

Mark Liles

Professor Brown

ENG 101

2 July 2, 2008

School Choice – An Educational Custom Fit

Imagine if only one size of pants were sold in stores and government regulations wouldn't allow any other size to be made available to consumers. This may sound crazy but it's much like what's happening with the education of our nation's children. As Americans we enjoy a wide range of personal choice, and thankfully it includes our ability to select the pants that fit us best. But think for a moment about traditional public education. For decades the public school system has offered a one size fits all approach to educating our nation's children. As we approached the 21st century, the public school system began to show its age. More and more children began to fall behind in a rapidly changing environment marked by the introduction of personal computers and later the internet. Sensing a need for change, many people began to push for new educational models that would keep up with the times. This marked the beginning of the school choice movement. Both charter schools and school voucher programs are collectively referred to as "school choice" initiatives, in that they allow parents freedom to choose individualized education options for their children that are outside of the traditional "one size fits all" public school system. A school voucher program provides parents with certificates that are used to pay for education at a school of their choice, rather than the public school to which they are assigned. Charter schools on the other hand are publicly funded schools that have been freed from inefficient public school system rules and regulations in exchange for accountability to produce positive, measurable results. These agreed to results are set forth in each school's

charter. The ability for parents to choose an education path that is best for their children is an exciting opportunity currently revolutionizing public education.

Considering the importance of public education, it's understandable that many people would be hesitant to make changes to the system. Those opposed to school choice site concerns that public schools would be traded in for profit based education corporations that care more for financial profit than the individual education of students. Others site concern for what appears to be government sponsorship of private religious schools through the funding provided by various school voucher programs. Those against choice should be commended for demonstrating a committed concern for the education of our nation's children, but the overwhelming evidence proves that school choice is the right direction for the future.

A characteristic of privately operated charter schools is the focus on success through measurable achievement and accountability. Imagine again the one size fits all pants store, how could they stay in business if another store offered various sizes and styles? Simple, they couldn't, not when faced with competition that provides a better choice for consumers. The traditional public school system of the past had no competition. There was no incentive to improve the quality of education they provided since there was nothing to measure it against. The school choice movement for the first time introduced an alternative to poorly performing public schools. Charter schools make a commitment, or charter, to achieve a measurable level of educational performance within a defined period of time. This concept works and has produced results in places like Chicago, where charter schools show better performance in ACT test scores, high school graduation rates, and greater numbers of students continuing on to college (Rand).

One group that benefits greatly from school choice is the urban poor. For decades there has been school choice for families that could afford it. The wealthy have always provided very expensive private schools for their children, and middleclass families with the resources have moved to neighborhoods that offered the best schools. But the poor, often in urban areas, have had no other option than to send their children to under performing and sometimes even dangerous public schools. Through school choice initiatives poor families have been given the same opportunities to send their children to safer and better performing schools which others have enjoyed for many years. In addition to the urban poor, other often overlooked groups can greatly benefit from a system that allows individual schools to focus on gifted, special education, or teen pregnancy programs (Chub). It's clear that choices in schools allow a custom fit of education solutions for every type of student.

School choice represents change and there will always be those that resist change stand to gain from a return to the old system. One of the most active opponents to school choice is the National Education Association. Representing public education professionals, the NEA is the largest labor union in the US and boasts over 3.2 million members (NEA). The NEA benefits from keeping status quo and exercising strong political power. At stake are changes in job performance accountability, and the loss of union jobs a result of non-unionized schools. The positions the NEA has taken on other issues have often been criticized as favoring the labor interests of its members rather than what's best for students. One of the programs the NEA has been most vocal against has been school vouchers, contending that vouchers amount to government funding of religious based schools. On the contrary, citizens are allowed to retain a portion of their tax dollars that would have been spent on local public school funding and apply it to a school of their choosing. It is the citizen, not the government that selects and contributes to

a private school whether it is religiously based or not. Consider families that are already sending children to private schools, they must pay the private school tuition and in addition to the tax burden for a public school they are not even attending. This double burden is unfair and amounts to a government fine for families that pursue private education without the help of vouchers.

