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The School Voucher Dilemma

Policymakers have struggled over the question of how best to educate our children since the beginning of our nation. Over the past decade, there has been a fight in Congress to enact a school voucher system funded by tax dollars as one way to do that. The debate over providing publicly financed education vouchers or "scholarships" is forcing many to rethink their commitment to public schools. With the overwhelming majority of American children of all races attending public school (93 percent of black children and 88 percent of white children), this is certainly an issue that deserves everyone's attention.

On one side of this argument are conservatives who assert that parents should have an alternative to the poor quality educations their children are receiving in many of their neighborhood schools. They also cite the violence and lack of discipline prevalent in some urban classrooms. Some argue that vouchers could be a stick to force these schools to shape up by having to compete with private and parochial schools for students.

Others demand that tax dollars be used to make public schools better. They also charge that permitting vouchers to be used to send children to parochial schools would violate the First Amendment's separation of church and state principle.

The debate over vouchers has divided African Americans to the point that a majority now favor such a program even though most black leaders and policymakers stand opposed to the idea. The Joint Center's recent national survey found that 57 percent of African Americans would support a voucher system. Some of this support no doubt comes from black parents who feel the public education their children are getting is so bad they'll grasp at anything. The same poll found that 61 percent of black Americans rated the public schools in their communities as poor or only fair. Many of these issues are discussed in greater detail in "School Vouchers and Black Americans" in the "Economic Report" in this issue of *FOCUS*.

All of these points of view converged on Capitol Hill recently when legislation was introduced to provide $3,200 scholarships to 2,000 children from poor families in Washington, D.C. The measure, backed by Republican House and Senate leaders, was framed as a means of providing educational equity. But Eleanor Holmes Norton, the District's black nonvoting delegate, protested that while the supporters of the measure were imposing it on the District, they have not proposed such scholarships or vouchers in their own jurisdictions.

This is a very complex issue and must be dealt with in the larger context of what is the best way to educate our children. It is clear that many of the nation's public schools are substandard, even dangerous. How do we provide relief to children trapped in these schools because—vouchers or not—private schools are not obliged to open their doors to everyone. On the other hand, not all public schools are bad—some are excellent. As policymakers decide what to do, they must weigh constitutional considerations along with our democratic principle of providing a free, quality education to all children.

African Americans have an overriding interest in this issue. It is after all, a matter that affects the education of *our* children, and the well-being of our communities. So we have a responsibility to be actively involved in helping to shape this issue as it courses its way through the legislative process. ■



PRESIDENT

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Are National Tests Good for Black Children?

FOCUS Looks at the Debate on National Tests from Two Points of View: The Secretary of Education and the NAACP Legal Defense Fund

Since President Clinton proposed national voluntary reading and math tests in his State of the Union Address in February, the plan has generated considerable controversy. The proposal calls for a national annual reading test in English at grade 4 and a math test at grade 8. The purpose of the tests would be to provide parents and teachers with information about how students are progressing compared to other states, the nation, and even other countries. While the Department of Education would fund the development of the tests, the administration, scoring, and reporting of test results would be left to states or local school districts.

On September 11, the U.S. Senate passed a measure by a vote of 87 to 13 supporting national tests but shifting control of them from the Department of Education to an independent board. The following week, in the House, an odd coalition of conservatives and liberals, including the Congressional Black Caucus, rejected national test legislation, 295 to 125. Conservatives saw tests as a costly federal intrusion into the workings of local school districts. But the black legislators, the Black Leadership Forum, and civil rights organizations fear the tests will be used to place poor and minority children into low-end classes. Following are two opposing views on tests. The first is the congressional testimony of Education Secretary Richard Riley before the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee on September 4, 1997; the second is a position paper by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc., "Serious Problems with the Proposed Voluntary National Tests in Rading and Mathematics."

Education Secretary Richard W. Riley:

More students than ever before are in our nation's classrooms—52.2 million. And that number is going to keep on growing. If we give all of these young people a quality education, America will remain strong, prosperous, and free.

Education begins with challenging students to do their best. That's why standards are so important—rigorous standards that encourage students to work hard and stretch their minds. If I could sum up everything I've learned about education in three words, they would be "High standards work." That's because schools and students rise to the expectations we set for them.

But let's not kid ourselves—we still have a long way to go. Most important, we need to make sure that every young American gets a solid foundation in the basics—reading and math. Reading scores have remained flat for a quarter of a century. And the results of the Third International Math and Science Study (TIMSS) show that our 8th graders are below the international average in math.

President Clinton and I took a look at all this and decided that we needed to take action. That is why we have proposed rigorous, voluntary national tests in 4th-grade reading and 8th-grade math. Fourth-grade reading and 8th-grade math were chosen because these two basic skills are the "make-or-break" points in a child's education. Let's take a look at reading.

Teachers will tell you that students who cannot read independently by the 4th grade often get down on themselves. Poor readers become frustrated, they start falling behind, and they often head down the road to truancy and dropping out. Some even begin to make the wrong choices about drugs. We can save these young people if we identify who needs help, which schools need help, and the give them the assistance they need.

