

AS A FORMER EDUCATOR AT THE HIGH SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY LEVEL AND AS A STATE LEGISLATOR, I AGREE WITH PRESIDENT BUSH. FOR I TOO AM PROFOUNDLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE CRISIS IN EDUCATION WE FACE ACROSS OUR COMMONWEALTH AND OUR COUNTRY.

AND I KNOW THAT YOU AS MEMBERS OF THIS ORGANIZATION ARE CONCERNED, TOO, FOR EDUCATION HAS BEEN ONE OF ROTARY'S PRIORITIES.

ALLOW ME NOW TO SHARE SOME THOUGHTS WITH YOU ON THIS MATTER. I'D LIKE TO TALK BRIEFLY WITH YOU ABOUT SOME HIGHLY SIGNIFICANT THINGS. THINGS LIKE:

EMPOWERMENT.

EXPECTATIONS.

ENLIGHTENMENT.

OWNERSHIP.

PARTNERSHIP.

AND, A LEGACY....

EEEOOPL -  
PEOPLEE

ALL PLAY A PART IN THE MAIN FOCUS OF MY REMARKS THIS MORNING

--THE RESTRUCTURING AND RENEWAL OF AMERICA'S EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM.

AT THAT MEETING LAST MONTH, PRESIDENT BUSH AND THE NATION'S GOVERNORS AGREED ON THE NEED TO OVERHAUL THE COUNTRY'S EDUCATION SYSTEM BY CREATING A SET OF GOALS THAT WILL FOCUS ON ELIMINATING ILLITERACY, RESHAPING CURRICULUMS AND HOLDING TEACHERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR PERFORMANCE.

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ONE OF THE ISSUES AT THE CENTER OF THE DEBATE ON HOW TO REFORM THE SYSTEM IS AN EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION KNOWN AS "SCHOOLS OF CHOICE."

PUT SIMPLY, UNDER THIS CONCEPT PARENTS ARE ALLOWED TO SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO THE PUBLIC SCHOOL OF THEIR CHOICE, NO MATTER IF THE SCHOOL IS LOCATED OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL DISTRICT IN WHICH THEY LIVE.

THESE DAYS, WHEN YOU GO OUT TO BUY A CAR, YOU HAVE MANY MAKES, MODELS AND DEALERS FROM WHICH TO CHOOSE. WHEN YOU GO TO THE GROCERY STORE, YOU'RE NOT LOCKED INTO SHOPPING AT ONE MARKET. AND, IF YOU NEED THE SERVICES OF A PROFESSIONAL, THE PHONE BOOK IS FULL OF LISTINGS OF DOCTORS, LAWYERS, SERVICE PEOPLE, AND OTHERS....THE CHOICE OF WHO TO ENGAGE IS YOURS.

BUT, IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR A PUBLIC EDUCATION FOR YOUR CHILD, THE SCHOOL THE CHILD WILL ATTEND IS DECIDED, NOT BY YOU, BUT IS DETERMINED BY WHERE YOU LIVE.

SHOULD THIS BE CHANGED? SHOULD SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN PENNSYLVANIA BE OPENED TO STUDENTS WHO LIVE OUTSIDE THE DISTRICT? WILL THIS ENHANCE A STUDENT'S EDUCATION?

THESE ARE SOME OF THE QUESTIONS THAT MUST BE ANSWERED BEFORE A DECISION IS MADE TO PUT THE CONCEPT INTO PLACE IN PENNSYLVANIA. ANY DECISION OF THIS MAGNITUDE WILL HAVE FAR-REACHING EFFECTS ON OUR YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FUTURE IN OUR COMMONWEALTH, OUR NATION AND OUR WORLD. WE CAN'T SHOOT FROM THE HIP ON THIS ONE. IT IS FAR TOO IMPORTANT.

THAT'S WHY SCHOOLS OF CHOICE ARE BEING DISCUSSED IN MANY QUARTERS.

PENNSYLVANIA IS NO EXCEPTION. JUST THE OTHER WEEK AT THE STATE CAPITOL THE HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE, ON WHICH I SERVE, HELD A PUBLIC MEETING TO GATHER INPUT ON THE "CHOICE" CONCEPT. TWO NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED EDUCATORS RELATED THEIR PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH THE PLAN.

