and that "state leaders [must] create a new system of public education."
Their new system would include the following major characteristics (1) states would establish minimal criteria for determining public schools (not unlike those currently used to accredit private schools), (2) any school meeting these criteria would qualify as a public school of choice, including current private schools, (3) a “Choice Office” in each school district would channel federal, state, and local funds as well as individual student scholarships to schools based on their enrollments, (4) students and parents would have the choice of any school in their state, (5) the state would provide transportation as far as possible, (6) schools would be independently governed—most state education mandates would be eliminated.  

LIMITATIONS OF THE ANALYSIS

As noted above, Chubb and Moe identify successful schools only with high achievement test scores, despite their recognition that no single measure of school effectiveness is adequate. In a footnote they hold that “academic achievement is almost invariably accepted as an important indicator. Moreover,” they continue, “the major association devoted to the promotion of more effective schools, the National Council for Effective Schools, employs achievement—its level, distribution, and breadth—as the sole criterion of school success." Given the numerous educational associations that seek to advance educational progress, the implication that the National Council for Effective Schools is the ultimate authority on such matters is specious Chubb and Moe justify their choice of a single indicator of school performance on a simple appeal to authority. Thus, they not only fail to heed their own advice, but they also dismiss a basic principle of curriculum and instruction which recognizes that a valid appraisal of student learning can only come from a variety of indicators.

Furthermore, by using academic achievement as the sole criterion, Chubb and Moe in effect biased their study in favor of private schools, which tend to focus more on academics than on other important goals. Correspondingly, comprehensive public schools, which historically have embraced a wide range of academic, social, personal, political, and vocational goals, were handicapped in the study because only one goal area was assessed. In fact, implicit in this narrow range of assessment is the rejection of comprehensive educational goals. Chubb and Moe emphasize that to many of “those [researchers] who have contributed to the literature on effective schools, the proliferation of school objectives is a serious problem. It has robbed schools of any clear sense of purpose and caused schools to lower their academic expectations.

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36 Ibid., pp. 219-225.
37 Ibid., p. 290
for most students.”\footnote{John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, \textit{Politics, Markets, and America's Schools} (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1990), p. 78} In a footnote to this passage, they cite the work of Sizer and Powell, Farrar, and Cohen, although these authors are not usually identified with the “effective schools” literature.\footnote{Theodore R. Sizer, \textit{Horace's Compromise. The Dilemma of the American High School} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984). Arthur G. Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David K. Cohen, \textit{The Shopping Mall High School} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985).} Chubb and Moe would willingly narrow the purposes of the public schools to the strictly academic and thereby dismiss the broad goals (including, presumably, the historic national education goal that dates from the New Republic: education for citizenship in a democracy) to which American schools have been committed during the 20th century.

By identifying school success exclusively with high achievement test scores, Chubb and Moe exalt the traditional subject-centered curriculum above other viable curriculum organizations.\footnote{Darnel Tanner and Laurel N. Tanner, \textit{Curriculum Development Theory into Practice}, 2nd ed (New York: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 464--491.} Their tacit assumption that the discipline-centered curriculum is all there is to curriculum organization is symptomatic of a pervasive failure on the part of the public, policymakers, and educators to examine seriously other curriculum organizations. James A. Beane incisively summarizes the causes of this mindset in the following way:

Within the education profession, then, the subject approach has come to form the basis of the symbiotic or mutually convenient relationship among schools, universities, state departments of education (including certification bureaus), commercial text and testing concerns, and other educational “elites.” So powerful is this network of relationships that there is barely a recognizable language for thinking about alternatives to the subject approach as the form of general education. It has come to be seen as the way the curriculum is supposed to be organized; it is construed to serve the common “needs” of young people. Other possibilities seem almost preposterous, nearly unthinkable.\footnote{James A. Beane, \textit{A Middle School Curriculum From Rhetoric to Reality} (Columbus, OH: National Middle School Association, 1990), p. 29.}