Now let me talk about math. Our proposal for the 8th-grade math test includes algebra and even some geometry. That's because the vast majority of experts view those subjects as the gateway courses that prepare young people to take college-prep courses in high school. Currently, only 20 percent of our 8th graders take algebra. Yet in many countries, such as Japan, 100 percent of 8th graders take algebra. We've got to close "the Algebra Gap" or our international competitors will move ahead of us.

Our proposal for voluntary national tests is not revolutionary. We are simply taking the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests one step further. Right now, NAEP does not test all students, and it provides no information at all on individual students, schools, or districts.

We want to change that and that is why I call the new national tests a "personalized version of NAEP" because they will test individual students in participating schools or states. These tests will tell parents, teachers, policy makers, and students about what it takes to reach national and even international standards of achievement—something no other test currently does.

Equally important, these tests will use the rigorous NAEP frameworks and hold students to high standards. That doesn't always happen with other tests. I have attached a chart to my testimony that illustrates this point. You can see that on some state tests, students appear to be doing high-level proficient work. But students don't do as well when measured against NAEP's high standards of excellence. This means that some parents are being told that their children are doing "A" level work, when in reality they're only getting a "C" education. Voluntary national tests, linked to high standards, will give parents and

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Tests

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teachers a much clearer, more realistic picture of how their children are doing.

Perhaps most important of all, these tests will get the whole country buzzing. They already have. I think I've heard more discussion about education in the last six months than I've ever heard, and that's the way to make bottom-up change happen. The American people are ready for this. The latest Gallup Poll found that two out of three Americans say that national tests would improve student achievement "a great deal or quite a lot."

Now, I know that some in the Congress and elsewhere have expressed concern about the tests. The President and I have moved to address these concerns. First, let me reiterate that the tests are voluntary. No state or school will be required to offer these tests as a condition of receiving federal funding.

Second, there is ample authority to fund development and use of the tests under the Fund for the Improvement of Education (FIE), authorized by Section 1010 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This statute expressly authorizes the Secretary of Education to support "nationally significant programs and projects to improve the quality of education." FIE and similar previous authorities have been used by the U.S. Department of Education under both Republican and Democratic administrations for a wide range of national and local activities similar to this initiative.

Third, the administration transmitted legislation to Congress yesterday which would authorize an already established, independent, bipartisan board to oversee the tests—the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB). We urge the Congress to pass this legislation without delay.

Fourth, there are some who say the tests will be too difficult for children in our poorer schools. Yes, richer schools may have advantages, but effort and commitment to excellence matter more. The fastest way to turn eager young students into 16-year-old drop-outs is to expect too little of them and dumb down their education.

Mr. Chairman, there is a movement in the Congress now that would deny states and school districts the right to choose whether they want to offer these tests. Yesterday, the executive director of the National Association of State School Boards wrote a letter to members of Congress which said, "We believe the states should be afforded the opportunity to decide for themselves whether to take part in these national assessments."

I heartily agree with that view. And I believe it is time to get serious about education. These tests will help mobilize the American people in a great national effort to raise reading and math achievement. Because this is so important for our country, I see it as a great patriotic cause, Let us move forward into the 21st century with high standards—and let's make sure we meet them. Thank you very much.

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NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.:

The Department of Education's effort to develop Voluntary National Tests in Reading and Mathematics for 4th and 8th grade students raises multiple concerns about harm to children through misuse of the tests if they are developed and implemented under the current proposal.

The tests will be used for high stakes decisions about students' futures. While the Department of Education has said that the tests will be for information purposes for parents, students, and teachers, testing experts agreed at a recent meeting of the Board on Testing and Assessment of the National Research Council that the tests inevitably will be used for many purposes including retention in grade, ability grouping, tracking, graduation, and possibly teacher assessment.

The Department has no plans to validate the tests. The consensus of professional educators and social scientists (as reflected in the "Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing" adopted jointly by the American Educational Research Association, The American Psychological Association, and the National Council for Measurement in Education) is that every separate use of a test instrument must be validated—that is, examined scientifically to insure that the test is an appropriate and reliable measure for the specific purpose for which it is being used. Despite the knowledge that tests with the imprimatur of the federal government will be used to make critical decisions about educational opportunities for children, the Department of Education has no plan to validate them for these purposes. This means that we are virtually certain that the tests will be misused.

The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF) filed a case in North Carolina on July 29, 1997, challenging the misuse of a standardized test to retain children in grade. The widespread misuse of tests has had particularly harsh and disproportionately adverse consequences for poor and minority children. These misuses result in the gross overrepresentation of poor and minority children in low-end classes and low curriculum tracks which ultimately limit opportunity and deny the life-long benefits of a quality education.

The Department has no plan to establish any mechanism to enforce traditional testing guidelines prohibiting test misuse. When asked about an enforcement mechanism at the Department of Education to police and enforce guidelines against test misuse, the response given by Department officials was only that no decision has been made on the issue of enforcement.

