



1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW  
Suite 204 • Washington, DC 20036

Tel 202-822-9000  
Fax 202-822-5077

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
JUNE 4, 1997

**CONTACT: DIANE L. CULLO**

**MEMBERS OF CONGRESS OFFER "A CAPITOL CHOICE" FOR DC CHILDREN  
HOUSE AND SENATE MEMBERS COLLABORATE EFFORTS ON NEW SCHOLARSHIP BILL**

WASHINGTON, DC -- Members of the US House and Senate will together announce the introduction of a bill offering the children of the District of Columbia the right to make a choice in their own education and an investment in their future.

Senators Dan Coats [R-IN] and Joseph Lieberman [D-CT] along with Representatives Dick Arney [R-TX], William Lipinski [D-IL], and Floyd Flake [D-NY] will together announce the introduction of the DC Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997 [DCSOS] today, June 4, at 2:00 p.m. on the West Front steps of the US Capitol.

"These members are leading the charge to offer scholarships or tutoring assistance to low-income DC children to attend the public, private or parochial school of their choice," said Jeanne Allen, president of The Center for Education Reform, "It's a right - not a privilege - for these children to have access to the best education available."

The bi-partisan group of US Senators and Congressmen will re-introduce the school choice pilot program for the District of Columbia that was a show-stopper last year and died under a filibuster from Senator Kennedy. Despite the filibuster, the bill garnered 56 votes last year. This year, some of the 'neas' are gone, and a few more 'yeas' have been counted, so the scene is similar, but many of the actors are new.

"Parents are taking an active role in their children's education," continued Allen, "They're critical of the present state of education, and they want more for their children."

The momentum and activity endorsing public school choice is growing throughout the country, but most recently in places like Lake Travis, TX, Dover-Foxcroft, ME, Chittenden, VT, Fulton County, GA, Lincoln Park, NJ, Baltimore, MD, New York, Pennsylvania, Arizona and Florida. Private sector scholarship programs are already active in 31 states, serving over 20,000 low-income children. And they're so popular that over 15,000 more children are on waiting lists.

"Many have finally conceded that school choice should be an alternative for the less fortunate," concluded Allen, "It's found new friends in high places, and while it may be a battle, our children are worth it."

###

# PUTTING KIDS FIRST

Education  
Information  
Center

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
SEPTEMBER 11, 1997

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:  
KEITH APPELL/LISA KRUSKA (703)-683-5004

## ON CAPITOL HILL, A SHOW OF BIPARTISAN SOLIDARITY AND SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL CHOICE

WASHINGTON, D.C. --- Surrounded by parents, children and grassroots representatives from across the country, leaders of *Putting Kids First* joined with a bipartisan collection of congressional leaders at a Capitol Hill news conference to kick off a campaign to get two school choice bills passed by Congress. One bill would provide a pilot scholarship program for students in Washington, D.C., and the other would create tax-free Education Savings Accounts.

"When you look around this room and see all of the children, the families and the bipartisan support for school choice you can see that our time has come. This Congress can truly become the 'Kids Congress,'" said Alveda King, founder of *King for America* in Atlanta and the niece of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

"Education choice is working in several communities around the country so it's with great enthusiasm that I join this outstanding group of leaders today in hopes of providing a much brighter future for America's children," said David Brennan, founder of HOPE Academies in Cleveland, Ohio - a state funded scholarship program.

Joining these and other leaders at the news conference were House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) who is co-sponsoring the Education Savings Accounts bill in the House with Congressman Bill Lipinski (D-Ill.); Sen. Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.) who is co-sponsoring a similar bill in the U.S. Senate with Sen. Paul Coverdell (R-Ga.); House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Tex.) who is co-sponsoring the D.C. school choice bill with Congressman Floyd Flake (D-N.Y.). A special guest was Gov. Arne Carlson of Minnesota where the Legislature has recently enacted a school choice program benefiting children of all backgrounds.

Other *Putting Kids First* coalition leaders at the news conference included Star Parker, president of the Coalition on Urban Renewal and Education in Los Angeles, Jackie Sissell of FORCE in Indianapolis, Bert Holt, director of Cleveland Choice Program, Rev. Ray Bryant of Putting Children First in Dallas, Rev. Tom Brown of Safe Haven Schools in Indianapolis and Sterling Tucker of Save The Kids Now in Washington, D.C.