It's clear that the historical one size fits all approach to education is outdated. The new fast pace of the digital age demands that we act quickly and accurately in guiding our public education policies. Cling to an antiquated system that provides poor results is a guarantee that traditional public education will continue to produce nothing other than poor results. Instead, a path of measurable results and accountability should be pursued. The arguments of those against school choice must be seen for what they are, and that is nothing more than protection of special interests such as big unions. Our nation must ensure that children will be provided with a choice based education that is forward thinking, customized, fair to all citizens, and able to move into the future with them.

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Jonathan Elosegui

Paola Brown

English 102

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Puerto Rico walks away from commonwealth.

I will not pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands. This must be the words of thousands of Puerto Ricans living in the island today wishing that their small island would once and for all become free from the colonization of the United States. Puerto Rico has been living under U.S. domination for the past 92 years and it's considered the last nation in Latin America that is still living in colonization. Puerto Ricans want to be free and should be allowed to be free; to have the opportunity to vote for the president who sends its young people to war, to have their own currency, to fly one flag in all their schools and finally to feel pride in being an independent nation and not labeled with terms like "territory" and "commonwealth". Bigger and more powerful nations that inhabit smaller nations for various benefits should never deny a nation's culture and roots, instead in these modern times people should be allowed to govern themselves and be independent nations. In the midst of the struggle over status (U.S commonwealth or Independency) only one clear realization can come of this, Puerto Rico ought to be independent and refuse commonwealth to the United States of America.

One of the many benefits citizens from all democratic countries enjoy is the ability to choose their chief in command. As a commonwealth under the United States, Puerto Rican citizens cannot vote during the presidential campaign. They are allowed to participate in presidential primaries but not the final event. This is somewhat of an insult to the younger generation on the island being sent off to fight wars representing the U.S. having been denied the

privilege to choose the person who is sending them. As an independent nation Puerto Ricans would have the right to participate in elections choosing who their leader would be. The island does have its own elections where they get to choose who will become governor and other various members of the political cabinet but all of these have limited power in deciding the fate of the island. The Governor is allowed to run the island and handle domestic issues but Washington has the final word.

This struggle for power has also affected the economy and the ability to export and carry out trades with other nations; United States keeps a tight hold on who the island does business with, ultimately creating a dependent economy. Puerto Rico should be allowed to diversify their sources of capital and their export market something that would strengthen its economy and eliminate the economic dependency that has been created throughout the years. Many in the island believe that independency would allow Puerto Rico to open a broader trading market and as stated by Eric Negron, tax adviser to the independence party, “as an independent nation Puerto Rico could attract foreign investment and it would at the same time be better able to direct what sort of industries is brought to the island.” Remaining a commonwealth takes all of these economic privileges away from the people and the government of Puerto Rico who want to see the island’s economy soar to a new level.

Nations across the world can be proud of their heritage and culture, which makes up their country and it’s the backbone to each individual society. A nation’s language is a stamp of their history; the DNA that makes up its people. Puerto Rico as a commonwealth could be in danger of losing its national language. Spanish has been the island’s national language since the Spanish conquistadors first discovered it in 1492. United States wants Puerto Rico to make the change from Spanish to English and demands that both Spanish and English be the national languages;

many schools across the island have already made the transaction and now teach in both languages. Being a Puerto Rican is not being part of an ethnic group or speaking Spanish is not speaking a dialect; these citizens are people who have their own language and roots and deserve the right to conserve their heritage and most important their culture.

