Senior Culminating Project  
Ethics Minor  

The culminating project is a capstone course for the ethics minor. Students enrolled in the minor are asked to work with the Institute Directors (Professors Donovan or Green) early in their academic studies to identify a research project that takes advantage of the courses in the minor and their own personal interests in a specific subject. The Ethics Institute minor advisors (Donovan and Green) will help to form the project and match the student with a suitable professor who will supervise the independent study.

Prior to the term that the student will enroll in PHIL 86 (independent study for the culminating project) the student must meet with either Professor Donovan or Green to identify a project. At that time the student will submit a title, an abstract, and a bibliography.

The culminating project is an independent study/research project that should be twenty to thirty pages long. Upon completion of the project students will be asked to provide a presentation at the Ethics Institute Spring Research Colloquium, held in the last few weeks of the spring term.

An example of a successful culminating project follows:  

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EDUC 85: Spring 2009  
Professor Aine Donovan

**Voucher Programs in US Public Education Reform Efforts to Improve Equality in Educational Opportunity**

*Whether vouchers will accentuate, or ameliorate, the inequalities built into the structure of the U.S. public school system is central to the voucher debate.*

I. INTRODUCTION:

American society has a steadfast belief in the idea of the “American dream”. We hold to the belief that anyone, regardless of his or her social and economic background with hard work and perseverance can succeed. In this belief system education becomes a

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central piece for the enabling of upward social mobility and success. However, in many ways the idea of mandating that all children must attend school is inconsistent with fundamental values of American liberty; we mandate what children must learn but simultaneously preach democracy and freedom. This sort of contradiction only adds to the debate over how best to set up a fair educational system.

Access to education is central to “protect the concept of equal opportunity”. While almost everyone receives some form of education, there is enormous variation in the quality of the education that students have access to. Works such as Savage Inequalities by Jonathan Kozol, which chronicles the state of some of America’s most impoverished schools 1988 to 1990, paint a vivid picture of the inequities and miserable state of many urban schools. These works raise questions of how we as a society can allow such situations to exist. Several quotes from students and staff in these financially challenged schools provided by Kozol clearly illustrate the need for education improvements as well as the motivation for school choice reform efforts. A fourteen-year-old girl explains:

‘We have a school in East St. Louis named for Dr. King...The school is full of sewer water and the doors are locked with chains. Every student in that school is black. It’s a terrible joke on history.’

The superintendent of the same urban school district comments on the children’s educational experiences states:

‘Gifted children...are everywhere in East St. Louis, but their gifts are lost to poverty and turmoil and the damage done by knowing they are written

\[\text{\footnotesize 2 Howell 5.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 3 Howell 2.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 4 Howell 3.} \]
off by their society. Many of these children have no sense of something they belong to. They have no feeling of belonging to America.”

It is clear that the state and the quality of education in different areas of the country can greatly impact the opportunity and potential for young students to succeed and potentially create barriers to success. Since some inequality is bound to exist, according to Howell the discussion becomes “Which inequalities are acceptable and which require some kind of state correction”. Many gaps and differences exist- from divisions between races (seventy percent of black students were attending schools with overwhelmingly minority student bodies in 1996), to how much is spent on education (New Jersey budgeted $9,600 per student while Utah spent $3,800), more qualified teachers tend to opt for higher salaries at more highly regarded schools, not to mention large gaps in achievement test scores by race and parental levels of education.

In addition to concerns over social equality and justice regarding choice, throughout the evolution of the public school system United States there have been many trends resulting in school systems that are less responsive to their local communities and, “schools and those who work in them now respond to norms set by the education profession and by state and federal policy makers, and not to local norms and society consensus”. Assuming that there should be equality in educational opportunity and that difference in educational quality need to be addressed, it is necessary to examine the

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6 Kozol 33.
7 Howell 2.
8 Howell 3.
education system and education policy and how educational opportunity can be improved. Within this context the question of school choice in education arises. The desire for social equality, as well as the desire for increased local and parental control of schools has been the impetus for voucher programs as a means for education reform.

To examine voucher programs within the United States, I will address: the history and trends in education which has led to the desire for school choice; why and when ideologies in favor of vouchers arose; the concern and debate surrounding this type of education reform; provide an overview of several of these programs; and finally evaluate where voucher programs and educational choice are today. Through this I show how voucher programs have been born out of a desire for parents to have more influence and control over their children’s education, as well as to provide more equity in opportunity for low-income families.

II. HISTORY AND TRENDS IN EDUCATION AND SCHOOL CHOICE IDEOLOGY:

Voucher programs essentially propose that the government (or private organizations in many cases) provide families with the basic tuition expense thus enabling parents to choose to send their children to private schools. While this is an oversimplification, essentially the idea behind vouchers is to provide choices for parents, and while this notion that is not new, it has become popular in recent days as a response to historical trends in the education system today.

One of the first proposals for a voucher-like system was in 1776 in Wealth of Nations by Englishman Adam Smith.\textsuperscript{11} Smith presented a model in which parents would choose a school and the government would provide the school with a subsidy, arguing that if parents were not a factor in school choice and funding, schools would feel less inclined to make certain that parents’ desires were met and there would be less accountability by schools.\textsuperscript{12} Not long after in 1791, American Thomas Paine elaborated on Smith’s ideas in \textit{The Rights of Man}, however, unlike Smith, Paine turned the focus to low-income and impoverished families who would receive “special aid” and elaborated that it should be a requirement of all families to purchase education for their children.\textsuperscript{13} Pain suggested that it would be not only beneficial to the individuals, but also advantageous for governments to have well educated members of society.\textsuperscript{14}