-- 30 --

# PUTTING KIDS FIRST

EDUCATION  
INFORMATION  
CENTER



## News Conference Parental Choice in Education

Grassroots Organizations from across the country came to Washington, D.C. today to join Congressional Leaders in support of parental choice in education for all children.

### Scheduled order of speakers:

- **Kevin Teasley**, President, **American Education Reform Foundation** based in Indianapolis, Ind.
- **Alveda King**, niece of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and President, **King for America, Inc.** based in Atlanta, Ga. (education as a civil rights issue and focus on the kids as a former schoolteacher in both private and public schools)
- **Star Parker**, former welfare mom, children now attend private schools, President & founder, **Coalition on Urban Renewal & Education** based in Los Angeles, Calif.
- **David Brennan**, Businessman and **Cleveland School Choice Program**
- **Pam Ballard**, mother with children in public-funded Cleveland school choice program, **Hope for Cleveland's Children** in Cleveland, Ohio.
- **Bert Holt**, Director, **Cleveland Choice Program** to discuss how choice in education is helping Cleveland's children.

### Elected Officials:

- **Speaker Newt Gingrich** (R-Ga.) (Confirmed)
- **Gov. Arne Carlson** (R-Minn.) (Confirmed)
- **Senator Coverdell** (R-Ga.) (Confirmed)
- **Senator Coats** (R-Ind.) (invited)
- **Senator Lieberman** (D-Conn.) (invited)
- **Majority Leader Dick Armey** (R-Tex.) (Confirmed)
- **Rep. Floyd Flake** (D-NY) (Confirmed)
- **Rep. William Lipinski** (D-Ill.) (invited)

### Additional Grassroots Representatives scheduled to speak after the Members of Congress:

- **Rev. Tom Brown**, Baptist Pastor and **Safe Haven Schools** in Indianapolis, Ind.
- **Rev. Ray Bryant**, Pastor and **Putting Children First** in Dallas, Tex.
- **Jackie Sissell**, **FORCE** based in Indianapolis, Ind.
- **Barbara Lewis**, **FORCE** based in Indianapolis, Ind.
- **Sterling Tucker**, **Save the Kids, Now** in Washington, D.C.
- **Rev. Frank Tucker**, President, **Baptist Ministers Convention of Washington, D.C. & Vicinity**
- **Bill Lightfoot**, former D.C. City Council Member (invited)

In addition, families from Washington, D.C. are expected to join the news conference






# PUTTING KIDS FIRST

EDUCATION  
INFORMATION  
CENTER




AA






## TALKING POINTS

### THE NATIONAL EDUCATION STATISTICS:

-  This year America will spend more than a quarter-trillion dollars trying to educate its children.
-  A recent *NBC/Wall Street Journal* poll shows that only 27% of the public thinks public schools adequately prepare students for the job market.
-  In an international comparison, U.S. eighth-graders placed an embarrassing 28<sup>th</sup> in the world in math and 17<sup>th</sup> in science.
-  Nearly 40% of the Members on the House Education committee, which has jurisdiction over school choice, have chosen private school for their kids. Recently the *Wall Street Journal*, citing a study by the Heritage Foundation, reported that of those responding 34.4% of the Members in the House and 50% of the Members of the Senate have sent their children to private school.
-  The more public school teachers earn, the more likely they are to send their children to private schools. 25.7% of the public school teachers sending their children to private schools earn less than \$35,000; 19.2% between \$35,000 and \$70,000; and 40% of the public school teachers sending their own children to private schools earn more than \$70,000.





### WASHINGTON, D.C. EDUCATION STATISTICS:

-  19.7% of all families in Washington, D.C. send their children to private schools compared to the national average of 13.1%.
-  28.2% of all Washington, D.C. public school teachers send their own children to non-government schools verses 12.1% nationally.
-  Of these public school teachers in the District who send their children to private schools: 49% are white, 24% are black.




-  36.4% of all teachers in the District, both public and private, send their own children to non-government schools. The national average is 17.1%.
-  61.1% of Washington, D.C. families sending their children to private schools are white. 12% of Washington, D.C. families sending their children to private schools are black.
-  The District ranks 7<sup>th</sup> in the nation in teacher salary with an average salary of \$43,700 per year, according to the Western Journalism Center.
-  80% of 4<sup>th</sup> graders in Washington, D.C. are scoring below basic math levels, according to a report published by the Annie Casey Foundation.
-  72 % of the District's 4<sup>th</sup> graders test below "basic proficiency" on the National Assessment of Education Progress.