However, as a person born in Puerto Rico I have enjoyed many of the benefits that being a commonwealth has provided in my life. One of the most important benefits is the right to American citizenship upon birth. All Puerto Ricans who are born in the island are American citizens and are free to enter the mainland U.S. If Puerto Rico remains a commonwealth this is a benefit that future generations will continue to enjoy. Another benefit the island enjoys is the aid provided by the United States and the tax exemption the island receives; Puerto Rico is exempt from paying federal taxes. Many supporters of the commonwealth status clearly point out the help the island receives and how life would be if Puerto Rico did not receive the strong financial support from the United States and research provided in *the CQ Researcher* article, Puerto Rico: The Struggle Over Status points out that “Puerto Rico receives generous tax benefits and more than \$6 billion a year from the U.S government” clearly something that the island will not receive if it became independent. All of these benefits the island receives still do not amount to independency and the benefit to govern itself. As an independent nation Puerto Rico would open its trading market with various countries around the world expanding the economy and not having to depend on the help the United States provides. American citizenship could be obtained through the necessary legal steps and travel between the island and the U.S. will still be available.

Receiving the benefits Puerto Rico receives from the United States has helped the island through the years develop into the place it is today but it has come at a costly price with words

like “territory” and “commonwealth” attached to it. No nation should turn its back on their heritage, culture and language at the expense of tax exemptions and financial aid. Instead, Puerto Rico ought to be independent to steer its own course and have the ability to conduct economic trades with other nations, keep Spanish as the main language and have the final word in government issues that affect its people. The Puerto Rican people need to cut the umbilical cord it has created to the United States and stand by their roots, culture and independency. The voice of thousands of Puerto Ricans living in the island need to come forward and make Puerto Rico a free independent nation.

Mark Liles

Professor Brown

ENG 101

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School Choice – An Unwise Option

The topic of charter schools and vouchers is an ongoing debate that is currently being argued in places from the local school board meetings to state supreme courts. Both charter schools and school voucher programs are collectively referred to as “school choice” initiatives, in that they allow parents to choose educational options for their children that are outside of the traditional public school system. A school voucher program provides parents with certificates that are used to pay for education at a school of their choice, rather than the public school to which they are assigned. Charter schools on the other hand are publicly funded schools that have been freed from some of the rules, regulations, and statutes that apply to other public schools. In exchange, charter schools have specialized accountability for producing certain results, which are set forth in each school’s charter. As Americans we enjoy choices and often associate choice as something positive. Being able to choose a school may sound like a reasonable initiative on the surface, but after a closer look it has serious problems. School choice turns out to not only be a bad idea; it’s also a violation of our constitution.

Considering the many challenges facing public schools, it’s understandable that many people would be eager to pursue new options. Supporters of school choice point out that under the current public school system, parents with economic means already exercise school choice by moving from areas with failing or dangerous schools to neighborhoods with better, safer schools. Their argument is that school choice would allow all parents the freedom, regardless of income

level, to select the school that provides the best education (Chub and Moe). Schools would then have to compete for students by offering higher academic results and greater safety. Schools unable to measure up to the standards of successful schools would fail and possibly close. Activists within the school choice movement can be applauded for seeking to improve public education, but the changes they propose would in fact seriously damage public education as a whole.

One of the biggest dangers of school choice is the power behind large corporations specializing in opening and operating charter schools. Two notable companies are Green Dot, which is the leading public school operator in Los Angeles (Green Dot), and KIPP, which operates 65 schools in 19 different states [KIPP]. These companies represent a growing trend of privatization of public schools by large corporations. It is feared that these corporations could grow to a point that public control of education would be lost. Education policy would be left in the hands of entrepreneurial think tanks, corporate boards of directors, and lobbyists who are more interested in profit than educating students [Miller and Gerson]. Education should be left in the hands of professional educators and not business people with MBAs. To do otherwise is not only dangerous, it defies common sense.

The validity of school voucher programs has met numerous challenges, with results varying from state to state. At the center of the divided opinions is whether or not it is constitutional for the federal government to give money directly to private schools, many of which are religiously based. According to the NEA “About 85 percent of private schools are religious. Vouchers tend to be a means of circumventing the Constitutional prohibitions against subsidizing religious practice and instruction [NEA].” One might view a parent’s choice to send children to a religious school using government funded school vouchers as acceptable

considering that family pays taxes and it's only fair that they have a say in where the money is spent on behalf of their children. But consider the many people who have no children, or who have grown children that no longer participate in the public school system. These people still pay taxes to support public education, and it is only reasonable to consider that they may object to the funding of religious schools with the tax money they are paying. It is clear from any point of view that far more people object to voucher programs than benefit.