Benjamin Rush similarly was focused on the importance of education as a tool to promote nationalist interests and create “Republican machines”.\textsuperscript{15} Rush spoke of free public education to promote community and citizenship.\textsuperscript{16} Horace Mann in 1840 took this further, Mann known for establishing the public school model in the United States, believed that public schools provided a way to teach common values for the nation.\textsuperscript{17} He viewed public schools as a means to assimilate children of different nationalities and turn

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Murphy 88-89.
\item[13] Murphy 89.
\item[14] Murphy 89.
\item[15] Glenn 143.
\item[16] Howell 6.
\item[17] Glenn 133.
\end{footnotes}
them into US citizens. A proponent of the Common School Movement, Mann believed that education should serve the purpose of eliminating diversity, avoiding controversial issues, and stressing democratic values and virtues. Curriculum included such things as patriotic celebrations like the pledge of allegiance, use of virtue focused materials like McGuffey’s reader, and English instruction in order to eliminate foreign languages of immigrant populations.

This concept of assimilation and the Common School Movement was continued in the educational philosophy of John Dewey in the early 1900’s. For Dewey, education served a social function and was essential to the development of democracy. He argued for students of diverse social and economic backgrounds within schools to serve as a microcosm of society- in this way, students could be exposed to privileged and underprivileged backgrounds and experience the democratic ideal where there is free interaction between different social groups. According to Dewey, social mobility requires education that encourages personal initiative and new experience for students.

A leader during the Progressive era, Dewey’s educational efforts were in line with many of the beliefs of society at the time. The prevailing attitudes of the period that impacted on Dewey’s educational philosophy are included in the following list provided by Murphy et al.:

18 Howell 6.
20 Donovan, Aine. "History of Civic Education Lecture."
1. Government should regulate economic power in the public interest
2. Expert knowledge and scientific method should be applied to solving social, political, economic, and educational problems.
3. The national environment should be conserved, and its quality enhanced
4. Political institutions and processes should be reformed to make government more efficient.
5. The spirit of community should be revitalized in the burgeoning urban areas.
6. Educational institutions and processes should facilitate democratic participation and scientific efficiency.\(^\text{24}\)

Dewey in *Democracy and Education* proposed that public state run education could be used to overcome social class and barriers to societal divisions as well as serve as a central tool for social mobility and a solution to economic inequality.\(^\text{25}\) However, this notion was difficult to implement as schools were locally controlled and the individuals in charge of the institutions were hesitant to change the system and relinquish their positions.\(^\text{26}\)

Following this progressive period, from the 1930’s through 1950’s focus shifted from Dewey’s model of a flexible style of educational, to a focus on basic skills.\(^\text{27}\) The following period in the 1960’s and 70’s was one of social consciousness and reform marked by the civil rights movement and efforts for special education legislation.\(^\text{28}\) The shift to a system of compulsory education controlled by the government has raised questions and promoted debate as to the rights of parents in the education their children receive.

The education system that one would endorse is dependent on the view of the purpose of education and the role of the educator. Dewey’s view was that the role of

\(^{24}\) Murphy 159.
\(^{25}\) Howell 8.
\(^{26}\) Howell 9.
\(^{27}\) Murphy 160.
\(^{28}\) Murphy 160.
educators was to work to challenge beliefs and help to enlighten children, in accordance with the belief that:

…it is that educators know better than parent what is good for their children, and that what is good for them is to become “autonomous” in a Kantian sense, that is, not influenced by inherited beliefs or standards that they have not themselves reflected upon critically and arrived at independently of any external authority. The task of educators, then, is to lead children out of darkness into the light.\(^{29}\)

If, as the above statement suggests, it is felt that education exists to help challenge and ameliorate problematic family views in order to create a more democratic and nationally conscious citizen, then a system or program which allows for parental choice and determination in their child’s education would be a less desirable option.

While the focus on the government interest of having an informed and educated populations is clearly present in the views of Paine, Rush, Mann, and Dewey, there are other who believe that the shift in focus to a centralized state controlled education system is problematic in terms of basic liberties as a parent and a citizen. As pointed out by law professor John Coons,

...a free society should not proceed on the assumption that any group knows better than average parents what is best for those parents’ children. ‘The right to form families and to determine the scope of their children’s practical liberty is for most men and women the primary occasion for choice and responsibility. One does not have to be rich or well placed to experience the family. The opportunity over a span of fifteen or twenty years to attempt the transmission of one’s deepest values to a beloved child provides a unique arena for the creative impulse. Here is the communication of ideas in its most elemental mode. Parental expression, for all its invisibility to the media, is an activity with profound First Amendment implications’\(^{30}\)

\(^{29}\) Glenn 148.
\(^{30}\) Glenn 148.
The US education system has transitioned since the 1900’s from being locally controlled by school boards, employing local teachers, to being controlled and influenced primarily by trends and policies of the education profession as well as state and federal forces. Teachers and administrators have become more professionalized, attaining high levels of specialized education in various aspects of the school system. Superintendents and principals typically obtain doctorates in the field, and teachers within the system receive advanced training in specific areas for example in special education, guidance, library studies, or school psychology.

Schools have become more centralized and consolidated, going from 120,000 school districts to under 15,000 from 1937 to 1998 respectively. With the merging of rural districts with larger urban areas, teacher unions began to become more popular in the 1960’s. National teacher labor unions such as The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) or the National Education Association (NEA) brought about contractual agreements between districts and teachers that strengthened teacher rights. At the same time legislation was brought regarding issues of funding between districts, rights of disabled students, health education requirements, as well as issues of personal liberties such as the pledge of allegiance and dress code requirements. All of these contributed to the creation of a more litigious educational system that decreased flexibility in school practices.