Note: *The above findings are based on the 1990 Census Bureau data.*

## THE WASHINGTON SCHOLARSHIP ACT - PILOT SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

-  The Washington Scholarship Act is co-sponsored by Sen. Dan Coats (R-Ind.) and Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.) in the Senate and by House Majority Leader Dick Armey (R-Tex.), Rep. J.C. Watts (R-Okla.) and Rep. Floyd Flake (D-N.Y.) in the House.
-  This is a pilot program in Washington, D.C. that provides 2,000 inner-city children up to \$3,200 in federal monies so that they can attend the school of their parents' choice – public or private.
-  Students whose family incomes are below the poverty line may receive a scholarship of up to \$3,200. Students whose family incomes are above the poverty line but below the 185 percent of the poverty level may receive \$2,400.
-  The bill also provides additional 2,000 children up to \$500 in federal monies to be used for tutoring programs.

## "A+ ACCOUNTS" - FOR ALL CHILDREN

-  The Parent and Student Savings Account Plus Act ("A+ Accounts") provides families with the opportunity to contribute up to \$2,000 a year per child to a tax free account. The Senate bill is co-sponsored by Sen. Paul Coverdell (R-Ga.) and Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.). The accompanying House bill is co-sponsored by House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and Rep. William Lipinski (D-Ill.).
-  Parents can use the monies in the "A+ Accounts" for a child's education at any school – public, private, sectarian or home school – from kindergarten through college. The money can also be used for expenses such as transportation, to purchase computers, and tutoring.
-  If a parent, or another contributor, places \$2,000 each year in an "A+ Account" starting in a child's first year, then assuming a 7.5% interest rate, \$14,488 would be available by the first grade, \$36,847 by the time the child starts junior high school, and \$46,732 when the child starts high school.



# **District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997**

## ***Summary***

**Rep. Dick Armev**  
301 Cannon House Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
(202) 225-7772

**Rep. William Lipinski**  
1501 Longworth House Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
(202) 225-5701

**Sen. Dan Coats**  
404 Russell Senate Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510  
(202) 224-5623

**Sen. Joseph Lieberman**  
706 Hart Senate Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510  
(202) 224-4041

# Introduction

In February of this year, *The Washington Post* ran a five-part series on the D.C. public schools, chronicling their complete breakdown. This series exposed a school system where jobs for bureaucrats are more important than providing textbooks. A school system that employs almost two times more central office administrators than the national average, despite a decreasing student population and a shortage of qualified teachers and principals. A school system that is literally falling apart, where students must try to learn in buildings beset with leaking roofs, bitterly cold classrooms, and thousands of fire code violations.

Tragically, these fundamental problems with the infrastructure and administration of the system are minor concerns compared to the violence and across-the-board academic failure of the D.C. public schools. Students are routinely promoted regardless of whether they have progressed in their studies and graduate from the school system with little to show for their 12 years of schooling. Eighty-five percent of D.C. public school graduates who enter the University of the District of Columbia need two years of remedial education before beginning their course work toward degrees. And more than half of all graduates who took the U.S. Armed Forces Qualification Test in 1994 failed.

A major reason these schools are failing is that many of them are simply not safe. The National Education Goals Panel reported last year that both students and teachers in District schools are subjected to levels of violence that are twice the national average. The violence is such a pervasive presence, in fact, that nearly two-thirds of D.C. teachers said in a survey that violent student behavior is a serious impediment to teaching.

This failure is why House Majority Leader Richard Armey (R-TX), Rep. William Lipinski (D-IL), Sen. Dan Coats (R-IN) and Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-CT) have introduced legislation that is aimed at directly addressing the need to provide relief to the most disadvantaged children. The District of Columbia Student Opportunity Scholarship Act (DCSOS) would provide tuition scholarships to about 2,000 low-income students in the District of Columbia to enable them to attend the public or private school of their choice. This bipartisan legislation would also provide extra tutoring assistance to 2,000 public school students.

Specifically, the bill provides opportunity scholarships for grades K through 12 for District residents whose family incomes are below 185 percent of the poverty level. The scholarships may be used for tuition costs at a public or private school in D.C. and adjacent counties in Maryland and Virginia. Students whose family incomes are below the poverty line may receive a scholarship of up to \$3,200. Students whose family incomes are above the poverty line but below 185 percent of the poverty level may receive the lesser of 75 percent of tuition or \$2,400. Students receiving tutoring assistance are eligible for up to \$500.