From a curriculum perspective Chubb and Moe’s analysis is limited further by their choice of institutional factors and organizational features to consider. The former are limited to “student ability, family background, peer group influence, school resources, and school organization.” The latter are limited to “goals, leadership, personnel, and practice,” and, combined, are considered a “comprehensive index.” “Practice” includes “the amount of homework assigned daily, the amount of time devoted to administrative routines, and the fairness and effectiveness of disciplinary practices.” They claim that “our comprehensive index includes indicators of every element of school organization that a descriptive analysis indicated might be of importance and excludes nothing of obvious significance.”\footnote{John E. Chubb and Terry M. Moe, \textit{Politics, Markets, and America's Schools} (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1990), pp. 116, 120, 122} Apparently for Chubb and Moe
curriculum and instruction are "of no obvious significance" to school effectiveness, since they excluded these factors from their index. In effect, they discounted the bearing that a discipline-centered, versus a correlated, versus a fused, versus a core curriculum organization had on achievement. Neither did their index consider the types of instructional techniques or teaching models teachers use, nor the powerful effect of the "hidden curriculum" on students both in the classroom and in the school culture at large. Rather, they mention curriculum and instruction once in passing, claiming only that schools that are less bureaucratic enjoy greater autonomy with these matters. The validity of generalizations about educational effectiveness drawn from data that omit curriculum and instruction—the crux of schooling—as variables is highly questionable. Given these limitations of the analysis presented in Politics, Markets, and America's Schools, there seems to exist insufficient favorable evidence upon which to base Chubb and Moe's far-reaching proposals for school choice. Let us now turn to the implications of their proposals for the comprehensive ideal.

DISMANTLING THE COMPREHENSIVE IDEAL

Politics, Markets, and America's Schools threatens the comprehensive model in three ways. First, questions of validity aside, by identifying academic achievement as the sole criterion of school success and as the only acceptable goal of schooling, Chubb and Moe exalt the single purpose academic preparatory school above the comprehensive school.

Second, Chubb and Moe identify among "two general conditions" that positively impact school effectiveness (as they define it) the existence of relative "social homogeneity in the local community, and in the resulting student population." They later explain, "In light of the analysis, it appears that the key thing about schools in urban areas may not be that they have especially troublesome students and parents, but that they tend to be embedded in large, heterogeneous school systems." According to Chubb and Moe, the "political uncertainty" that results from a heterogeneous local population makes solving problems nearly impossible and results in diffuse goals that are unattainable and that dilute focus on academic performance, as discussed above. If this is true, comprehensive high schools that draw a diverse student body from the surrounding community are simply not viable. Chubb and Moe apparently prefer schools composed of a homogeneous population to a heterogeneous student body that reflects our polyglot society.

The third way that Chubb and Moe disparage the comprehensive model is by embracing the "anything goes" mentality common among choice advocates. Chubb and Moe claim that "schools controlled only by the market are
free to organize any way they want" in order to "please" their clientele. The familiar euphemism of "educational diversity" promoted by advocates of alternative schools and choice would be the result:

In the private sector, schools do not have to be all things to all people. To be successful, they need to find their niche—a specialized segment of the market to which they can appeal and attract support. The obvious way to do this is through the strategic design of their curriculum. They might offer a broadly based liberal arts education, for instance, or they might specialize in math and science, in the dramatic arts, in the humanities, in vocational education, or in almost anything else that a clientele of parents and students might value. They are also free to target their appeals to other value dimensions, discipline, religion, theories of learning, the socioeconomic and ethnic make-up of the student body, school or class size, athletics and other extracurricular activities, perspective on personal growth, sensitivity to particular cultures and languages—the list could go on until it exhausts the educational concerns of parents and students.

Ironically, in Chubb and Moe's scheme, schools that chose to specialize in a nonacademic area possibly would fail to meet their own benchmark for an "effective" school, that is, high academic achievement test scores. While the establishment of specialized schools could very well cater to the variegated special interests and needs of youth, it would render the equally important task of unifying a heterogeneous populace nearly impossible simply because common sympathies, understandings, and discourse are best developed in common.

The most serious weakness of Chubb and Moe's proposal, then, lies in their failure to consider the potential impact of this scheme on the wider society. As schools would specialize, so would their constituencies. Students would have limited access to peers of different backgrounds, abilities, and aspirations. As groups of students and parents were separated from each other educationally, so would they tend to be separated socially. The wider society would be threatened with aggravated fragmentation along a variety of lines. This problem is also implicit in Chubb and Moe's preference for private schools and the "free-market" arena in which they operate. As one reviewer of *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* explained:

> within the private-school sector, one may observe considerable division along class, race, religious and ideological dimensions. To the extent that the private sector is taken as the exemplar, one might anticipate further social segmentation as a consequence of adoption of a market-based institutional formation. It may be that society is segmented quite enough already without adopting an institutional strategy designed to exacerbate segmentation.

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*Bill J. Johnston, Review of *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*, "Educational Studies 22 (Summer 1991). 228*
The comprehensive high school model was designed expressly to mitigate against the kind of social fragmentation that would result from a system of specialized, or special-interest, schools.

The social fragmentation problem pervades choice proposals popular in educational discourse today. The magnet school plan touted by David Kearns, for example, similarly leaves no provision for unifying a diverse student population and would rather segregate students by interest, aptitude, and aspiration.