The reading test for 4th graders is to be offered in English only. As the nation experiences an increasingly diverse population and children who speak and read in many languages other than English, it is both discriminatory and unwise to treat large segments of the population as non-persons by failing to recognize reading proficiency of young children in languages other than English. The negative stigmatizing effects of "English only" national tests

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Nonprofits and Workfare Jobs

Expectations That Nonprofit Groups Can Employ Large Numbers of Welfare Recipients to Comply With Reform Legislation Are Unrealistic

The following article is based on the recently released Joint Center issue brief: "Work Requirements Under the New Welfare Block Grant: Can Nonprofit Organizations Provide the Jobs?" by Katherine McFate. Presently associate director, Equal Opportunity Division at The Rockefeller Foundation, she performed the research for the brief in 1994 as associate director of research for social policy at the Joint Center.

As a result of the work requirements contained in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program enacted by the 104th Congress, about one million parents of poor children who are recipients of public assistance will be expected to begin working by October of this year and another million over the next five years. But placing that many people into viable employment will be problematic. Given the characteristics of welfare recipients—half have not finished high school; about 60 percent of new applicants have very low basic skills; two-thirds have preschool-age children at home—few are likely to be the first preference of private employers. Government jobs have been proposed as another option, but with the recent push to cut back government programs and reduce the public workforce, it seems unlikely that many jobs will come from the public sector either.

That leaves nonprofit institutions as the last option to fill this void. According to the Washington, D.C.–based Center for the Study of Policy Attitudes, 75 percent of Americans in 1994 had a high level of confidence in the ability of nonprofit groups and charities to solve the poverty problem. Clearly, however, not all nonprofits are well suited to this purpose. Some organizations are too small to take on workfare participants, while others are not located in the areas where poor people live. Further, nearly a third of the nonprofit sector's total funding comes from the government, a source of funds that is likely to diminish, not increase in the future.

Nonprofits are not only being considered as potential employers of welfare participants, but also as vehicles to fulfill the federal law's workfare provisions. The law authorizes states to require welfare recipients to provide up to 20 hours or more of community service per week in exchange for retaining their benefits. Nonprofit groups will be expected to provide most of these workfare slots. Yet supervising untrained, inexperienced, and in some cases reluctant staff persons will be time-consuming for nonprofit managers, who will be additionally burdened by the reporting requirements and red tape mandated by welfare offices.

The temptation to turn to the nonprofit sector to meet welfare reform's new work requirements will be greatest in poor urban neighborhoods with large numbers of welfare recipients, but the relatively thin and chronically underfunded layer of civic and charitable organizations in these neighborhoods is already hard pressed, with many organizations finding it difficult to fulfill their primary goals.

Nonprofits: Some Willing, Some Unable

In the fall of 1994, anticipating the passage of welfare reform legislation, the Joint Center began examining the capacity and willingness of nonprofit organizations to employ welfare recipients. As a part of this study, a survey of 13 major cities with relatively large welfare case loads was conducted. The cities were: Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, Memphis, Miami, Milwaukee, Newark (NJ), Norfolk (VA), and Philadelphia.

The Joint Center study found that to provide jobs for just 25 percent of the mothers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in these cities in addition to all the unemployed individuals who were actively searching for work would require generating more than 590,000 new jobs, 11 percent more than were available in 1994. Yet between 1993 and 1994, only two central city locations among the 13 cities in the survey had actual job growth rates of over 3 percent, suggesting that reaching an 11 percent expansion in jobs is unrealistic.

The Joint Center then surveyed, in these cities, all established nonprofit service providers large enough and stable enough to be a continuing source of employment for welfare recipients in order to gauge their capacity to help meet the law's 25 percent goal. The responses of the 1,343 diverse organizations that participated in the survey are summarized below.

The overwhelming majority of nonprofit executive directors reported that they were willing to take on welfare recipients. Overall, 85 percent of the nonprofit executive directors surveyed said they would be willing to accept welfare recipients as workers. Over a quarter believed they could fill an existing position with a welfare recipient, about half would create a work assignment for the individuals they employed, and a quarter would do both. About half of those surveyed reported that there "would be an opportunity for permanent, unsubsidized employment for welfare recipients who performed well."

Many of the nonprofits in the study (40 percent) had prior experience using welfare recipients as workers in their organizations. Of those, 86 percent said the experience was a good one, benefitting both the organization and the worker.

Despite their willingness to help, nonprofit organizations were able to absorb only a tiny fraction of the welfare recipients who need jobs. While 86 percent of those surveyed reported that they could use at least one welfare recipient, less than a third could place more than

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Nonprofits

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five persons. Altogether, these nonprofits indicated that they could provide placement for 9,194 welfare recipients—an average of eight recipients per organization. Unfortunately, to employ 25 percent of the welfare caseload in these cities in 1994 would have required 17 times the number of slots these providers thought they could generate.

Many welfare recipients lack the work skills nonprofit directors are looking for. Nonprofit directors, like corporate employers, want individuals who are "job ready." Almost three-quarters of those surveyed were looking for welfare recipients with high school diplomas. More than half would either strongly prefer or require them to have recent work experience, and three quarters would strongly prefer or require good verbal skills and a good command of standard English. When asked what work a recipient would be asked to perform, the most common answer was in fact clerical support (23 percent), an assignment for which these skills are essential (see table below).