The scholarship legislation would allow low-income parents to choose the best schools for their children. Many private schools that operate in the same neighborhoods with the same student population as public schools are succeeding while the public schools are failing. Providing low-income parents with the means to send their children to the best possible school will improve the education of the children who receive scholarships, and will likely improve public schools as well. When public schools are forced to compete for students, they will overcome bureaucratic inertia and improve. According to a recent *Washington Post* article, a local Bethesda public high school strengthened its curriculum in order to "woo [back to public school] private school students searching for a rigorous educational experience."

Recent evidence shows that allowing parents the opportunity to choose the best school for their children is effective in improving academic performance. According to a study by Jay P. Greene, of the University of Houston, and Paul E. Peterson, of Harvard University, students participating in the Milwaukee school choice program showed significant improvements in their academic performance. A study by Cecilia E. Rouse, of Princeton University, found that Milwaukee school choice students substantially increased their mathematics scores.

Not surprisingly, opportunity scholarships are extremely popular among parents whose children attend unsafe, failing schools. According to a survey of Washington, D.C. residents conducted by The Polling Company and the Global Strategy Group, a scholarship program enjoys strong support from those who would benefit most from such a program. The survey found that 61 percent of single parents believe a scholarship program for low-income parents is an "excellent" or "good" use of tax dollars while only 25 percent believe it is a "poor" use. Similarly, 59 percent of low-income respondents — those whose children would be eligible for the program — support it while only 17 percent oppose it. Fully 50 percent of parents with children in public schools and 48 percent of all African-Americans support the program while 25 percent and 29 percent, oppose, respectively.

The results of the recent survey of District residents are consistent with what many other polls have found. An April 1996 national poll by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a Washington, D.C. think tank, found that 61 percent of African-American parents support school choice.

There is more evidence than just polling data that shows parents want the opportunity to enroll their children in the best schools. The Washington Scholarship Fund, which offers partial scholarships to about 230 low-income D.C. residents, has 800 children on its waiting list. (In New York City, about 23,000 students recently applied for 1,300 scholarships.) If the funds were available, hundreds of low-income families would have already opted out of failing schools. The D.C. Student Opportunity Scholarship Act provides those funds and is a lifeline of hope for the thousands of D.C. parents waiting for an opportunity to give their children a solid education and the chance to succeed.



## **Bill Summary**

### **Opportunity Scholarships**

The bill provides opportunity scholarships for grades K through 12 for District residents whose family incomes are below 185 percent of the poverty level. The scholarships may be used for tuition costs at a public or private school in D.C. and adjacent counties in Maryland and Virginia. Scholarships are also available for tutoring assistance for students who attend public school in the District.

### **District of Columbia Scholarship Corporation**

The legislation creates a seven-member private, nonprofit corporation to administer the scholarship program. One board member is to be appointed by the mayor of Washington, D.C. and the remaining six are to be appointed by the President—three from a list of nominees submitted by the Speaker of the House and three from a list provided by the Majority Leader of the Senate (both in consultation with the minority). The board members must be residents of D.C. and may not work for either the federal or D.C. government.

### **Eligibility**

Students whose family incomes are below the poverty line may receive a scholarship of up to \$3,200. Students whose family incomes are above the poverty line but below 185 percent of the poverty level may receive the lesser of 75 percent of tuition or \$2,400. Students receiving tutoring assistance are eligible for up to \$500. These figures are indexed to inflation.

If there are not sufficient funds available for all the eligible applicants, scholarships are to be awarded randomly. The corporation is required, to the extent practicable, to award an equal number of tuition scholarships and scholarships for tutoring fees.

Private schools accepting tuition scholarship students are required to abide by anti-discrimination and health and safety laws, and charge the same tuition to scholarship recipients that is charged to other students.

### **Funding**

The bill authorizes \$7 million for fiscal year 1998, \$8 million for FY 1999, and \$10 million each year for FY 2000 through FY 2002. At these funding levels, approximately 2,000 students will receive tuition scholarships and an equal number of students will receive tutoring assistance.

## **The District's Failing Schools**

**"A WELL FINANCED FAILURE."** According to *The Washington Post*, the District school system is "a well-financed failure." Despite spending about \$7,500 per student, 65 percent of all D.C. public school children test below their grade levels. In 1994, 72 percent of fourth-graders in D.C. public schools tested below "basic proficiency" on the National Assessment of Education Progress — worse than any other school system in the nation. As a result, the D.C. Control Board took the drastic step of creating an independent board of trustees to manage the public schools.