THE MEEITNG HELPED THE COMMITTEE LEARN FROM THE INITIATIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF OTHER STATES AND CITIES. AND THAT, OF COURSE, ULTIMATELY WILL BE A FACTOR IN HELPING SHAPE THE LEGISLATION THAT WILL BE INTRODUCED AND DEBATED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

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WHATEVER PROPOSAL FINALLY EMERGES IN OUR LEGISLATURE, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT IT BE UNIQUELY FITTED TO THE NEEDS AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF PENNSYLVANIA,

IT IS ESSENTIAL IN FORMING "CHOICE" LEGISLATION THAT WE KEEP IN MIND THAT ALL CHILDREN HAVE DIFFERENT NEEDS, CAPABILITIES AND LEARNING MODES. THAT TEACHERS HAVE DIFFERENT APPROACHES. AND THAT PARENTS HAVE DIVERSE PHILOSOPHIES.

SUCH LEGISLATION MUST CONTAIN COMPONENTS THAT GUARANTEE A STUDENT'S EDUCATION WILL BE ENHANCED. OTHERWISE, OUR GOAL, OUR EXPECTATION THAT THIS WILL OCCUR WILL REMAIN UNMET. AND THAT IS SOMETHING WE DO NOT WANT TO HAPPEN. I ASSURE YOU I WILL DO WHATEVER I CAN TO SEE THAT IT DOES NOT.

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BY NOW, I WOULD VENTURE TO GUESS MOST OF YOU IN THIS ROOM PROBABLY HAVE FORMED SOME SORT OF OPINION ON THIS CONCEPT. ALLOW ME TO TELL YOU HOW SOME OF YOUR FELLOW PENNSYLVANIANS FEEL ABOUT THE IDEA.

THE COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION, A THINK-TANK OPERATION HEADQUARTERED IN HARRISBURG, RECENTLY CONDUCTED A POLL OF 1200 STATE RESIDENTS ON THE SUBJECT.

WHEN THEY WERE ASKED IF THEY FELT PARENTS SHOULD HAVE THE CHOICE AS TO WHICH PUBLIC SCHOOL THEY CAN SEND THEIR CHILDREN, OVER 60 PERCENT SAID YES.



SCHOOLS OF CHOICE ARE ESPECIALLY SUPPORTED BY URBAN RESIDENTS IN PHILADELPHIA AND PITTSBURGH. IN PHILADELPHIA, ALMOST 80 PERCENT SAID YES TO THAT QUESTION. OUT IN PITTSBURGH, 68 PERCENT WOULD SUPPORT SUCH SCHOOLS.

THIS SAYS VERY CLEARLY THAT PARENTS WANT TO HAVE A ROLE IN CHOOSING THEIR KIDS' SCHOOL. THAT THEY WANT TO BE PART OF THE PARTNERSHIP FOR BETTER EDUCATION.

A RECENT GALLUP POLL SHOWS THAT MOST AMERICANS--60 PERCENT OF THOSE POLLED--FAVOR PARENTAL CHOICE. THE NEW YORK TIMES RECENTLY REPORTED THAT A GROWING NUMBER OF EDUCATORS AND POLITICIANS SAY COMPETITION IS THE ANSWER--LETTING PARENTS CHOOSE THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOLS.

"SCHOOLS OF CHOICE" IS AN IDEA THAT'S BEEN EMBRACED BY CONSERVATIVES AND LIBERALS ALIKE. SOME FORMS OF "PARENTAL CHOICE" HAVE BEEN ADOPTED BY 20 STATES, AND 20 MORE ARE CONSIDERING "CHOICE" PROPOSALS.

*range from state wide to specific communities*

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF CHOICE VARY FROM STATE TO STATE. THE INITIATIVES VARY TOO BECAUSE WHAT WORKS WELL IN ONE STATE MIGHT NOT BE WHAT IS NEEDED IN ANOTHER.

*shown for in 1989*

*state wide* MINNESOTA AND *- within school districts* MASSACHUSETTS HAVE LED THE WAY IN ADOPTING CHOICE PROGRAMS.

*States: Nebraska, Arkansas*

IN MINNESOTA, BY 1990, ALL 700,000 OF MINNESOTA'S PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS WILL HAVE THE OPTION OF TRANSFERRING TO ANY OTHER SCHOOL DISTRICT IN THE STATE.