These findings point to the continuing need for preemployment or "job readiness" training for those who have not been in the workforce for a long while. Workfare assignments are generally no substitute for such training.

The directors of nonprofit social service organizations are very concerned about the time and potential costs involved with participating in a workfare program. The survey showed that most nonprofit service providers are very cautious about accepting workfare employees because they believe that their involvement may consume staff time and resources that detract from their primary mission. Forty percent of the respondents were very concerned that "reporting requirements and red tape with the welfare office would be very time-consuming." Nearly a quarter of the respondents were also very concerned that "supervising new untrained or inexperienced staff persons would be time-consuming and might not be worth the extra work received." A quarter of the respondents likewise worried that workfare recipients would be unreliable or unmotivated employees.

One positive sign from this part of the survey is that directors who had actually worked with welfare recipients in the past tended to be less concerned about these problems than those who had not.

Even full-time employment in the nonprofit sector may not lead to long-term economic self-sufficiency. Even if community service work in the nonprofit sector eventually led to permanent employment, the jobs offered by nonprofits would not be likely to bring economic self-sufficiency to former welfare families. Salaries at nonprofits tend to be relatively low, with meager benefits. Since these organizations rely on donations and grants, their revenue flows also tend to be unreliable and fluctuating.

In 1994, the average annual salary for a maintenance/custodial worker among nonprofit organizations responding to the survey was $12,775, and the average annual salary for a clerical employee was $15,300. Even paraprofessionals in these organizations (individuals with some vocational training or some college) had an average salary of $17,600. Only a quarter of the nonprofit organizations in the survey paid for health care for all their employees.

Nonprofits Can't Solve the Welfare-to-Work Problem

Although they are clearly willing to do their part, our study shows that nonprofit groups simply do not have the capacity to solve the nation's problem of providing jobs for welfare mothers. They cannot undertake, on their own, the training and supervising of inexperienced or reluctant workfare assignees without considerable added cost.

Moreover, nonprofits required to monitor and record the attendance of workfare participants and report on their progress are placed in the dilemma of being asked to police a segment of the population they are committed to serve. As a consequence of these reports, individuals may be cut off from receiving assistance. Thus instead of being seen as an ally or advocate, nonprofits may come to be viewed by the poor as one more social control agent, an extension of an already intrusive bureaucracy. Turning away a candidate could also mean condemning a family

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Important characteristics when selecting individuals for most jobs

N = 1,290

	Absolutely necessary	Strongly preferred	Mildly preferred	Doesn't matter
Some college	2%	19%	33%	46%
High school diploma	30	42	20	8
Recent work experience of some kind	6	49	36	9
Recent work experience / vocational training	4	37	38	21
Good verbal skills / use of standard English	26	53	19	3
Physical appearance / neatness	39	48	11	2

Source: 1994 Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Study of Urban Nonprofit Organizations.

The Health of African American Youth

Joint Center Fact Sheets Show That Homicides Cause the Most Deaths Among Young Black Males But Smoking and Drinking Are Declining

Eight new Joint Center fact sheets on the health of African American youth reveal both disturbing and encouraging findings about black youth under the age of 24. Each fact sheet focuses on a different aspect of adolescent health, including substance abuse, HIV infection and AIDS, sexual activity and its consequences, accidents, and homicide and suicide.

The fact sheets, prepared by the Joint Center's health policy program, reveal enormous differences in death and injury rates between young blacks and whites and between black males and black females. Overall, black males are much more at risk of death than other males or than black females, especially from firearm injuries. One heartening trend is that the use of tobacco and alcohol among black teens has declined and is lower than for other groups. Key findings are highlighted below.

Accidents, Homicide, and Suicide

Accidents are the leading cause of death among 10 to 14 year olds regardless of race, and the second leading cause of death for 15 to 19 year olds. These deaths are principally from motor vehicle and firearm-related incidents.

But the number one cause of death among black youth ages 15 to 19 years is homicide, and most of these deaths (86 percent in 1994) are also associated with firearms. Homicide is much more frequently the cause of death among young blacks than among whites and Hispanics. In fact, in 1994, over half of all homicide victims between the ages 15 to 24 in this country were black males. From 1993 to 1995, young black males were nine times more likely to be victims of homicide than young white males, more than twice as likely as Hispanics, and eight times more likely than young black females. Between 1985 and 1992, the rate of homicides committed with firearms nearly tripled for black boys ages 10 to 14.

Rates of suicide were similar for young males in all groups (ages 15 to 24), though highest for white males. The big differences were between young men and young women regardless of race, with men much more likely than women to commit suicide. Between 1980 and 1992, the rate of suicide increased dramatically for all young adolescents (ages 10 to 14), the greatest increase being among young black males at 300 percent.

Sexual Activity and Its Consequences

The 1995 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, a national sample survey of 9th through 12th graders conducted annually by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, found that more than half of all students reported having had sexual intercourse at some time during their high school years. More blacks than whites had had sexual relations and more males than females.

One striking difference was in the age of the first sexual intercourse. Forty-one percent of black male students reported that they had had sexual intercourse before age 13, compared to 13 percent of Hispanic males and 8 percent of white males. Among girls, the percentages were much lower for all groups: 10 percent for blacks, 5 percent for Hispanics, and 4 percent for whites.