**D.C. DIPLOMA MEANS LITTLE.** Eighty-five percent of D.C. public school graduates who enter the University of the District of Columbia need remedial education before beginning their course work toward degrees. On average, these students require two years of remedial education to get up-to-speed, up from one year during the late 1970s. In 1994, 56 percent of D.C. public school graduates who took the U.S. Armed Forces Qualification Test — a vocational aptitude exam — scored below 50 percent, a failing grade.

**MONEY FOR SALARIES, NOT FOR KIDS.** In apparent violation of federal law, the D.C. school system kept two sets of books in order to spend more on personnel than the budget allowed. During the past few years, the school system has employed between 900 and 1,400 more people than were authorized. The D.C. public schools employ a central office administrator for every 20 teachers. The national average is one administrator for every 38 teachers.

## **Low-Income Parents Support Scholarships**

**IF MONEY WAS NOT AN ISSUE...** In a recent poll, nearly two-thirds (64%) of D.C. residents indicated that if money were not an issue, they would send their children to a private school.

**LOW-INCOME PARENTS SUPPORT SCHOLARSHIPS.** By a 44 to 31 margin, District residents believe providing scholarships to low-income residents is a good use of taxpayer dollars. Among families earning less than \$25,000, 59 percent support the program, while just 17 percent oppose it. African-Americans support the idea of a scholarship program by a 48 to 29 margin. Opposition is highest among families who earn \$60,000 or more, most of whom already send their children to private schools.

**VOTING WITH THEIR FEET.** The Washington Scholarship Fund, which offers partial scholarships to about 230 low-income D.C. residents, has 800 children on its waiting list. (In New York City, about 23,000 students recently applied for 1,300 scholarships.) Moreover, thousands of families have left the District (or never moved in) because of the poor condition of the D.C. public school system.

## **Questions and Answers**

**Question: *Doesn't the scholarship bill drain D.C. public schools of the resources they desperately need?***

**Answer:** No. The legislation wouldn't take one dime away from D.C. public schools. The funding for this proposal would *not* come out of the District school budget. In fact, under the bill, per-student spending for public schools will increase because the budget will remain the same, but there will be 2,000 fewer students in the schools.

**Question: *Isn't the amount of the scholarship too small for parents to afford to send their children to all but a handful of schools?***

**Answer:** Absolutely not. The amount of the scholarship is enough to provide parents a wide selection of schools, including Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, and non-religious private schools. There are 88 private schools within the Washington Beltway that cost less than \$4,000 per student, including 60 that cost less than \$3,200.

**Question: *Isn't it unconstitutional and bad public policy to support religious schools with taxpayer dollars?***

**Answer:** The bill does not give any taxpayer funds to schools, religious or otherwise. It provides scholarships to parents. Parents decide where the funds go. The Supreme Court has held that as long as beneficiaries decide where education funds are spent on their behalf and as long as the program does not help or hinder a particular religion, public funds can be spent by beneficiaries in religious institutions.

**Question: *Won't private schools just cherry-pick the brightest students and leave the public schools with the students who need the most help?***

**Answer:** The scholarships do not go to schools. They are awarded to parents. The parents decide where the children go, so the parents will cherry-pick the best schools. With regard to which children get scholarships, the legislation requires that they be awarded randomly, so neither the scholarship board nor the schools would be able to pick just the brightest students.

**Question: *Under the bill, won't schools be able to discriminate against African-American children or against other groups the legislation doesn't protect?***

**Answer:** No. The bill specifically states that any school participating in the program may not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin. It also reaffirms that participating schools must abide by health and safety laws that already apply to them. Finally, the legislation is consistent with the new IDEA law, which guarantees the right of disabled students to receive a free and appropriate public education.

**Question: *What accountability is there in this program? Since the bill imposes no rules or standards, how can we be sure that student performance will improve?***

**Answer:** There are currently students attending private schools and public schools in the District, and there is ample evidence demonstrating which students are getting a better education. Nearly three-quarters of fourth-graders in D.C. public schools recently tested below "basic proficiency" on the National Assessment of Education Progress, the worst performance in the nation. Fully 85 percent of public school graduates who enter the University of the District of Columbia require remedial education before beginning their course work toward their degree. On average, they require two years of remedial courses. The burden is on those who would deny parents the opportunity to have an alternative to a system that is among the worst in the nation to explain how children could be worse off by having the opportunity to go to a different school.