31 Glenn 134.
32 Howell 10.
33 Howell 10.
34 Howell 9.
35 Howell 10.
36 Howell 10.
37 Howell 10.
III. WHY VOUCHERS? IDEOLOGY AND THEORY BEHIND TYPE OF REFORM:

The shift in power and distancing from local control in the education system has in turn led to a desire in local communities for increased control and influence as a reaction to these trends towards centralization. John Stuart Mill developed a full voucher proposal in the nineteenth century- very similar to what Nobel Prize Winning economist Milton Friedman would later propose in the 1950s. Mill’s 1859 publication On Liberty stressed that if parents could not afford to send their children to school, the state should pay the difference and placed a strong emphasis on the rights of children to obtain an education. While Benjamin Rush saw the goal of education to produce “republican machines” and conformed citizens, Mill took the opposite stance, believing that state education used to conform citizens went against individual liberties. As Friedman would later elaborate, Mill posited that competition between educational institutions would promote improvements.

The idea of vouchers reentered public discussion in 1955 when Friedman proposed that voucher programs replace the existing system. He suggested that the pressure of competition for students would force schools to improve, as well as allow students and parents the ability to choose institutions that they felt best fit their personal needs and desires. Friedman saw the monopoly of public schools as problematic in that if schools know that there is only one option for education in a given district, they have

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38 Howell 13-14.
39 Murphy 89-90.
40 Donovan, Aine. "History of Civic Education Lecture."
41 Murphy 90.
42 Murphy 90.
44 Gill 4.
less motivation to keep high standards and efficiency in the system.\textsuperscript{45} Competition, he argued would induce, “productivity, efficiency, and consumer satisfaction” as in other market situations.\textsuperscript{46} However, the Friedman proposal came at the beginning of the civil rights period at a time when cases such as \textit{Brown vs. Board of Education} were applied by Southern segregationists as a way to maintain segregation.\textsuperscript{47} Because of this, vouchers became associated with this social injustice and fell out of favor until the 1970’s when they were suggested by many liberal social reformers as a way to combat overcrowded and poor quality urban schools.\textsuperscript{48} One Harvard sociologist, teaming with the Office of Economic Opportunity attempted to gain approval of federally funded experimental voucher programs but was met with large amounts of opposition from teachers unions and never was implemented.\textsuperscript{49}

During this time period the number of children being home schooled increased, going from 15,000 in the 1970s to one million in 1995.\textsuperscript{50} This trend clearly suggests parental discontentment in the available public education and the trends towards a federally controlled school systems. In the 1971 Gallup Survey, as would be expected parents were primarily concerned with the effect of school instructional practices on their children.\textsuperscript{51} Their concerns included: experimental teaching trends which they desired more information and communication with teachers about; and the impact of things such

\textsuperscript{45} Howell xi-xii.  
\textsuperscript{46} Howell xii.  
\textsuperscript{47} Howell 14.  
\textsuperscript{48} Howell 14.  
\textsuperscript{49} Howell 14.  
\textsuperscript{50} Murphy 160.  
as classroom discipline, testing, grade reports, and quality of things like text books.\(^{52}\)

This demonstrates motivation for not just vouchers, but public interest in programs that would permit more school choice for parents and students. Coupled with this, was the publication of an influential study by James Coleman in 1982 comparing private and public schools and concluding that private Catholic schools were more effective because of the “social capital” and community in the schools.\(^{53}\) This discussion was furthered in a book which details the advantages of parochial education by Bryk, Lee, and Holland, titled *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*.

Voucher programs again gained any momentum in the early 1990s led by educational academics Chubb and Moe.\(^{54}\) They argue that, “direct democratic (and bureaucratic) governance turns schools into incoherent institutions dominated by interest groups rather than by a shared sense of educational mission and public purpose”.\(^{55}\)

**IV. CENTRAL CONCERNS AND DEBATES REGARDING VOUCHER PROGRAMS:**

In discussions of the viability of voucher programs there are several central topics that recur as issues of debate and concern. These topics include: parental ability to make these choices; school voucher programs increasing racial and socioeconomic divisions rather than ameliorating segregation; exclusion of less academically gifted or learning disabled students; academic advantages of private schools versus public schools and their respective abilities to educate students; and finally that choice and access to private

\(^{52}\) Savage 126-129.

\(^{53}\) Howell xii.

\(^{54}\) Howell 14.

\(^{55}\) Gill 4.
schools will not encourage values of tolerance, exposure to differences, and unconstitutional encouragement of religious values.\textsuperscript{56}

Central to the debate over vouchers is the concern over what choice in education will create. However, as Howell and Peterson point out in \textit{The Education Gap: Vouchers and Urban Schools}, choice has always existed, just under the guise of the housing market.\textsuperscript{57} They explain that:

\begin{quote}
\textit{School choice is not an abstract vision of the future; it is deeply embedded in contemporary practice. School vouchers not so much introduce choice in education as reduce its dependence on the housing market...Many defenders of public education presume the existence of common schools in which all children are educated together regardless of their race, creed, household income, or parents' occupations. But public schools in fact serve very differentiated populations.}\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

Dalton Conley in his sociological exploration of the race-class debate, \textit{Being Black, Living in the Red: Race, Wealth and Social Policy in America}, describes the link between family wealth and opportunities for social mobility connected to race. In his study, he examines the impact of residential patterns on perpetuating racial segregation and unequal opportunity, describing the process of “white flight” in many urban and suburban areas.\textsuperscript{59} According to Conley, the growth of minority populations in residential areas cause the white population to move elsewhere because of the perception that property values decrease with increased minority populations.\textsuperscript{60} Since, “…school budgets are financed through local property taxes, the issue of school quality is tied to the value of