Let me tell you a success story. East Harlem - 1400 students  
1974 - ranked 32nd among New York City's 32 Community School Districts

60 - Hispanic  
35 - black  
4 - white  
1 - Asian

only 15% of its children read at or above grade level -

it is a community that has all of the economic and social problems associated with the underclass. 7% poor enough for lunch

35% - on some form of public assistance - twice the norm for NYC  
\$3,300 - median annual income

1/2 families single mothers

first school to implement a program of parental choice - keeps in mind opponents of choice - argue the poor, minority - non speaking parent are unable to make informed choices

1975 - only 10 students admitted to NYC elite high schools

1987 - 139 students gained admittance to top 4 schools.

18 yrs.  
1988 -  
62.5 above  
grade level -  
ranked - 19th

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MAGNET SCHOOLS REPRESENT ANOTHER VALUABLE FORM OF CHOICE FOR STUDENTS AND PARENTS, AND ALREADY ARE OPERATING IN SOME SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN PENNSYLVANIA. VIEWED AS A STARTING POINT FOR IMPLEMENTING CHOICE, MAGNET SCHOOLS RESPOND TO STUDENTS' SPECIAL INTERESTS AND TALENTS IN SUCH AREAS AS THE ARTS, SCIENCE, ECONOMICS AND LITERATURE, AS WELL AS TECHNICAL STUDIES. THE BASICS ALSO ARE TAUGHT AT SUCH SCHOOLS.

ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL MAGNET SCHOOLS IN THE COMMONWEALTH IS IN PITTSBURGH. SCHENLEY HIGH SCHOOL CENTER THERE HAS BEEN NAMED A "SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE" BY THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. ITS CURRICULUM FOCUSES ON INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AND HIGH TECHNOLOGY.

SOME EXPERTS FEEL THAT BY EXPANDING CHOICE BEYOND MAGNET SCHOOLS TO INCLUDE ALL PUBLIC SCHOOLS, RACIAL INTEGRATION CAN BE ACHIEVED IN MANY AREAS. STILL OTHERS FEAR THAT SCHOOLS OF CHOICE WILL DISRUPT THE RACIAL BALANCE URBAN SCHOOLS HAVE TRIED TO ACHIEVE.

HOWEVER, THE COMMONWEALTH FOUNDATION HAS FOUND THAT BY PROVIDING SCHOOLS WHICH ATTRACT STUDENTS SPECIFICALLY BECAUSE OF THE CURRICULUM, RACIAL INTEGRATION AND EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR MINORITIES ACTUALLY CAN BE ENHANCED.

ALSO, THE PEOPLE WHO'VE HAD EXPERIENCE IN SCHOOLS OF CHOICE TELL US THAT TEACHERS CAN BENEFIT TOO THROUGHOUT SUCH SCHOOLS. MOST TEACHERS RECOGNIZE THAT PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THEIR PROFESSION HAS DIMINISHED ALONG WITH THE PERFORMANCE OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM.

SUCCESSFUL CHOICE PROGRAMS ELEVATE TEACHERS BY REGARDING THEM AS PARTNERS AND ALLOW THEM GREATER INDIVIDUALITY IN CURRICULUM FORMULATION AND TEACHING TECHNIQUES, THE EXPERTS SAY,

AS WITH ANY ISSUE OF SUCH MAGNITUDE, THERE ARE, OF COURSE, ARGUMENTS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE MATTER, HOWEVER, IT APPEARS THERE ARE MANY GOOD THINGS TO COME OUT OF OPTING FOR "SCHOOLS OF CHOICE" AS A WAY TO RESTRUCTURE AND RENEW OUR FAILING EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

BUT, AS I SAID EARLIER, WE CAN'T SHOOT FROM THE HIP ON THIS ONE. WE MUST TAKE A VERY LONG AND VERY HARD LOOK AT THE WHOLE PICTURE AND ALL ITS RAMIFICATIONS --NOW AND INTO THE FUTURE.

TAKING THIS COURSE WOULD MEAN THAT WE ARE TURNING FROM ESTABLISHED NORMS INTO UNCHARTED WATERS AS FAR AS OUR STATE IS CONCERNED. SUCH CHANGES WOULD HAVE TREMENDOUS EFFECT ON PARENTS, STUDENTS, TEACHERS. THE IMPACT PROBABLY WOULD BE FELT FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

IN THE LONG RUN, ANY REFORM OF OUR EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM MUST BE LASTING REFORM. PROGRAMS THAT ARE NOT WORKING MUST BE SET ASIDE IN FAVOR OF INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS THAT WILL WORK.