The public school system guarantees an education for every child in our nation. It becomes apparent that this isn't the case after examining the various school choice options. One must also consider the fate of special needs students which require many additional hours of direct teacher attention. These students could easily be viewed as "too expensive" to educate and could face sub-standard treatment or even exclusion in profit minded, corporate operated, charter schools. Even voucher programs possess a hidden selective element when one considers that religious schools are allowed to choose their students. Parents may apply to the school for admission of their children, but the school may choose to not admit them [ATF]. The only way to truly guarantee equality in public education is to invest in our public education system.

America was the first country to provide public education to all and we must ensure that it is not eroded by school choice. It can be seen that charter schools, while attractive at first, fade under closer examination. The dangers of huge corporations taking control of education are real. Consider what would have happened if Enron was involved in education. And voucher programs, also attractive under first light, become less appealing after considering their constitutional legality and the fact that private schools are allowed to practice a form of "student choice". All of the school choice initiatives are answers to the problems facing public education. But consider that for decades public education has suffered from lack of proper funding [Haider-

Markel]. Without proper funding, public schools have never had a legitimate chance to succeed.

Why don't people pursue a simple answer to a simple problem? American's should fund the public schools adequately so they can get the job done. It's a simple answer that will work.

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Bonnie Fellhoelter

Paola Brown

English 102

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Argument Paper

“Are you hot?
Are you cold?
Are you wearing that?
Where’s your books and your lunch and your homework at?
Grab your coat and your gloves and your scarf and hat.
Don’t forget; you got to feed the cat!” (1)

Anita Renfroe wrote these catchy words for the song “Momisms”, sung to the familiar tune of the William Tell Overture. Her words best describe a typical day of mayhem through the eyes of a mother. Mothers who stay at home know that at times, their lives can be discombobulating. Despite the chaos, stay-at-home mothers get the tremendous responsibility of only having one chance of raising their children in such a way that makes a difference in their children’s lives and in society.

Throughout history, society has looked upon the male as the breadwinner: the one expected to work and support the family. The mother has been viewed as the nurturer: the one to stay home and raise the children. During the 1960’s, women wanted more rights, power, and the ability to get higher paying jobs. Women were given this right so they expressed this new found freedom by going to work outside of the home. As women sought employment, their children were left to the care of babysitters and day care workers. Because society has redefined the role of a mother to be one who is an important element in the workforce, the loss of the mother in the home has led to the

decline of the family unit, and thus, to society. This forfeiture has created a generation for whom social morals and values are not as important as they once were. Perhaps this is due to a working mother being absent from the home where she is unable to personally instill these ethical standards in her children, thus leaving her children to receive their value system from strangers. “Society truly does begin at home”, asserts Sibyl Niemann, so, in order to return to a culture with better morals and values, the importance of the role of the stay at home mother should be restored. (2) In this way, stay at home mothers can improve society.

It is disappointing when mothers are devalued for staying at home to raise their children. Richard Lowry states, “There is something valuable in a mother’s caring for her own child.” (4) In general, no one can take care of your child in the same way his or her mother would. A mother’s care is usually superior to daycare since she naturally wants what is best for her child. “According to a non-partisan Public Agenda survey in 2000, roughly 80 percent of parents with children five and younger say a stay-at-home parent is best able to give children the “affection and attention they need.”” (qtd. in Lowry 4)

A mother’s individual care can also curb the aggression that is evident in day care centers. “A study done by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), reports that, kids in non-maternal care tend to be associated with qualities such as “gets in lots of fights,” “cruelty,” “explosive behavior,” “talking too much,” “argues a lot,” and “demands a lot of attention.”” (qtd. in Lowry 1) Teachers who work in a preschool environment, like my daughter, are frustrated with how badly the children usually behave. Workers in day care are governed by strict rules which prevent

disciplining children the way one can do at home. This causes a disregard and loss of respect for others because many children grow up thinking they can do what they want. Today, many of the younger generation act like they are owed something. In the workplace, it is shocking to see the way they treat others with their degrading manners and think there is nothing wrong with their behavior. They also tend to have lazy work ethics and “cop an attitude” when asked to do anything extra. This makes it difficult for many employers to find hard working and respectful employees.