\textsuperscript{56} Howell 17.
\textsuperscript{57} Howell 22.
\textsuperscript{58} Howell 22.
\textsuperscript{60} Conley 39.
property.”61 With larger school budgets, schools have more resources and thus can provide more for their students in terms of numbers of teachers and educational tools and technology such as computers.62 In areas of residential poverty, children are also exposed to other factors that can negatively impact educational achievement such as an absence of positive peer value on education, or “violence, crime, and drug abuse” which are prevalent in these socioeconomic settings and in turn create obstacles for education.63 White parents when polled were statistically more likely to choose their residential location based on the quality public schools in an area as compared to minority parents (45 percent of white parents, 35 percent of Hispanic parents, and 22 percent of African American parents).64 As Howell and Peterson explain, “Because racial inequalities pervade the U.S. housing market, this system of educational choice through residential selection contravenes the ideal of equal opportunity that the nation espouses.”65 Since vouchers have been thought to be an effective way to separate schools from the housing market dynamics, providing more equality in opportunity,66 it is important to examine the key issues of discussion surrounding voucher programs to determine how they can work to either promote or inhibit the “ideal of equal opportunity” as discussed above.

Issue #1: Parents ability to obtain information to make choices for children’s education:

Central to the debate is parents’ ability to make good choices for their children when it comes to education.67 The ability of parents to obtain information about schools

61 Conley 39.
62 Conley 61.
63 Conley 62.
64 Howell 25.
65 Howell 27.
66 Howell 27.
67 Howell 17.
to make decisions about which school to send their children to and their knowledge of voucher programs and the application process are crucial in order for choice to force schools to improve themselves for the education consumer.\textsuperscript{68} The idea that choice will improve schools and the available options in the education market is central to the principle of educational choice.\textsuperscript{69} The idea of choice is tied to concepts of liberty for parents and families in the United States\textsuperscript{70}, however, at the same time, if people are unable to make good choices; the argument that choice will create positive change in the education system becomes a moot point. The issue with choice here becomes not the concept of choice, but the availability and equity of choice.\textsuperscript{71} If parents are not well informed or unable to access the information necessary to make a properly informed choice, the system results in inequality. Voucher programs function within a system of “first come/first serve” and as a result the access to information about programs, how to apply for a voucher, and different school options, rewards families who have access to information and are able to act quickly.\textsuperscript{72}

One of the primary purposes for vouchers is to reduce inequality and provide equity in options for low-income families; however a lack of information does not in fact help to open up these possibilities. In one study of the St Louis area it was found that few parents visited schools when deciding where to send their children.\textsuperscript{73} Education is a difficult consumer good to gather information about, as education is dependent not only on the instructor, but also the individual child and their learning style as well as many

\textsuperscript{68} Howell 18. \\
\textsuperscript{69} Gill 127. \\
\textsuperscript{70} Gill 128. \\
\textsuperscript{71} Gill 151. \\
\textsuperscript{72} Murphy 121. \\
\textsuperscript{73} Howell 18.
other variables. Parents may also be inclined to evaluate schools based on arbitrary factors and statistics and as a result may not make the most effective choice for their child. Some researchers however argue that so long as part of the population is informed and making good choices about schools the entire education market will be positively affected. It is also possible that non-academic factors will in the end prove to be the central motivating factor.

For parochial schools it is in their best interest to increase the size of their student body to provide additional tuition income. As a result, churches in a voucher system try and recruit students who would otherwise have no information. Thus it is not surprising that not only were sectarian and Catholic schools the most frequently chosen, but families that applied for and programs were found to be on average more religious. Depending on the particular interests of an educational organization, they may be more or less involved and motivated to disseminate information about their programs that can influence who is applying for and using vouchers. In addition, while the difference were small, families applying for vouchers tended to be two parent households and better educated.

An important factor in the decision of parents to participate in voucher programs after winning voucher lotteries was being notified that they were recipients. Many

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74 Howell 18.
75 Howell 18.
76 Howell 18.
77 Howell 19.
78 Murphy 121.
79 Murphy 121.
80 Howell 65.
81 Howell 62.
82 Howell 66.
families were not informed until close to the start of the new school year or after many of the private schools were unable to admit new students that received vouchers. As a result parents tended to rely on the plan that they had already made for their child’s upcoming school year. Some argue that because of the central importance of being informed and obtaining information about schools in this model of education, “low-income parents with low levels of education who are living in segregated areas will be disadvantaged in the decision making process. Social networks are a key method of obtaining information on educational options, and families living in segregated areas are closed off from many information channels and tend to belong to segregated networks.”

From this statement it is clear that the community in which an individual lives greatly shapes their knowledge of educational options and thus influences the choices that parents are capable of making for their children. Having the freedom to make a choice for their child’s education loses some of its power and benefit if parents lack the tools to make the best choice possible.

Issue #2: Impact on racial and socioeconomic stratification in education

Another fear of voucher programs is that they will not achieve the desired outcome of creating more equality in education opportunity and rather increase racial and socioeconomic divisions. In terms of socioeconomics, additional costs associated with attending private schools can contribute to making this choice inaccessible for some. Costs not covered by the tuition voucher excluded families from being able to participate

83 Howell 66.
84 Howell 66.
85 Gill 173.
86 Howell 17.
87 Howell 67.
in the programs—for example, the cost of books, uniforms, and other school fees.\textsuperscript{88} Other families that did not use vouchers explained that it was due to the inability to find transportation for their children to schools that were farther from home than the local public school.\textsuperscript{89} These kinds of issues can serve to exclude low-income families from the programs rather than increase the options for education.