Consistent with these statistics, 15 percent of black high school students and 13 percent of Hispanic students in 1995 had either been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant, compared with only 4 percent of white students. The birth rate for young black women ages 15 to 17 was more than twice that for their white counterparts. Considering the earlier age of sexual activity, it is not surprising that black teenagers suffer from much higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis and gonorrhea.

Another hazard of early and frequent sexual activity is infection with the AIDS virus. Since the first case of AIDS among adolescents was reported in the early 1980s, the numbers have been steadily increasing. Since 1981, black youth have accounted for nearly half of all reported cases of AIDS among adolescents. Moreover, the number of cases of HIV infection among young black females is more than triple the number among young white females.

Substance Abuse

There is some good news about the health of black teens, particularly concerning the use of tobacco and alcohol. Daily smoking has declined so dramatically among African American youth that it is now the norm not to smoke on a regular basis. From 1980 to 1993, the percentage of African American high school students who smoked daily fell from 16 percent to 4.4 percent. Among this same age group, a much larger proportion of black (75 percent) and Hispanic (71 percent) students than white students (57 percent) reported that they had never smoked.

Between 1985 and 1995, alcohol use by teens in all groups declined. Among black teens, the proportion reporting "current" alcohol use dropped between those years from 22 percent to 16 percent; among whites the proportion dropped from 34 percent to 23 percent. Heavy drinking and bouts of binge drinking are also much less common among blacks than among whites.

For other substances, the statistics have not been as encouraging. Black and Hispanic students were more likely to report lifetime use of marijuana than were their white counterparts and to report using marijuana earlier.

Those interested in receiving copies of the fact sheets should contact Barbara Buhl at the Joint Center. ■

Nonprofits

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that cannot find work to the loss of public income assistance.

If policymakers expect nonprofit organizations to provide opportunities for welfare recipients, and they further believe that nonprofits perform socially valuable work in poor communities, then there must be an effort to create real, publicly funded jobs that pay reasonable wages to welfare recipients to do needed community service work. As another Joint Center study, "Neglected Voices: What Low-Income Americans Think of Welfare Reform," has documented, most welfare recipients feel it is fair to ask people who receive public assistance to work, but they want "real jobs" that provide them with earnings and a future.

Paid work has a number of advantages over workfare for both nonprofits and welfare recipients. For the workers, real jobs with wages do not have the stigma that is attached to workfare. For the employer, it removes the moral qualms and practical issues involving the use of unwilling workers. Nonprofit directors would be more willing to invest in training for motivated individuals who could be long-term employees. Setting up a wage-based system—rather than a bureaucratic monitoring and sanctioning system—should also reduce concerns expressed by nonprofit directors about extra "red tape."

Finally, paid work can increase the overall income flowing into individual households and local communities. In many states, even half-time paid work will bring a family a higher income than current public assistance levels. If a family supplements its earnings with the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), it can further improve its overall annual income and bring new federal resources to the local economy. But families can only receive the EITC if they have a wage-paying job; families working off their welfare grants do not qualify.

Although many state and local governments claim that the administrative costs and headaches of a paid-work program are too great to shoulder, they may find that large-scale workfare, with its attendant placement and monitoring, is at least as burdensome. In any case, one thing is certain: No matter who takes on the responsibility of providing work for the hardest to employ, the task will require new resources, because a work-based assistance system costs more than one that pays mothers meager sums to stay at home to care for their children. ■

Tests

Continued from page 4

are harmful and inappropriate for a nation of people of many backgrounds.

The tests are not for diagnostic purposes. The Department of Education has stated that the tests are not for diagnostic purposes. Therefore, the tests are not designed or intended as an aid to teachers who are assessing a student's skill level or determining an appropriate curriculum to improve the reading or math skills of a particular student.

Parents, students, and teachers will not be given any information that will help them determine or respond to the factors contributing to a student's test score. While the stated intent in developing these national tests is to empower parents with information, the failure to give "opportunity to learn" information such as the level of education of the teacher, teacher certification in field, school funding levels, availability of books and other supplies, and pupil/teacher classroom ratios means that the test scores will be of little value for parental action to improve the quality of education offered to their children.

The serious problems that LDF and others have raised about the proposed Voluntary National Tests have not been answered. LDF is opposed to the Department of Education's testing initiative as currently designed. ■

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TRENDLETTER

POLITICAL REPORT

by Mary K. Garber and David C. Ruffin

Dr. David Satcher Named to Be Surgeon General

On September 12, President Clinton nominated **DAVID SATCHER**, currently head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to fill the long-vacant post of surgeon general and also become assistant secretary for health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). If confirmed, Satcher, an African American, will become the second person in the nation's history to hold the two posts concurrently.

In announcing the nomination, Clinton stressed that the new surgeon general's main goal would be to further the campaign against teenage smoking. Satcher also intends to dedicate his energies to helping the poor and disadvantaged. He has spoken of his commitment to "send messages of good health to our cities and our suburbs, our barrios and reservations and even our prisons."