In addition, the bill includes the best system of accountability that exists — parents. The parents who care enough about their children to apply for the scholarship are not going put them in worse schools. And they most certainly are going to monitor the progress of their children and change schools if they aren't satisfied.

**Question: *How is this scholarship program any different from a voucher?***

**Answer:** Under a traditional voucher approach, school funding follows the child. If the child goes to a private school, the per capita amount spent on his behalf, or some portion of it, follows him to the private school. Under the bill, the public school system funding is unchanged if a child leaves the public school. A totally separate program is being created, which does not draw resources from the school budget, that provides a scholarship to qualifying children. In addition, the scholarship board is a public-private partnership under which private donations can supplement the activities of the board.

**Question: *Isn't the legislation a violation of home rule? Shouldn't education policy be under local control?***

**Answer:** Congress has a constitutional authority in the affairs of the District, including education policy. Moreover, no district resident is forced to apply for a scholarship; nothing is being imposed on anyone. If every resident is satisfied with their child's school, no scholarship will be awarded. However, a recent poll shows that by a 44 to 31 percent margin, District residents believe providing scholarships to low-income residents is a good use of taxpayer dollars. Among families earning less than \$25,000, 59 percent support the program, while just 17 percent oppose it. African-Americans support the idea of a scholarship program by a 48 to 29 margin. Opposition is highest among families who earn \$60,000 or more, most of whom already send their children to private schools.

**Question:** *How are the kids going to obtain transportation to school?*

**Answer:** There are more than three dozen private schools that cost less than \$4,000 and another 50 outside of the District but inside the Beltway. There are 14 schools in Southeast, 10 in Northeast and 14 in Northwest that charge less than \$4,000. There are plenty of schools where children live. Moreover, 230 students receive scholarships from the Washington Scholarship Fund (and another 800 are on a waiting list), and the parents of these children are willing and able to overcome the logistical obstacles to sending their children to a private school.

# DC STUDENT OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP ACT OF 1997

## “A CAPITOL CHOICE”

### INTRODUCTION:

The stage has been set in the District of Columbia for education reform, and together, the Members of Congress from both sides of the US Capitol are waiting for the curtain to rise for the opening act.

Members of the House and Senate have recognized that school choice is an answer to the status quo within the public education system. It's worked in cities such as Milwaukee, WI and Cleveland, OH and community leaders in Philadelphia, PA, Detroit, MI, and Baltimore, MD are clamoring for it. Now they want to offer it to the children of our nation's capitol.

Children will learn if given the right tools and the opportunity to succeed. That's a fact. Unfortunately, 72% of all fourth-graders in the DC public school system tested below the *basic proficiency* level on the National Assessment of Education Progress [NAEP] exam in 1994. It's the worst performance of any school system in the nation. That's also a fact, and what's more, of the approximately 80,000 students presently enrolled in the DC public school system, 65% consistently test below their grade levels.

These statistics are a cry for help by these kids who are caught in a system of what some might consider to be in disrepair. However, the sponsors, co-sponsors, and supporters of the DC Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997 have taken the first step to fix the problem of bad schools and poor academic performance. They're offering a choice to the thousands of families in the District to have their tax dollars follow their child to the school they attend...whether that school be public, private or parochial.

These Members, and these children are watching as the curtain rises, and the orchestra begins to play for the opening act...the introduction of the bill. There's great anticipation as grassroots activists prepare to get involved to spend their summer vacation working on passage of a bill which will have greater impact on the citizens of the District - and a much better finale - than *The Phantom of the Opera* could offer any theatergoer.

They're working on offering children the chance to receive a quality education, thereby improving their outlook for the future. And when passed, this play will continue on tour to be seen and accepted by every state and school district in the country.

### **SUMMARY:**

Many in the education reform world have said for far too long that school choice should be an alternative for the less-fortunate, and now many are joining in the chorus to offer all children the same right to determine their own destiny, not to be limited by family income, or what side of the tracks they live on...or in this case, what side of the Potomac River.

The purpose of the DC Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997 is to allow DC children access to a quality education and the same learning opportunities presently available to more advantaged students around the country. It will provide opportunity scholarships for students enrolled in grades K-12 to be used for tuition costs at the public, private, or parochial school of their choice in Washington, DC, Maryland or the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Not being limited to only school choice, this legislation will offer funding assistance for transportation or tutoring services outside of regular school hours for those students who attend a public or private school in the District.