Others argue that the residential requirement reinforced racial and economic inequalities in schools; private schools being able to perpetuate these inequalities based on which students they choose to accept and what types of students are drawn to apply.\textsuperscript{90} Some experts believe that in the end choice does not empower students and families to choose their educational institution, but that private schools evaluating the applications have the real choice.\textsuperscript{91}

Howell and Peterson following their studies on voucher programs posit that if certain rules and regulations are placed on the programs and their implementation, it is possible to avoid these issues and the possibility of increasing social divides.\textsuperscript{92} There is also a need for more private school and public school alternatives if the voucher programs are to be successful as it is difficult to provide enough spots for students, even including religious schools.\textsuperscript{93} Without regulation studies have found that rather than serving the low-income population of students, it is white middle class students who make use of voucher programs, which in part could be related to the informational issue

\textsuperscript{88} Howell 67.  
\textsuperscript{89} Howell 67.  
\textsuperscript{90} Howell 19.  
\textsuperscript{91} Howell 19.  
\textsuperscript{92} Howell 20.  
\textsuperscript{93} Murphy 121.
discussed previously. In cases where schools were free to enforce their own admissions criteria some populations were excluded, however, in cases like Milwaukee’s “highly regulated public voucher program” these issues were prevented.

Important to this debate is concern that schools will preferentially select those students who are the easiest to educate, thus leaving behind children who are either learning disabled, behaviorally challenged, or not academically motivated. Many argue that even in systems where schools appear diverse and racially integrated, there still exists the possibility of segregation and divisions within the schools themselves on a classroom level in the form of tracking programs. It is thought that by allowing minority students to enter smaller institutions with less tracking (i.e. historically white private schools) vouchers will improve racial divisions. Countering the argument that with voucher programs public schools are left with all of the low income students, it has been observed that in most cases those making use of vouchers in regulated programs are in fact low income students, thus students with higher family incomes are not being pulled from the public schools and lowering the average family income demographics of the public schools. The statistics for public schools and schools within the voucher program in Milwaukee demonstrate that voucher schools are much less racially divided. Data from 1999-2000 shows that “50 percent of Milwaukee public-school students attend schools with enrollments that are at least 90 percent minority or 90

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94 Murphy 121.  
95 Murphy 121.  
96 Gill 172.  
97 Gill 173.  
98 Gill 173.  
99 Gill 177.  
100 Gill 177.
percent white.” In comparison, for voucher schools forty-percent attend schools with similar degree of segregation; the most integrated were religiously affiliated voucher program schools with thirty percent. From this data it appears that while vouchers will not completely alleviate racial segregation within schools, depending on how these programs are employed there are small improvements in racial stratification. These programs, however, must be designed to target specific populations to avoid the reverse outcome of “white flight”. In a study of private school enrollment in New York, it was found that “When the proportion of minority students in the public schools rises by one standard deviation, the likelihood of white, college-educated parents sending their children to private school increases by one-third.” The authors of this study conclude that if vouchers are readily accessible by white higher income parents, movement away from schools with diversity will increase racial division within schools.

“Skimming”, defined by Howell and Peterson as “the practice of recruiting and selecting talented, committed people for whatever the task at hand” occurs in many facets of the education system and can result in stratification in the education system. This is a concern in the debate over vouchers. The most common example of skimming in US education occurs in the admissions process for higher education institutions, where schools to obtain higher rankings and prestige strive to have higher achieving and scoring students at their institutions. However, in both public and private schools skimming by

101 Gill 178.
102 Gill 178.
103 Gill 185.
104 Gill 185.
105 Howell 56.
106 Howell 56-57.
separating students based on “ability and background” also exists.\textsuperscript{107} Examples of skimming in the public school system take the form of selective magnet school programs, as well as through the housing market as discussed previously.\textsuperscript{108} The housing requirement in this case serves as a mechanism to weed out individuals from different racial and financial backgrounds\textsuperscript{109} - thus, “skimming” out particular subsets of students.

As Conley illustrates, social and environmental factors all influence a child’s development and in turn academic performance. For families without wealth, factors such as the necessity for children to hold a job,\textsuperscript{110} or the stress of living in a poverty stricken area in overcrowded households make for an environment which makes academic focus and achievement more difficult.\textsuperscript{111} This is confirmed by studies that demonstrate a correlation between the academic achievement level of schools and the proportion of students who qualifies for free lunch programs.\textsuperscript{112} Private schools demonstrate skimming by the exclusionary factor of need to pay.\textsuperscript{113} However, since the housing market leads to similar economic stratification, overcoming tuition barriers through a voucher system is arguably a feasible way to overcome the racial and economic stratifications that exist in the public school system.\textsuperscript{114} However, while private schools statistically are heterogeneous in terms of economic standards, there is much less academic and racial difference within private institutions compared to public schools.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{107} Howell 56. 
\textsuperscript{108} Howell 57. 
\textsuperscript{109} Howell 57. 
\textsuperscript{110} Conley 60. 
\textsuperscript{111} Conley 67. 
\textsuperscript{112} Howell 58. 
\textsuperscript{113} Howell 59. 
\textsuperscript{114} Howell 59. 
\textsuperscript{115} Howell 60.
In terms of voucher programs themselves, skimming exists and must be considered for the programs to ameliorate the problems they seek to address rather than perpetuate the same problems of racial and socioeconomic stratification. Some students are denied admission based on the discretion of the private school either due to poor test scores or other factors. Racial and socioeconomic stratification can also as discussed previously due to a lack of information for low-income parents about voucher options and application processes.

