

direct financial support for parents who send their children to private schools. However, several states provide limited or indirect support for private-school students:

- Iowa allows parents who send their children to private schools to deduct from their state income taxes up to \$1,000 per child, with a limit of \$4,000 per family.
- Minnesota allows parents to deduct from their income taxes up to \$1,000 per year for school-related expenses, which can include private-

school tuition, as well as transportation, books, supplies, and required clothing.

- Vermont lets small towns that have no nearby public schools pay the tuition for residents who send their children to nearby private schools, but that tuition cannot be paid with state funds.
- Wisconsin has the nation's only state-sponsored voucher plan, but that program is limited to fewer than 1,000 families in Milwaukee. That plan provides vouchers worth about \$3,000 a year to students from low-income

New Book to Shed Light on Impact of Choice

While evaluations of the impact of school choice on student learning are hard to come by, a forthcoming book promises to shed new light on the subject. The book, *School Choice: The Cultural Logic of Families, the Political Rationality of Institutions*,¹ examines school choice programs in San Antonio, Tex., and Milwaukee, Wis., and a magnet schools program in Montgomery County, Md.

Bruce Fuller, associate professor of education at Harvard University, is an editor of the book and the author of a July 1995 National Conference of State Legislatures policy brief on the topic. Among the findings Fuller mentions are these:²

- The public schools in San Antonio—in the face of a private school-choice effort—were able to attract large numbers of Hispanic children into multilingual alternative schools. There was a statistically significant impact on student achievement compared to students who remained in the traditional public schools. Part—but not all—of the higher achievement could be explained by more motivated students being attracted into the alternative schools.

- Inner-city African-American and Hispanic students, given the option through a choice program, flocked to private schools in Milwaukee, and new schools sprung up to meet the demand. There was little or no impact on learning, but parents were more satisfied.

- Magnet schools in Montgomery County drew few students, apparently because too little was done to distinguish the course offerings from those offered at other public schools. Researchers expressed a fear that more educated and affluent parents would have greater access to information about the magnet schools, thus creating inequities in opportunities for students.

Fuller cautions that research into the school choice movement is still in its early stages. He notes that the school choice movement can expand educational options for low-income families and increase parental satisfaction. But school choice may increase racial segregation in schools. That's because people of similar cultural backgrounds are more likely to be attracted to schools where those cultures are practiced.

Less-educated, low-income parents and those with lower educational expectations for their children also are less likely to choose, Fuller notes. This creates the risk of poor children of less-involved parents falling further behind.

—Mike McLaughlin

FOOTNOTES

¹ Bruce Fuller, et al., *School Choice: The Cultural Logic of Families, The Political Rationality of Institutions*, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York, N.Y., forthcoming.

² Bruce Fuller, "Who Gains, Who Loses from School Choice: A Research Summary," National Conference of State Legislatures Policy Brief, Denver, Colo., pp. 1-8.

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