Satcher has been director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the HHS agency charged with promoting public health and preventing disease and injury, since November 1993. During his tenure, CDC initiatives have led to an increase in child immunization rates from 55 to 78 percent, resulting in the lowest level of childhood diseases preventable by vaccination in the nation's history. The CDC also expanded its breast and cervical cancer-screening programs to cover all 50 states, and improved its ability to meet public health emergencies such as outbreaks of infectious diseases.

Unlike Clinton's last nominee for surgeon general, obstetrician **HENRY FOSTER**, Satcher is not expected to face much opposition at his Senate confirmation hearings. Anxious to avoid the embarrassment of having to withdraw another nominee's name from consideration, the White House first mentioned Satcher for the post months ago to see if opposition would materialize. Further, because of Satcher's experience dealing with the public, he is not expected to make the sort of unfortunate remarks that led to the resignation of **JOCELYN ELDERS**, surgeon general from September 1993 to December 1994.

Some opposition, however, has surfaced. First, the National Rifle Association has announced its opposition to Satcher based on his support for research focused on firearms as a public health issue. Another recent controversy involves two CDC-funded research studies that are looking into less expensive alternatives to AZT for AIDS-infected mothers in developing countries to prevent the transmission of the virus to their infants. The Public Citizen Health Research Group, a consumer advocacy organization, contends that the studies are unethical because some women in the study receive placebos rather than a known effective treatment for prevention of the transmission of AIDS. Satcher approved the studies as both ethical and scientifically sound.

Satcher's supporters stress his commitment to the health of minorities and other underserved communities and note that a good portion of his career has been as an administrator in black medical schools. From 1982 to the time of his appointment as director of the CDC, he served as president of Meharry Medical College in Nashville. He has also been professor and chairman of the Department of Community Medicine and Family Practice at the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta; professor and chairman of family medicine and interim dean at the Charles R. Drew Postgraduate Medical School in Los Angeles; assistant professor at the UCLA School of Medicine; and director of the King/Drew Sickle Cell Center.

Satcher decided to become a physician after a childhood bout of whooping cough nearly killed him. A native of rural Alabama whose parents never completed elementary school and never earned more than $10,000 a year, Satcher became the first African American to earn both an

M.D. and a Ph.D. from Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

Leading public health experts and health care advocates have strongly endorsed his nomination, stressing that Satcher's qualifications and experience cover both the content and the politics of public health issues. The medical community's high regard for Satcher is reflected in the many awards he has received, including the Dr. Nathan B. Davis Award from the American Medical Association for outstanding service in advancing public health; the American College of Physicians' James D. Bruce Memorial Award for distinguished contributions in preventative medicine; the New York Academy of Medicine's John Stearns Award for lifetime achievement in medicine; the National Conference of Christians and Jews' Human Relations Award; and election to the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences.

Mayoral Races: Belton In, Sharpton Out, Campbell Challenged

SHARON SAYLES BELTON, who in 1993 became the first woman and the first African American to be elected mayor of Minneapolis, has cleared the initial hurdle in her 1997 bid for reelection by leading a field of 14 candidates in an open primary on September 9. Belton, a member of the Democrat-Farmer-Labor Party, captured 52 percent of the vote in a city that is only 13 percent black. In second place was Independent **BARBARA CARLSON**, a former Republican city council member and radio talk show host, who won 35 percent of the vote. The two will face each other in a runoff on November 4.

Belton, previously the city council president, won the mayoralty four years ago by a vote margin of 57 percent to 43 percent, succeeding **DONALD FRASER** who retired after 14 years as mayor. This year, with the campaign theme, "Getting the Job Done," she's running on her record, taking credit for the city's lower crime rate and an improved economy. The city's unemployment rate has fallen dramatically since 1993, from 5 percent to 2.3 percent.

Belton attended Macalester College in St. Paul and studied at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Before her tenure as Minneapolis's city council president and mayor, she worked as a parole officer and assistant director of the state's program for victims of sexual assault, and she served on the city council for 10 years.

Black activist Rev. **AL SHARPTON** was knocked out of the ring in his campaign for mayor of New York after polling 32 percent of the vote in the September 9 Democratic primary. A count of absentee ballots put Manhattan Borough President **RUTH W. MESSINGER** over the 40 percent threshold she needed to avert a runoff. Messinger's victory clears her path to face Republican incumbent Mayor **RUDOLPH GIULIANI** in the November 4 general election. Giuliani, seeking a second four-year term, had no primary opponent.

Sharpton is a highly visible public figure in New York, but he has never held public office. A youthful devotee of the late Harlem Congressman, Rev. **ADAM CLAYTON POWELL**, Sharpton's political activism began as a 14-year-old youth director of the New York chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In 1971, he founded the National Youth Movement Inc. (NYM), a New York-based advocacy organization focused on voter registration, economic development, and the fight against job discrimination.

Sharpton's volatile confrontational style as well as his refusal to disassociate himself from Nation of Islam leader Rev. **LOUIS FARRAKHAN** and from City University of New York Professor **LEONARD JEFFRIES**, who is alleged to have made anti-semitic remarks, have been political liabilities to Sharpton.