Issue #3: Potential exclusion of learning disabled and handicapped students:

The concern over skimming leads to another issue of debate regarding voucher programs, inclusion for learning disabled and handicapped students in a voucher system. With vouchers there is the issue of additional cost to meet the needs of students—extra costs that are not provided within the voucher amounts. For students with special needs there is debate over how best to meet their needs, whether that means public schools, private schools, specialized services, or mainstream classrooms with additional help. The need for additional services to meet the needs of disabled students in some cases serves to deter families from utilizing vouchers as public schools are legally required to provide services and in some cases families felt unsure that the costs of these additional services would be covered in other schools. However, for those families of disabled students who used vouchers, families of students attending private

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116 Howell 60.
117 Howell 61.
118 Howell 20.
119 Howell 72.
120 Howell 73.
121 Howell 73.
schools were overall much happier with the services their children received.\textsuperscript{122} One national survey showed that, “In Washington, D.C., 49 percent of the private school parents said that their school was addressing their child’s special needs ‘very well,’ compared with only 23 percent of the public school parents.”\textsuperscript{123} At the same time, some educators have raised the concern that by becoming known as a school that is good at providing for a certain population of students, for example those with learning disabilities, the school will be inundated with all these students making it more difficult to provide these services and changing the overall school population.\textsuperscript{124} That being said, the data indicates that public schools service the majority of the special needs population and the number of special needs students participating in voucher programs is small.\textsuperscript{125}

\textit{Issue #4: Effectiveness of private versus public education:}

A related issue that is often debated is the effectiveness of private schools as compared to public schools.\textsuperscript{126} In books such as \textit{Catholic Schools and the Common Good} by Bryk, Lee, and Holland, the factors that are said to make parochial education more effective than public school are questioned. Many studies have explored the impact that school systems have on student achievement and raise questions regarding the effects of private schools on student achievement; asking if these private schools are in fact more effective, or do they just serve a selected population of students that would do well regardless of school.\textsuperscript{127} However, this issue is less pertinent given the broad range of public and private schools throughout the country. While one private school might in fact

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{122} Howell 74.
  \item \textsuperscript{123} Howell 74.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} Howell 20.
  \item \textsuperscript{125} Gill 163.
  \item \textsuperscript{126} Howell 20.
  \item \textsuperscript{127} Howell 20.
\end{itemize}
be better than one public school, another public school in a higher income area might in fact be better than a given private school, thus generalizations of private versus public school seem slightly arbitrary.

There is also question of what makes a school effective and how can these qualities be measured.\textsuperscript{128} Comparing schools on a number of individual factors does not necessarily indicate the quality of education for children. For example, comparing expenditures between schools does not show strong connections to how much material students are actually learning, not to mention that the differences in services between public and private schools makes comparison difficult.\textsuperscript{129} The importance of school size is another issue of debate. Some point to the ability of larger schools to have more programs and activities like sports teams or theater programs, while other argue that these larger schools are less effective because students can become anonymous and not get the personal attention that will positively affect and promote learning.\textsuperscript{130} Chubb and Moe, in evaluating the characteristics of effective schools, describe these qualities as, “clear school goals, rigorous academic standards, order and discipline, homework, strong leadership by the principle, teacher participation in decision making, parental support and cooperation, and high expectations for student performance.”\textsuperscript{131} They also found that in schools that were effective, “…superintendents and central office administrators had less oversight regarding curriculum, instructional methods, hiring and firing of personal, and disciplinary standards…effective schools had an above-average level of administrative

\textsuperscript{128} Howell 91.
\textsuperscript{129} Howell 91-92.
\textsuperscript{130} Howell 101.
\textsuperscript{131} Howell 103.
autonomy.”¹³² In many ways this goes back to the earlier discussion of the trends in education towards a more centrally controlled professional institution. Their findings would seem to suggest that perhaps the more litigious and centrally controlled school system in the United States perhaps does not lend itself to the most effective student achievement.

Parental involvement and communication with schools is one of the major factors that is thought to improve with the market model of education.¹³³ If parents are paying for their child’s education, and if teachers are held responsible by these paying customer parents, there is more incentive for closer communication and involvement on both sides.¹³⁴ Studies demonstrate more homework in private schools as compared to public schools,¹³⁵ in addition policies for school uniforms were much more common in private schools. Many parents felt these differences improved the structure and discipline of the school environment.¹³⁶ Physical and measurable factors are also important for many parents as often class size is smaller in private schools and the physical buildings themselves of higher quality.¹³⁷

While the data on academic achievement is still topic for debate, studies have measured greater parental satisfaction for families using vouchers to opt for private schools.¹³⁸ Measuring a school’s success based on test scores is a contentious issue, however there have been some studies that conclude that when minority students attend

¹³² Howell 103.
¹³³ Howell 104.
¹³⁴ Howell 104.
¹³⁵ Howell 107.
¹³⁶ Howell 109-110.
¹³⁷ Howell 99.
¹³⁸ Gill 140.
Catholic schools on average there is higher future educational achievement as measured by high school and college graduation rates.\textsuperscript{139}

\textit{Issue #5: Impact on democratic values of the society:}

The final central issue is tied to early notions of schools serving a function in nation building described in the earlier sections of this paper. A concern related to vouchers is the view that this type of choice will “contribute to racial isolation, political intolerance, and unconstitutional establishment of religion”\textsuperscript{140} If people are left to choose private education which suits their personal beliefs it is feared that society will be split “along ethnic and racial lines” as people surround themselves with only those that are ethnically similar.\textsuperscript{141} Many individuals and scholars such as Amy Gutmann, share the belief that it is necessary for public schools to work to teach not just academic subjects and practical skills, but also shape and instill common democratic and American values upon which society is founded.\textsuperscript{142} Gutmann in has stressed the importance of public control in shaping the democratic values that are taught in schools.\textsuperscript{143} She argues that it is only through communal and public debate and discussion of various issues that society can come to make value judgments that are in the public interest.\textsuperscript{144} According to Gutmann, having vouchers is antithetical to the goals of democratic education in that parents have the choice of what civic values are learned rather than the community and society at large.\textsuperscript{145} Through this collective education citizens are formed and the moral

\textsuperscript{139} Gill 114.
\textsuperscript{140} Howell 17.
\textsuperscript{141} Howell 21.
\textsuperscript{142} Howell 21.
\textsuperscript{143} Gill 202.
\textsuperscript{144} Gill 202.
\textsuperscript{145} Gill 202.
character of the nation is established. In addition to the fear that vouchers and school choice will harm the collective identity and values of the country, many also question the constitutionality of voucher programs arguing that providing public funding to religious schools is a violation of the First Amendment.