THIS IS NOT TO SAY OUR EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS HAS NOT BEEN GOOD. WE HAVE COME A LONG WAY, BUT CANNOT AFFORD TO STAGNATE NOW. WE MUST MOVE FORWARD SO WE'RE READY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY, THE CHALLENGE IS FORMIDABLE AND THERE IS MUCH AT STAKE--AMERICA'S PLACE IN THE WORLD ECONOMY AND COMPETITIVE ARENA FOR STARTERS.



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IT IS IMPORTANT THAT ALL WHO ARE INVOLVED IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS HAVE SOME SENSE OF COMMITMENT, OF OWNERSHIP, THE PARTNERSHIP MUST INCLUDE PARENTS, CHILDREN, EDUCATORS, THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY, LAWMAKERS AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES.

ALL MUST BE EMPOWERED TO HAVE A SAY IN HOW AND WHAT CHILDREN LEARN AND TEACHERS TEACH. IN THIS WAY, WE CAN PLAY A PART IN HELPING GUARD AGAINST THE MEDIOCRITY, SOCIAL DECAY AND NATIONAL DECLINE OF WHICH PRESIDENT BUSH SPOKE.

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ALL OF THIS, OF COURSE, LEADS US TO THE LEGACY I SPOKE OF EARLIER. AND IT'S  
THE BEST PART OF IT ALL....

TO ILLUSTRATE MY POINT, ALLOW ME TO SHARE WITH YOU A TRUE STORY OF A  
KINDERGARTEN SCHOOL TEACHER WHO ASKED HER STUDENTS TO PAINT A PICTURE OF THEIR SCHOOL  
COMPLEX. IN REVIEWING THEIR WORK, SHE CAME UPON ONE CHILD'S DRAWING AND, TRY AS SHE  
MIGHT, COULDN'T SEE HOW THE DRAWING IN ANY WAY RESEMBLED THE ACTUAL BUILDING AND  
GROUNDS.

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MINUTES LATER, IT STRUCK HER. THE CHILD HAD DRAWN AN AERIAL VIEW. A NOVEL APPROACH, TO SAY THE LEAST. AND ONE LUCKILY REINFORCED BY THE TEACHER.

THE CHILD'S DRAWING ILLUSTRATES NOT JUST A SCHOOL, BUT ALSO THE ESSENTIAL QUALITY OF ANY MAJOR CHANGE--A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE THAT OPENS UP NEW POSSIBILITIES. A UNIQUE APPROACH TO SUPPLANT THE TRIED-AND-TRUE.

THIS SAYS, TOO ONE OF THE FINEST, MOST LASTING, MOST MEANINGFUL THINGS WE CAN GIVE OUR CHILDREN IS A GOOD, SOLID QUALITY EDUCATION. BUT, COUPLED WITH THAT MUST BE A CERTAIN SENSE OF FREEDOM TO BE CREATIVE. TO TRY ONE'S WINGS IN THE CLASSROOM SO THERE'S A LINKUP BETWEEN IMAGINATION AND LEARNING.

BY SO DOING, WE ARE PREPARING THEM TO EDUCATE THEMSELVES THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES, WE ARE HELPING THEM REALLY USE THEIR MINDS. WE ARE HELPING GIVE THEM A BRIGHTER, MORE SECURE FUTURE.

ALL OUR CHILDREN DESERVE A FAIR CHANCE TO PREPARE FOR ADULTHOOD AND THE RESPONSIBILITIES IT BRINGS. NO ONE SHOULD HAVE TO ATTEND A SECOND-RATE PUBLIC SCHOOL OR GET AN UNINSPIRED, SECOND-RATE EDUCATION IN OUR COMMONWEALTH OR IN OUR COUNTRY, MAKING CERTAIN THAT DOES NOT HAPPEN IS, INDEED, A WONDERFUL LEGACY TO LEAVE OUR CHILDREN. DON'T YOU AGREE?

I OPENED MY REMARKS TODAY WITH SOMETHING PRESIDENT BUSH SAID. ALLOW ME NOW TO BRING THEM TO A CLOSE BY QUOTING HIM AGAIN:

"EDUCATION IS OUR MOST ENDURING LEGACY, VITAL TO EVERYTHING WE ARE AND CAN BECOME. AND, COME THE NEXT CENTURY--JUST 10 YEARS AWAY--WHAT WILL WE BE? WILL WE BE CHILDREN OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT, OR ITS ORPHANS?"

THANK YOU FOR ALLOWING ME TO SHARE MY THOUGHTS WITH YOU ON THIS OCTOBER MORNING. IT HAS BEEN A GREAT PLEASURE TO BE WITH YOU FOR THIS OCCASION.