### **OVERSIGHT:**

Similar to paying the highest price for a ticket to a play, wherever you sit it still may be a poor performance by the cast, the members collaborating on this effort recognize that just offering millions of dollars to improve educational opportunities does not guarantee individual student success. Therefore, the legislation will create a seven-member private, not-for-profit corporation - the director - to manage the program and administer the funds.

The board members will be residents of the District who don't work for either the federal or DC governments, thereby eliminating any potential conflicts of interest. Yet, as they are residents, will have a vested interest in

the on-going success of the program which will increase the value of education offered to students in the scholarship program.

Six of the members will be appointed by the President of the United States with the approval of both the majority and minority members of the Senate and the House. The final member will be appointed by the mayor of Washington, DC.

#### **APPROPRIATION:**

In an effort to offer as many students enrolled in grades K-12 improved educational opportunities, the DC Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997 authorizes and appropriates \$7 million for fiscal year [FY] 1998, \$8 million for FY 1999, and \$10 million each for FY 2000, 2001, and 2002.

At these subsidy levels, over 3,600 students will benefit from the program per year: approximately 1,800 will receive tuition scholarships and another 1,800 will benefit from either transportation or tutoring services.

#### **SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT QUALIFICATIONS:**

A scholarship of up to \$3,200 per school year will be awarded to those students whose family income is below the poverty line, and for those families whose income is above that line, but does not exceed 185 percent of the poverty level, their children are eligible to receive either a \$2,400 scholarship or 75 percent of their school's tuition, whichever is less.

In the event that the number of eligible students exceeds the appropriated funds, the corporate board members will award scholarships by lottery, and be required to grant an equal number of tuition and tutoring or transportation scholarships.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

The nation's schools have steadily improved over the last 10 years, unfortunately, those children living in the poorest communities throughout the country have not received any better of an education.



The DC Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997 is the first step in improving the condition and quality of education students in the District receive. They deserve better. They deserve a bright future.

You are invited to buy a ticket to the best show in Washington this summer, the introduction, and passage of the DC Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997. It's an investment in more than a two-hour show...it's an investment for a bright tomorrow.

**THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SCHOOL SYSTEM...**  
**THE COLD, HARD FACTS**

Poor record-keeping and accounting procedures by the administrators of the school system tend to prevent accurate statistics, therefore, analytical cataloguing of precise numbers are the norm, not the exception. Therefore, all numbers are approximate.

***The Students:***

Student enrollment:	80,000
High School graduation rate:	56%
Dropout rate:	8.2%
Students testing below grade levels:	65%
1994 "basic proficiency" level on 1994 NAEP exam: <b>The worst in the United States!</b>	72%
% of 4th graders scoring below basic math levels: <b>More than twice the US average!</b>	80%
Failed US Armed Forces Qualifications Test [1994]:	56%
College-level remedial education necessary: <b>Before students begin working on their degree!</b>	85%

***The Administration:***

Number of Employees:	10,000
Budget: <b>\$600 m + \$90 m for retired teacher benefits!</b>	\$690 million
Per student spending: <b>One of the highest in the country!</b>	\$7,500
Teacher: administrator ratio: <b>National average is 38:1</b>	20:1

## **A PATTERN OF CORRUPTION AND CRONYISM THEY THOUGHT THEY WERE THE UNTOUCHABLES**

- **Breaking the law:** The DC school system kept two sets of books in order to shift funds and spend more on personnel than the budget allowed. In the past few years, the school system has employed 900-1,400 more people than were authorized.
- **Not enough teachers to do the job:** The DC public schools employ 20 teachers for every central office administrator. The national average is 38.
- **Money for salaries, not kids:** Until recently, members of the school board, who only work part-time, were the highest paid school board in the country at **\$30,000 per year**.
- **Nepotism and Favoritism are the norm:** A recent series by *The Washington Post* uncovered a pattern of nepotism and favoritism in the hiring of DC school employees. Numerous scandals have been uncovered showing how school funds have been funneled to political allies and contributors to the mayor of the District and the school board.
- **More money down the drain or to repair the roof:** The physical conditions of the DC schools is deplorable because of mismanagement and cronyism. Funds directed for repairs were diverted to pay salaries. At one school, the city spent \$600,000 to fix a roof only to have a construction company rip up the roof two days later and spend \$1.4 million on a new roof.