It is important to note that not all children in daycare grow up to be aggressive and unproductive adults. Even though many women in the work force find raising children to be a very difficult task which leaves them feeling lonely and bored, they do a fine job of balancing their jobs with raising successful children. These women enjoy being able to show their children the advantages of working outside of the home. They are able to “teach their children how to be independent, inquisitive, and ambitious”, as well as “learn the value of personal fulfillment and goal setting.” (Karaim 1) Reed Karaim also proclaims that, “successful working mothers give their children one of the best gifts any parent can: the example of a life lived to its potential.” (3) I think that all of these examples are helpful in raising successful children, however, I believe a stay at home mom can also teach these same qualities in the home. I know this to be true because I was fortunate to remain at home and raise my children. I was the one who was the nurturer and demonstrated love and compassion to my children by hugging, cuddling, and kissing them. I was personally involved in teaching them throughout all the stages of development and shared in the joy of my children’s accomplishments. There is something special about hearing your child’s first word and watching them take their first

step as they giggle with glee. I was able to mold my children's character by instilling good values and morals that taught them to be independent and set goals for themselves, such as being on time for work and appointments. These attributes have helped to contribute to society in a positive way and leave me feeling as if I have done a good job.

Despite the seemingly successful results of a stay at home mom's efforts, "our culture no longer values the household supported by a sole breadwinner." (Niemann 3) This is demonstrated by the many women who currently do work outside of the home because they feel the need to contribute to their families' well being. According to Niemann, "everything—from buying a house to applying for a college loan for one's son or daughter—seems structured around the two income family." (3) A household that has a dual income helps "boost many families into middle class.", says Karaim. (2) This allows their children to experience the comforts, options for education and opportunities that they might otherwise not have had.

As tempting as this extra income may be, couples should be careful that this does not impact their relationship as husband and wife. When spouses compete for power in the workforce and then return home too tired to deal with the many needs of their children, the harmony of the family unit can suffer. This is because husbands often feel threatened by the success of their wives. Steven Rhoads claims that "men are more likely to divorce women who are ambitious." (5) Lowry explains that "just the specter of divorce creates a kind of intra-marital arms race. The wife works to hedge against getting abandoned, but her very act of working, research shows, makes it more likely that the marriage will fail—a dismaying downward spiral." (3) Since divorces negatively impact society, we should refocus on preserving marriage and on strengthening the family unit.

When men and women are happy and comfortable in their roles as the father-breadwinner, and mother-caregiver, marriages can thrive.

Women who do remain at home should not hide behind their children or husbands but instead should be proud of their role. They should be vocal about how productive they are with their children and family. This allows working women and men to see and appreciate the importance of the role of a stay at home mom. Perhaps they will see for themselves the advantages of remaining at home and raising their children. According to Lowry, “most women would like to stay home and care for their children, but society pressures them into believing that a career is more important than family.” (1) Unless some changes are made, the family unit will continue to decline. Less time spent with children building character increases the risk for disregarding and disrespecting others. The current attitudes of “you owe me”, “I deserve it”, as well as “it is all about me” will probably continue to get worse.

Even though being a stay-at-home mom may have periods of loneliness, boredom, frustration, and feelings of futility, the rewards of being personally involved with raising one’s own children greatly outweigh the negatives. One of the greatest accomplishments in life is being a stay-at-home mom where one can teach and model good behavior and moral fortitude. By emulating these morals and values, children enter into adulthood with the necessary tools needed to produce a successful society. As tough as this unpaid task may be, this self-sacrifice of staying at home to raise ones’ children can be the most society enhancing job a woman can do.

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