Atlanta mayor **BILL CAMPBELL** faces 10 challengers in his campaign for a second term in an open election on November 4. Campbell clearly has to be considered the front runner, based on the success of Atlanta's 1996 Summer Olympics and the support Campbell has garnered for furthering the minority business development programs of his predecessors, mayors **MAYNARD JACKSON** and **ANDREW YOUNG**.

But City Council President **MARVIN ARRINGTON**, an African American who has been on the council for 28 years (18 as president), is making a contest of the mayor's race. Observers in Atlanta are casting the campaign as that of a home-grown senior statesman (Arrington) trying to unseat a Raleigh-born upstart (Campbell).

The smart money seems to be on Campbell. The mayor set himself a goal of raising $2 million (an unprecedented sum for a local Atlanta election), and with his high-powered national fundraising effort, he is well on his way to achieving it. Fundraisers have been hosted for Campbell by Mayor **RICHARD DALEY** in Chicago, Mayor **RICHARD ARRINGTON** in Birmingham, Mayor **WILLIE BROWN** in San Francisco, former New York Mayor **DAVID DINKINS**, and Atlanta Congressman **JOHN LEWIS**. Observers believe that the combination of money and incumbency may put this race out of the reach of Marvin Arrington and the rest of the challengers. ■

ECONOMIC REPORT

by Cecilia Conrad and Malinda Lindquist

Improvements in Educational Attainment, But Little Reward

While the gap between the high school completion rates of African Americans and whites continues to narrow, the earnings gap between blacks and whites with high school diplomas has not diminished. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, as of March 1996, 74 percent of African American adults (ages 25 and older) had graduated from high school, compared with 83 percent of non-Hispanic whites. Ten years earlier, the corresponding figures were only 54.9 percent of black adults compared to 76.2 percent of non-Hispanic whites.

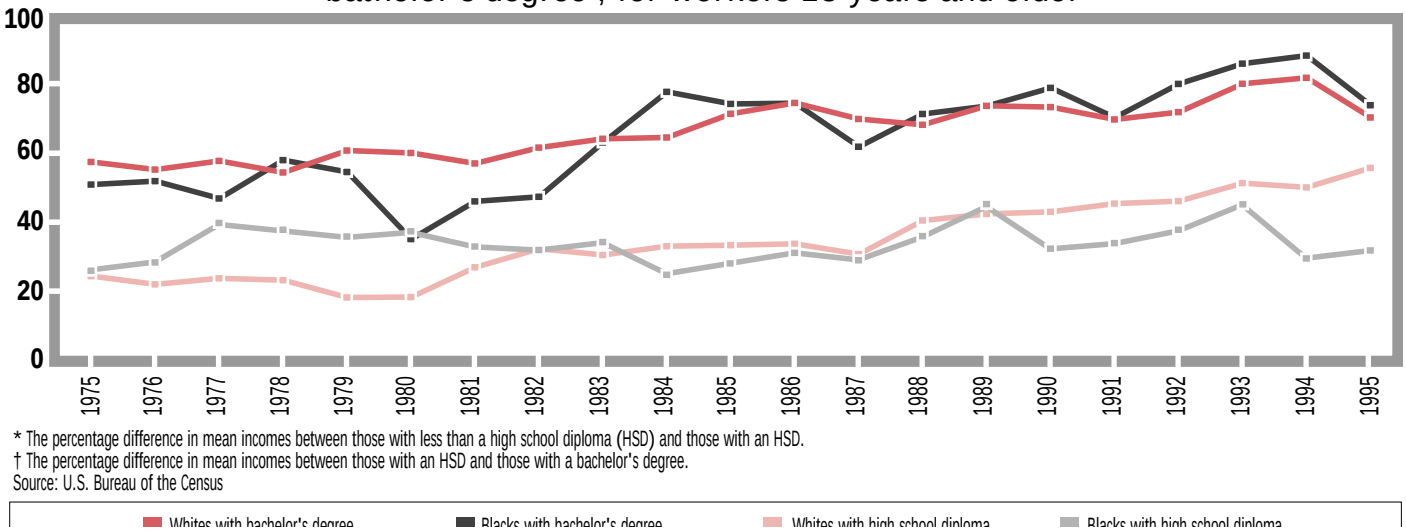
Unfortunately, these educational gains have had little effect on racial income inequality. In 1986, blacks earned, on average, 72 cents for every dollar earned by whites; in 1996, they earned 74.5 cents. Among women, the inequality in earnings actually grew worse between 1992 and 1995: The ratio of the median earnings of black women to those of white women was 0.90 in 1992 and dropped to 0.86 in 1995. Among year-round, full-time workers in 1995, black women had median earnings of $21,355; for white women the median was $24,788. Similarly employed black men that year earned a median of $25,660, appreciably more than their female counterparts, but far less than white males, whose median earnings were $36,018.

This disparity in earnings persists, despite the improvement in educational attainment because a high school diploma boosts the earnings of blacks less than it boosts the earnings of whites. Figures from 1995 show that a high school diploma increases mean earnings for whites by 55.6 percent, but for blacks only by 31.8 percent. (See figure.) Researchers offer a variety of reasons for this disparity. One cause may lie in the fact that a higher percentage of blacks complete their high school education through alternative certification, such as the Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED), which is known to have a lower economic value. Economists **S.V. CAMERON** and **J.J. HECKMAN** at the University of Chicago found that holding other factors constant, a person with a GED will earn less than a person with a traditional diploma.