## **NOTABLE QUOTABLES: FROM SOME OF THE COUNTRY'S OPINION LEADERS**

"Poor, urban children, most of them black, are getting a lousy education -- and that won't change until parents have the leverage to force reforms," Detroit Free Press, [Nov. 14, 1996].

"Real reform will only come from pressure outside the system, generated by empowered parents with expanded school choice," Dr. Howard Fuller, Marquette University, The Wall Street Journal [Sept. 11, 1995].

"A lot of our parents can't choose where they live, what hospital they go to. So being able to choose their own school is a very powerful thing." Bob Rauh, principal, Urban Day School.

"It's not that I think the public school system can't be changed, but I don't think we have to sacrifice the lives of our children while waiting on that system," Assemblywoman Polly Williams.

"Clearly school choice has become a rallying point for parents and reform-minded teachers and educators seeking to give this country's children a globally competitive education." Give Choice a Chance [Editorial], The Wall Street Journal, [Dec. 30, 1996].

"Opponents of a full voucher program for poor children apparently fear they may be contaminated by religious ideas. But that risk should be for them and their parents to evaluate. Attending classes with crucifixes on the walls doesn't keep kids from learning. Too bad the same can't be said for attending inner-city public schools." Stephen Chapman, The Washington Times, [Apr. 2, 1997].

"The only way poor parents have choice is if they control the money. If the money follows the students and the parents can take their students - and the money - out of the schools, parents are empowered and schools will be forced to change." Zakiya Courtney, parent, The Detroit Free Press, [Nov. 14, 1996].

"Parents, students and taxpayers should not have to tolerate schools that fail to do what they are supposed to do," Mitch Skandalakis, County Commission, Fulton County, GA.

"More than 23 states have private scholarship programs run by businesses and entrepreneurs to help low-income parents defray the cost of sending their kids to private schools. You don't read much about these reforms...but they're bringing about changes critical to the future of our children and our country," Jeanne Allen, The Center for Education Reform, The Iola Herald, [March 21, 1996].

"It seems as obvious for poor children as for rich ones that one-size-fits-all education doesn't make sense," William Raspberry, The Washington Post, [May 30, 1997].

## **SCHOOL CHOICE AROUND THE COUNTRY COMING SOON TO A SCHOOL DISTRICT NEAR YOU**

There's activity all over the country, and school choice proposals are being unveiled regularly, and that's because parents are demanding options and alternatives to public education, and they're being heard.

The school choice programs that are carefully designed to provide options should not be looked upon as a threat to public education, but as a way to expand the current system to embrace new and different kinds of schools...an alternative to the status quo.

The Detroit Council of Baptist Pastors took six months to ask the *tough* questions about what it would take to improve public education. Their fact-finding mission on education reform efforts in Milwaukee, WI and Cleveland, OH led them to publish the following key findings:

- 1. Our kids deserve better.**
- 2. It's a lie that disadvantaged children can't learn.**
- 3. Good schools make a difference.**
- 4. Choice gives parents power at the school house door.**
- 5. Choice pushes all schools to improve and gives district school reformers the leverage they need to improve the system.**
- 6. Choice has become a civil rights issue.**
- 7. Different children learn in different ways.**
- 8. The church-state argument against parental choice is a smokescreen.**
- 9. Choice gets parents more involved - and that's key to reform.**

And while traditionally mainstream journalists and newspapers have generally touted school choice they have recently conceded that it should be an alternative for the less-fortunate. In the past six months, The Washington Post, The New York Times, *Fortune*, The Washington Times, and *Emerge*, all have highlighted school choice as a viable option to what we have now. They're jumping on the bandwagon that's being driven by thousands of parents who are taking an active role in their children's education.

Activity in favor of school choice is strong in places like Lake Travis, TX, Dover-Foxcroft, ME, Chittenden, VT, Fulton County, GA, Lincoln Park, NJ, Baltimore, MD, New York, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Arizona and Florida. And the momentum is building.

This doesn't include the 31 states which presently have private sector scholarship programs, which serve over 20,000 low-income children. Another 15,000 are on waiting lists.

The District of Columbia would be joining a crowd of thousands as the Members of Congress vote and approve the DC Student Opportunity Scholarship Act of 1997. It's a capitol choice and investment for a bright tomorrow.