Magnet schools are just as important to the future of education. Indeed, they are essential. It should now be clear to most Americans that just as there are different people, there are different teaching and learning styles. The old idea of one best system is now thoroughly discredited. What we need in the future is a school system as varied as the interests, talents, and capacities of our teachers and students. We need academic schools, schools for music and art, mathematics and science, technology and office skills, dance and theater, military schools, and boarding schools.  

Plans for school choice tacitly reject the comprehensive ideal and in effect exalt the specializing function of the comprehensive model at the expense of the unifying function to an extreme unprecedented only by the short-lived deschooling movement of two decades ago. Unlike the deschooling movement, however, choice has been widely embraced by citizens, policymakers, and educators across the country. During a time of seething racial tensions, a rash of bias crimes, political exploitation of racial anxieties, and evidence of lingering and widespread school segregation, choice advocates would foist upon our public education system an inherently separatist organization. Indeed, the very history of “free choice” in public education should serve as a potent lesson, since the practice was invented for the expressed purpose of maintaining segregated schools.  

Further, special-interest schools featured by choice proposals could go so far as to isolate the handicapped in separate facilities, and thereby fly in the face of the long grassroots struggle on the part of parents and educators to integrate special needs students into the educational mainstream. These implications have been overlooked by Chubb and Moe and other advocates of school choice.
CONCLUSION

Criticisms of bureaucracy hold an almost irresistible appeal for those who have on occasion experienced its discomforts, and that includes just about everyone. Few would dispute the contention that bureaucracy hinders human achievement more often than is desirable. While cumbersome bureaucracies certainly can and should be streamlined, Chubb and Moe too easily reject any possibility for reform short of a complete dismantling of the existing system of public education in the United States. Considering Chubb and Moe’s findings that correlate decreased bureaucracy with improved achievement test scores, efforts to decentralize decision making, for example, seem a manageable approach to reform. Yet decentralization, not unlike the thrust of Chubb and Moe’s analysis, often focuses on administrative matters and neglects the area of curriculum and instruction. Fifty years ago, however, the Eight-Year Study demonstrated that focusing on improving curriculum and instruction is a powerful way to enhance student learning, as one would expect. Significantly, the Eight-Year Study provided opportunities for teachers to solve problems relating to curriculum and instruction and yielded remarkable levels of student learning. Yet Chubb and Moe underestimate or dismiss these and other approaches and instead exalt the universal application of free-market principles as the only acceptable alternative for educational reform. In the context of the pervasive free-market idealism of the last decade, epitomized by the ideas of Milton Friedman (who characterizes the public school system as “an island of socialism in a free-market sea”) and the rhetoric and policies of the current and previous administrations, Chubb and Moe’s dismissal of approaches to improving the educational status quo other than a total transformation to a market scheme of school choice seems, perhaps, to have more to do with temporal ideological commitments than with a resolve to confront complex problems flexibly and realistically.

Chubb and Moe’s generous faith in the free market vividly reflects the sociopolitical milieu from which their book emerged. Yet by ignoring the history of choice in the United States and the wider social and political goals that the public schools historically have served, Chubb and Moe, in effect, treat their limited data in a sociopolitical vacuum—despite their discussion of democratic control of schools. The comprehensive high school model, on the other hand, was an effort to provide a workable curriculum theory consistent with the purposes of public schools in a democracy. The comprehensive

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high school was designed to serve the specialized interests of a diverse student population and concomitantly unite a heterogeneous population by fostering "common ideas, ideals, and common modes of thought, feeling, and action that make for cooperation, social cohesion, and social solidarity." It was designed to achieve its goals by enacting a unique and viable curriculum theory.

School choice plans that would segregate students along any number of lines—background, ability, aspiration—violate the comprehensive ideal of uniting a diverse student population. The proposals of Chubb and Moe typify this central flaw of school choice thinking. In an age of free market idealism and relentless deregulation of the private sector, "choice" at first seems an appealing possibility for the public school system. Closer scrutiny, however, reveals that essential provisions of school choice hold potentially dire consequences for the very fabric of our polyglot society. The unifying function is not simply an ideal of the comprehensive high school model, it reflects an ideal central to our democratic republic. It is, in effect, an effort to act upon the motto of the United States, *E Pluribus unum*—out of many, one. Our system of education must be true to our highest social and political ideals if we expect the schools to contribute to the ongoing struggle to effect genuine democratic forms of living.56

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WILLIAM G. WRAGA is Social Studies Program Supervisor, Bernards Township Public Schools, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920


56This article is adapted from the author's doctoral dissertation, "The Comprehensive High School in the United States Since Midcentury," (Rutgers University, 1991), currently being prepared for publication by the University Press of America Professor Gail McCutcheon, Ohio State University, book review editor for the *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision,* gave valuable assistance in preparing this article.