Another explanation may lie in the poor quality of education in many urban public schools, which blacks disproportionately attend. Several years ago, the Institute for Independent Education found that nearly *three-quarters* of blacks attending primary school in eight urban areas were enrolled in schools that ranked below the national norm in reading or math. A more recent study (1996) by the National Center for Education Statistics also found that urban schools—especially in highpoverty communities—were more likely than others to suffer from a host of problems, including overcrowding, fewer resources, and higher rates of absenteeism. Moreover, young adults who had attended urban and high-poverty public schools were more likely to experience poverty and unemployment later in life.

Nevertheless, black high school graduates continue to enjoy higher incomes than blacks who drop out of school. High school dropouts are less able than graduates to pursue education beyond the attainment of an equivalent high school diploma. This is significant since it is a college education that offers the big payoff.

Percentage increase in mean earnings associated with a high school diploma* and bachelor's degree†, for workers 18 years and older



* The percentage difference in mean incomes between those with less than a high school diploma (HSD) and those with an HSD.
† The percentage difference in mean incomes between those with an HSD and those with a bachelor's degree.
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Median earnings of black year-round full-time workers with bachelors degrees were $32,824, while for those with only a high school diploma earnings were only $20,359.

These statistics dramatize the continuing importance of higher education as both a source of black/white inequality and a vehicle for economic mobility. College completion rates among blacks continue to lag behind those among whites, and in an era of retrenchment in affirmative action, there is little reason to expect change.

School Vouchers and Black Americans

According to the most recent Joint Center national opinion survey, educational vouchers are gaining support among African Americans. Over 57 percent of the blacks polled indicated that they "support a voucher system where parents would get money from the government to send their children to the public, private, or parochial school of their choice." **HUGH B. PRICE**, president and CEO of the National Urban League, may have expressed the feelings of many black parents in his August 3, 1997, keynote address at the League's national convention. "We hereby put public school[s]… on notice," he said. "If urban schools as we know them continue to fail in the face of all we know about how to improve them, then your customers will be obliged to shop elsewhere for quality education. We Urban Leaguers believe passionately in public education. But make no mistake. We love our children even more."

Much of the debate over vouchers centers on the ability of the market economy to allocate educational resources equitably and efficiently. School vouchers are taxpayer-funded programs that would provide families with grants to apply to private school education. While voucher advocates support government funding of education, they argue that public schools lack accountability and, as a result, provide a low-quality education at high cost. They assert that in a private market, a school that offered poor service and a low-quality product would lose customers to its competitors and go out of business. Public schools, according to voucher advocates, are not subject to this market discipline because many parents, especially poor parents, are unable to afford other educational options. Advocates contend that private school vouchers will give poor families the freedom to choose safer and better schools for their children, a freedom already possessed by some higher income families.

Opponents, including the NAACP, argue that voucher programs will undermine the quality of education received by low-income students. While public schools must open their doors to all children, private and parochial schools are not required to accept all students and they don't have to accommodate disabled or learning-impaired students. Thus there is no assurance that all populations will be treated equally under voucher programs, and there is a greater potential for large segments of young people to be isolated on the basis of their ability, race, or religion. Since vouchers would be supported by taxpayer dollars, opponents also fear that such programs would divert funding from urban public school systems that are already cash poor. Disadvantaged groups, constrained by a lack of information, transportation, and the supplemental money necessary to take full advantage of choice, will be further isolated in less competitive, poorly funded public schools.

School voucher programs thus far have had mixed results. In Milwaukee, some 1,600 low-income students can elect to attend private, non-religious schools. The voucher covers either the full tuition of the private school the child attends or the equivalent of what Milwaukee public school students are allocated per pupil. Participants express satisfaction with the program, but scholars have offered mixed assessments about the program's impact on academic success. **JOHN WITTE**, professor of public policy at the University of Wisconsin, found no strong evidence that voucher-using students are outperforming students of similar backgrounds in Milwaukee's public schools. **PAUL PETERSON**, director of the Program on Educational Policy and Governance at Harvard University, has challenged Witte's conclusions, citing evidence from Milwaukee that the test scores of these "choice" students are higher than the scores of students who requested vouchers but did not receive them.

The American Federation of Teachers' study of a voucher program in Cleveland concluded that the program did not appreciably increase the educational options of public school students. Of the nearly 2,000 students who received vouchers in that city, 67 percent were either already attending private schools or had never attended any school before. Thus, fewer than 700 students had apparently shifted out of public schools as a result of vouchers.

In a national Joint Center poll, only 6.3 percent of black parents rated their local public schools as excellent while 23.3 percent rated them poor. Clearly, African American parents are dissatisfied with the state of urban education, and private school vouchers seem to offer their children another educational option. However, the mixed evaluations of the Milwaukee and Cleveland programs suggest that vouchers will not guarantee a quality education to all. ■