Regarding the suggestion that private schools corrode the democratic character of the United States, surveys show that in fact there is little difference in the democratic attitudes of students in private versus public schools, and in fact some suggest that those students educated in Catholic schools were perhaps more tolerant of different groups than students in public schools. Studies have shown that the majority of voucher recipients choose religious schools that are of the same denomination as their own faith, and attending religious schools was reported in many cases to increase the religious activities of students. Books such as Catholic Schools and the Common Good, propose that the success seen in many Catholic schools is the direct result of a focus on “character formation” and in the Catholic school setting students feel very much a part of a community and practice citizenship within this “microcosm of society” thus preparing students for democratic and civic actions in the future. Many believe that in the years following the appearance of publications such as A Nation at Risk, the public school focus has shifted away from any value education and focused instead on basic skills of

146 Howell 21.
147 Howell 21.
148 Howell 131.
149 Howell 133.
150 Gill 201.
math and reading. Within a pluralistic society like the United States, the notion of value education is a contentious and a focus of much debate.

V. WHAT VOUCHER PROGRAMS LOOK LIKE: EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMS:

From 1990 to 2000 the number of vouchers being used has increased dramatically (from 5,000 to 60,000 students, and of those about 50,000 vouchers were made available through privately funded programs). Private and public programs differ in many ways especially in the extent of the legal limitations associate with government funding.

In publicly funded voucher programs, efforts to address the issues and concerns discussed in the previous sections were directed towards limiting public vouchers to students who fit the following criteria: from low-income families, attending public schools that are designated as “failing”, or students from areas without an available public school. In Milwaukee the first public, state-funded, voucher program was passed in 1990 after much conflict between teachers unions and school boards who opposed the programs and Republican legislators who proposed this solution. The program was initially small, capping the number of students at one percent of the public school population, and limited students to secular schools (even though 90 percent of the private schools in the area were religiously affiliated). While the program was in place to enhance choice, choices were still very limited based on the program restrictions. In addition, dynamics of power and conflicts between competing interests of teachers,
school boards, and parents, within the educational system were also an issue. The program and the choice available was expanded in 1996 with an increase the number of students allowed to participate, as well as the inclusion of religious schools making more schools available for more students.\textsuperscript{158} After challenges over the constitutionality of including religious schools, the Supreme Court ruled in 1998 that the program did not violate the first amendment.\textsuperscript{159} By the year 2000 students could receive up to $5,326 in tuition assistance, and in total were attending as many as 100 different private schools in the area.\textsuperscript{160} The Cleveland program started in 1996, and differed from Milwaukee in that it included religious schools as an option from the inception.\textsuperscript{161} It also differed in the requirement for students participating to be between kindergarten and third grade and they could receive only up to $2,250 in tuition assistance.\textsuperscript{162} Florida is another example of a state with a publicly funded voucher program. Governor Bush proposed the plan for students attending “failing” schools determined by state testing.\textsuperscript{163} The program started in 1999 provided as much as $3,389 in private school tuition.\textsuperscript{164}

Privately funded programs are often too controversial to be passed as government legislation; however, they can serve as useful experiments of new public policy practices.\textsuperscript{165} Private voucher programs and private scholarship funds are different in several respects: vouchers are not dependent on academic ability and performance;\textsuperscript{166} are

\textsuperscript{158} Howell 30.  
\textsuperscript{159} Howell 31.  
\textsuperscript{160} Howell 31.  
\textsuperscript{161} Howell 31.  
\textsuperscript{162} Howell 31.  
\textsuperscript{163} Howell 32.  
\textsuperscript{164} Howell 32.  
\textsuperscript{165} Howell 33.  
\textsuperscript{166} Howell 33.
randomly given by lottery; and are not connected with specific schools or programs\textsuperscript{167}-thus making them more open to school choice. Many of the programs provide assistance to parents for partial tuition leaving parents responsible to pay the difference.\textsuperscript{168} In New York the School Choice Scholarships Foundation held lotteries to award 1,200 vouchers of approximately $1,400 each.\textsuperscript{169} The vouchers were valid for three years and only available to students in free-lunch programs.\textsuperscript{170} It is also worth noting that in 1997 when the program was first offered as many as 20,000 students and families were interested in the program,\textsuperscript{171} pointing to a desire in families to have school choice and potential dissatisfaction with their current educational options. Other private programs, such as the voucher program in Washington, D.C. supported by the Washington Scholarship Fund and a program in Dayton, Ohio founded by the Parents Advancing Choice in Education group both came about in 1998.\textsuperscript{172} Both of these programs restricted income levels targeting low-income populations and covered roughly sixty percent of private school tuition.\textsuperscript{173}

In addition to the public program in Milwaukee, it is also worth noting the presence of a privately funded voucher program started in 1992 called the Partners Advancing Values in Education (PAVE).\textsuperscript{174} PAVE, from 1993-1994, provided vouchers to 2,370 students form a pool of 4,000 applications, each student receiving $1,000-$1,500

\textsuperscript{167} Howell 34.  
\textsuperscript{168} Howell 34.  
\textsuperscript{169} Howell 34.  
\textsuperscript{170} Howell 34.  
\textsuperscript{171} Howell 34.  
\textsuperscript{172} Howell 35.  
\textsuperscript{173} Howell 35.  
\textsuperscript{174} Murphy 114.
in tuition.\textsuperscript{175} Of the students receiving PAVE vouchers ninety-five percent used the funds to attend religious schools, most choosing Catholic schools.\textsuperscript{176} In studies of the program it was found that many of the parents found out about the programs from either the schools themselves or from their religious groups.\textsuperscript{177} This points to potential conflicts of interest between the schools, religious groups in the information distribution regarding voucher programs. Regardless, many parents were pleased with the private schools that their children were able to attend and there is some indication that students performed better on academic skills tests as well.\textsuperscript{178}

There are also national privately run voucher programs in existence such as the Children’s Scholarship Fund (CFS). With 1.25 million applications in 1999, CFS provided 40,000 students with vouchers selected through a lottery.\textsuperscript{179} These numbers once again would seem to indicate a strong parental interest and desire for private school choice. Like the other programs previously mentioned, students qualified for the program based on family income levels and were restricted to low-income families, awarding amounts depending on a family’s income in relation to the poverty line.\textsuperscript{180}

VI. WHERE ARE WE TODAY? CONCLUSIONS:

Education reform based on the idea of providing choice to promote equal opportunity has become a popular topic for discussion today. Much of the current discussion, however, has been focused on charter programs rather than voucher efforts. A recent article appearing in the New York Times, illustrates some of the problems

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\textsuperscript{175} Murphy 115. \\
\textsuperscript{176} Murphy 115. \\
\textsuperscript{177} Murphy 116. \\
\textsuperscript{178} Murphy 116. \\
\textsuperscript{179} Howell 37. \\
\textsuperscript{180} Howell 37.
\end{flushleft}
associated with unions and school regulations. The article details teacher frustration with the Knowledge Is Power Program charter school network and problems associated with increased rigidity of school and teacher requirements that has been a result of teacher union regulations. On the one hand, some teachers believe that unions place unnecessary requirements on schools that make it impossible for them to do their jobs, while on the other hand others argue that union efforts, “are just trying to ensure that teachers are given fair pay and clear guidelines for how and why they could be dismissed.” In an interview a teacher explains that the rules and practices formalized in agreements between schools and unions end up causing “rigidity for the sake of rigidity”. As the article makes clear, the path that public education has taken towards formalized and contractual controlled institutions has many people looking for other options.

Charter schools, which must be publicly approved to operate, are popular a option as these programs give choice and flexibility for individual schools, but avoid some of the issues surrounding voucher programs discussed above. Some formerly Catholic private schools are being converted into charter schools, maintaining many of

182 Medina, Jennifer.
183 Medina.
184 Medina.
185 Gill 9.
the elements of the previous school, however, with modifications to the religious curriculum.\textsuperscript{186}

The Bush administration brought attention to the voucher debate with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 which enabled parents to choose alternative schools within their district if the public school their child was attending failed state evaluation twice.\textsuperscript{187} In 2002 the case of Zelman v. Simmons-Harris also brought the voucher issue to public attention, when the Supreme Court ruled that because parents are able to choose either religious or non-religious options in voucher programs in Ohio were not in conflict with the First Amendment.\textsuperscript{188} Other government policy changes of note include the 2004 voucher program passed by Congress.\textsuperscript{189} This program targets students form low-income families and provides 1,600 vouchers.\textsuperscript{190} In addition, charter schools have been encouraged in many areas and are “the most rapidly spreading form of school choice”, with as many as one million students attending this type of school.\textsuperscript{191}

Another approach currently being discussed is that of the recently appointed head of the Washington, D.C. school system Michelle Rhee.\textsuperscript{192} According to Rhee, “…the answer to the U.S.'s education catastrophe is talent, in the form of outstanding teachers and principals. She wants to make Washington teachers the highest paid in the country,

\textsuperscript{187} Howell xvii.
\textsuperscript{188} Howell xvii.
\textsuperscript{189} Howell xviii.
\textsuperscript{190} Howell xviii.
\textsuperscript{191} Howell xviii.
and in exchange she wants to get rid of the weakest teachers." Rhee believes that it is necessary to get rid of ineffective teachers and adopt a system of merit-based pay. However this has teachers and unions concerned about how merit and good teaching will be measured. Unlike the market approach where teachers are motivated because the parents they are serving are paying the tuition for their salaries, Rhee’s plan for schools has teachers select merit pay in exchange for tenure, or else, teachers can keep tenure at the expense of potential (up to $130,000 in bonuses). However, teacher unions have not agreed to her proposals and tensions have increased between Rhee and the teachers unions.

Many studies confirm Rhee’s approach to school reform and focus on teaching quality, Eric Hanushek a researcher at Stanford concludes that:

*If two average 8-year-olds are assigned to different teachers, one who is strong and one who is weak, the children's lives can diverge in just a few years... The child with the effective teacher, the kind who ranks among the top 15% of all teachers, will be scoring well above grade level on standardized tests by the time she is 11. The other child will be a year and a half below grade level–and by then it will take a teacher who works with the child after school and on weekends to undo the compounded damage. In other words, the child will probably never catch up.*

It is clear how important teacher quality is for educational success. In the debate over choice for educational opportunity much of the focus is on attempting to provide the most effective education possible in order to give all students an equal chance at success. Just being able to choose a private school will not solve the
crux of the problem—since the real issue is the quality of the schools not just the ability for students to have choice. While voucher programs provide a small-scale improvement for students that are able to receive vouchers, the real focus should be placed on improving the existing public schools and overhauling the existing system.

Works Cited


